

Chapter – I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of the Problem

On January 25th, 2011, in line with the Arab Spring Revolution thousands of Egyptians took to the streets of Cairo demanding the removal of President Muhammad Hosni Mubarak. After 18 days of anti-government demonstrations, Vice President of Egypt Omar Suleiman announced on television that Muhammad Hosni Mubarak, the fourth President of Egypt had officially resigned after almost thirty years of presidency by relegating his power to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces.¹ The Egyptian Revolution was marked by two important features, firstly, it saw the emergence of an active civil society in Egypt and secondly, it witnessed the massive utilization of social media networks like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube for the purpose of mobilizing the masses and for co-coordinating the work of the activists. The New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof Labeled the “Quintessential 21st-century conflict,” in which “on one side are government thugs firing bullets and on the other side are young protesters firing ‘tweets.’”²

The Egyptian Revolution has fostered in a growing discourse about the role of social media and its effect on civil society. The questions remain as to how far social media was successful in enhancing the effectiveness of civil society in Egypt? To what extent did social media accelerated the revolution?

¹ See for details Anup Khalpe, *Egypt's Timeline: Rocky Revolution*, August 19, 2013, The Washington Post, <http://apps.washingtonpost.com>

² See Nicholas D. Kristof, *Tear Down This Cyber Wall!*, June 17, 2009, The New York Times, <http://nytimes.com>

Civil society is not a new concept; it can be traced way back to Aristotle. Some of the main propagators of this concept include John Locke, Nicolo Machiavelli, Alexis de Tocqueville, John Stuart Mill, Antonio Gramsci, Max Weber, Friedrich Hegel etc. Despite its conceptual difficulty, civil society can be summarized as an association (formal and informal consisting of trade unions, church organizations, cooperatives, online groups etc) which is formed voluntarily by the members of the society in order to achieve a common or collective goal and which enjoy a certain amount of autonomy from the state and the market. According to Alexis de Tocqueville, voluntary associations serve as the “free schools of democracy” where individuals are transformed into citizens as they exercise their rights within and accept their responsibilities to the group.³ While liberal philosophers like John Locke and Montesquieu deemed it as a means for checking the despotism of the state. The arena of civil society is viewed as a sphere which transcends beyond the social, Karl Marx saw the emergence of the civil society through revolutions, where dissatisfied citizens would bring about regime change. Antonio Gramsci also claimed civil society to be the prime arena for social and political struggle. Max Weber regarded it as the space of social realm “between private lives and the political arena.”⁴ The central element of the concept consequently lies in citizen participation; civil society is viewed as a representation of collective citizen action, whether to advance mutual interests, solve common problems, or promote shared aspirations.⁵ An efficient and strong civil society thus requires active citizen’s

³See Alexis de Tocqueville as quoted by Kumi Naidoo and Rajesh Tandon, “The Promise of Civil Society,” CIVICUS, ed., *Civil Society at the Millennium*, (Replika Press Pvt. Ltd., India, 1st Edition, 2005), p. 14.

⁴ See Max Weber as quoted by Sung Ho Kim, *Max Weber’s Politics of Civil Society*, (Cambridge University Press, UK, 1st Edition, 2004), p.96.

⁵ See Andre Beteille, “Civil Society and its Institutions,” Carolyn M. Elliot, ed., *Civil Society and Democracy: A Reader*, (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1st Edition, 2003), p.195.

participation within the social and political realm which in turn depends to a large extent on the prevalent means of communication. Modern theorist Jurgen Habermas has elucidated the critical role of communication in the integration of the societal interests. He formulated civil society as a site where public opinion is formed through discourse in which private individuals forge a common understanding about public goals and exercise scrutiny over the state.⁶

It is without a doubt that every new development in communication has resulted in massive changes in the society. For instance, the advent of Gutenberg's printing press in the 15th century had played a crucial role in weakening the power of the medieval church leading ultimately to the Renaissance, and later the Reformation and Scientific Revolution. The invention of the telephone in 1876 by Alexander Graham Bell made the world smaller and more accessible to all; it has also fostered a whole host of new inventions like the cellular phone and the internet. In this new era of digital revolution, the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are transforming many aspects of modern society. The internet and the social technologies which consist of websites, services and applications that allows users to engage in social behaviors online or on a mobile phone has tremendously increased the capacity of sharing information.⁷ Egyptian Google executive Wael Ghonim had famously said, "If you want to liberate a society, just give them the Internet."⁸

Social media with its tools of social networking and online communities has opened up new ways of mass communication, which is quick and easy to access. It has also

⁶ See Andre Beteille, "Civil Society and its Institutions," Carolyn M. Elliot, ed., *Civil Society and Democracy: A Reader*, (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1st Edition, 2003), p.7

⁷ See Suw Charman Anderson, *Making the Connection: Civil Society and Social Media*, (Carnegie, UK, 2010), p.5.

⁸ See for details <http://techcrunch.com/2011/02/11/wael-ghonim>

opened up new prospects in freedom of expression especially in the field of political reforms. In order to understand social media it is crucial to understand its tools of social networking:

1. **Facebook**

Founded by Harvard student Mark Zuckerberg in 2004 as a way to connect with fellow students, and which was first initially adopted by high school and college students has now grown to billion active users worldwide. Varied applications are available to Facebook users they can create profiles, send messages, play online games, receive automatic notifications, post videos, audios and join common interest groups.

2. **Twitter**

Twitter, launched in 2006, is a “real-time information network that connects you to the latest information about what you find interesting.”⁹ Twitter users communicate via “tweets” which consists of short posts consisting of 140 characters, also allowing for embedded media links.

3. **YouTube**

YouTube is a website which is dedicated wholly to uploading and sharing of personal videos.

4. **Whatsapp**

Whatsapp a messenger app was created to serve as a better SMS alternative. It uses the internet to send text messages, documents, images, video, user location and audio.¹⁰

⁹ See for details <http://twitter.com/about>

¹⁰ See <http://en.m.wikipedia.org>

5. Instagram

Instagram has become the home for visual storytelling for everyone from celebrities, newsrooms and brands to teens, musicians and anyone with a creative passion.¹¹

6. We Chat

We Chat is a messaging and calling application that allows the user to connect with family and friends across countries.¹²

7. Tumblr

Tumblr is a micro blogging and social networking website founded by David Karp in 2007.¹³

These social networking sites particularly Facebook, Twitter and YouTube have proved to be instrumental in directing the Egyptian Revolution (2011). Branded as a ‘social media revolution’ the revolution was triggered by a young Google executive called Wael Ghoneim who helped organize a call for a demonstration on 25th January, 2011 in Cairo’s Tahrir Square through a Facebook page entitled We Are All Khaled Said in honor of Khaled Said, a young man who had been brutally beaten and killed by the police in Alexandria, Egypt. Eyewitness accounts attest that Khalid Said was killed after he was dragged from an Internet cafe by policemen who had caught him trying to expose corruption by uploading pictures of the police splitting the proceeds of a drug bust.¹⁴ Fifty thousand people came, not just the dedicated hard core, but fresh faces, old and young. They came back the next day, and the next and the next, swelling to millions, and

¹¹ See <http://www.instagram.com>

¹² See for details <http://www.wechat.com>

¹³ See for details <http://en.m.wikipedia.org>

¹⁴ See for details Laurel E. Miller, Jeffrey Martini, Stephen F. Larrabee, Julie E. Taylor, Twewodaj Mengitsuj, *Democratization in the Arab World: Lessons from around the Globe*, (RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, CA, 1st Edition, 2012), p.159.

the rest is history.¹⁵ However, it would be an over statement to assert that social media was the sole factor which triggered the revolution; the eventual downfall of Mubarak's 30 years authoritarian regime was the result of a repressive rule coupled with wide spread discontentment. The regime of Mubarak began with the assassination of President Anwar Sadat in 1991 and lasted till the Egyptian revolution of 11th February, 2011, where he was overthrown in a popular uprising as part of the broader Arab Spring Movement. Egypt under Mubarak witnessed grave human rights record, pervasive political censorship, police brutality, arbitrary detention, torture and restrictions on individual freedoms. It was under these circumstances that the civil society in Egypt began to gain momentum prior to the revolution. By the end of 2008, there were some 30,000 civil society organizations in Egypt, or approximately one for every 2,800 Egyptian residents.¹⁶ Reports from Egypt's State Information Service put the figure at 16,800 in 2011.¹⁷ What the civil society in Egypt needed was an impetus and social media became the platform to achieve its goal. Social media served as a platform for venting out outrage resulting from years of repression.

The 18 days revolution witnessed a massive utilization of the social networking sites. According to Al-Jazeera's coverage of the 18 days uprising, "protest organizers relied heavily on social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter to organize this initial protest."¹⁸ The extent to which these social media tools were employed and the

¹⁵ See for details Johnny West, *Karama: Journeys through the Arab Spring*, (Quercus Publishing, UK, 2011), p.154.

¹⁶ See for details Hassan A. Hamdy, *Civil Society under the Mubarak regime*, October 29, 2011, Afro- Asian Journal of Social Sciences, Volume 2, No.2.2, Quarter II, 2011, <http://papers.ssrn.com>

¹⁷ See Laurel E. Miller, Jeffrey Martini, Stephen F. Larrabee, Julie E. Taylor, Twewodaj Mengitsuj, Note 14, p.90.

¹⁸ See for details *Timeline: Egypt's Revolution*, Al- Jazeera, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast>

role that they played in the revolution can be best demonstrated by the ban on internet use by the Egyptian government on 28th January, 2011, initially the ban was first on the use of Facebook but later it led to a full internet blockade. The use of the social networking sites was prevalent even during the initial build-up of the revolution beginning with the large scale protest on 25th January, 2011 in Cairo's Tahrir square which was the result of a Facebook page and which later triggered demonstrations in Alexandria and Toukh. The first protest in Tahrir square started with the attendance of about thousands of people and by the 1st of February, it is estimated that nearly one million protesters had gathered in Tahrir Square. Not only did these social networking sites served as a common platform to direct common interests but it also enabled the activists to organize and direct the flow of the revolution. Eira Martens, a research associate with the Deutsche Welle Academie, carried out an empirical study on the role of social media during Egypt's Arab Spring in 2011. Her research showed that in addition to helping organize protests, social media in particular shared photos and videos allowed participants to form a collective identity.¹⁹

Social media has paved the way for restructuring social movement mobilization, social capital formation and civic participation in a very novel understanding. However, the role of social media cannot be considered solely as the main cause of the Egyptian revolution, rather it should be viewed as one of the key factors which had helped in accelerating the effectiveness of civil society in Egypt. The revolution which was a consequent result of years of oppression under an authoritarian rule found its impetus in the form of social media. Social media essentially served as the common platform from which the different civil society associations in Egypt could come together and fight towards a collective goal. Some have even labeled the revolution as a 'Facebook

¹⁹See for details <http://www.dw.de/social-media-use-evolving-in-egypt/a-16930251>

revolution' since the initial call of the demonstrations was issued via Facebook. What Social media did was to provide a main platform for popular mobilization as well as the medium through which the events were accurately reported. While Facebook and Twitter served as the primary means for coordinating the times, locations, and messages of the various demonstrations in the uprising, amateur videos of the demonstration as well as the narratives of the eye witnesses were uploaded on YouTube as part of the *New Independent Journalism*. Whatever maybe the debate as in regard to the role played by social media in the revolution, the mass mobilization capacities possessed by it cannot be overlooked as online social networks are becoming increasingly important for demand articulation and civic engagement. What the Egyptian revolution gained from social media was the emergence of a vibrant civil society where connected and concerned citizens could struggle towards a common goal.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the present study are:

1. Examination of the concepts of civil society and social media in order to understand the common link between these two concepts.
2. Analyzing the impact of social media and its networking tools like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube on civil society.
3. Studying the use of social media by the Egyptian social activists and the masses in the Egyptian Revolution (2011).

4. Examining the connection between civil society and social media and analyzing how it can be utilized for the purpose of organizing and generating awareness for political mobilization with particular reference to the Egyptian Revolution (2011).

1.3. Review of Literature

This literature review examines the concept of civil society, social media and the Egyptian revolution (2011) in order to understand the role played by social media in accelerating the emergence of a vibrant civil society in Egypt. These topics are examined from a range of perspectives to analyze the relationship between civil society and social media and their role in the Egyptian revolution. This literature review is divided into three sections; the first section starts off with a discussion on the concept of civil society, civic participation and the importance of forming a vibrant civil society. The second section deals with the social media and its impact. The third section examines the implications of these two concepts on the Egyptian revolution by placing importance on the role of social media and civil society in the revolution. It is evident from this review of literature that more research is needed in order to help demonstrate how far social media can be effective in producing a vibrant civil society.

The Concept of Civil Society

This section of the literature review examines the concept of civil society along with civic participation and the idea of a vibrant civil society. The concept of civil society is analyzed at length by Sung Ho Kim in Max Weber's *Politics of Civil Society*. Kim asserts that civil society is an ethical sphere separate from the state, where citizens are politically educated and mobilized accordingly. Kim further asserts that civil society is "the

harbinger of the public citizenship without which neither healthy democratic governance nor the liberal morals of individual autonomy, freedom and agency could be realized to the fullest extent.”²⁰ The book *Civil Society and Democracy: A Reader* presents civil society as a sphere where “Private persons deliberate on public matters...public for example, can mean (1) state related, (2) accessible to everyone, (3) of concern to everyone, and (4) pertaining to a common good or shared interest.”²¹ This notion of self-governance or citizen initiative is an important element of civil society and within its core lie civic participation which is central to the functioning of civil society. The issue of civic participation is discussed at length in the book *Civil Society at the Millennium* (CIVICUS, 2005), The book basically maintains that a well informed and active citizen participation is considered as the first attribute of a strong civil society. Stressing upon the importance of active citizen participation, it states that, “The promise of citizen engagement was poised to breathe new meaning and life into the very notion of democracy.”²² The importance of an active civil society is also stated by Gideon Baker in his book *Civil Society and Democracy: Alternative Voices* (2002). Baker contends that a robust civil society is “the vision of a democracy of civil society.”²³ Baker further draws upon the examples of radical models of civil society from Eastern Europe (Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary) and Latin America (*Zapatistas* in Mexico and the *Civil Society Assembly (Asamblea de la Sociedad Civil)*, Guatemala) in the 1970s and 1980s and places the radical approaches like ‘civil society first’ and ‘self- management’ as the main

²⁰ See for details Sung ho Kim, “Max Weber’s Politics of Civil Society,” Note 4, p.3.

²¹ See Carolyn M. Elliot, “Civil Society and Democracy: A Reader,” Note 5, p.96.

²² See Kumi Naidoo and Rajesh Tandon, “The Promise of Civil Society,” Note 3, p.3.

²³ See for details Gideon Baker, *Civil Society and Democracy: Alternative Voices*, (Routledge Publishing, London, 1st Edition, 2002), p. 2.

foundation for building a robust civil society. Baker asserts that these strategies form the basis for “building civil society to counter totalitarianism.”²⁴

Social Media and its Impact

This section of the literature review will examine the concept of social media or the new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), its mass mobilization capacities and its implications on civil society.

Social media is a part of the new ICTs whose greatest benefit is the capacity to share information. In *Civil Society at the Millennium* the book fundamentally maintains that “ICT introduces abilities for our collective minds and hearts to move from working in isolation to working together.”²⁵ The importance of ICTs in the 21st century is also explained in detail by Robert Hassan in his book *Media, Politics and the Network Society* (2004). Hassan states that the new ICTs like the internet and social media are the main mode of transmission of ideas within the society as well as across the borders. Hassan further asserts that “these virtual channels of communication flicker and buzz twenty-four hours a day with critiques of the present order, and ideas for ways to assemble a different society.”²⁶

Since ICTs forms a part of the larger mass communication realm, it can be effectively utilized as a tool for mass mobilization aimed at promoting civil society. The mass mobilization capacity of mass media is stated by Doris A. Graber in her book *Media*

²⁴ See Kumi Naidoo and Rajesh Tandon, “The Promise of Civil Society,” Note 3, p.22.

²⁵ Liz Rykert, “New Tools- Same Values: Information and Communication Technology to support Civil Society,” Note 3, p.192.

²⁶ See Robert Hassan, *Media, Politics and the Network Society*, (Open University Press, England, 1st Edition, 2004), p.133.

Power in Politics. Graber contends that “The truly revolutionary significance of modern mass communication is the ability to form historically new bases for collective thought and action quickly, continuously and pervasively across the previous boundaries of time, space and status.”²⁷ The greatest benefit of these ICTs or social media is thus its capacity to create common platforms for sharing information, building networks, and joining people of common cause for the purpose of change, support, learning and the creation of civil society.²⁸ In *Global Civil Society* the author, John Keane, asserts that ICTs are all the more important for civil society in the 21st century owing due to the increasing cross border interactions between the different Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) within the new emerging political development leading to the emergence of cosmocracy, simply termed as “world wide webs of inter-dependence.”²⁹

The Role of Social Media and Civil Society in the Egyptian Revolution (2011)

Following the Arab Spring revolution (2011) Egypt also witnessed a popular movement around early January- February 2011 leading to the end of 30 years of authoritarian regime. In the book *Powers and Prospects: Reflections on Human Nature and the Social Order* (2002), the author, Noam Chomsky while stressing on the issue of political goals and visions, contends that “popular movements of resistance have a good deal to teach us about the goals and visions of ordinary people, their understanding and aspirations.”³⁰ The Egyptian revolution is primarily viewed as a citizen’s initiative or a civil society

²⁷ See Denis McQuail, “The Influence and Effects of Mass Media”, Doris A. Grabber,ed., *Media Power in Politics*, (Macmillan India Ltd., New Delhi, 2nd Edition, 1994), p. 32.

²⁸ Liz Rykert, “New Tools- Same Values: Information and Communication Technology to Support Civil Society”, Note 3, p. 180.

²⁹ See for details John Keane, *Global Civil Society?*, (Cambridge University Press, New York, 1st Edition, 2003),p. 98.

³⁰ See Noam Chomsky, *Powers and Prospects: Reflections on Human Nature and the Social Order*, (Madhyam Books, Delhi, 2nd Edition, 2002), p. 85.

movement. In *Democratization in the Arab World: Prospects and Lessons from around the Globe* by Laurel E. Miller, Jeffrey Martini, F. Stephen Larrabee, Angel Rabasa, Stephanie Pezard, Julie E. Taylor and Tewodaj Mengistu, the revolution is presented as part of a larger democratization process in the Middle East. The authors contend that even though the revolution was initially started via Facebook, yet, it was the civil society associations in Egypt which maintained and directed the revolution. The authors further assert that these civil society organizations “brought organizational capacity and experience in street politics.”³¹ The emphasis on citizen’s initiative is also stated in the book *Egypt the Moment of Change*. According to the authors Mubarak’s authoritarian regime marked by widespread unemployment, corruption, police brutality, poverty and the increasing gap between the rich and the poor had essentially laid the foundation for pro democratic protests against the regime. The authors assert that the regime and its model of control have nonetheless been challenged. For the first time in decades “Egypt has witnessed an upsurge of protest that cuts across society, involving workers, peasants, government employees, physicians, teachers and others.”³²

Nonetheless, in addition to this emphasis on civil society organizations there are also others who view social media, ICTs as the main driving force behind the success of the revolution. The importance of new media is also stated by Kenneth C. Killebrew in his book *Managing Media Convergence: Pathways to Journalistic Cooperation*. Killebrew maintains that, “in the distant past, voices were determined by who owned the press, but as new media formats were invented (radio, television, the internet), developed

³¹See for details Laurel E. Miller, Jeffrey Martini, Stephen F. Larrabee, Julie E. Taylor, Tewodaj Mengitsu, Note 14, p. 96.

³² See Rahab –El Mahdi and Philip Marfleet, *Egypt the Moment of Change*, (Zed Books Ltd., London, 2009), p.134.

and cast on the public landscape, the expectation of diverse voices became higher.”³³ In the book *Tweets from Tahrir: Egypt's Revolution as it Unfolded, in the Words of the People who made it*, the authors primarily argued that the internet and social media were the primary tools which had helped in shaping the uprising where social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter served as the press and organizing tool for the revolution. The author further contends that “the Arab Spring would not have happened at the speed and in the manner in which they did without social media. And the way in which the revolution is seen in the West, in the Arab World, and even within Egypt would be very different if we had not been able to hear from protesters and see the action so directly.”³⁴

Social Media and ICTs are important tools of civil society, owing due to their mass mobilization capacities which are central to the maintenance of a robust civil society. But while most of the prevalent studies on civil society focus mainly on the theoretical issues of the concept, the study on media stresses mainly on media effects, not much study is prevalent in regard to study of the connection between civil society and social media or ICTs. This study therefore, tries to trace the main connecting factor between the two concepts which is mass mobilization and attempt to analyze how proper channels of communication can serve as an important tool in enhancing the effectiveness of civil society by taking up the Egyptian revolution (2011) as a case study.

³³ See for details Kenneth C. Killebrew, *Managing Media Convergence: Pathways to Journalistic Cooperation*, (Surjeet Publications, Delhi, 1st Edition, 2005), p. 185.

³⁴ See Alex Nunns and Nadia Idle, *Tweets from Tahrir: Egypt's Revolution as it Unfolded, in the Words of the People who made it*, (Or Books, New York, 2011), p. 22.

1.4 Hypothesis

1. Was social media successful in enhancing the effectiveness of civil society in the Egyptian Revolution (2011)?
2. To what extent did social media served as a tool for political mobilization in the Egyptian Revolution?
3. Can social media serve as a catalyst for the emergence of an active or vibrant civil society?

1.5 Methodology

The methodology of the present study is based on descriptive, analytical, historical and empirical. Data has been collected through primary and secondary sources. The primary sources consisted of information and interview collected from the different dignitaries from Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, New Delhi and from the officials from Egyptian Embassy, New Delhi, and the secondary sources will consist of books, articles, journals, newspapers, magazines and websites.

1.6 Chapterization

The present study included the following chapters as:

Chapter: I- Introduction

Chapter: II- A Historical Background of the Egyptian Political
System Prior to the Revolution (1952- 2010)

Chapter: III- Civil Society and Citizen's Participation

Chapter: IV- Social Media

Chapter: V- Role of Social Media in the Egyptian Revolution

Chapter: VI- Civil Society in Egypt

Chapter: VII- Conclusion

In order to fully comprehend the role played by social media in accelerating the emergence of a vibrant civil society in Egypt it is pertinent to discuss at length the political situation which pre existed in Egypt prior the revolution. The absence of representation in the public sphere is taken as a triggering factor for increased online participation. The domination of the Egyptian public sphere by President Hosni Mubarak and his National Democratic Party (NDP) led to the overall exclusion of the Egyptians from participating in the political sphere as a consequent result the virtual world became a feasible gateway through which the Egyptians could come together and voice their common concerns far from the prying eyes of the regime. The preceding chapter discusses at length the political situation under President Hosni Mubarak and the varied laws aimed at suppressing participation in the public sphere. The oppressive Emergency Law as well as the varied laws adopted to repress public participation are analyzed in order to fully understand the degree of suppression in the public sphere.