

2011

Egypt in January 2011: Social Media as a Tool and not a Cause of the Revolution

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Recommended Citation

Tobin, Jillian (2011) "Egypt in January 2011: Social Media as a Tool and not a Cause of the Revolution," *3690: A Journal of First-Year Student Research Writing*: Vol. 2011 , Article 3.
Available at: <https://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/journal3690/vol2011/iss1/3>

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Egypt in January 2011: Social Media as a Tool and not a Cause of the Revolution

Abstract

Overview: On January 28th, 2011 Al Jazeera English broadcasted an image of hundreds of Egyptian citizens massed on the Nile Bridge facing armed police forces (“Police attack praying Egyptians”). In order to prevent the citizens’ advance, the police arrived in tanks and pelted them with water cannons and tear gas. However, these deterrents did not dampen the Egyptians’ drive. They continued to advance by organizing themselves in rows in order to endure the obstacles as one. Ultimately, the Egyptians forced the drastically more equipped police forces to withdraw and gained access to the other side of the bridge. Their noble demonstration was among countless others whose participants risked imprisonment, torture and even death to challenge a rooted authoritarian regime. They all partook in Egypt’s January 2011 revolution against authoritarian figure Hosni Mubarak.

Egypt’s uprisings and consequently, the successful overthrow of Mubarak, came as an inspiring shock to most individuals (“Hosni Mubarak Resigns as President”). Previously, many possessed a fatalist attitude towards authoritarian governments in the Middle East, and specifically in Egypt, which oppressed and afflicted people for decades. Understanding the tools used to topple such a well established and debauched leadership provides useful information for future revolutions and campaigns for human rights. Further, Egypt, as a leader in cultural and media growth in the Middle East, has the potential to provoke others to follow its example. The country boasts the second largest economy in the region due to assets such as the Suez Canal and developments such as increased privatization. This combined with the diversification of the media by previous presidents and open policies with the West modernized Egypt and positioned the nation in its place of leadership (BBC Egypt Country Profile). Egypt could potentially set a precedent for the region and the findings of this research thus have important consequences for the broader domain of Middle Eastern political structure and stability.

Because of the unprecedented nature of this revolution, it immediately generated abundant commercial discussion, particularly in regard to social media’s contribution to the events. History proves media an effectual tool and affirms the value of this discussion. From 15th century Europe, when the invention of the printing press lead to an unheard-of dissemination of ideas (Kreis), all the way to Barack Obama’s utilization of the Internet to obtain equally unparalleled campaign donations in 2008 (Vargas), the media has powerfully influenced culture, politics and public opinion. Modernly, the Internet and social media devices dominate the media scene and integrate further into society each year, as does their potential impact on world order.

Keywords

Writing

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