The Role of New Information and

Communication Technologies and Social

Media

during the Arab Spring

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Summary of my argument

The so-called 'Arab Spring' or 'Arab Awakening' of 2011 has demonstrated that the 'myth of authoritarian stability', as described by Gause III, no longer stands. Academic specialists have failed to predict the consecutive overthrows of Arab authoritarian regimes as witnessed in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, as well as the mass protests against the ruling regimes that occurred in countries such as in Yemen, Syria and Bahrain. Since the Arab Spring's occurrence, several researches have been conducted in order to study new Information and Communication Technologies' (ICTs) and, most specifically, social media's impact, such as Twitter and Facebook, in order to identify their effects on the revolutions. However, opinions are divided on whether such technologies were sufficient to lead to the toppling of authoritarian regimes, or whether these simply had an enabling effect for the revolutions to emerge. This dissertation thus focuses on the role of new ICT's and social media during the events of 2011. I argue, along with scholar's findings, that although social media was undeniably an important tool used by activists during the Arab Spring, it had a facilitator role rather than a causal role. Indeed, I demonstrate my argument through different means. First, I show how satellite television was also crucial during these revolutions as it amplified and legitimized protestors' online activity and claims. In addition, I highlight the absence of a causal relationship and positive correlation between the level of Internet, Facebook and Twitter penetration in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and the occurrence of social movements and regime change. Regardless of one country's Internet, Facebook or Twitter penetration, these rates have not proved to be predictors of social mobilizations or political change nor did they increase the chances of a country to be the target of such events. In addition, I show

how the physical engagement of activists, mainly the Arab youth, was also essential in removing dictators from power. Protestors' claims, in regards to domestic socio-economic and political conditions, were strong enough to push them to voice their demands in the streets in great numbers. Finally, that is why, I also argue that young Arabs' online and offline activism represented a driving force during the 2011 events.

The so-called 'Arab Spring' or 'Arab Awakening' of 2011 has demonstrated that the 'myth of authoritarian stability', as described by Gause III, no longer stands. Many academic specialists in the subject of the Middle East have overestimated the authoritarian regimes' ability to maintain control over their population and suppress popular dissent. This explains why these scholars failed to predict the consecutive overthrows of Arab authoritarian regimes as witnessed in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, as well as the mass protests against the ruling regimes that occurred in countries such as in Yemen, Syria and Bahrain. Academics had mostly focused their attention on analyzing these regimes' ability to secure power and ensure political stability in spite of unpopularity and various politico-economic problems (Gause III, 2011). It is only after the events of 2011 that Arab citizens demonstrated their capacity to challenge their rulers and topple totalitarian regimes through nationwide popular mobilization. The Arab Spring's revolutions have been described as leaderless 'in the classic sense as there was no longstanding revolutionary figurehead, traditional opposition leader, or charismatic speechmaker to radicalize the public' (Howard and Hussain, 2011, p37). Also, because information about events was exchanged instantly through new social media and through satellite television channels, like Al-Jazeera, it allowed protestors to organize themselves quickly (Howard and Hussain, 2011). This dissertation will focus on the role of new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and social media during the events of 2011.

Before the Arab Spring, only a few scholars had already started to recognize the new Arab media's increasing role in political and cultural settings of Middle Eastern societies. Some scholars, like Howard who predicted 'digitized' democratizing revolutions in the Middle East, anticipated how the use of new ICTs, such as satellite television, mobile phones and Internet technologies, would serve as means for political change in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region (Howard, 2010). Since the Arab Spring's occurrence, several researches have been conducted in order to study new ICTs' impact and, most specifically social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, in order to identify their effects on the revolutions (Segerberg & Bennett, 2011, Lynch, 2011, Youman and York, 2012, Howard et al., 2011, Howard & Hussain, 2011, Rane & Salem, 2012, Mourtada & Salem, 2012, Shirky, 2011, Anderson, 2011, Aouragh & Anderson, 2011, Himelfard, 2011, Alterman, 2011, Aday et al., 2012, Lim 2012, Karagiannopoulos, 2012). However, opinions are divided on whether such technologies were sufficient to lead to the toppling of authoritarian regimes, or whether these simply had an enabling effect for the revolutions to emerge.

Through my research, I will, thus, provide a clearer picture of the different arguments developed before the Arab Spring on the potential impacts of new ICTs and social media on the Middle East's political situation. Also, I will present the diverse opinions set out by scholars on social media's impact on the Arab Spring. I will, thus, illustrate how scholars, prior to the Arab Spring, had underestimated the social media's ability to facilitate the revolutions. At the same time, I will also show that opinions have not completely changed on the ability of new ICTs, including social media, to be sufficient in enabling successful revolutions. Indeed, there are

important contextual elements that also need to be included in the picture in order to understand why new ICTs have had such an important role. That is why I also intend to demonstrate how, during the course of the 2011 revolutions, the given socio-economic and political contexts in MENA countries that experienced uprisings have also strongly contributed in the overthrow of autocrats. Indeed, protestors' claims, in regards to domestic socio-economic and political conditions, were robust enough to lead them to express their demands in the streets in masses. Social media users have also represented a significant contributing factor. These users have predominantly represented young and educated activists whose online and offline activism represented a driving force during the 2011 events.

And so, most of the literature here reviewed will be based on social movements, communication, and political science works. The methodological issues encountered in this research will stem from the limited pool of study developed since the Arab Spring's advent, as new ICTs and social media' impact on these revolutions is a new studied phenomenon. On a side note, it was noticed that there are still gaps in the literature as scholars struggle in trying to differentiate the various types of ICTs and their respective effects.

This paper will first give background information about the context in which the revolutions of 2011 emerged in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Yemen and Syria. This will situate and inform readers about the circumstances wherein each of these uprisings have taken place and allow them to recognize how different these movements were. Indeed, although these mobilizations may have similarities, they have nonetheless emerged from unique sources and played out differently in each case. Secondly, this research will introduce different arguments in

regard to new ICTs and social media's role and impact on various revolutions that took place before the Arab Awakening, such as the Cedar revolution and the Green Movement. These will support my argument on scholar's unchanged opinion on ICTs' ability to assist regime change. Thirdly, through a literature review, I will contrast different scholars' arguments on determining whether new ICTs and social media had a causal effect on the Arab Spring or not. This will demonstrate how these technologies simply represented an enabling factor during the Arab Awakening. I will argue, like demonstrated by Rane and Salem (2012), that there is not a causal relationship nor a positive correlation between the level of Internet, Facebook and Twitter penetration and the occurrence of social and political change in the MENA region during the Arab Spring. Regardless of one country's Internet, Facebook or Twitter penetration, these rates have not proved to be predictors of social mobilizations or political change; nor did they increase the chances of a country to be the target of such events. Finally, after presenting social media's impact on the Arab youth, I will demonstrate how young Arabs' online activism and their physical engagement during the revolutions, have contributed to the mass mobilizations and the authoritarian regimes' collapse. It will be demonstrated that social media's role was that of a facilitator, because of its users' effective ability to use them as political tools to organize mobilizations and to express their strong discontent toward socio-economic and political conditions.

Arab Spring's Context

Previous to the Arab Awakening, the persistence of authoritarianism and the resistance to democratization had been regarded as a 'central puzzle' for scholars that studied Arab politics

(Brynen et al., 2012, p1). Unlike other parts of the world, the political history of the MENA region was not marked by democratization following colonialism. The region proved to be resistant to the third wave of democratization of the 80s and 90s (Lust 2011). Following MENA's states' independence, those that had some features of democracy were soon toppled by military coups (like in the case of Syria, Egypt, Iraq and Sudan) and were affected by civil war (like in the case of Lebanon) (Brynen et al. 2012). Others states like Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates emerged as authoritarian absolutist monarchies. States, like Jordan, Morocco, Kuwait and Bahrain, became authoritarian constitutional monarchies. And finally, states like Algeria, and South Yemen, saw their national liberation movements install single-party states to put an end to colonial rule (Brynen et al. 2012).

The events of 2011, however, have crushed the authoritarian status quo of certain countries in the MENA region. As defined by Brynen et al, the Arab Spring has been 'a series of Arab uprisings that unseated long-standing dictators in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen. It generated mass protests and countervailing repression in Bahrain and Syria, and affected almost every other regime in the region in some way' (Brynen et al., 2012, p.1). And so, these events have since been at the heart of scholarly debates and researches both because of the Arab Spring's sudden occurrence and for its future implications in the region's politics. Surely, this is only the beginning of a new political era in the region. For some countries, a long political transition awaits them, for others, political changes might arise -or not- as governments will have to adapt according to the new political environment in the region (Brynen et al., 2012).

When studying the Arab world and the Arab Spring, it is important to understand that there is not (or was not) a single Arab authoritarianism in the region. As stated by Brynen et al, 'the politics of Ben Ali's Tunisia were very different from those of Saleh's Yemen or the Khalifa monarchy in Bahrain, and nothing anywhere resembled Qaddafi's Libya'(Brynen et al., 2012, p.2). Consequently, this allows us to also recognize that the underlying forces of the opposition were inherently different from a country to another, although some of the claims made by protestors across the region were similar (Brynen et al., 2012). Indeed, it is important to acknowledge that demonstrators' claims were directly shaped by the political settings dictated by their respective authoritarian rulers. Like mentioned by Jones, 'the present events are the result of a combination of immediate grievances specific to each country, the social and technological changes sweeping the region and broader historical trends; but the story is quite different in each country' (Jones, 2012, p.450). Let us, thus, expand on the socioeconomic and political context of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Yemen and Syria, as these have all experienced anti-regime protests and, in some cases, saw their ruler ousted.

TUNISIA

In the aftermath of Tunisia's independence, the country was ruled by two political leaders, first, by Habib Bourguiba and then, by Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali (BBC Monitoring, 2013). Although Ben Ali had reformed the Social Destourian Party of Bourguiba as the Democratic Constitutional Rally (DCR), he left little room for competitive party politics (Brynen et al., 2012). Also, while Ben Ali's government was improving in terms of economic growth through liberalization since the 90s (King, 2009), perceptions of increased social inequality

nonetheless emerged. In fact, the main recipients of these economic benefits were concentrated in the hands of the 'coterie of the crony capitalists close to the DCR and President Ben Ali' (Brynen, 2012, p.19). In the face of such corruption and unequal wealth distribution, Tunisians' anger started to be felt as early as 2008 (Brynen et al., 2012).

According to Brynen et al, the combination of 'single-party institutional legacies, façade multipartyism, and patronage-based economic privatization' (Brynen, 2012, p.19) seemed to have guaranteed the Tunisian government's and other similar authoritarian government's stability until 2011. However, the 'perceptions of economic inequality, corruption, cronyism and the absence of a meaningful political voice' (Brynen, 2012, p.19) led governments to loose popular legitimacy and, in some cases, face the collapse of their regime (Milanovic, 2011).

And so, in the provincial town of Sidi Bouzid, on December 17th 2010, Mohamed Bouazizi, a Tunisian street vendor, after being harassed by police officers, set himself on fire as his complaints got rejected (Noor, 2011). After his self-immolation, Bouazizi triggered a series of anti-authoritarian mobilizations that spread across the country and eventually throughout the MENA region. The Tunisian protests and events where instantly and extensively covered by different media outlets. Protestors were numerous and also various as they belonged to different socio-economic backgrounds (Goldstone, 2011). Eventually, this succession of happenings led to the overthrow of President Ben Ali on January 14th 2011 (Brynen et al., 2012).

When studying the Arab Spring's unfolding, it is also important to acknowledge the fact that protestors no longer feared the domestic security forces (Brynen et al., 2012). Indeed, it was

reported that in the case of Tunisia, Ben Ali had ordered his security forces to restrain from using violence to appease protests that started on January 13th, 2011. Soon, the police were receiving contradictory orders from different senior officers on ways to manage the crisis. This eventually led them to show signs of weaknesses to the public. As mass protests flooded the country, Tunisian security forces saw their deterrent power fade away, as military officers progressively abandoned repressive measures to crush the protests. That is why scholars have considered that Tunisia's successful revolution was partly due to close civil-military relationship that was formed during the anti-regime protests (Brynen et al., 2012). In fact, such a relationship was also notable in the case of Egypt as well (*'Egypt's protestors remain firm'*, 2011 and Brynen et al., 2012).

EGYPT

After being under British colonial rule, Egypt became a constitutional monarchy. However in 1952, King Farouk was overthrown after a military coup organized by the Free Officers headed by Gamal Abdul Nasser (Palmer, 2007). The Arab Socialist Movements (ASM) was then established as the unique political party to guarantee stability and domestic support. In the aftermath of Nasser's death in 1970, Anwar Sadat took power and created a new political order characterized by a limited multiparty system (King, 2009 and Palmer, 2007). Indeed, the National Democratic Party soon replaced the ASM and served as the 'dominant, pro-regime political force' (Brynen et al, 2012, p.22). In 1981, Sadat was killed by radical Islamists and was replaced by Hosni Mubarak, the vice president at that time (King, 2009). Ever since, Egypt enjoyed a close relationship with Washington and engaged in economic reforms and

privatization (Palmer, 2007). In fact, the Mubarak government made sure that the benefits of such economic activities remained in the hands of business leaders close to the regime. Also, granting that multiparty elections were allowed, Mubarak, nonetheless, ensured that his party repeatedly 'won' elections (King, 2009). That is why Brynen et al characterized the presidential elections of 2005 as 'uncontested referendums rather than genuine elections' (Brynen et al., 2012, p.22).

In order to understand Egypt's engagement in mass mobilizations in 2011, it is important to acknowledge the country's socio-economic and political context. Mubarak's regime, for long, had to contend with domestic challenges on the political and economic level (Brynen et al., 2012). Indeed, it had to deal, for example, with the 'Kefaya' protest movement in 2004 (King, 2009), with radical Islamists' discontent and with the formation of civil society organizations, such as Youth movements (Brynen et al., 2012). Also, despite decent economic growth in the recent years (Brynen et al. 2012), the country was nonetheless facing rising unemployment, especially among the youth, and food prices escalation (King, 2009). Like in Tunisia, although economic inequality increase was not evident in numbers, it was nonetheless widely perceived by Egyptians (Milanovic, 2011). And so, this public perception, that most of the economic profits derived from growth were solely benefiting the elite and close individuals to the regime, was enough to rally the Egyptian population against their ruler (Milanovic, 2011). Indeed, like stated by Jones, 'calls not to rock the boat of the economic growth meant nothing to people who believed that the only crew members benefiting from the statuquo were a very small elite tied to the regime; it was […] the profoundly uneven distribution of the wealth […] that was the primary source of frustration for those who supported the revolution' (Jones, 2012, p451).

Undeniably, although socioeconomic and political dissatisfaction was felt, Tunisia's success story also encouraged Egyptians to protest against their government as well (Brynen et al., 2012 and Strategic Survey, 2011).

And so, on January 25th 2011, as stated earlier, Egyptian activists occupied Tahrir Square to protest against the regime and police brutality. These protests were not solely constituted of Egypt's opposition parties, but also, of various social and ethnic groups, such as the Arab youth (Strategic Survey, 2011). Just like in Tunisia, the public soon perceived the government's deterrent power progressively disappearing especially when the army became less and less willing to exercise repression on the protestors. That is why, similarly to Tunisia, the army's role during the demonstrations was key as this security force entity also no longer perceived Mubarak's regime as legitimate and soon restrained from crushing the protests(Brynen et al., 2012).

LIBYA

Since 1969, Libya was under the dictatorial rule of Muammar Qaddafi (Strategic Survey, 2011) who proclaimed himself as being at the head of the 'state of the masses' (Brynen et al., 2012, p27). Qaddafi's Libya did not allow for political party pluralism and its 'politics and administration were dependent on the whims of the country's peculiar dictator and his apparent aversion to strong and permanent institutions' (Brynen et al., 2012, p.27). Although there were rumors about several coup attempts over the years (Joffé, 2011), Qaddafi's repressive measures were effective enough to supress and eliminate all types of regime opponents (Brynen et al.,

2012). Qaddafi's ability to remain at the head of the country was also guaranteed and financed by the oil wealth generated from oil exploitation (Fisher, 2011). In fact, oil rents supported political patronage and military purchases, but also allowed for the improvement of living conditions in the country. Nonetheless, in the recent years, unemployment was at the rise, particularly among the Libyan youth, and strong discontent was felt among the public in the face of government corruption (Brynen et al., 2012 and Strategic Survey, 2011). And so, the Libyan demonstrations of February 2011 were not only inspired by the Tunisian and Egyptian ones, but also, emerged from the deeply felt socioeconomic and political discontent of Libyans. It is important to mention that Libya's case is very different from others: Libyan uprisings resulted in a direct western military intervention (Strategic Survey, 2011). Libyans, but also, external actors regionally and internationally, had interest in seeing Qaddafi ousted (Jones, 2012). In fact, as described by Jones, Libya's case 'represents a unique confluence of factors which is unlikely to be repeated' (Jones, 2012, p.457). Indeed, such a military intervention is unlikely to occur again in the region, especially in Syria given the complex features of the current internal conflict (Jones, 2012).

Anti-regime protests in Libya unfolded as following: first, in mid-February 2011, Benghazi and other towns in the east side of the country were taken over by the rebels although the government had previously tried to appease discontent through social funds distribution. Then, on February 27th, the National Transitional Council was formed by the rebels in order to oust Qaddafi from his position (Strategic Survey, 2011and Joffé, 2011). However, the 'King of Kings' (Brynen et al., 2012, p.28) responded harshly by sending loyal military units to reconquer the areas held by the rebels such as the city of Benghazi. In the face of this erupting civil war, on

March 17th, the United Nations Security Council ratified Resolution 1973 under the principle of the Responsibility to Protect in response to the various previously issued statements by the Members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the Arab League (Strategic Survey, 2011 and Joffé, 2011). Indeed, these statements not only condemned the violent repression exercised on Libyan civilians by the Qaddafi loyalists but also, they urged a UN-enforced no-fly zone like it had been suggested by the British Prime Minister David Cameron on February28[th] (Strategic Survey, 2011).The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) thus deployed its forces in order to crush Qaddafi's loyalists and stop them from reclaiming Benghazi. Eventually, Qaddafi was killed by the rebels on October 20th, 2011 (Brynen et al., 2012 and Joffé, 2011). As pointed out by Brynen et al., Libya's case highlights the importance of institutional settings and historical legacies when analysing 2011's protests' roots. Indeed, the Libyan uprisings were very much influenced by the regime's nature, the security establishment's structure, the patterns of patronage and various social factors. Unlike Tunisia and Egypt, not all military units of Qaddafi's regime joined the protests (Strategic Survey, 2011). In fact the response of Qaddafi's forces to popular demonstrations was more violent than the ones in Tunisia and Egypt. That is notably why the internal Libyan conflict resulted in an external military intervention by NATO forces (Brynen et al., 2012 and Joffé, 2011).

BAHRAIN

It is important to recognize that Bahrain is governed by a Sunni monarchy, despite being a majority-Shiite country (Strategic Survey, 2011). However, this religious divide is not enough to understand the country's politics (Brynen et al., 2012). There are other socioeconomic and

historical divides which also need to be considered, especially when analysing the Bahraini protests of 2011. It is also important to consider Bahrain regional and international ally's role during the Arab Spring as these have considerably impeded and limited the protests' scope (Strategic Survey, 2011). For example, unlike Egypt's and Libya's case, the US restrained from criticizing too much their Bahraini ally. Also, Bahrain's security apparatus was reinforced through Saudi Arabia's and UAE's military assistance (Brynen et al., 2012, and Jones, 2011). And so, although, the Bahraini protests were in part a result of the Arab Spring's contagion effect, those mobilizations were nonetheless mainly shaped by the country's internal politics. Indeed, these were characterized by a long history of measures developed by King Hamad's regime in order to counterbalance the opposition, and to secure power through top-down patronage (Brynen et al., 2012).

And so, that is why the roots of the Bahraini uprisings were quite different from those witnessed in the rest of the MENA region. Though, the government wrongfully blamed Iran of being behind the demonstrations (*'Bahrain says terror suspects linked to Iran's Revolutionary Guard'*, 2011), these protests featured Shiite activists demanding for the political reformation of Emir Shaikh Hamad ibn Isa al-Khalifa's regime. In fact, while Bahrain was progressively engaging in participatory politics previous to the 'Day of Rage' on February 14th, 2011(Nonneman, 2006 and Kapiszewski, 2006), it nonetheless proved the opposite. Indeed, the governmental and GCC security forces violently repressed, and in some cases, killed dissidents (Brynen et al., 2012, Jones, 2011 and Strategic Survey, 2011). Bahrain illustrates the case of an authoritarian regime's security force that willfully engaged in a brutal crackdown by firing on peaceful activists and engaging in mass arrests of dissidents such as doctors and professionals

('*Bahrain crackdown on protests in Manama's Pearl Square*', 2011). The Bahraini case stands in direct opposition to Tunisia's and Egypt's cases as the Bahraini security forces, reinforced by GCC troops, did not part with the dissidents (Strategic Survey, 2011).

YEMEN

The effects of the Arab Spring on Yemen were different from those in other MENA countries. It mainly led to great public unrest, divisions within security forces, bloody confrontations and eventually caused President Ali Abdullah Saleh to step down in February 2012 (Thiel, 2012 and Brynen et al., 2012). Like in the case of Bahrain, Yemeni protests were not only influenced by the regional turmoil but also by internal factors such as tribal and kinship politics and oil income. Indeed, the unequal redistribution of oil revenues by the regime led to important rates of unemployment and child malnourishment (Sinjab, 2011 and Brynen et al., 2012). Also, Yemen's history has been marked by civil wars and conflicts between the previous North and South Yemen (BBC Monitoring, 2012). These also influenced the country's internal political dynamics leading up to the 2011 uprisings. In addition, as stated by Brynen et al., 'the particularly egregious characteristics of Yemeni rentier-financed patronage likely contributed to the swelling of public disenchantment against the Saleh regime, culminating in the Yemeni uprising of 2011' (Brynen et al., 2012, p.86-87). Finally, on February 24th 2011, President Saleh resigned. The Yemeni protests of January 2011, thus, represented the culmination of various internal political and economic problems that burst into widespread mass mobilizations.

SYRIA

Beforehand, it is important to recognize the sectarian nature of the Syrian government given the variety of ethnic groups present in the country. The Alawite Assad government governs a Sunni-majority population since 1970, following Hafez al-Assad's military coup. Also, as argued by Phillips, in order to understand the dynamic of the current political situation in Syria, it is essential to study opposition's nature and grievances (Phillips, 2012). Indeed, only specific ethnic, economic, demographic and geographical groups have proved to be resistant to Bashar's regime. Their grievances took root in Hafez el Assad's security state's establishment which used the divide and rule strategy in order to secure its power (Phillips, 2012). Al-Assad would, for example, through economic measures, favor certain sectarian groups over others thus, leading notably to the exclusion of Syrian Kurds and the anti-socialist and former Sunni Arab ruling elite (Phillips, 2012). Bashar's government inherited these economic and political divisions and reinforced them through political and economic reforms. In fact, this liberalization not only led to the creation of a new class of crony capitalists, mostly constituted of Alawis, but also created increased inequality among the population. This notably increased popular resentment especially among the Sunni Arab workers, peasantry and youth. These economic grievances partly explain for the Syrian upheavals that broke out in Daraa on March 19th 2011 (Phillips, 2012).

Since these protests, Syria has ever since been plagued by Bashar al-Assad's violent regime crackdown (Marsh, 2011). Indeed, despite the government's effort to appease dissidents through various political concessions, protest movements sparked all over the country such as, in Latakia, Homs, Damascus and Aleppo. Eventually, these led to the current eventful civil war between regime opponents and President Bashar's loyalists (Hinnebusch, 2012 and Brynen et al.,

2012). Facing this bloodbath led by Bashar's security forces, Baath party members gradually resigned in large numbers from their governmental positions in order to join the opposition movement and to express their rejection towards the regime's repressive means against its own population (Marsh, 2011 and Hinnebusch, 2012). In fact, by mid-May 2011, various international powers voted for several sanctions against Syrian government officials, as the human toll was becoming alarming (Marsh, 2011and Brynen et al., 2012). Also, states, such as the US, advised Bashar to consider engaging in a transition to democracy or even resigning (Lee, 2011). However, Bashar rejected these options and rather continued violent repression on dissidents. Till today, despite UN's restless efforts to put an end to fierce confrontations, Bashar has proven to be reluctant to let go of his position in government and has only resorted to limited reforms and concessions (Hinnebusch, 2012). However, these latter have not been enough to content dissidents, since their one goal is to oust Bashar. In fact, in August 2011, the Syrian National Council was created as the organized opposition (Hinnebusch, 2012).

Like described by Brynen et al., Syria had 'all the ingredients for an explosion' (Brynen et al., 2012, p.46) to take place. Indeed, when analysing the Syrian case, the sources that led to the protests were numerous and various in nature. Indeed, the social dissatisfaction took root in the absence of sufficient reforms since Bashar's arrival at the head of the Syrian government (Phillips, 2012). Also, discontent emerged from the various measures established by Bashar's regime in order to secure his power. For example, the Bashar government managed to do so by placing close allies at the head of governmental institutions, such as the military, by ordering the arrests of regime opponents, and by limiting Internet use (King, 2009 and Brynen et al., 2012). Also, public frustration emerged from low levels of economic growth and social development

(Hinnebusch, 2012). Indeed, the combination of notably high social inequality, rising poverty, increasing unemployment rates (intensified by important population growth rate) and government corruption led to rising social tensions which ultimately triggered the uprisings of 2011 (Brynen et al., 2012, Phillips, 2012 and Coutts, 2011).

Now that we have provided the background in which Tunisia's, Egypt's, Libya's, Bahrain's, Yemen's and Syria's protests emerged, let us now present the impact of new ICTs and social media on domestic and regional politics, and on social dynamics in the Arab world. In addition, Arab citizens' understanding of democracy will also be presented, as well as, different arguments developed before the Arab Spring in regard to new ICTs' and social media's role under MENA's authoritarian regimes.

Impact of new ICTs and social media on the Arab world

One of globalization's main effects is the spread of new ICTs, such as satellite television, mobile phones and Internet technologies, throughout the world and notably in the MENA region (Mellor et al., 2011). In fact, since the advent of such information technologies in that region, many scholars have sought to study their impact on domestic and regional politics and on social dynamics. Since the arrival of new ICTs, scholars noticed that geographical boundaries and time barriers between all states have been erased (Mellor et al., 2011). Indeed, new ICTs have notably allowed the Arab population and Diaspora to be better informed and develop a more critical perspective on state affairs in the Middle East. Brynen et al. have in fact argued that 'satellite stations and the new social media have emerged […] as a new channel of permeability in the

Arab world' (Brynen et al., 2012, p.251). Also, Arab transnational media ensured limited state media control as these technologies have been better able to evade state censorship (Mellor et al., 2011). That is why Mellor et al. have also argued that new ICTs have allowed for the diffusion of new ideas, notably, democratic principles (Mellor et al., 2011). Indeed, contrarily to the permeability of the 1950s and the 1960s which was shaped by regimes, the recent permeability in the Arab world has been 'driven from below' (Brynen et al., 2012, p.251) and 'expresses a set of political and socioeconomic demands, ranging from individual freedoms, freely elected and accountable governments, to a fairer distribution of national wealth and foreign policies that reflect public opinion' (Brynen et al., 2012, p.251). That is why Brynen et al. have considered attitudinal factors as key during the Arab Spring as the Arab political culture included notions of 'freedom, justice, dignity, accountability, and even democracy'(Brynen et al, 2012, p.251). These notions have served as mobilizing tools especially as democracy expanded as a globalized ideal ; 'Arab populations knew that their present authoritarian regimes were not the only way of organizing politics and that many other peoples […] had made successful democratic transitions' (Brynen et al, 2012, p.111).   And so, we understand that new ICTs have, thus, contributed to greater freedom of expression and to democratic ideas' development within people's minds (Mellor et al., 2011). However, it is important to also acknowledge that Arab's understanding of democracy can differ from the Western view of such a concept and among ordinary citizens of the Arab World (Jamal & Tessler, 2008).

Through attitudinal surveys, many scholars, such as Amaney Jamal and Mark Tessler, have been able to assess MENA citizen's attitudes toward democracy over the last decade. The Arab Barometer has allowed them to notice a general support for democracy among citizens of

the MENA region (Gao & Tessler, 2005; Jamal & Tessler, 2008). However, they noted that definitions of such a concept varied importantly from an Arab country to another (Gao & Tessler, 2005; Jamal & Tessler, 2008; Jamal et al., 2012). Indeed, they observed, for example, that some Arab citizens will understand democracy as a concept based on governmental accountability and political freedoms while other will regard it as one based on instrumental considerations such as ability to reach certain economic levels (Jamal & Tessler, 2008; Jamal & Tessler, 2012). Indeed, Arab citizens believe that when it comes to governance, and economic issues, such as inflation, unemployment and poverty, are more important than obtaining rights and freedoms (Jamal & Tessler, 2008). Indeed, ordinary citizens are divided in their understanding of democracy as this concept is understood along dual dimensions, hence economic and political (Jamal & Tessler, 2008, Jamal et al., 2012). Also, Jamal and Tessler found that Arabs support two different 'types' of democracy which shapes their attitudes (Gao &Tessler, 2005; Jamal & Tessler, 2008, Jamal et al., 2012): either 'secular democracy', which is closer to the Western notion of democracy and, 'Islamic democracy', which integrates notions of Islam and, which ultimately shapes, in an Islamic way, rights and freedoms (Collins & Owen, 2012). In fact, they found that 'those who support both democracy and political Islam are somewhat less likely to hold democratic values than supporters of secular democracy' (Jamal et al, 2012, p.99). For example, according to the Arab Barometer survey, between June and July 2011, 77 percent of Egyptians, understood democracy in the economic sense while only 6 percent believed that free and fair elections were at the basis of democracy (Jamal et al., 2012, p.100). Also, between September and October 2011, Tunisians, like other citizens of the MENA region, were also divided when it came to understanding democracy (Jamal et al., 2012, p.101). In fact, only 52 percent chose political fundamentals when defining democracy (Jamal et al.,

2012, p.101). Thus, these sets of findings exemplify how Arab citizen's understanding of democracy is different from westerners' view of such a concept and demonstrate the existence of discrepancies among Arab citizen understanding of democracy as well.

Now that we have presented the impact of new ICTs in the Arab world on domestic and regional politics and social dynamics, and, Arabs' understanding of democracy, let us continue with the presentation of the different arguments developed before the Arab Spring in regard to new ICTs' and social media's role under the MENA's authoritarian regimes.

Different arguments developed before the Arab Spring about new ICTs' and social media's role

Previous to the Arab Spring, many popular mobilizations took place, such as the Cedar movement in Lebanon in 2005, and, the Green movement in Iran in 2009. These mass mobilizations have lead scholars to analyse more closely ICTs' role during those upheavals. Opinions were divided on whether these technologies had a democratizing effect and whether these had been sufficient to explain for the movements' occurrence. Let us expand on the different arguments presented prior to 2011's events.

As described by Pintak, many revolts before the Arab Spring had underlined Arab satellite television's importance, such as Al-Jazeera (Pintak, 2008). This Qatari satellite television channel, for example, had provided 24/7 coverage of Lebanon's 2005 revolt, and at the same time, allowed for the region and the world to witness how Lebanese were standing up against Syria's regime, which had occupied the country for decades. Undeniably, satellite

television's arrival in the Middle East in the 1990s, where authoritarian governments had for long controlled the airwaves, represented an important advancement in terms of communication technologies. In addition, these Arabic channels made it harder for authoritarian regimes to control information flows and triggered political debates which would have not otherwise existed (Pintak, 2008). Arabic channels provided an alternative to Western ones, such as BBC and CNN, which were present and portrayed events from a Western point of view (Pintak, 2008). Also, as stated by Harb, Al-Jazeera and these other satellite channels were now providing a new 'counter-hegemonic' perspective in terms of news reporting; information flows could now be transmitted from the South to the West (Harb, 2011). Pintak, in fact, reiterates scholars' argument that media not only shapes public attitudes but it also reflects public opinion (McCombs, 2004; Bennett and Entman, 2001; Entman, 2004). As described by Lynch, Arab satellite television and new ICTs have created 'new Arab public sphere' (Lynch, 2006, p.21), more 'critical and articulate' (Brynen et al., 2012, p.233). It is defined by 'the rapidly expanding universe of Arabs able and willing to engage in public arguments about political issues within an ever-increasing range of possible media outlets' (Lynch, 2006, p.21). Indeed optimistic scholars like Lynch believe that the arrival of new ICTs in the Arab World has allowed for the emergence of a new type of Arabism 'held together by a feeling of common Arab destiny that transcends state frontiers, and a new Arab public mobilized not on the basis of rigid ideological platforms but around specific policy issues' (Brynen et al., 2012, p.233). However, as pointed out by Brynen et al. (2012), other scholars have also been more critical about Arab media's democratizing effects as they rather noted that these were also used by authoritarian regimes as governance tools to upgrade themselves and maintain their stability (Heydenmann, 2007, Zayani, 2004, and Fandy, 2007).

And so, although, one could argue, that the Cedar movement in Lebanon exemplified how television news can be regarded as an 'arsenal for democracy' (Bertrand, 2003), many political scientists were cautious of not overemphasizing media's role (Pintak, 2008). As argued by Pintak, television cannot by itself be regarded as the driving force that allowed for Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon but rather, it should be considered as a tool used by the architects of change to enable for political shifts (Pintak, 2008).

Other scholars have also studied ICTs' impact on the Arab region and some, such as Howard, have speculated on these technologies' democratizing role. Indeed, in his research, Howard sought to highlight how the spread of ICTs could contribute to democratization (Howard, 2010). Like Pintak, Howard argued that these technologies have been used not only as vehicles for the diffusion of democratic ideals across communities but also as means to counter authoritarian governments' censorship. Howard, by analysing the 2009 Green movement in Iran, demonstrated how the development of social networks had challenged greatly regimes' authority. For example, he underlined how it is harder for a ruling regime to disable networked information infrastructures than to shut down a broadcast tower. New ICTs, as he argued, facilitate collective action under authoritarian regimes and allow the world to witness brutalities exercised by such regimes. Howard, also, emphasized the importance of network design in allowing for social movements to organize and threaten authoritarian regimes' stability. Online participation also increased the level of deliberation taking place among citizens and with members of their respective Diasporas. Also, he noted that mobile phones and Internet coverage were increasingly spreading in the Middle East region. He underlined how these means of communications had been the source of mobilization, campaigning, and information about activities of political

parties. But, he also pointed out the forms of repression that arose in response to these technological developments. He also claimed that these ICTs, hence mobile phones and Internet, were not sufficient to allow for contemporary regime change to occur in all countries. Finally, in his opinion, the only key to successful revolutions is elite's defection (Howard, 2010).

Aday et al. also studied the role of social media and Internet technologies, such as blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and You Tube, in response to the Green movement in their first 'Blogs and Bullets' work (Aday et al., 2010). They argued that these technologies played an important role in episodes of contentious political action and have been glorified as efficient tools for pro-democracy activism and efforts of democratization. However, these scholars warned their audience not to fall for journalistic anecdotes and rather call for more rigorous research design to be done, in order to better assess the role of social media in the political realm. That is why, Aday et al. highlighted the emergence of new tools developed to better analyse the 'sketchy' data produced by social media. These tools have proved to measure the linkage patterns and content across media channels in order to better understand social media's impact (Aday et al., 2010). That is why they suggested a new framework composed of five different levels of analysis which are: 'individual transformations, intergroup relations, collective action, regime policies and external attention' (Aday et al., 2010, p.3). Through this framework, the authors have analysed the Iranian Green movement of 2009 and noticed that this case exposed both positive and negative effects of social media. It was not only used by political activists but also by the regime to repress and harass dissidents. These results demonstrated that, just like other media outlets, Internet is not a 'magic bullet' and maybe just a 'rusty' one (Aday et al., 2010, p.3). In fact, they argued that traditional media was as important as new media. Although they concluded that 'new

media have the potential to change how citizens think or act, mitigate or exacerbate group conflict, facilitate collective action, spur a backlash among regimes, and garner international attention toward a given country'(Aday et al, 2010, p.3), they, nonetheless, recommended that scholars should not jump to direct conclusions about the ability of social media to enable democratization and political change and rather adopt a more nuanced perspective on this media outlet (Aday et al., 2010).

These findings show how some scholars already had recognized new ICTs usefulness in the MENA region for civic and political participation before the Arab Awakening. However, those scholars believed and predicted that these were not and will not be sufficient to ensure effective movements and enable democratization in the region.

Currently, there is a debate on the nature of social media's effect during 2011's events. Indeed, some scholars consider that the effect was causal, while others argue that social media simply had a facilitator role. I will support the claim that social media only had an enabling role because of the absence of a positive correlation and causality between the level of Internet, Facebook and Twitter penetration and the occurrence of social and political change. Let me present in further detail this previously stated debate.

Did new social media have a causal or an enabling effect on the Arab Spring?

Following the events of 2011 in the MENA region, various scholars have sought to study the relationship between collective action, and new ICTs, more specifically social media

(Segerberg& Bennett, 2011). Facebook has in fact been regarded as a useful tool and an efficient catalyst for activists. Lynch identified four ways in which social media had contributed to collective action. First, he noticed that it helped activists to coordinate their actions in great numbers. Second, it also created information cascades that encouraged dissidents to also mobilize in their own country. And finally, social media discouraged the unstable authoritarian regimes to use repression and dramatically increased publicity as activists would diffuse information on the net (Lynch, 2011 and Youman and York, 2012). Rane and Salem also recognized the facilitator role that social media had during the uprisings as for example it enabled activists to organize mobilizations, to diffuse information about unfolding events, and to acquire knowledge on non-violent tactics of protest. Also it allowed them to have better access to medical assistance and to bypass the government's attempt to block and limit the access to Internet. In fact, by instantly submitting to mainstream media various types of information and multi-media files about the protests and about the way security forces and the police would manage these, activists allowed traditional media to re-broadcast their content to a wider public; it allowed for a wider dissemination of information (Rane &Salem, 2012).

Such researches on the relationship between collective action and new ICTs and social media have created a debate over online activism's influence on the unfolding of the 2011 revolutions and whether or not labelling these as 'Facebook' or 'Twitter revolutions' (Hounshell, 2011, para.2) could be misleading. Many scholars consider social media to have played an essential role for allowing regimes, such as Ben Ali's and Mubarak's, to be ousted (Iskander, 2011; Kavanaugh, Yang, Sheetz, Li, & Fox, 2011; Khamis & Vaughn, 2011; Wilson & Dunn,

2011). Indeed, they argue that social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, have represented one of the key factors that allowed for the revolutions to triumph.

Howard et al, in fact, are part of the scholars who believe that social media was one of the factors allowing for the Arab Spring to occur. Their research seeks to go beyond anecdotes on social media's role during the 2011events. By putting together a database of information collected from social media sites (such as Facebook, Twitter and You Tube) and political websites on Tunisia and Egypt's revolutions mainly, they demonstrated that social media evidently has been a source explaining for the Arab Awakening (Howard et al., 2011). Based on their findings, they demonstrated that despite the difficulty of seizing whether online activism lead to offline activism or the other way around, online conversations on blogs and Twitter extensively contributed to the success of the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions. Howard et al. noticed that important amounts of online revolutionary conversations about liberty, democracy and revolutions on blogs and on Twitter generally preceded major mass mobilizations. Howard et al. also interpreted government's blocking of social media sites (such as Facebook in Tunisia), and the arrest of bloggers, as evidences demonstrating how governments recognized the ability of social media to rally opponents to the regime. Finally, Howard et al. added that social media 'helped cascade conversation about freedom across the region' (Howard et al., 2011, p.15). Indeed, they believe that following Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation, social media, notably Facebook, Twitter, and You Tube, were flooded of similar stories reported by activists within the countries in revolution. These stories have inspired political dissidents regionally to also mobilize themselves to express their discontent toward their government and demand greater democratization. Howard et al.'s findings also illustrate how

social media users in Egypt and in Tunisia who opposed the ruling regime and aspired to democratic ideals would also exchange with supportive users outside the country. The information flows proved to be bilateral as Egyptians and Tunisians in their home countries would notify their international supporters about events' unfolding. And so, we understand that these flows of information about democratic ideas such as 'freedom, liberty, and revolution' (Howard et al., 2011, p.3) spreading regionally encouraged other Arabs in the MENA region to also engage in political uprisings.

Howard also wrote a piece with Hussain on the role of digital media during the Arab Spring (Howard & Hussain, 2011). According to classical social science, social change can be explained by various factors that can rally populations who share common grievances in a given region. For example, these factors can be high unemployment, low quality of life, declining economic productivity, or increased polarization of incomes. However, Howard and Hussain argue that digital media also deserves to be pointed out by social scientists as a new and possible factor that could contribute to the transformation of people's discontent into social mobilization, like it has been the case during the Arab Spring. Indeed, they highlighted how the spread of mobile phones and Internet usage in the region has allowed for Middle Easterners' long felt dissatisfaction to be expressed through new means. Indeed, mobile phones also played a role in political uprisings as activists would communicate with each other and organize via Short Message Services (SMSs). They argued that the common denominator in the region has been the spread of digital media since the 2000s which allowed for social movement activists to better disseminate their protest messages, to connect and to organize with each other like never before. Digital technologies have, since, allowed for the population's discontent to gestate especially in

countries like Tunisia, Egypt and Bahrain. Only over the last few months, preceding the Arab Spring, has social discontent been translated into offline activism. Indeed, although political dissidents have always expressed their claims toward their regimes, since the arrival of Internet in the region, activists have been able to build even more structured opposition movements, through the extensive and popular use of mobile phones and social network sites (Howard & Hussain, 2011). As stated by Howard and Hussain, 'it may seem that digital-media use in times of political crisis is novel. But for residents of Tunis, Cairo, and other capitals, it was the sheer everydayness and familiarity of mobile phones that made them a proximate cause of political change' (Howard & Hussain, 2011, p.42-43). Demands varied across countries but digital media use was common to all. That is why, Howard and Hussain have determined that political change which occurred in the Middle East in 2011, contrarily to other revolutions, was largely due to digital media technologies. Digital media have allowed civil society movements to benefit from a new tool for activism, effective enough to circumvent state control. As Howard and Hussain argued 'Digital media changed the tactics of democratization movements' (Howard & Hussain, 2011, p.46); they 'provided both an awareness of shared grievances and transportable strategies of action' (Howard & Hussain, 2011, p.40). These revolutions were 'inspired by Facebook; they were inspired by the real tragedies documented on Facebook' (Howard & Hussain, 2011, p.48). In fact, Howard and Hussain estimated that less than one fifth of Tunisians actively used social media but most of the population used mobile phones. Also, they underlined how Tunisia's success story inspired Egyptian's population to take the streets and to also overthrow their authoritarian ruler (Howard & Hussain, 2011).

Howard and Hussain have in fact identified five phases describing the impact of digital media on the unfolding of the Arab Spring. First, they noticed the preparation phase during which activists have used digital media to their advantage by connecting with their peers who were also aspiring to common political goals. Then, the ignition phase took place like in Tunisia when online activists broadcasted Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation contrarily to the state-run media. Indeed, this video has not only triggered anger and sympathy from the public in the region for this man but it also led people to express their outrage in the face of the state-run media's oversight on such a tragedy. Tunisia's ignition was Bouazizi and Egypt's trigger was Tunisia's success story. For the rest of the region, the broadcasting of scenes of protests and escaping dictators on satellite television and on social media sites (SNSs) inspired activists in countries such as Libya and Syria. This phase was then followed by street protests which marked the third stage thanks to online networking and coordination via digital media. These protests have been unique as they occurred without a recognizable leader's presence. This made it hard for regime authorities to know who to arrest. Also, these protests were organized in unusual ways which also destabilized and challenged regime authority. The fourth stage was the international buy-in as foreign governments, worldwide Diasporas, international organizations and news agencies all over the world accessed digital media coverage of local events. Finally, the climax phase erupted and resulted in various outcomes ranging from regimes trying to control protests and appease discontent through further repression or through greater political concessions to bloodbaths such as in Libya and Syria (Howard & Hussain, 2011).

Finally, although, Howard and Hussain, concluded that social media was the main factor that led to social change, they somehow showed how traditional media sources also played a

crucial role during 2011's events as satellite television would use online information posted on social media sites by regime opponents to build their programs. Indeed, Howard and Hussain noticed that a strong transnational identity emerged regionally, thanks to satellite television's type of controversial coverage. However, Howard and Hussain underlined how Al-Jazeera's success was nonetheless explained by its use of digital media to collect information, images and video footage, notably of its journalists being harassed (Howard & Hussain, 2011). As they claimed: 'These digital networks gave Al Jazeera's journalists access to more sources, and gave a second life to their news products. Indeed, the use of social media itself has become a news peg' (Howard & Hussain, 2011, p.45).

However, other scholars are skeptical about whether or not these new Internet technologies have played an emancipator role and enabled democratization (Shirky, 2011). Indeed, some have rather underlined the main socio-economic and political causes that explained why people have gathered collectively to topple regimes. These scholars seek to demystify social media's role (Anderson, 2011; Aouragh & Anderson, 2011).

Himelfarb, from the US Institute of Peace, is an example of a scholar that sought to study the impact of Internet on political and social change in recent years. He recognizes that there is a 'vigorous debate' (Himelfarb, 2011, para.2) on social media's role in the Middle East, but warns his readers not to make quick conclusions on such a topic (Himelfarb, 2011). Indeed, he believes that there needs to be more in-depth study on the subject matter as Internet has generated lots of unstructured data. This type of data needs to be studied through proper analytical tools in order to better seize how online activism translates into offline change. He claims that 'more good

questions than good answers' (Himelfarb, 2011, para.3) have emerged in the aftermath of the events of 2011 in the Middle East (Himelfarb, 2011).

In fact, his research notably allowed him to tear apart the myth of the 'Twitter revolution' in Iran as he claimed it proved to 'be neither a revolution nor twitter-driven upon careful analysis of the activity on that platform' (Himelfarb, 2011, para.3). Indeed by studying Internet's impact in relation to social change during the Iranian Green movement of 2009, as well as during the Arab Spring, he established that it was necessary to disentangle the various channels and distinct levels of activism. Indeed, he decided to study different channels such as Facebook, Twitter, and blogs through four different levels of activism hence individual, group, intergroup and regime activism. His research ultimately permitted him to come up with the following conclusion: 'don't rush to judgment about the role of technology in anything as complex as political and social change'(Himelfarb, 2011, para.4). We, thus, understand that he is also part of the scholars that are more skeptical about the ability of social media to allow for political change. Indeed, in an interview, he highlighted the shift that occurred in social media's role since the Arab Spring. The debate used to be held between cyber-utopians and cyber-skeptics who respectively believed that Internet and social media were 'liberators'(Himelfarb, 2011, para.8) and those who believed that these represented a new tool for authoritarian regimes to repress its people and secure its power (Himelfarb, 2011). Now, the debate acknowledges social media's organizing power and rather gives voice to a more critical discussion which put into play those who believe that social media has an enabler role and those who think it is an accelerator (Himelfarb, 2011).

And so, we understand that new social media has not been regarded as the main factor that lead to the revolutions of 2011 by all researchers. Although, they recognize the contributing role of social media, some scholars are more cautious when analysing the extent to which these new media have had an effect on the revolutions. I am also supportive of this assertion since social media's role cannot be sufficient to allow for political change since not all social movements have led to regime change, like in the case of Yemen and Bahrain. That is why other important factors also need to be taken into account. Some scholars have argued that traditional mainstream media has rather had a more important role than social media (Alterman, 2011). Also, some have argued that both, traditional mainstream and social media have contributed to the successful revolution as satellite television amplified social networking (Nanabhaya and Farmanfarmaianb, 2011). Others have demonstrated the importance of socio-economic and political circumstances in which the revolutions emerged and the importance of online activists' physical engagement (Karagiannopoulos, 2012). And finally, some have demonstrated the absence of a positive relationship between the level of Internet, Facebook, and Twitter penetration and regime change (Rane and Salem, 2012). Hence, let me present in greater depth these previously stated arguments in order to demonstrate the facilitator role of social media during the Arab Spring.

Following the events of 2011 in the MENA region, Aday et al. have continued their work on 'Blogs and Bullets' and have argued that new media, which use Bit.ly (URL shortening service), have not played a major role during the 2011's events' unfolding(Aday et al., 2012). In their opinion, new media outlets such as Twitter that used Bit.ly linkages, did not allow for in-country collective action or for regional diffusion of information as they proved to be more

efficient at spreading information outside the MENA region than inside it(Aday et al., 2012, p.21).However, they don't insinuate that social media using Bit.ly links were useless; they simply demonstrated that the data they have collected and analysed did not support claims that new social media had an effect on the regional political protests. They also pointed the difficultly of separating new from old media, as both reinforce each other, and have created complex interrelationships (Aday et al., 2012).

In his article, Karagiannopoulos, by analysing the 2009 Iranian Green Movement and Egypt's 2011's revolution, also seeks to balance the claims made about social media's impact on these cases of political unrest. Instead of focusing solely on the role of digital communications, he, instead, looks also at traditional medium of communication, and at the socio-political background that led to the protests. Karagiannopoulos recognizes how Internet technologies have served for both activists and authoritarian regimes, but questions whether these technologies were sufficient to tip the balance in favor of activists. He underlines how traditional ways of communicating and organizing have also been largely used by protestors, since activists were running the risk of getting caught by regimes' security apparatus when using social media. That is why Karagiannopoulos encourages us to be careful when claiming that Internet technologies had an important impact on revolutions since it is challenging to determine the true dimension of their impact. His analysis led him to the following conclusions.

First, he believes that there was no Twitter or Facebook revolution during the Arab Spring, and, it was rather protestors' courageous willingness to actively and physically participate in the mobilization that allowed for the revolutions to be successful. Internet

technologies would not have been sufficient to allow for regimes' ousting if it wasn't for protestors going into the streets and physically engage in offline activism. Faris, also, in his analysis of protestors' use of Facebook and blogs, had claimed that, while social media networks in Egypt could 'trigger informational cascades through their interaction effects with independent media outlets and on-the-ground organizers' (Faris, 2010, p. 22), they could not substitute grassroots organizing or challenge Egypt's strong state security apparatus (Nanabhaya and Farmanfarmaianb, 2011). Karagiannopoulosalso notes that not all protestors had access to Internet, and, this did not prevent them from also participating in protests.

Secondly, Karagiannopoulos underlines how it is also important to take into account contextual elements such as background socio-political conditions, tactical choices, organizational level of adversaries, and popular and international levels of support, as these have also been crucial in allowing for revolutions to be victorious. For example, he demonstrates how, if it wasn't for populations' widespread and strong discontent towards the low provision of public services, these revolutions would not have gathered as many political dissidents. Karagiannopoulos, however, recognizes Internet technologies' important role in our societies as these were not only used by citizens, but also, by political regimes. Also, he considers that these represent promising tools for future popular unrests. As he states : 'Whatever its function in contemporary politics, though, the internet and social media are entrenched in our everyday lives and it would seem unimaginable that there could be a future political struggle without entailing internet communications and applications, much like mobile texts and landlines are also socially entrenched and employed during political struggles' (Karagiannopoulos, 2012, p. 171).

Lim also argues that social media cannot represent the one and only factor that enabled the Egyptian revolution and, more largely, the Arab Awakening. Identification to a group is also crucial for activists to mobilize. She demonstrates how, in Egypt's case, the revolution had emerged from a politico-economic context which, for decades, had fed the discontent of a large part of Egypt's population. Egyptians were sharing common grievances over increasing inequalities, political repression, rising cost of living and unemployment. These factors had been setting the stage for political change to be demanded from the masses. Social media had already been playing a role in social movements, such as 'Kefayah', 'Sixth of April' and 'We are all Khaled Said' (Lim, 2012). It is, thus, through strong identification to political opposition groups that disaffected Egyptians, from different socio-economic backgrounds, have come together through social media to achieve a common goal: put an end to Mubarak's regime. And so, from Lim's point of view, social media's important role during the Arab Awakening was only possible, thanks to Egyptians' strong and shared dissatisfaction towards their government. This argument echoes with Karagiannopoulos's on the importance of contextual elements. Also, like Karagiannopoulos, Lim does recognize that social media, nevertheless, has created space for online political participation and for activists of contemporary populist movements to take the streets. Social media was not only a neutral tool used to benefit social movements, but, it has also shaped how activists formed their political movement (Lim, 2012).

Also, Farrell and Alterman are among the scholars that deny social media's causal effect on 2011's events. Also, despite the fact that Farrell recognizes social media, Internet technologies and other traditional media as being facilitators for social activism, he nonetheless argues that such media technologies might not result in self-sustainable democratic regimes in the future. In

addition, Farrell is skeptical of such social movements' ability to actually organize themselves into strong political parties, other than Islamic political parties that would be able to 'appeal to a broader political constituency' (Farrell, 2012, p10). For his part, Alterman believes that the Arab Awakening's revolutions were not 'tweeted' since such a 'narrative glosses over much of what is important about what has happened in the Middle East in early 2011' (Alterman, 2011, p.1). He considers that traditional media, such as television, rather than social media, played a crucial role during the Arab Spring. Television allowed for activists to be legitimized and broadcasted on the international level. Indeed, he doesn't believe that social media has been at the heart of the transformation from the ineffectual 'Kefaya' and 'Sixth of April' protests to 'the sudden jolt of January 25th in the case of Egypt's revolution' (Alterman, 2011, p12). However, Alterman, points at how scholars were able to capture social media's facilitator role for people to have access to content but, not how social media allowed for activists to create content as well.

To echo Alterman's argument on satellite television's importance in legitimizing and broadcasting protestor's activity to the world, Nanabhaya and Farmanfarmaianb have also argued through similar lines. They have sought to analyse media's impact during Egypt's 2011 revolution and defined it as the 'amplified public sphere' (Nanabhaya and Farmanfarmaianb, 2011, p.573). They seek to identify to what extent did amplification occurred. Here, amplification is defined as the physical expansion and the exponential dissemination by media. They argue that during this revolution, the intersection of the 'physical (defined by the protests), analogue (defined by the satellite television and other mainstream media) and digital (defined by Internet and social media) spaces' (Nanabhaya and Farmanfarmaianb, 2011, p.573) created an information environment. Indeed, each of these three spaces was informing one another. The

Mubarak regime was toppled because of the extent to which protestors were able to access Internet and to occupy in great number public spaces, such as Tahrir Square. After the release of information by protestors on social media platforms, their messages and videos were then broadcasted nationally and internationally, thus, creating an amplification effect. Unlike other revolutions, Nanabhaya and Farmanfarmaianb, consider that the Egyptian revolution was more than just a 'spectacle of dissent' as described by Bruce D'Arcus (Nanabhaya and Farmanfarmaianb, 2011, p.1). In their opinion, it became a media 'spectacular' as 'mainstream media amplified the space defined by social media and turned it into an internationalised space of rolling news coverage, where audiences throughout the world were just a click away from 24/7 broadcast' (Nanabhaya and Farmanfarmaianb, 2011, p.574). Indeed, the authors identify two phases in the Egyptian revolution. During the first phase, being the spectacle phase, citizen's videos were produced and posted on social media outlets in great numbers, while bypassing both state and mainstream media. These videos were more consumed than mainstream media footage. The second phase marked the shift from the spectacle to the spectacular phase during which, social media no longer played the dominant role, but rather, mainstream media did. Amplification was also created by citizens as they also participated in the dissemination of live video footage released by their compatriots by sharing them. Indeed, since digital media can easily be copied, reproduced and distributed, it is hard to identify and distinguish between producers, consumers and publishers of videos. And so, activists and journalists were co-constructing the news. This reflects the importance of the symbiotic relationship between producers and consumers of information in the new digital age.

Rane and Salem's research has also allowed them to demonstrate, through the diffusion theory, the absence of a causal relationship or a positive correlation between the level of social media penetration and the materialization of social movements demanding political reform and regime change in the MENA region (Rane &Salem, 2012). Regardless of one country's Internet, Facebook or Twitter penetration, these rates have not proved to be predictors of social mobilizations or political change during the Arab Awakening nor did they increase the chances of a country to be the target of popular uprisings or regime change. For example, despite relatively low Internet, Facebook and Twitter penetration levels, countries like Yemen, Libya, Syria, still witnessed mass mobilizations and, in the case of Libya, saw their dictator ousted. Such findings, in fact, echo with Karagiannopoulos' as he also underlines how some countries still had mass protests even though their level of Internet and social media penetration were low. While Rane and Salem recognized the facilitator role that social media has had for purposes of inter- and intra-group communication and information dissemination, they somehow argued, like Alterman, that mainstream mass media had also been quite important, as well. Mainstream media played a crucial role as it not only allowed the dissemination of news and footage nationally and internationally, but also it served greatly in the framing of the protests. This framing highlighted the non-violent, pro-democratic aspect of social movements and, thus, appealed to Western publics and governments. Indeed, Rane and Salem justify social movements' success by their ability to attract and gather international mass media organizations and Western governments' support as they framed the protests as non-violent, non-Islamist and as seeking freedom and democracy. This support and important media coverage allowed uprisings to be strengthened, but led contested authoritarian regimes to be weakened. Indeed, regimes that relied heavily on Western governments were the ones that got undermined the most, such as Egypt which

depended heavily on United States' support. Although these protests have taken place in an era where social media had widely penetrated the region, mass media nonetheless proved to still play a major role, as it was the most dominant source of information, even in countries where uprisings were taking place. Indeed, for example, in Egypt, only 8 percent of the population followed events online through social media sites while 81 percent followed them on state television and another 63 percent relied on Al-Jazeera. That is why Rane and Salem claimed that referring to social media as having led to MENA region's uprisings is an overstatement. Nonetheless, Rane and Salem, also argued that social media ensured direct and fairly constant channels of communication for ideas to be diffused.

In addition, Rane and Salem, like Karagiannopoulos, underlined how the success or failure of the uprisings across the region also depended on the broader geopolitical context and domestic factors (Rane &Salem, 2012). Indeed, they argued that the Arab Spring took place as MENA's population could no longer tolerate the social, economic, and political conditions in which they were living. What rallied people in the region to protest were notably factors such as widespread corruption, socioeconomic injustices, shortfall in job opportunities and freedom, all sustained and resulting from decades of authoritarian ruling (Rane and Salem, 2012). Like also stated earlier in this paper, protestors were also encouraged to mobilize as they no longer feared the domestic security forces' repressive measures as this state institutions soon lost legitimacy in the eyes of the populations (Brynen et al. 2012).

Like stated earlier, Rane and Salem, also, used the diffusion theory in order to clearly identify key factors that lead to the transfer of ideas circulating among the different groups

involved in the Arab Spring (Rane &Salem, 2012). By understanding the diffusion's dynamic, allowed them to develop a comprehension of the social movements that were at the source of such uprisings. According to this theory, the diffusion process is characterized by four components. The transmitter initiates the diffusion of an innovation which in turn is transmitted through a given means and which is received by a given adopters (Katz, 1968). Based on this theory, Rane and Salem have established that during the Arab uprisings, Tunisians, as well as Egyptians, have been the main transmitters of democratic ideas and the use of nonviolent tactics then adopted by Yemenis, Bahrainis, Libyans, and Syrians. These innovative items were then received by publics across the MENA region which made them the adopters of such innovations. Here, the transmitters and adopters identified with each other thanks notably to the capacity of social media to connect groups sharing high levels of identification. That is why, 2011's uprisings can also be characterized as having been proximal and direct as activists have communicated trans-nationally with other individuals who shared a common identity and ideology through notably social media. And so, in their opinion, the diffusion process in the MENA region was not a consequence of social media but it was facilitated by it (Rane &Salem, 2012).

Rane and Salem also sought to determine whether the Arab Spring consisted of social or revolutionary movements (Rane &Salem, 2012). They defined these as having been independent, un-hierarchic and having a structure based on a network of networks. These movements unified individuals who shared a collective identity, wanted common sociopolitical changes and aspired to similar ideas based on democracy and freedom (Rane &Salem, 2012). As defined by Green (2009) and Hannigan (1991), social actors, such as individuals, groups and organizations, that

carry out group action, in order to affect social and political change, are referred to as social movements. These latter can be hard to dissociate from revolutionary movements since they both have been regarded as 'contentious politics' (Rane &Salem, 2012, p.98). Indeed, Goldstone attempts to differentiate these two, by defining a revolution as a movement whose goal is to oust a given regime, and social protests as ones that seek to alter or eliminate a state policy or influence a social group's or society's position (Goldstone, 1998). However, as pointed out by Rane and Salem, both 'revolutions and uprisings may similarly begin as social movements in response to similar conditions but they tend to evolve differently, specifically on account of how the ruling regime responds and how both the protest actions and the state response is perceived by the broader social, cultural and political environment' (Rane &Salem, 2012, p.98). And so, from such a statement, Rane and Salem demonstrate how across the MENA, results have been different as response of respective Arab regimes and Western powers have caused some social movements to remain in the uprising stage and some to turn into revolutions which ended up overthrowing the ruling dictators (Rane &Salem, 2012).

Some scholars have also used the rates of Internet, Facebook and Twitter penetration in order to better assess social media's impact on revolutions. Indeed, by analysing those rates of penetration across the MENA region during 2010-2011, it allowed them to determine whether there is a correlation or causality between these rates and the incidence of mass mobilization and regime change. These rates can also inform on users of social media's characteristics.

Mourtada and Salem determined that in December 2010 (see Appendix I), on the eve of the Arab Spring, levels of Internet penetration in the MENA region were the following. They

found that 34.07 percent of Tunisia's population had access to Internet while Egypt had 24.26 percent, Yemen 9.19percent, Libya 5.51percent, Bahrain 53 percent and Syria 20.40percent of their respective population connected to Internet (Mourtada & Salem, 2011). Also, in terms of Twitter penetration (see Appendix II), Mourtada and Salem determined that on average, between January 1st and March 30th 2011, 7.53percentof Bahrainis, 0.96percentof Libyans, 0.34 percent of Tunisians, 0.17 percent of Syrians, 0.15percentof Egyptians and 0.12percentof Yemenis had Twitter accounts (Mourtada & Salem, 2011).

As we notice, that all these mentioned countries, with the exception of Bahrain, have rates of penetration below 2 percent. According to Mourtada and Salem, these countries are thus considered 'developing users' while Bahrain is considered as a country with a high penetration level (Mourtada & Salem, 2011, p.17). Indeed with a Twitter user penetration above 5percent, Bahrain is among the countries with high use of Twitter compared to other regional countries. Mourtada and Salem also make an important point as they note that 'only 30-40 million of the 200 Twitter users are actually "active," meaning that most information on Twitter is generated by a minority, while the majority use Twitter to consume news as more of a newsfeed than a microblog' (Mourtada & Salem, 2011, p.15). This information informs us on the utility of Twitter made by its users.

Also, by examining Facebook's penetration level in the MENA region (see Appendix I), Rane and Salem have demonstrated the absence of a causality and positive correlation between social media and the emergence of social movements for political reform and regime change (Rane &Salem, 2012). They reported that more than 20 million individuals in the MENA region

had Facebook accounts which represented a national average of penetration of only 7 percent. In December 2010, the national level of Facebook penetration in the region in fact varies approximately between 1 to 45percent (Rane & Salem, 2012). The UAE (45.38percent), Bahrain (34.27percent), Qatar (33.95percent), Lebanon (23.11percent), and Kuwait (20.64percent) feature among the countries where Facebook's penetration level was relatively high. Tunisia (17.55percent), Jordan (17.06percent), Saudi Arabia (12.24percent) and Palestine (10.76percent) featured among those having had a modest level of Facebook penetration. And finally, Oman (7.55percent), Morocco (7.55percent), Egypt (5.49percent), Algeria (3.99percent), Libya (3.74percent), Iraq (1.26percent), Syria (1.07percent) and Yemen (0.74percent) represented the countries with relatively the lowest level of Facebook penetration.

These findings, thus, support Rane and Salem's argument that 'social media penetration is not a predictor of whether an uprising will emerge let alone whether it will evolve into a revolution'(Rane& Salem, 2012, p.102). As these numbers show, countries where uprisings erupted and where the dictators were overthrown, like Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, featured among those with relatively the lowest levels of Facebook penetration. Let me describe each case in order to illustrate in greater depth Rane and Salem's argument.

Tunisia's and Egypt's case illustrate the absence of a positive correlation and causal relationship between the occurrence of social and political change and the levels of Internet and social media penetration. Indeed, although these countries had a relatively low level of Facebook and Twitter penetration and a moderate level of Internet penetration, their social movements resulted in regime change. Also, each country's respective level of Internet, Facebook and

Twitter penetration level did not determine whether they would be the prey of mass mobilization and regime change. Despite the fact that about one third of Tunisia's population had access to Internet, about one fifth used Facebook, and 0.34 percent had Twitter accounts, Tunisians were still able to overthrow their dictator. Nonetheless, Rane and Salem do recognize that social media did contribute to the Tunisian uprisings as it informed dissidents about the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, which triggered collective action, and as it also allowed dissidents to be up to date about the mobilizations and events taking place. Similarly, although about one quarter of Egypt's population had access to Internet, about 5 percent of Egyptians were Facebook users and 0.15 percent had Twitter accounts, Egypt still had social movements for freedom and democracy which led to Mubarak's toppling. In Egypt's case too, social media was nevertheless useful to exchange with their Tunisian counterparts to learn from their experience and to get codes to counter regime control over Internet. In both Tunisia's and Egypt's case, social media was useful but cannot explain for their dictator's toppling (Rane &Salem, 2012).

Libya's case supports even more Rane and Salem's argument as it had even lower levels of Internet (5.51percent), Facebook (3.74percent) and Twitter (0.96percent) penetration. Yet, it still witnessed mass mobilization for freedom and democracy which ultimately resulted in regime change. Yemen also serves as a counter example to arguments supporting the idea that social media caused social movements to erupt in the MENA region. Indeed, Yemen, with a relatively low level of Internet (9.19percent), of Facebook (0.74percent) and of Twitter (0.12percent) penetration, was among the first countries in the region to have witnessed protests. As reported by Rane and Salem, Yemini activists have importantly relied on traditional methods of information dissemination to organize their protests. Nonetheless, although SMSs and

brochures served as the dominant mediums of communication, Yemini activists also relied on those living abroad, thus, the Diaspora who had better access to social media (Rane &Salem, 2012).

Syria's case also illustrates the absence of a positive correlation and causal relationship between the incidence of social and political change and the levels of Internet and social media penetration, as this country witnessed uprisings although it had relatively low levels of Internet (20.40percent), Facebook (1.07percent) and Twitter (0.17percent) penetration. Nonetheless, Facebook and other social media sites have been used by activists to notably share videos about the current blood bath. It is also important to acknowledge that the Syrian uprisings have evolved differently than the other regional revolutions. Indeed, this can be explained by distinct domestic factors and realities that have inhibited Syrian's efforts of collective action. These conditions partly explain why the uprisings still have not been able to overthrow Bashar el-Assad's regime. Indeed, because Syria is composed of different confessional and ethnic groups, Syrians are conscious about the issues around sectarian divisions if a political vacuum was created and since it would impacts upon the regime's present and future character (Rane &Salem, 2012). However, ever since June 2012, Syria has been in a full-scale civil war, like first declared by the UN peacekeeping chief Herve Ladsous (AP, 2012).

Finally, Bahrain's case is interesting as it illustrates the importance of traditional media attention and international support in determining whether uprisings will result in revolutions or not. Indeed, although Bahrain has a relatively high level of Internet (53percent), Facebook (34.27percent) and Twitter (7.53percent) penetration and although Bahraini Shiite activists have

used social media and blogs such as Twitter and Global Voice to disseminate information about the uprisings, the social movements have not evolved into revolutions. The Bahraini uprisings have not gathered as much media attention from satellite television networks, such as Al-Jazeera, and have not gotten any support from Western democracy like Egypt and Tunisia had from the US. Indeed, this can be justified by the regional politics that govern the MENA. Indeed, Saudi Arabia, member of the Gulf Cooperation Council, is strongly opposed to regime change in the Gulf Region as it could threaten its own regime stability. For that reason, the Qatari television station, Al-Jazeera, did not grant much airtime about the uprisings as it did not want to jeopardize its regime stability and its relation with Saudi Arabia. Also, the United States have not voiced their support to the uprising in Bahrain, as it feared that a regime change would give place to a Shiite government which would most likely become an additional ally to Iran. Also, given its tight and long-lasting political relationship with Saudi Arabia, the United States didn't want to alter its relations with this Gulf state. The case of Bahrain, thus, demonstrates that regional and international politics are important factors which can limit the ability of social movements to result in revolutions. Indeed, the absence of a strong international support, such as the US one, has greatly inhibited the ability of the pro-democracy, non-Islamist, and non-violent social movements to succeed as well as the ones pursed by the Egyptian and Tunisian activists (Rane &Salem, 2012).

Stepanova has also studied the role of modern ICTs and digital social media tools and networks in the Arab Spring. In her research, she argues that 2011's uprisings have exemplified how mass forms of sociopolitical protest can be facilitated by social media networks (Stepanova, 2011). For example, in the case of the Egyptian revolution, she argues that although new ICTs

and social media networks' had little to do with the underlying sociopolitical and socioeconomic factors behind the protest movements' (Stepanova, 2011, p.1), they nonetheless allowed for the Egyptian revolution to erupt right after the Tunisian one. While Stepanova recognizes social media networks' organizational and disseminator role, she, however, warns her readers and other enthusiasts of being careful of not using the Middle Eastern case as a general rule to infer about the ability of social media to serve as accelerator of social transformations. Indeed, as she states, 'the mobilizing effect of new information and social media networks as catalysts of broad sociopolitical protest will vary significantly from a region to another'(Stepanova, 2011, p.3). Like Rane and Salem, she also argues that there is no direct correlation and causality that can be drawn between the level of Internet and social media penetration and the occurrence and intensity of social protests (Stepanova, 2011). Her findings also show that states regardless of their level of Internet and social media penetration have experienced mass mobilization. Furthermore, although countries with low Internet and social media penetration did not benefit from the useful functions of social media networks, these countries nonetheless profited from mainstream electronic media devices. Finally, she also believes, like Rane and Salem, that the role of social media networks has been overemphasized when revolutions, like Tunisia's, were referred to as the 'Twitter revolution' (Stepanova, 2011, p.4).

And so, although social media was undeniably an important tool used by activists, it is clear that it had a facilitator role, rather than a causal role, during the Arab Awakening. Satellite televisions also played a crucial role during these revolutions by amplifying and legitimizing protestors' online activities and claims. In addition, online activists' physical engagement also

essential for the regimes to collapse as protestor's discontent was strong enough to push them to voice their demands offline and in the streets. Let us now study the Arab youth's importance during the Arab Spring as this demographic group represented an important part of social media's users and greatly participated in the mobilizations.

The importance of the Arab Youth activism and its effective use of ICTs and social media

In the following section, I will show how the Arab youth represented an important intervening variable during the Arab Spring as its online activism, and also, its physical engagement during the mass mobilization were significant. I will also present the different grievances held by this demographic group explaining for its large contribution during the uprisings. In addition, I will show how ICT's and social media's facilitator role was only possible thanks to the youth's effective ability to use these SNSs as tools for political activism. And finally, through the analysis of SNSs' impact on Youth movements, I will demonstrate how these technologies have allowed the Arab youth to become active in the political sphere during the Arab Spring.

Prior to the Arab Spring, Howard (2010) had made an interesting prediction regarding youth's important involvement in potential future revolutions. He believed that, although social media might provide new capacities for certain political actors, it cannot, alone, allow for political change. As he claimed, it doesn't really matter how many Internet users there might be,

only a few brokers can be sufficient to permit for regime change, such as the youth (Howard, 2010). In fact, this is what was witnessed during the Arab Spring. As argued by Goldstone, what specifically distinguished 2011's revolutions was youth's participation in the uprisings. Scholars have defined the Arab Awakening as being unique not only because of social media's role but also due to its demographics, as it was marked by the Arab youth's high involvement (Goldstone, 2011). Indeed, various scholars and organizations have recognized the important role played by the Tunisian and Egyptian youth for having significantly contributed to the overthrow of Ben Ali and Mubarak (Hanafi, 2011 and International Republican Institute (IRI), 2011). In fact, this justifies why the Tunisian revolution has also been described as the Youth Revolution (The International Republican Institute, 2011).Also, the IRI stated that 'the watershed protests that began in Egypt on January 25 were spearheaded in large part by communities of tech-savvy youth activists who, under the close scrutiny of the government security structure, ardently campaigned to bring change to Egypt for years' (The International Republican Institute, 2011, para.7). In fact, regarding Egypt's case as well, Alexender argued that the Egyptian youth was truly a 'carrier group' which shared common ideas which have pushed them to engage in popular mobilization (Alexander, 2011, p33). Alexender stated that 'despite claims of being spontaneous and leaderless, it was reported that not only through the events but well before them, a small group of Internet-savvy young political organizers had been meeting frequently with one another' (Alexender, 2011, p.33). Also, he added that 'it was these young Internet pioneers who were calling the shots and who remained the vanguard behind the scenes'(Alexender, 2011, p. 33-34). By the end of the Egyptian revolution, the New York Times headlined: 'Wired, Educated, and Shrewd, Young Egyptians Guide Revolt' (Alexender, 2011, p33).We, thus, understand that studying the characteristic about this demographic group can allow us to better understand the

impact of youth participation during the 2011 events in the MENA region and especially recognize the essential role they played in the cases of Tunisia and Egypt.

When studying the role of the Arab youth during the Arab Spring, it is important to recognize their strong demands and complaints which encouraged them to participate in mass mobilizations in great numbers. Indeed, young Arabs' main grievances were governmental corruption and the high levels of youth unemployment (Goldstone, 2011).Part of the politics of modernization that had been adopted since the 1990s by the authoritarian regimes allowed these young Arabs to acquire higher levels of education and to become better aware of democratic principles. However, as a counterpart, these governments were not able to create sufficient jobs to employ the newly graduated students. Consequently, as the Arab youth was highly unsatisfied due to the lack of job creation and the scarcity of higher wage jobs; it represented one of 2011's revolutions' main activists protesting in the streets (Goldstone, 2011). In fact, in Syria, the 'frustrated youth' has been 'the most persistent source of opposition activity since 2011' (Phillips, 2012, p. 38). Indeed, the Syrian labour market was not able to absorb the surplus of young Syrian, especially as a result of the 1980 demographic boom. Also, during the period of Bahraini upheavals, young Bahrainis asked for more jobs and living condition improvements. In fact, on February 14th 2011, youth Bahrainis, such as the Bahrain Youth for Freedom movement, used social media networks in order to call for the Day of Rage (Slackman & Audi, 2011 and Lutz, 2011). Also, they would organize rallies to call for political reforms as they were committed to toppling the monarchical regime (Carlstrom, 2011). Indeed, like other Shiite activists, they also asked for a new constitution and democratic changes in order to have a legitimate and representative parliament and government (Slackman & Audi, 2011). For

example, a young Bahraini activist, Maryam al-Khawaja, 23, member of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights said: 'we want real reforms, a real parliament elected by the people with real legislative power; we want a constitution written by the people' (Slackman & Audi, 2011, para.5). Also, Bahraini youth created Facebook pages, used Twitter and created telephone chains in order to exchange information and pictures with each other (Slackman & Audi, 2011) and to organize rallies (Carlstrom, 2011). In addition, in the cities of Aden and in Sana'a, young Yemeni university students have also organized demonstrations demanding for the resignation of President Saleh's regime and have protested after the arrest of Tawakul Karman, a student leader and member of the Islah Party, supporter of the Jasmine Revolution of Tunisia (Azikiwe, 2011). Thus, we understand that Arab youth represented an important driving force during the Arab Spring, especially in Tunisia and in Egypt, as it lead online and offline activism and demanded significant socioeconomic and political changes. Let us now focus on the demographic breakdown of Facebook users at the start of the Arab Spring.

Various researches have demonstrated how social network platforms' main users in the MENA region and during the Arab Spring were young Arabs. Indeed, Howard for example established that young, urban and relatively well educated individuals were the predominant users of social media and were the ones conducting political discussions criticizing their governments through Facebook, Twitter and You Tube (Howard et al., 2011). Al Omoush et al.'s research also revealed that 55 percent of Facebook users in the Arab world are students aged between 13 and 24 years old (Al Omoush et al., 2011). In addition, Mourtada and Salem have determined that the Youth (between the ages of 15 and 29) represented 75% of Facebook users in the MENA region in December 2010. According to the demographic breakdown of Facebook

users, 64 percent of Facebook users in Bahrain, 67percent of Facebook users in Libya, 78 percent of Facebook users in Tunisia and Egypt, and 80 percent of Facebook users in Yemen are aged between 15 and 29 years old (Mourtada and Salem, 2011, see Appendix III). These findings therefore show why, it is also crucial to take into account SNS users' characteristics when studying social media's role on 2011's revolutions. These results also demonstrate how the use of social media by the Arab youth has allowed for these means of communications to have an enabling role during the Arab Awakening. Let us now identify the impact of SNSs on Youth activism since their arrival in the MENA region.

As observed by Al Omoush et al., in recent years, social media has been expanding as these virtual meeting places have been multiplying. These SNSs have led various scholars to study their impact on societies and have shown how these have facilitated and improved different forms of self-representation and social relations (Al Omoush et al., 2012). Since their arrival in the Arab region, social media platforms have proved to be vital, as dissidents have used them as means for collective action, to circulate information and express their political views (Aouragh & Anderson, 2011; Howard & Hussain, 2011).Al Omoush et al. believe that SNSs have allowed the Arab youth to create its own sphere of public life, away from state control (Aday & Livingston, 2008; Armbrust, 2007).And so, they have studied 'the impact of cultural values on motivations and attitudes toward SNSs in the Arab world, and the factors affecting the continuity of membership value' (Al Omoush et al., 2012, p2387). They have notably underlined how, due to the different cultural, social, religious, moral and political limitations faced by young Arabs, SNSs have allowed them to overcome such restrictions on freedom of speech, self-representation, social interaction, and self-discloser (Al Omoush et al., 2012). As described by

these scholars, 'the absence of barriers to entrance and the lack of any direct kind of coercion or preaching with utility of using fake names lead to provide SNSs with the power of liberating individuals from cultural and power differences' (Al Omoush , 2012, p.2397).

However, as pointed by Youman and York, social media's architecture can also be constraining as it has also been used by authoritarian regimes to counter collective action. It allowed regimes to infiltrate social media platforms and gather information on dissidents and use these networks to promote their own party. Regimes have indeed demonstrated learning curves as they have worked to dampen and disrupt their opponents through various tactics. That is why, Youman and York underline how social media firms' information policies behind these types of media are double edge swords (Youman and York, 2012; Dewey et al., 2012). For example, repressive regimes have used different techniques to deceive activists in order to gather information, such as creating Facebook accounts displaying pictures of attractive women (Wood, 2011). Also, during the Arab Spring, authoritarian rulers, such as Mubarak, Ghaddafi and Bashar Al-Assad, used the option of shutting down Internet and websites, as a mean to counter activists' doings (Howard &Hussain, 2011). However, this tactic's effect can be limited as it can only be effective if Internet use is widespread in the country, if protestors rely heavily on Internet to function and communicate (Cowie, 2011) and if activists are not wise enough to develop counter tactics. Indeed, following these Internet shutdowns, protestors have developed measures to counter regime's attempt to suppress their activities by using alternative means of communication or referring to proxies outside the country to supply them with information and internet codes. Also, to escape from state censorship and control, activists in Syria have recommended their followers to remove contacts that had names with an Islamic connotation and content that referred to the revolution (Sayed, 2011). Furthermore, young activists would use

Muslim online-dating sites to subtly communicate with each other (Howard & Hussain, 2011). Thus, despite regime's attempt to dampen anti-regime activism, protestors were still able to develop creative alternatives to counter regime control. This allowed for social media and ICTs to have an enabling role during the Arab Awakening.

Nevertheless, scholars have wondered why online political participation had not allowed for offline political participation earlier than during the Arab Spring. Indeed, scholars, such as Sika, have shown how, although limited political reformation took place in the Arab world between 2001 and 2005, no true democratization occurred in the region. Despite these reforms, most Arab countries continued to limit their citizen's ability to participate in the political sphere by using repression. That is why, Sika sought to study Egyptian youth's political engagement through the 'dual motivation theory'. In her research, she focused on the motives that explain for Egyptian youth's civic disengagement in the political sphere, prior to 2011's revolution. She sought to determine whether the youth's political disengagement was justified by a lack of social capital; or, whether it was justified by young Egyptian's belief that they would not be able to change the political dynamics of their country because of uncompetitive elections.

Sika noted the emergence of two important Youth movements, 'Youth for Change' and 'Sixth of April', before the 2011 Egyptian revolution. These movements did not associate to mainstream political parties not to the Muslim Brotherhood movement. Contrarily to other Youth movements in the country, these had unique features as these highly criticized Mubarak's regime, pushed for greater political reform and were secular. Also, these movements were able to rally youth from different socioeconomic and religious backgrounds. These were also able to

mobilize and organize their activities through the use of information technology and social networking. Indeed, their ability to function using several media outlets, especially cyberspace, to express their political opinions importantly differentiated them from other civil society groups and political parties. Instead of participating in parliamentary or presidential elections, these movements would express their political opinions in regards to democratic ideals and political reforms through social networking sites and in the streets. Also, rather than having a unified political agenda, these movements were simply constituted of a wide array of political dissidents expressing their discontent in regards to public policies. As also argued by Alexender, the collective identity of the young Egyptian activists was years in making, as this 'carrier group' was initially constituted of traditional, working class oriented activists to then become an aggregate of radial advocates for civil society (Alexender, 2011, p.35).However, as stated by Sika, prior to January 25th, 2011, although, young Egyptians believed in democratic values, their level of political engagement was relatively low. Indeed, she explained such findings by showing how these did not have sufficient understanding of the dynamics of their ruling regime.

However, she highlighted how, after to the Jasmine revolution in Tunisia, the Egyptian Youth movements were able to efficiently frame the issue around regime change through political and civic engagement. In the aftermath of Ben Ali's toppling, the Egyptian Youth movements and activists started to build 'passive networks' (Sika, 2012, p.190). These involved a variety of bloggers, movements and unions, and transformed themselves into a wider movement through active communication and cooperation. During the Arab Spring, the Egyptian youth criticized the state corruption, such as, the 2010 rigged parliamentary elections and, used slogans that rallied different segments of the population such as 'Food, freedom and human

dignity' and 'Come on Mohamed, come on Mina; tomorrow Egypt will follow Tunisia' (Sika, 2012).Finally, the Egyptian youth's efforts contributed to Mubarak's downfall. As Sika stated, 'the actions undertaken during the month of January 2011 marked the apogee of their participation and were directed towards changing, not only, the outcome of the elections, but, the regime as a whole' (Sika, 2012, p.190). That is why, Sika concluded by arguing that the dual motivation theory applies under democratizing regimes and not under authoritarian ones (Sika, 2012).These findings exemplify how the Arab Youth's involvement was pivotal in the victorious oust of the ruling dictators like Ben Ali and Mubarak, and how SNSs have served it as important tools to organize the anti-regime mobilizations.

And so, these findings have allowed us to highlight the importance of the Arab youth during the Arab Spring through their effective social media use and their important physical involvement. This claim especially applies in the cases of Tunisia and Egypt as their respective Arab youth highly contributed to the toppling of their authoritarian rulers. Also, we have demonstrated how youth's strong discontent, especially in regards to unemployment and the lack of democratic reform, explained for their high rates of participation during the protests. Also, we showed how ICTs and social media have allowed the Arab youth to acquire new means of communications that evade from state control even in times of political turmoil like witnessed during the Arab Spring. Indeed, the Arab youth was able to develop tactics to circumvent regimes' attempt to hinder their actions. And so, we understand how social media's facilitator role was only possible thanks to the effective ability of the Arab youth to use these SNSs as tools for political activism. These arguments, thus demonstrate the importance of the Arab youth as a key broker during the Arab Spring.

Concluding remarks

This research, through empirical evidences, demonstrated that although new ICTs and social media were important tools for political activism during the Arab Spring, these, nonetheless, had a facilitator role rather than a causal role during the 2011 events. Indeed, with the growth of social media penetration in the MENA region and given the political nature of their usage, social media proved to have played a contributing role in organizing mobilizations, empowering citizens, sharing information and ultimately leading to social and political change in some countries. Through my work, I developed a more nuanced picture of the actual role of new ICTs and social media during the Arab Spring by showing how satellite television was also crucial during these uprisings as it amplified and legitimized protestors' online activity and demands. Furthermore, by highlighting the absence of a causal relationship and positive correlation between the level of Internet, Facebook and Twitter penetration in the MENA region and the occurrence of social movements and regime change, I was able reinforce my argument. I demonstrated that irrespective of country's rates penetration, these have not proved to be forecasters of popular uprisings or regime change during the Arab Awakening; nor did they increase the likelihood of being the target of such happenings. Simply looking at Syria's ongoing bloody civil war attests the limited ability of social media and new ICTs to allow for regime change. Also, by presenting activist's physical engagement and online activism, such as the Arab youth, I demonstrated how these factors also contributed in the occurrence of the 2011 events and in some cases the ousting of authoritarian rulers. I showed how the social media's facilitator role was in part possible thanks to its young subscribers' ability to use them as tools for political
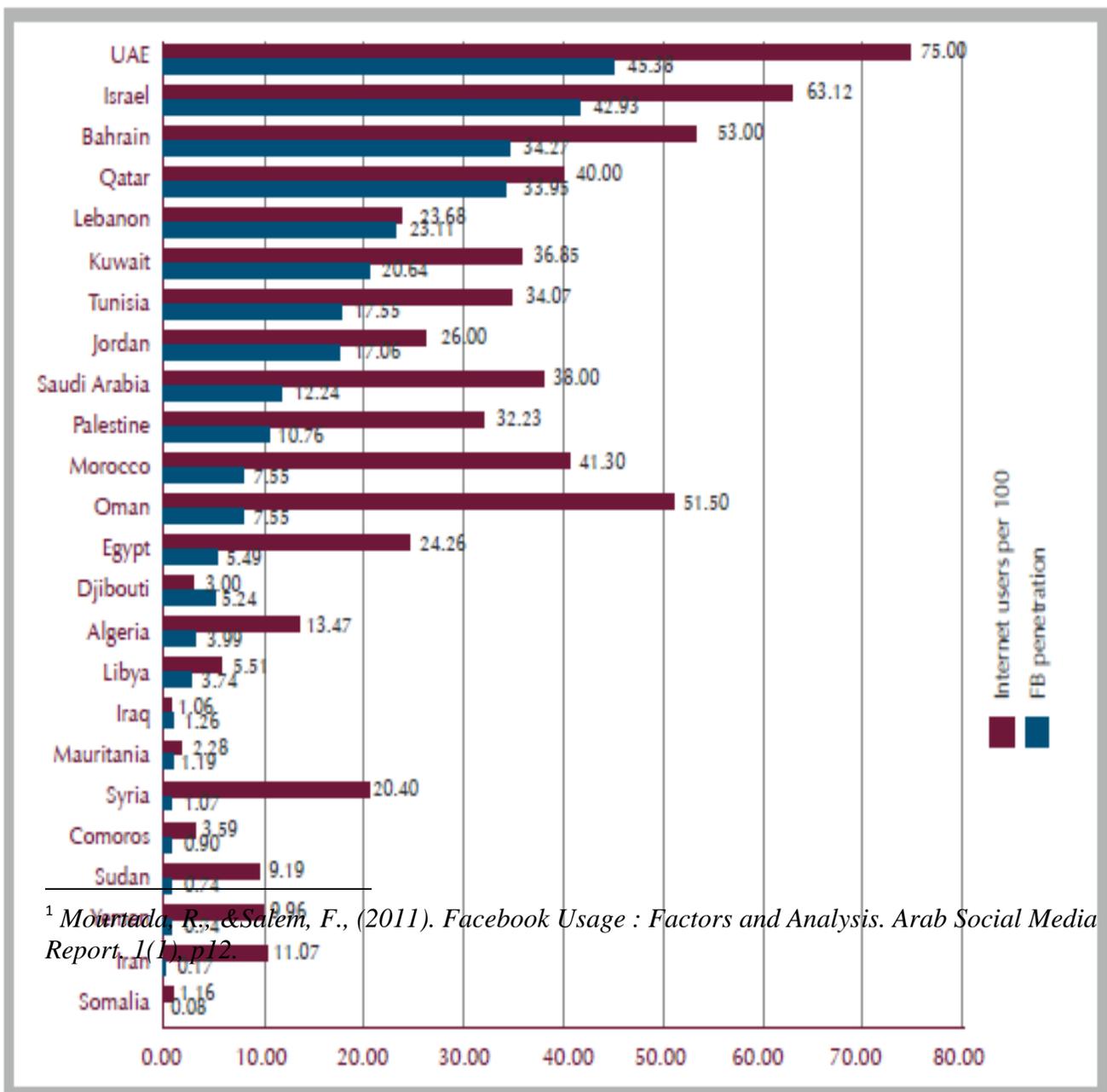
activism. However, as also stressed by Mourtada and Salem, it is important to note that it is still premature to make a final assessment on new ICTs and social media's role during the Arab Spring and their role on Arab civil movements. When looking ahead, we can expect that in the years to come, scholars, with further research, will be able to better pin point the actual scope of new ICTs' and social media's impact and role during the Arab Spring. As emphasized by Aday et al., this better understanding will notably be appreciated by policymakers and researchers, as it will provide them 'with a far better grasp of the forces potentially shaping politics in the twenty-first century, as political actors struggle to use these media for their various purposes'(Aday et al., 2012, 23).

One thing is certain, we can expect that social media will continue to contribute to political and socio-economic development in the MENA region and serve as political tools as subscribers will keep on growing in the upcoming years (Mourtada and Salem, 2011). The Arab Spring has marked a new era in the MENA region as populations now hold new expectations and demands towards their governments. These factors will play out different according to each country and over time. New ICTs, including social media and satellite television channels, will continue to evolve. Their role will most likely remain a political action facilitator and a technological mean to spread information and democratic ideals. In fact, the so-called, Arab Spring is still ongoing as upheavals are still erupting and taking place in the MENA region. In some cases, these uprisings will not end anytime soon. Like stated by Jones, 'the Arab Spring is a long-term realignment of regional societies and the politics that serve and define them'(Jones, 2012, p.462). We might not experience upheavals on a scale as important as in the beginning of 2011, but MENA countries will have to keep on adjusting their politics in order to control for

rising popular demands like in the case of Egypt and Tunisia. Regional order is far from being settled and each country, given their respective conditions, will have to adapt accordingly. As for Gulf States, these might not be the next ones to face similar types of events as their regional neighbors, but Bahrain's case leaves us wondering. It may simply be a matter of time before social and political change emerges especially, since these countries hold the most important rates of Internet, Facebook and Twitter penetration rates in the region. It will be interesting to see how these rates will play out in the forthcoming years. As unexpected as was the self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi in triggering the Arab Spring, we may witness then a similar catalyst event, enough to ignite social and political change in this Gulf region.
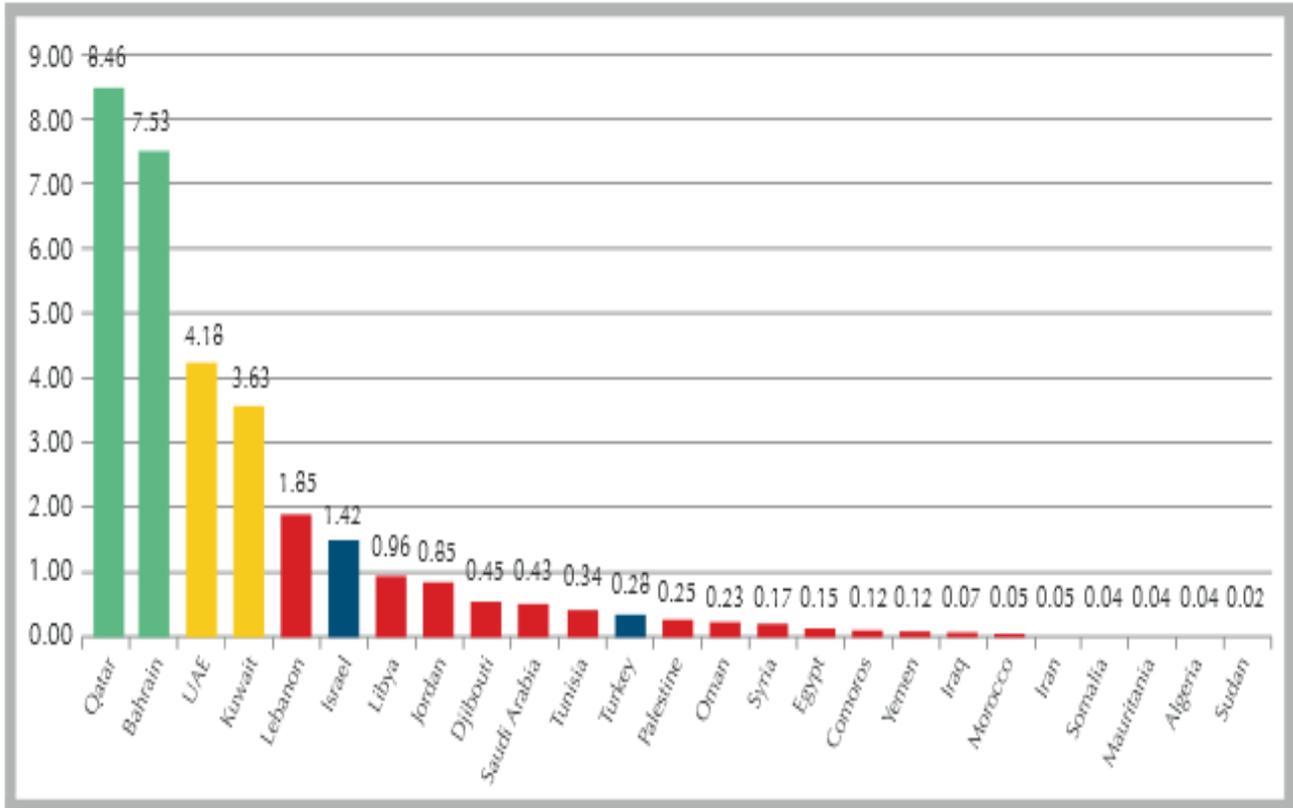
APPENDIX I:

Facebook and Internet Penetration Rates in the Arab countries (plus Iran and Israel) (December 2010)[1]:

Country	FB penetration	Internet users per 100
UAE	45.36	75.00
Israel	42.93	63.12
Bahrain	34.27	53.00
Qatar	33.95	40.00
Lebanon	23.11	23.68
Kuwait	20.64	36.85
Tunisia	17.55	34.07
Jordan	17.06	26.00
Saudi Arabia	12.24	38.00
Palestine	10.76	32.23
Morocco	7.55	41.30
Oman	7.55	51.50
Egypt	5.49	24.26
Djibouti	5.24	3.00
Algeria	3.99	13.47
Libya	3.74	5.51
Iraq	1.26	1.06
Mauritania	1.19	2.28
Syria	1.07	20.40
Comoros	0.90	3.59
Sudan	0.74	9.19
Yemen		9.96
Iran	0.17	11.07
Somalia	0.08	1.16

[1] *Mourtada, R., &Salem, F., (2011). Facebook Usage : Factors and Analysis. Arab Social Media Report, 1(1), p12.*

APPENDIX II:

Twitter Penetration in the Arab Region plus Iran and Turkey (Average between Jan. 1 and March 30, 2011)[2]:
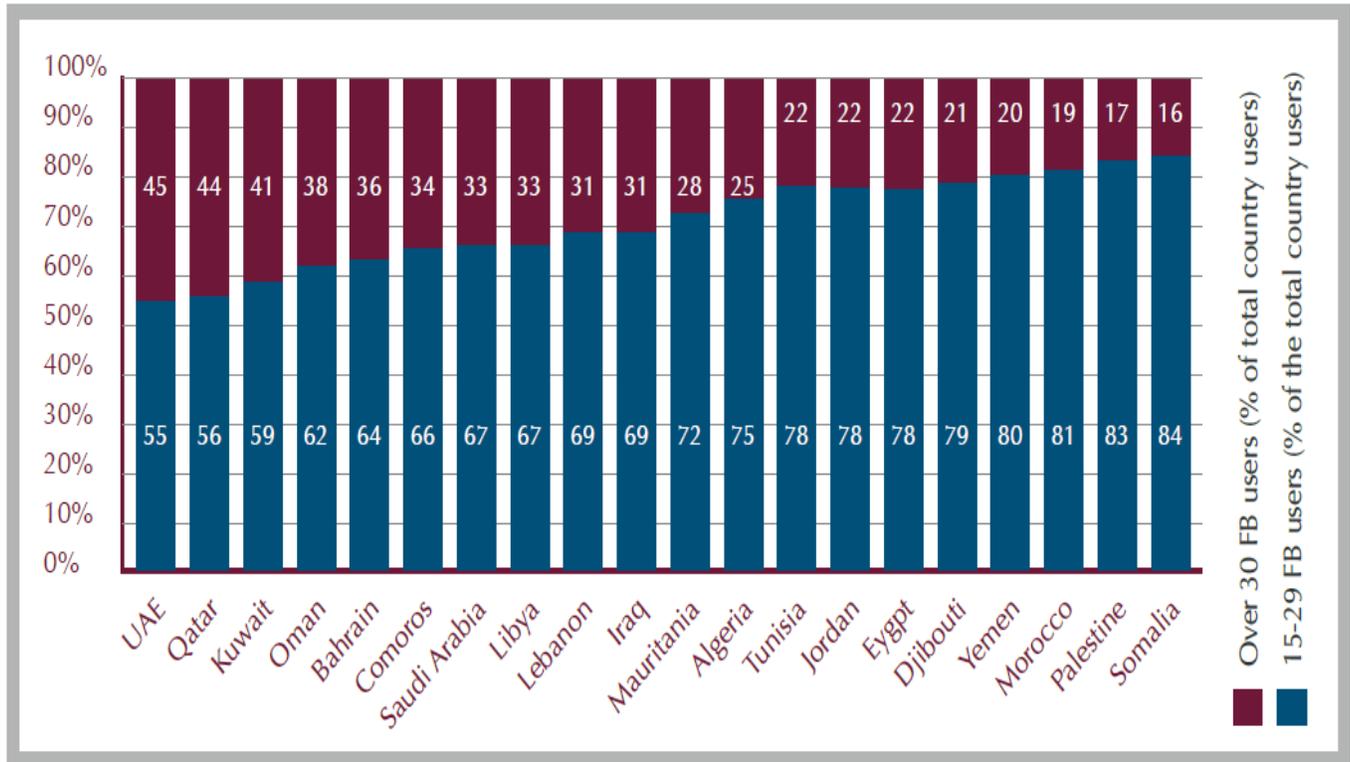

* 2011 populations, from United Nations ILO Department of Statistics, http://laborsta.ilo.org/

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[2]*Mourtada, R., &Salem, F., (2011). Civil Movements: the Impact of Facebook and Twitter. Arab Social Media Report. 1(2), p.17*

Demographic Breakdown of Facebook Users in the Arab Region (December 2010)[3]

* Excluding Syria and Sudan (due to US technology sanctions, no data on demographic breakdown of Facebook users available)

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[3]*Mourtada, R., &Salem, F., (2011). Facebook Usage : Factors and Analysis. Arab Social Media Report. 1(1), p12.*

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