Social Media and Arab Revolts: An Appraisal

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ABSTRACT

As evidenced by terms like "Twitter Revolution" and "Facebook Revolution", social media has emerged as a major theme in public discourse and scholarly literature discussing Arab Spring revolutions that have occurred across several Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) nations since 2010. Research literature discusses existing studies that examine social media's role in giving rise to, sustaining, and publicizing political revolts in numerous MENA countries, along with other key factors of Arab agitation, influencing political transformations in the region. In addition the current review paper sheds a light on the role of satellite television in the region and civic engagements of Arab's youth by using cyber spaces in developing a global public sphere in Arab states that subsequently changed the political system of this region.

Keywords: *Social media, cyber activism, satellite television, Arab dictators, global public sphere*

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Uprisings in MENA countries often termed Arab Spring emerged with the Tunisian revolution which took place on December 18, 2010 and culminated on January 14, 2011 with the removal of then President Zain el Abidine Ben Ali, in power for over 25 years (Britannica, 2014)). The Tunisian revolution was followed by the Egyptian Revolution which began on January 25, 2011 and ended with the expulsion of President Hosni Mubarak on February 11, 2011 (Shukrallah, 2013). This chain of revolutions ended with the Libyan uprising that brought the death of Muammar Al Qaddafi on October 20, 2011 after 40 years in power. The remaining Arab states like Morocco, Syria, Yemen, Jordon, Bahrain, and Algiers have been struggling hard to date in quest of political freedom and democracy through different

popular mutinies. This chain of protests and demonstrations in the Middle East were later termed "Arab Springs" (Ashley, 2011).

New media, particularly social media and mobile phones played a significant role in prompting struggle for democracy and human rights in this region of the world (Comninos, 2011; Haddadi, 2011). The current political condition of Middle East reveals that social media tools play a driving role in political conflict between citizenry and ruling elites. The new media has created an emergent public sphere characterized by a current phase of intervention, negotiation and institutionalization (Peters, 2009). Networked information and communication technologies accelerate the course of democratization by facilitating grassroot struggles against tyrannical rulers (Aday et al, 2010).

In both popular media and scholarly research, a consensus has emerged regarding the significant roles of social media as tools for information dissemination, disaster and emergency communications as well as citizen news reporting during conflict and crisis, as evidenced by early events such as the Mumbai terrorist attacks in 2008, Iran's presidential elections in 2009, and the Haitian earthquake of 2010.

The past decade has seen numerous political and social insurrections instigated and steered by social media users. For example, in 2009, Costa Ricans effectively used Twitter to garner support for victims following a devastating earthquake (Recuero 2011). Social media facilitated a Greenpeace petition with 1.5 million signatures pressuring the Argentinian government to approve a Forestry Act that would protect the natural forests of Argentina (Recuero, 2011; Greenpeace, 2007). Similarly, Twitter was used worldwide to launch a peaceful protest on April 6, 2009 in Moldova against rigged governmental elections, resulting in new snap elections and a weakening of the Communist Party (Cullum, 2010). Likewise social media played a significant role in the Orange revolution of Ukraine (2004) and revolution in Iran in 2009.

CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF ARAB MEDIA

Despite social media's important role in facilitating political awareness and mobilizing political action amongst grassroots in the Arab world and other regions, political upheavals in the MENA countries is not the result of social media alone. Multiple other factors come into play in creating political, social and technological conditions that facilitate the development of social media into a revolutionary political player and platform.

The reason behind the accelerating role of social media for political climate change in Arab World is three-fold. Firstly, growth of independent satellite TV channels in the Arab region, namely Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya gave rise to a new pan-Arabic, globally aware public sphere in the Middle East (Howard, 2010, Lynch, 2011; Nisbet & Myers, 2010). Secondly, the swift expansion of the internet and intensification of social networking sites radically changed the sub structural patterns of social connectivity (Khamis & Vaughn, 2011; Radsch, 2008). Thirdly, declining costs, greater access, and increasingly technologically powerful mobile phones have widened the public sphere to connect individuals and groups both within the Arab states and also transnationally. Hence within the span of one decade, new connective technologies transformed groups of people who previously lacked access to political information into information-rich societies (Bailard, 2009; Howard, 2010). These new networked societies are characterized by highly active online public spheres in which layperson individuals and grassroots activities bear witness using video-cam-enabled mobile

phones to document misconduct of their ruling elites, and to report them to the world. In many Arab countries, new networked media effectively remove previously insurmountable hurdles preventing the citizen participation in political life. In cases, where old powerful regimes were overthrown, such grassroots participation in public spheres results in actual political change.

ROLE OF SATELLITE TELEVISION AND THE INTERNET

In the late 1990s, the establishment of satellite television news in the Middle East opened up new avenues for political discourse, challenging state control over the flow of information, and thus establishing a new public sphere in the Middle East (Hafez, 2008). These television news channels highlighted the shared concerns of citizens living in these countries, bringing public awareness of political issues and bringing about political reforms. Al-Jazeera, in particular, proved to be a major source of information and an agenda setter in the political arena of the Arab world.

Initially, satellite television brought only limited short-term effects in the form of dissenting voices. The status-quo remained, bringing little change to ruling governments and their existing policies and practices, with no new political coalition emerging (Lynch, 2011). Al-Jazeera had little effect beyond causing irritation to political elites. Arab states responded to these initial jolts by establishing their own satellite TV channels and local newspapers to counter what they perceived as propaganda against them. In addition, pressure was placed upon journalists and local political forces to refrain from using the new media in any way that might muster political pressure against the ruling government.

The public sphere in the Middle East is the final area where control and domination of the states might be deeply challenged. The awareness which satellite television has disseminated paved the way for internet penetration in the region. The Arab world has been wisely using the satellite and new media technologies since the self- immolation of a Tunisian citizen against the atrocities of long ruling dictator Zine el-Abidine. Since then an un-ending chain of protests has been going on in Middle East that has already resulted in regime change in Tunisian and Egypt. Notwithstanding economic, social and security problems that have emerged since the initial overthrow of long-term dictators in both countries, the fact remains that grassroots political movements (all galvanized, organized and reported to the world via social media), are a democratizing political force to be reckoned with. At least the cases is so in under-developed and developing Arab countries.

The more developed states in the Middle East have generally been considered resistant to such democratic revolutions. Abundant oil resources and strategic rents allow ruling elites in the gulf Arab states to devise more effective measures of state control and surveillance over possible dissent (Ayubi, 1995). Hegemonic establishments, domestic military control and vast intelligence services have enabled the governments to survive trials that might oust ruling elites elsewhere in the region.

Hypothesizing the factors contributing to the staying-power of Arab dictatorial regimes, Bellin, (2004) asserts that "the region's enduring authoritarianism can be attributed to the robustness of the coercive apparatuses in many Middle Eastern and North African states and to this apparatus's exceptional will and capacity to crush democratic initiatives". These states still resist surviving but the huge wave of protests supported by satellite television and social media have brought changes in some countries for instance Tunis and Egypt. The

new media environment in these states has partly restrained the abilities of the governments to use their repressive force against the citizens. The broad information environment and the longstanding shifts in user's competencies matter most here rather than the direct and speedy apparatuses of political contest (Shirky, 2011).

The long term impact of the internet will be to transform a powerful public sphere in the authoritarian Arab world that will possibly serve as an open democratic platform for the inhabitants of the Gulf region. Through this way the long denied petitions of transparency, accountability and citizenship by existing dictators will be effectively challenged (Bunt, 2009). Lynch, (2013) argues that the new information environment plays a crucial role in the transformation of public sphere in Arab states, bringing about monumental social change in politics and society. However, the longer term impact of these changes upon democracy are still unclear and difficult to ascertain.

In the mean time, democratic protests in the Middle East, beamed across the region and the world via satellite television and also accessible via the Internet has resulted in heated debate across online and offline public spheres of Arab region. The satellite television and internet based social media pose a serious threat to Arab states which were based on state's censorships, status quo and low internet penetration. The waves of the uprisings since 2010 hitting Arab world contradict the assumptions and assertions regarding the staying-power of authoritarian regimes in the Middle East. Globalization, world-wide financial crises, global peace activists, are forces that demand democracy for Arab states. Powerful international players like Al-Jazeera, satellite communication channels and internet have destabilized the once powerful regimes of the Arab states.

Pondering upon the soft power of new media technologies, Lynch (2013) highlights four distinct factors that are challenging the authority of the Arab states. According to him, the new media has firstly galvanized collective grassroots action against the Arab dictators, secondly new media limits state repression, thirdly new media affects global support for the tyrannical Arab regimes and fourthly shifted the overall control of the public sphere from state controlled media to the satellite and social media. Lynch argues that although these changes are discrete in nature, they are however closely related to one another. Each factor, functioning individually, also reinforces the other.

Lynch (2013) predicts that with the passage of time the transformative effects of the internet, capabilities of the masses and networked communication in the form of new media will eventually bring systematic change in Arab world. Castells (2008) asserts that the Arab states undermine the rising abilities of the networked communication which has already challenged the power of the Arab's governments. He is of the view that the Middle Eastern states should accept the transformation of power from states into the networked public sphere. Al-Malky (2007) shared the same views and endorsed the instrumental power of the new media. He said that the wired youth of Tahrir Square is the epitome of the vision of competencies of new networked public spheres bringing about political change in Middle East. The climate change of that began in the Tahrir Square protests has crossed all the red lines of the Gulf politics and the horizon of this political change encompasses the whole of Middle East. According to Lynch, (2011) the expansion of internet and diffusion of cell phones in the last decade added a new layer onto the new evolving public sphere in Arab world.

Internet and cell phones, initially minimally used only among Arab elites and their English-speaking youth, have now diffused amongst the Arab public, permeating all social

classes. For example, Facebook had more than 21 million users by 2011, higher than the estimated figure of newspaper readers in Gulf region (Salem & Mourtada, 2011). Penetration of new media in Tunisia and Egypt is particularly high. Smart phones with internet connectivity has enabled the users to generate even more refined contents, bearing witness to (and sharing globally) tyrannical actions of ruling regimes. Lynch, (2013) asserts that the Arab young generation communicates and interacts in different manners and has associated different kind of expectations with the new high tech public sphere. Such speedy and substantial information in the form of political communication definitely brings significant results. He asserts that there is a strong relationship between the prevailing environment of information and existing social and political activism in Arab World.

ROOTS OF ARAB AGITATION

The Arab revolution did not come out of the blue; it is rather result of the oppression of the ageing dictators towards their subjects. Moreover prevailing poverty, large economic gaps between rich and poor, exploitation, corruption, unemployment, lack of security, absence of freedom of speech and lack of assurance of individual's rights paved the way for these revolts. Regardless of difficulties in identifying individual factors of insurrections, one cannot deny the role played by social media particularly Facebook and Twitter in the rise of democratic revolts in this region (Paul, 2011). Apart from the above mentioned causes of Arab revolts, there are certain core reasons that have not been thoroughly explored by many of the scholars. The following pages, will explore some of these factors that have yet to emerge in mainstream political or scholarly debates, namely: kleptocracy in the Arab region; massive unemployment amongst Arab youth; and a prevailing police state in many Arab countries.

KLEPTOCRACY

The Middle East has historically been a region where annexation is practiced by powerful regimes and dictators. There is a general consensus amongst Arab scholars that kleptocracy is one of the main reasons behind the unstable situation of the Arab world (Khawaja, 2011). The kleptocrates are normally allied with the fraudulent forms of the authoritarian regimes of dictators, military rulers, nepotistic and autocratic governments in which no external oversight or check-and-balance of power exists.

The results of such kleptocratic practices on a society are usually adverse with regard to the managing of economic, political and civil affairs of the states. The kleptocrates assume despotic powers by practicing transfer of money and power from many to a few individuals and families.

The Middle Eastern Gulf States are rich with oil wealth; therefore the region is a sanctuary of kleptocrates. The moneyed elite class of the Gulf consolidates their tyrannical powers by usurping the citizens' rights of freedom, liberty, equality and justice (Khawaja, 2011).

THE UNEMPLOYED ARAB YOUTH: A DEMOGRAPHIC TIME BOMB

The Arab states have been fighting against the demographic time bomb since decades. The population in Arab countries increased tremendously and reaches to 367 million from 1975 to 2011. A two-third of the Egyptian population is under the age of 30 (Emirates24/7News,

2011). Due to the incompetence of ruling elite the economic and political developments are not keeping up with the surprising increase in the population (Manfreda, 2011). In contrast to the mega rich life style of the Arab Kleptocrates, thousands of Arab families live in grim conditions and the youth is suffering from poverty and unemployment (Khawaja, 2011).

The Arab world has a long history of fighting for political freedom but the protests that broke out in 2011 would not have grown into mass protests if they had not been augmented by widespread restlessness about low living standard and unemployment of the youth of the Arab (Manfreda 2011). The self-immolation of a Tunisian youth unemployed Muhammad Bouzizi is a leading example of how unemployment can be deadly for a state and how the indifferent attitude of the regime can be proven disastrous for the whole state (Khawaja, 2011). University graduates were left with little choice but to do menial labour to earn a living and while families must struggle hard to feed their children. This situation has further incited the youth of the Arab region, leading them to revolt.

POLICE STATE

The social and political conditions of the Gulf region have transformed many of the Arab regimes into 'police states' (Khawaja, 2011). The term is associated for the states that adopt repressive and stiff measure to regulate social, economic and political lives of the masses by means of secret intelligence agencies and police forces. In Syria, the dynastic Bashar Al-Assad regime intimidated the people with the help of secret agencies and police force (Khawaja, 2011). The regimes used all the state apparatuses to repress the dissent voice of the citizens against his administration, enacting and enformcing laws that bar any political freedom, demonstration and activism (FIDH, 2011).

Syrians were not allowed to raise dissent voice against the president and the ruling Baath party. The public discussion on ethno-religious issues in Syria was strictly banned and the people were often punished for discussing sensitive matters (Khawaj, 2011). The same was the case with the regimes of Hosni Muabarak, Zine el-Abidine and Muammar Al- Qaddafi. Hence information scarcity in these countries led the masses to use alternative media to protest against and overthrow the ruling regime.

YOUTH AND LEADERLESS STATES OF ARAB

Wheeler (2006) maintains that credit for the transformation of political change goes to the information-rich youth who have proven themselves as a great social force. Their skill in the internet use and state-of-the-art communication tactics has changed the climate of Middle Eastern politics. Wheeler continues that the sub cultures of the Arab youth have sowed the seeds of the social norms of the future. As Arab youths become more sophisticated at evading state firewalls and government restrictions and control over information and communication, it is likely that networked media will succeed in bringing about democratic norms in Arab nations (Lynch, 2013). However, Lynch cautions that such new competencies and parallel rise of transformed public spheres could bring vague and conflicting effects. However gradual and continuing changes in the political system of the Arab world allow much time for ruling regimes to absorb the challenges. He further conveys that uneven distribution of such new citizens possibly produce a digital divide and can widen a gap between haves and haves not. Those who live in big cities and have access to latest information technologies may

dominate over the masses who lack such facilities. Lynch cautions that tensions between the conventional political governance and the intense protests behavior of the Arab's youth could bring serious challenges to the stability of the newly built democratic regimes. He argues that the web based public spheres will radically change the political scenario but the course of this change still remains ambiguous.

Social media has been unexpectedly proven as a substitute of leadership for Arab youth in Middle Eastern countries. Keen to bring political and economic reforms in Arab countries, the leaderless educated middle class took immense advantages from the widespread availability of new media technologies. By using the social media, they safeguard themselves against conventional media suppressions. Instead of waiting for the saviors to come, they heavily relied on cell phones, shared web technologies and collaborative social media application to execute protests against their myopic rulers. By doing so, they attracted the foreign news media attention and broadcast their discontentment concerning their political systems to the international world. Through such activities over social media, the like-minded youth in the Middle East remained successful in establishing a political wave against their despotic political administrations (Mamoun et al, 2012). In riposte states and ruling regimes respond to the political activism of Arab's youth over social media with control, filtrations, and pressure and tried to control the web based social networks through many measures. However the power of the new media technologies put the muzzling efforts of the governments in vain and allowed the users to circumvent web censorship effectively.

In Tunisia and Egypt, we have witnessed a new genre of revolution whose distinguishing feature lies in its organization by networks and particularly in social networks, which played an important informational and organizational role. (Allagui & Kuebler, 2011, p. 1435).

DIGITAL ACTIVISM AND ARAB'S DICTATORS

Many scholars, communication experts and even former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in recent years repeatedly used the term "Dictator's Dilemma" while talking about the impact of online media in non-democratic states (Howard, Agarwal, and Hussain, 2011; Tufekci, 2011; Meier, 2011; Quinn, 2011). This dilemma is commonly taken as a trade-off a dictator has to face in order to create a balance between economic benefits from the right to use internet and dangers to the survival of their regimes from internet enabled communication (Almond, et al. 2004). If the authoritarian rulers allow internet penetration into their states, it will eventually risk opposition to the endurance of their regimes and if they do not do so, they get themselves isolated from the international world economy, hence triggering economic decline to their states. Dorman (2013) asserts that internet penetration will ultimately pave the way for democracy; hence the dilemma indicates that the dictatorships are bound to tumble down one by one. The case of Egypt explains the same phenomenon when President Hosni Mubarak allowed the internet penetration and developed the infrastructure in terms of telecommunication to reap the economic benefits then activists used the same internet and telecommunications to plinth their opposition against him. They mobilized the masses by using new media technologies and organized a mass demonstration against the then president which attracted the attention of the international media that brought end to his regime (Saleh 2012).

Howard (2010) while conducting research on the usage of social media and political mobilization in Islamic world found that the internet is more resistant to state control as

compared to traditional media. He asserted that the new media has greatly helped the masses to build strong networking ties for political mobilization against the dictators in Arab countries. Stepnova (2011) opposes the role of social networking sites arguing that the information communication technologies have little to do with the prevailed socio-economic and political crisis behind the protests. She continues that the socio-political gap between small ruling elite and the common folk had been widened enough that the experts were indeed anticipating upheaval at some point. However she believes that the protests took place earlier rather than later and information communication technologies in general and social networking sites in particular initially played a huge role in mobilizing the masses and incited them for the prompt protests.

THE FLAME OF ARAB UPHEAVALS REACHES TO IRAQ

The online social networking started to increase rapidly in Iraq after 2010 general election. The flame of Arab upheavals that emerged from Tunisia reached to the Iraqi capital Baghdad. Many Iraqis during the Arab revolts started to express their grievances against the government that eventually brought dozens of protests in Iraq on February 12, 2011.

According to Robertson (2013) Facebook and YouTube are most popular means for Iraqi people to stay connected with the global world. Keeping in mind the restrictions on mainstream media, thousands of Iraqi protestors used Facebook and YouTube to organize protests. By the end of 2013, Iraq was placed at 50th position in terms of Facebook penetration in the world with 3,265,880 monthly active users (Socialbakers, 2013). They relied on alternative media channels to voice their concerns against the Maliki's government. Similarly in 2009, the Iranians used Twitter to protest against their government after presidential elections and revealed the misconduct of Ahmadinejad's administration (Parmelee & Bichard, 2011). Hundreds of Iraqis from different sects gathered around Baghdad's Tehrir Square on this day and chanted slogans against their government. They intoned their words loud together saying "No, no to corruption," "The government's officials are thieves," and "Baghdad, Baghdad, spark a revolution" (Sly, 2011). In Mosul, a 31 years old jobless, father of four children, added fuel to the movement by setting himself on fire and died later on (AFP, 2011). Nouri Maliki, the Prime Minister of Iraq, prohibited the journalists from live coverage of the event in hopes of lessening the impact of the demonstrations. This move made protestors angrier and they observed a "Day of Rage" against the government's corruption and brutalities. During that day the Iraqi police killed more than thirty people and injured many others (Reuters, 2011). The restriction imposed on media by the Iraqi government was not a surprise rather this was the precedent of the media environment across all Arab countries. Al-Rawi (2012) maintains that Maliki's restrictions on media bear a resemblance to the media systems of other Arab countries. For instance Gadhafi used repressive measures to control the media and ordered a news embargo during the protests in Libya in 2011(Black and Bowcott, 2011). In Yeman, Ali Abdullah Saleh's government, dismayed the journalists by not paying any heed towards the brutal attacks and persecutions of the media persons who were covering the protests in 2011 (Kasinof, 2011). In the similar fashion, the Iraqi government tried to damage the cause of the protests and labeled the protestors as anarchists and traitors of the state by accusing them Al-Qaeda's affiliates. The government alleged them of being rebels of the states as they

were the believers of banned Baath party of Saddam Hussein (Reuters, 2011).

Discussing the reasons of failure of social media campaign in Iraq, Al-Rawi (2014) stated that Iraqi people used social media to change the political fate of the country but the Arab spring in Iraq was somehow marginalized by the international media. He assumed that the prevailing violence and extremism in the country might have overshadowed the revolutionary expedition of social media for political and social change in Iraq. Moreover he declared that the protests in Baghdad were less aggressive in nature as compared to the protests in Tunis and Egypt. He confirmed that these protests were intended to improve the public services and to counter the prevailing corruption in the country rather than dismantling the government.

GLOBAL CONCERNS OF LOCAL ISSUES

The global public sphere initiated a rational exchange of dialogue on the global spaces. It is so dramatic that uncertainty prevails in Arab region about the emergence of such a public sphere ever being imagined (Robertson 2013). According to him, scholars are more interested in exploring the structure of the relationship that exists today between the self and the others at global level. He argues that the scholars are more concerned about the question that how the individuals consider themselves as citizens of the global community at this global space. The available literature on technologies and discourses define the global spaces as progressively more reciprocal, emphasized, and increasingly unified into the fabric of everyday life (Silverstone 2007). He is of the view that when media outlets frame the 'other' people at that time they define the space in such a way that the 'other' people appear to us and invite us to give them the same response and provoke us to react as potential audience or actual citizen of the global space. He proclaims that such global space cultivates a sense that we are sub-part of the larger part of the globe and all the inhabitants of this global space are one single entity. Depending upon the transmissions which we keep an eye on, a sense is possibly generated into us that we may or may not be there to rescue the people when they call us into the streets. The actual geographical locations for the inhabitants of this space get disappear and people across the world feel that what happens in Tunis, Egypt, Bahrain or Syria is our business (Silverstone 2007). Cottle (2011) in the same notion maintains that the new media technologies have a deep-seated sense about the world that it is a shared and a singular space. Media messages incite thinking into the audience not only that they belong to one world but also that they share the same consciousness of the world as a whole. According to him, the global media actors while defining global crisis possess a significant position. The global crises are not only conveyed by the media outlets rather they are constituted by them. Silverstone (2013) tells that the way the audience collectively responds to the events of the world rest upon that how they are defined and interceded by those media pipes.

Silverstone (2007) while criticizing the agenda of the different mainstream media outlets argues that the world which has been presented by the technological development is not singular rather plural. According to him, the world that appears on CNN is totally different from Al-Arabya. He asserts that both broadcast and online media reflect a disputed image of the global world on this public space. He dismisses the assumptions that the international media presents a homogeneous global culture. In order to explore the homogeneity in global mediated culture Silverstone demands the scholars to move between different worlds like BBCW, CNNW, RTW and the world of Al-Jazeera.

CYBER ACTIVISM, CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, CITIZEN JOURNALISM AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN ARAB WORLD

El-Nawawy and Khamis (2014) tell that social media has played an important role before, during and after the Egyptian revolution. They argue that firstly social media enabled cyber-activism among the masses that triggered street activism. This encouraged civic engagement into the Egyptian masses to mobilize and organize different forms of political expression including protests. Both scholars further maintain that cyber-activism and civic engagement supplemented a new form of citizen journalism in Egyptian society that provided a platform for common people to build and distribute their own version of reality. They have found an inter-link among cyber-activism, civic engagement and citizen journalism in Egyptian case.

Howard (2011) articulates that people use cyber-activism to advance a political cause online with the aid of internet, which is difficult to perform offline. He articulates that the purpose of such activism is to create certain persuasive digital artifacts that highlight the stories of cruelty, injustice and violation of human rights undertaken by rulers and the political elite of society. According to him such digital artifacts interpret the history in such a way that touch humans emotionally and intellectually, to advocate a desired political outcome. Howard maintains a difference between cyber-activism and mobilization wherein the latter is more related to designing, planning, facilitating and implementation of a particular action. There is, however, a correlation between the two concepts, wherein cyber-activism may promote civic engagement which, in return, fuels various forms of mobilization.

Putnam (2000) has characterized civic engagement in two forms: cooperative and expressive. The cooperative form is related to broader public interests whereas the expressive forms of civic engagements are individualistic and attend narrowly focused public interests. The "civility of contemporary political discourse" grew weaker due to the collapse in cooperative form of civic engagement (Putnam 2000, p. 46).

In order to clearly comprehend the term civic engagement, one has to deeply understand the closely related term: civil society. It is defined as "a reservoir of caring, cultural life and intellectual innovation, teaching people . . . the skills of citizenship and nurturing a collection of positive social norms that foster stability, loosely connected under the rubric of 'social capital" (Edward 2004, p. 14). The purpose of civil society is to struggle for independent judiciary and freedom of speech to build a democratic society that manifests the interests of the citizens.

Civic engagement is made possible through mobilizing the public will. The term "public will" refers to "a social force that can mobilize organically, or with external support and influence, to become a political lever for social change…[it] has the potential, if adequately resourced, organized, and mobilized, to serve as the impetus for social change" (Salmon, Fernandez & Post, 2010, p.159).

The formation of civil society is the cornerstone of any given democratic society. According to the contemporary political scholars, theories on political discourse reflect that civil society is the underpinning of a true democratic society. Brower (2006) supplements the point and states that a shift in terms of discourse of democratization from government to society is a discrete one. He has noticed a considerable shift in the theoretical debates that once believed that the states to be the venues of change but now consider the non-governmental

public domains as the stimulus for political change and stability.

El-Nawawy and Khamis (2014) assert that citizen journalism has a significant importance in bringing political change in various countries of the world. The new genre of journalism enables common citizens the opportunity to document their own account of the story. Both the scholars believe that citizen journalism is different from conventional forms of professional journalism as ordinary citizens with the aid of new media technologies record the events and upload them straight onto the internet in the form of texts, images, audios and videos. They maintain that the mainstream media today frequently makes the exclusive news stories based upon the items captured and forwarded by common citizens. Reich (2008) contends that the citizen journalism is an encouraging practice of making news which has been supported by different scholars for permitting the common citizens to capture events that cannot be reported or neglected at times by mainstream media due to various constraints.

This new form of non-conventional journalism has empowered the masses by providing them a platform to voice their concerns. The contribution of the masses in the form of citizen journalism is regarded positively that produces informed citizenry and democracy (Nip, 2006). Therefore it is predictable that "average citizens are capable of intelligent judgment, mature understanding, and rational choice if offered the opportunity; in other words, that democracy as 'self-government' is not a dream but a practical premise" (Rosen, 1994, p. 18).

The anti-hegemonic nature of the new media has offered new means of communication to politically marginalized people to voice their concerns. The alternative media facilitate the politically ignored demographers to counter oppositional discourse and to articulate their own identities. The internet has challenged the loose peripheries of the conventional public spheres of the world (Dahlberg, 2007).

Becket (2011) maintains that the horizontal, diverse and flexible nature of the Arab revolts puzzled the authorities as to how to cut down the organic strength of such movements. He further asserts that democratic movements are the result of operative procedures of group mobilization in both the spaces; offline and online, rather than led by any single charismatic individual personality, therefore such revolution is generally termed as leaderless revolution. Khamis and Vaughn (2011) continue that leaderless nature of the uprising is the evident that it was a true expression of public's will. The protests were steered by a loose network of young demonstrators who belong to different walks of life. Telhami (2011) stated that such movements did not have any representative or symbolic leader rather it had some "accidental leaders" like Wael Ghonim, the indiscernible forerunner for the Facebook page "We are Khalid Saeed". He became known to the people when he was imprisoned for 12 days by the Egyptian security agencies.

Khamis and Vaughn (2011) believe that the Egyptian people used the new media technologies effectively in order to release their political grievances. They assert that cyber-activists in Egypt with the aid of internet informed the world about their grievances against the state, organized protests and acted as a deterrent force against their the ruling regime. Both the scholars are agreed that the Egyptians through new media tools ensured that their narrative was heard and their complaints were recorded at international level. The new media were set up efficiently before, during and after the uprising as instruments to enhance their efforts to organize demonstrations and mobilize public will (Salmon, Fernandez & Post, 2010).

CONCLUSION

The existing literature reveals that Arab uprisings did not occur out of the blue rather they were the results of historical and contextual factors, closely related to the dictatorial nature of long-standing ruling regimes. The masses were deprived of their basic right to vote and to express their opinion freely against the brutalities of their long dictatorial regimes. Satellite television opened up new avenues of political discourse initially and influenced political restructuring of the Arab world, while ruling regimes reacted by loosening certain firewalls. The Arab dictators later allowed internet penetration in the region in order to avoid isolation from international world economy which ultimately paved the way for democratic movements, mass revolts, and the overthrow of many long-standing dictators (Dorman, 2013). The current scenario of Middle Eastern politics suggests that the Gulf kingdoms should accept the transformation of power from states into the networked public sphere and should legitimize its rule. The current appraisal of the literature notes the widespread use of new media by Arab youth, leading to a global net worked public sphere in the region that consequently is sowing the seeds to reformation of the political system in many Middle Eastern countries.

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