



KADIR HAS UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
PROGRAM OF NEW MEDIA

**CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES GRANTED TO
ARAB WOMEN BY SOCIAL MEDIA DURING THE
POLITICAL UPHEAVALS BETWEEN 2011 AND 2018**

ASMAA MEDHAT FARAHAT

MASTER'S THESIS

ISTANBUL, SEPTEMBER, 2020

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MASTER'S THESIS

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies of Kadir Has University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master's in the Program of New Media

ISTANBUL, SEPTEMBER, 2020

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ABSTRACT

Starting with 2011, the so-called Arab Spring threatened the authoritarian leaders in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries, enabling protesters to mobilize others to their cause and provide an effective tool for self-expression. The use of social media changed the demographic makeup of social movement participants in many countries. Of particular interest is the mobilization of women both online and offline. Literature has previously examined the impact of the use of social media during Arab Spring generally, with a clear gap on the participation of women in social movements and a clear absence of theoretical base for past findings. This study employs a qualitative approach to understand how the Arab Spring shaped the political use of social media by activist women. This study contributes to the literature by investigating the extent of political engagement of Arab women online, most notably during the Arab Spring upheavals in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Libya and Syria. Thirteen Arab activist women were interviewed on their use of social media in efforts to facilitate social change. The interviews aimed to explore the effects of Arab Spring revolution on women's participation in social media and contextualize the opportunities that social media provided to empower Arab women in political participation through the cultural, technical, as well as political affordances. In addition, the threats Arab women faced as a result of engaging in social media before, during, and after the Arab Spring period are investigated. Results indicate that social media encouraged Arab activist women to be involved in the social movements where they demanded their political rights. However, women's active (online and offline) political participation also led to social media bans, violations of their privacy as well as arrests and banishments.

Keywords: Social media, Online activism, Arab Spring, Social movements, Protesters, Activist women, Status of Arab women, Women empowerment, Women political participation.

2011-2018 ARASINDAKİ SİYASİ GELİŞMELERDE SOSYAL MEDYA TARAFINDAN ARAP KADINLARINA VERİLEN ZORLUKLAR VE FIRSATLAR

ÖZET

2011'den itibaren Arap Baharı, Orta Doğu ve Kuzey Afrika (MENA) ülkelerindeki otoriter liderleri tehdit ederek protestocuların diğerlerini kendi davalarına yönlendirmelerine ve kendini ifade etmeleri için etkili bir araç sağlamalarına olanak tanıdı. Sosyal medyanın kullanımı, birçok ülkede sosyal hareket katılımcılarının demografik yapısını değiştirdi. Özellikle ilgi çekici olan, hem çevrimiçi hem de çevrimdışı kadınların mobilizasyonu. Literatür, genel olarak Arap Baharı sırasında sosyal medya kullanımının etkisini incelemiştir. Fakat, kadınların toplumsal hareketlere katılımı konusunda ve bir teorik çerçeve oluşturma konusunda açık bir boşluk vardır. Bu çalışma, Arap Baharı'nın aktivist kadınlar tarafından sosyal medyanın katılımcı kullanımını nasıl şekillendirdiğini anlamak için niteliksel bir yaklaşım kullanıyor. Özellikle Tunus, Mısır, Yemen, Libya ve Suriye'deki Arap Baharı ayaklanmaları sırasında Arap kadınlarının çevrimiçi siyasi angajmanlarının kapsamını araştırarak literatüre katkıda bulunuyor. Sosyal değişimi kolaylaştırmak için sosyal medyayı kullandıkları konusunda 13 Arap aktivist kadınla mülakat yapıldı. Görüşmeler, Arap Baharı devriminin kadınların sosyal medyaya katılımı üzerindeki etkilerini araştırmayı ve sosyal medyanın Arap kadınlarını kültürel, teknik ve politik koşullar aracılığıyla politik katılımı güçlendirmek için sağladığı fırsatları bağlamsallaştırmayı amaçladı. Ayrıca Arap kadınlarının Arap Baharı öncesinde, sırasında ve sonrasında sosyal medyaya girmeleri sonucunda karşılaştıkları tehditler de incelendi. Sonuçlar, sosyal medyanın Arap aktivist kadınları haklarını talep ettikleri toplumsal hareketlere katılmaya teşvik ettiğini gösteriyor. Bununla birlikte, kadınların aktif (çevrimiçi ve çevrimdışı) siyasi katılımı, sosyal medya yasaklarına, mahremiyetlerinin ihlaline, tutuklamalara ve sürgünlere yol açtı.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Sosyal medya, çevrimiçi etkinlik, Arap baharı, sosyal hareketler, protestocular, Aktivist kadınlar, Arap kadınlarının statüsü, kadınların güçlendirilmesi, kadınların siyasi katılımı.

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إهداء

هذا البحث إهداء لكل امرأة كافحت، ولو بجهد بسيط ليصبح هذا العالم أجمل، للاتي قد نستمتع حين ننصت لقصصهن أو نكتب عنهن، لكننا لا نعلم كم واجهوا من تحديات أو مقدار ما تجاوزوه من مخاطر.. إلى كل من أمنت بنفسها، إلى كل ناشطة.. وكل ملهمة..

إلى أمي .. التي تابعت هذا العمل بكل خطوة فيه، ابتسمت وشجعت في نجاحاته، وعاتبت في إخفاقاته وعند إهماله.. ملهمتي، ممتنة لكل صلواتك ودعواتك..

إلى جدتي.. التي لم تكثر يوماً لما يقوله المجتمع عن فتاة سافرت لتكمل دراستها، بل كانت أكثر من بارك وأيد وشجع، دفعت ومازالت تفعل لأحقي أحلامي وطموحاتي، قدوتي..

إلى أختي.. شيماء.. الجدار المتين الذي أسند عليه ظهري يوماً في قوتي وضعفي، والتي كانت عائلتي في رحلة الماجستير..

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إلى أقربائي في كل مكان.. شكراً على الرفقة النقية، وعلى الدعم الوفي طوال الدراسة وأثناء الرسالة.. إلى مشرفتي.. سأبقى ممتنة طوال حياتي لما بذلته معي من جهد، لإلهامك لي، لأفكارك، لتحفيزك، هذا الجهد صنع يديك..

صديقاتي.. مروج، مريم، هيلينا، فاطمة، مرام، إسراء، زهراء، ربي، رؤى، نغم، ياسمين، رغد، غيداء، بسمة، هديل، نور، انتصار، صفاء، عائشة، أحلام، دانيا، الميرا، سارا، توبا، هيا.. الجزء الآخر من رسالتي.. وقلبي..

على كل الحب والدعم الروحي في رسالتي، وحياتي بشكل عام.. شكراً ولا أوفيكم..

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أخوالي.. الذين ظلموا لأن ذنبهم كان فقط مساندة من يحتاجون، يقال "من رحم الألم، يأتي الأمل"، وألم الشوق والفقد فجر تلك الصفحات التي أصبحت أملاً بالحرية كما تؤمنون..

والحمد لله!

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1. INTRODUCTION

Social media and information communication technologies (ICTs) changed our daily lives substantially, which sparked curiosity and interest to search on for most of the people. Relating to that, many researches in different fields were concerned about these changes. Lots have been written and said about the role of social media in the Arab Spring revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) since it started in 2011. Historically, ICTs have a significant role in many social movements. For instance, in 1979, cassette tapes have played a big role in the Iranian Islamic revolution, while short message service (SMS) was reported as a significant tool used to overthrow the Philippine's President in 1995 (Shirky 2008). Last decade, in 2009, social media played a significant role in Moldova's revolution which was marked as the first Facebook revolution (Zuckerman 2009). In addition, the demonstration in Iran, in 2009 was recognized as the first Twitter revolution (Sullivan 2009).

Scholars suggested that Facebook, Twitter and YouTube transformed the political discussions from online platforms to offline social movements, which presence people's (Castells 2011; Khamis 2011) and helped in spreading information, events and in supporting the interaction between protesters. These transformations naturally changed the role of women in Arab countries as Khamis argues, "The prolific online and offline political activities of Arab women over the last several months have contributed in making a new chapter to the history of both Arab feminism and the region" (2011, 748). Indeed, women participated in the Arab Spring revolution which had been considered as a place designated for the man before the Arab Spring. This shift has been caused by three factors: (1) the increase of socio-political awareness which lead the desire to change, (2) the spread of social media, and (3) the emergence of the feminist movement worldwide.

Existing research has explored the advantages and disadvantages that social media provided during the Arab Spring in general and did not fully address women's online activism in particular (see for instance; Bruns, Highfield and Burgess 2013; Hassan 2015; Howard et al. 2011; Markham 2014; Wolfsfeld, Segev and Sheaffer 2013). The existing studies which focused on women and the Arab Spring examined this relationship either in the context of empowering women politically (Bargain, Boutin, and Champeaux 2019; Radsch and Khamis 2013) or in the context of gender equality (Khamis and Vaughn 2013; Newsom and Lengel 2012), leaving the opportunities and challenges of the Arab Spring on the use of social media of women. In order to fill this gap, the study reported here focuses on women's political and media's participation with the aim of making a unique contribution to the field of women's political participation.

Specifically, the goals of the study are to identify the opportunities that were provided to Arab women by social media during the Arab Spring uprisings (January 2011-December 2018) and the threats they faced as a consequence of their social media use. Based on Howard and Hussain's (2011) degrees of strength theory which discusses the six phases that activists must move on while using social media for mobilization: (1) The preparation phase: when activists used digital media to build identification of collective identities and goals, by sharing grievances. Then, (2) The ignition phase: activists using media to publish the events and increase the awareness of rights, but the authorities ignore these changes because they do not realize this dangerous stage like in the case of Mohammed Bouazizi in Tunisia. After that, (3) the protest phase: the organizing for offline protests, by mobilizing popular to join streets. Then, (4) the international buy-in phase: The extension from the local coverage to international broadcast networks via digital media, when activists internationalize their issues. Then (5) the climax phase: regimes tumbled, either harsh repressive actions or welfare packages from the authorities as maneuvered to appease public dis-content. Finally, (6) the information warfare phase: The challenge when activists try shape civil society and information infrastructure (2011), which lead to understand the mechanism of the social movements and the effects of online activism. So, this thesis answers the following research questions: (1) What are the effects of the Arab Spring revolution on women's

activism on social media? (2) What are the opportunities and challenges granted to Arab female activists by social media during the Arab uprisings (January 2011 – December 2018)?



2. LITTERATURE REVIEW

This chapter introduces the key studies and concepts linked to the main themes of explored through in this study. First, the literature on social media, Arab Spring, and the Arab activist women is summarized. Secondly, the role of social media during the Arab Spring protests will be laid out. Finally, the main idea in the study, the digital activism of Arab activist women in the Arab Spring will be discussed.

2.1 Social Media

By the end of the 20th century, media has captured our life in storage; media perspective is drawn by the massive introduction of electronics, computer technology and telecommunications (Mazzei 2016). Life without media might have been at odds, relatives and friends would spend much time together without usage of communicating applications. Students would be regular to classes without Google or collaborative project sites e.g. Wikipedia. People might have taken interest physically in political events, to understand the current issues or gather at national appeals or discussions without Facebook or Twitter.

The evolution of media can generally be divided into two different ages: The first one is the broadcast age, which is called traditional or old media owned by some big companies and controlled by business owners such as newspaper companies, and tele-broadcasts or the movie production studios. In the traditional media, it is not possible to receive feedback from the audience. Second is the interactive age which is based on user interaction, content-sharing and collaboration with people. This type of media is generally being referred to as new media (Manning 2014). As mentioned before, the relationship between old and new media is integrative; not in opposition to each other.

Part of new media is social media, platforms that enable social interaction online. Next, we discuss social media in more detail and its relation to activism and Arab Spring.

Defining 'social' part refers to 'society'; the interactivity between individual and groups, or we can say the human affairs as parts of society (Mariam Webster 2019). 'Media' is the plural of 'medium', which derived from the Latin word 'medius', that means 'middle' between the producer of the message and the reader of it (Cambridge Dictionary 2019; dictionary.com 2019). Thus, social media mean websites, applications and computer programs which allow people to interact, create and share information by using internet variance.

Some stakeholders explain that social media is a group of internet-based applications that are built on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 (Web 2.0: the read-write web, or the participatory web (Lee 1998). In addition, it is the reshape of the web after '.com' domination (Aghaei, Nematbakhsh and Khosravi Farsani 2012; O'Reilly 2006) and which allows the creation and exchange of user generated content (UGC). They are formed by social media apps, hence, each platform get categorized by its services (Kaplan and Heinlein 2010; Obar and Wildman 2015). Manning defined social media as the digital platforms that must have two common functions: (1) Participation: Either in positively or negatively and it differs from traditional media that is people known by their profiles, and (2) Interaction: that is being with family, friends or with people that have common interest or mutual friends with them (2014).

Social media have been fundamental in various fields, which lead to the launch of many types of social media to achieve different goals.

2.1.1 Common forms

Based on the structure and features of each medium, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) classified social media under the following categories: (1) blogs and publishing networks, (2) collaborative projects, (3) content communities, (4) virtual worlds, (5)

social networking sites (SNS). Each media element will be discussed in more detail in the following section:

1. Blogs and Publishing Network: From the word weblog, blog has been deprived (Kaplan and Haenline 2010; Manning 2014). It is named after the website where people share their opinions, thoughts, stories or experiences, photos, audio clips, and video clips with other people; like: WordPress, Tumblr and Blogger. The terms blog and blogging were defined in Oxford English Dictionary for the first time in 2003 (Puschmann 2013). In 2004, it was listed with the most often used words in Merriam-Webster dictionary (BBC News 2004).

Firstly, it was just like an open diary or personal homepage as Justin Hall - The founding father of personal bloggers as New York times magazine dub him (Rosen 2004; Thompson 2006) - called it. Then, blog ads (blog advertising) launched by Nick Danton. Afterwards, video blogs (vlogs): the blog based on video and supported by other multimedia (GAO Et Al. 2010) - published in YouTube and being the most popular type. Blogging played a significant political role in the Iranian war in 2003.

Consequently, blogs had been such effective phenomenon in the last decades, played an effective role in the world events especially in the social movement, clarified the reality for the public (Bruns and Jacobs 2006). In 2018, there was about 800 million active accounts in Tumblr and over of 170 billion posts ("Digital 2018: Reddit Overtakes Twitter — Datareportal – Global Digital Insights" 2020; "Tumblr: Total Number of Blogs 2020 | Statista" 2020).

2. Collaborative projects: Maybe we should say that this is the most flexible and democratic applications in social media (Kaplan and Haenline 2014). In one hand, it is a group of applications or foundation tools of Web 2.0 that help the researchers or users to create, share, edit or change knowledge and interlink webpages (Kaplan and haenline 2010) like; Google Docs, Dropbox but the most popular one, the online encyclopedia- Wikipedia; in December 2018, the articles grew to 49.3 million in 278 languages written by 2.67 million contributors. On the other hand, it differs from blogs as it had

collaboration content (or the content created by the users equally), between the blog is published by one person -in general- then the others can comment or share.

3. *Content communities*: Content communities are the platforms that allow users to share multimedia content, that's existing; (1) videos (YouTube), (2) photos (Flicker), (3) PowerPoint presentation (slide share) and (4) text (Goodreads). After adding the content and the description of it, the other users (e.g., "friend" or "follower" or "subscribers" relationships) can view, upload, comment and share (Cross 2014; Thompson 2011).

In using content communities, copyright-protected materials have a big risk maybe opposed to ban or remove the illegal content. On the other hand, many companies choose the content communities because it has been the most digitally active worldwide (Kaplan and Haenline 2010).

By the launch in 2005, YouTube has become one of the most popular social media websites, and the biggest online video platform. In 2018, 27% of worldwide users accessed YouTube at least once per day. It had been the most downloaded application in Google Play and the Apple App Store. Overall, every minute more than 500 hours of video were uploaded to YouTube that means the average of newly uploaded videos are about 30,000 hours per hour.

4. *Virtual worlds*: A virtual world is defined as user- based content multi-player games that allow users to design, build, change, development in the virtual environment, which provide users to form groups (teams, clubs, friends, etc.) and communicate with each other, to see the changes on the virtual world at the same time. Consequently, many terms are used in the literature of virtual world: virtual world (VW); virtual environment (VE); multi-user virtual environment (MUVE); massively multiplayer online game (MMOG); immersive virtual world (IVW); serious virtual world" (Girvan 2018, 1096-1098).

Typically, the results that make users (gamers) spending time in virtual world: (1) learning and searching desires, (over than 400 academic institutes used in virtual world, also the courses that given in arts, languages, history, science, technology and architecture, (2) Creativity mode of explore, generate their own world and build relationships, (3) create business and earn money (In 2013, the total of the transaction in second life was about 2.3 million USD for virtual goods) (Ensslin 2017; Thomas and Brown 2007; Vrellis et al. 2010;).

In this decade, the most popular types of virtual world: social virtual world (Second Life “SL”), it’s launched in June, 2003 by linden lab. It is kind of platform based on user-content so-called “residents” - they create a 3-D characters of themselves called avatar. By the end of 2017, the active user account had been between 800,000 – 900,000, they can explore the world and know new cultures, meet the other users (avatars) and socialize, learn languages and study science (Kaplan and Haenlein 2009).

5. *Social networking sites (SNS)*: Boyd and Ellison (2007) defined social media as “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections made by others within the system” (517-518).

Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, and Silvestre identified the properties of social networks sites as the following: (1) *identity*: profile’s information that represent the user (nationality, hobbies, ...etc), (2) *conversations*: space that used for communicating with each other’s, (3) *sharing*: content of activities that users publish it, (4) *relationships*: the virtual activities (follow, like ,comment) that represent the relationships between members, (5) *presence*: space that members know who’s available/unavailable (online/offline) to contact with, (6) *reputation*: the information provided about persons or products suggested by other users, (7) *groups*: the collaborations of members they interest in something or they affiliate with (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

Facebook is one of the most popular SNS used by billions of people as the primary digital medium for social interaction. It was launched by Harvard student Mark Zuckerberg and some of his colleagues in 2004. In the third quarter of 2019 the active users became 2.45 billion ("Facebook: Active Users Worldwide | Statista" 2019) which mean Facebook is the biggest social network worldwide. Users can open their private or public accounts, add other users such as their friends, and communicate with each other by private messaging and post related comments. Additionally, users can join groups or pages that they are interested in (Edosomwan et al. 2011).

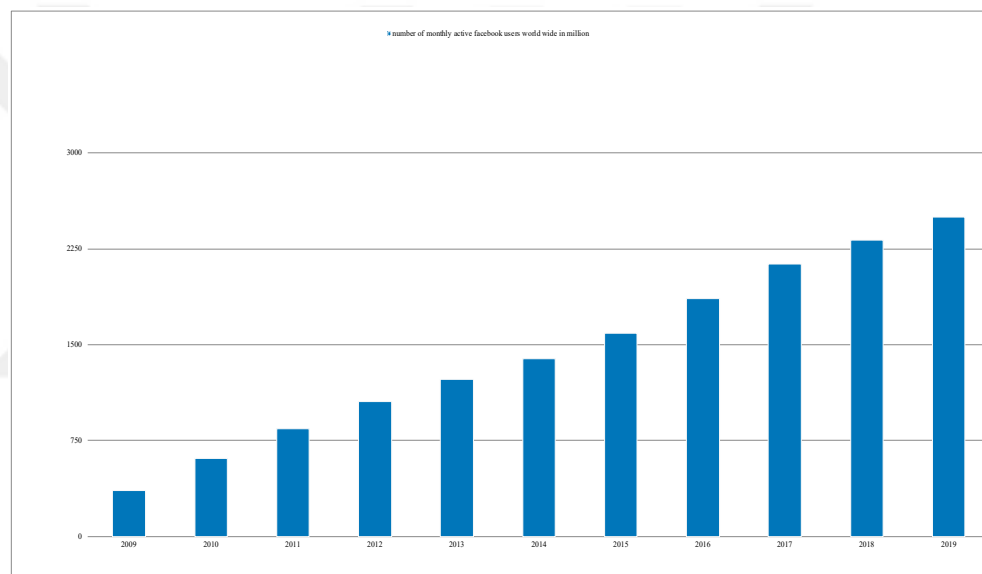


Figure 2.1 Facebook users Worldwide 2019

(Source: Statista.)

In Twitter, the most popular microblogging platform, tweets are limited to 140 characters-during Arab Spring- while it is 280 characters right now. Users can upload photos or short videos. Users can write about anything in two ways: (1) public timeline tweets and (2) private direct messages. In 2019, Twitter's monthly average of active users reached 330 million ("Twitter: Monthly Active Users Worldwide | Statista" 2019).

The new media is no longer just a tool for communication. It has played a socio-political role in the MENA countries, particularly in the last ten years. In the following section, the role that new media played during the Arab Spring revolutions is discussed.

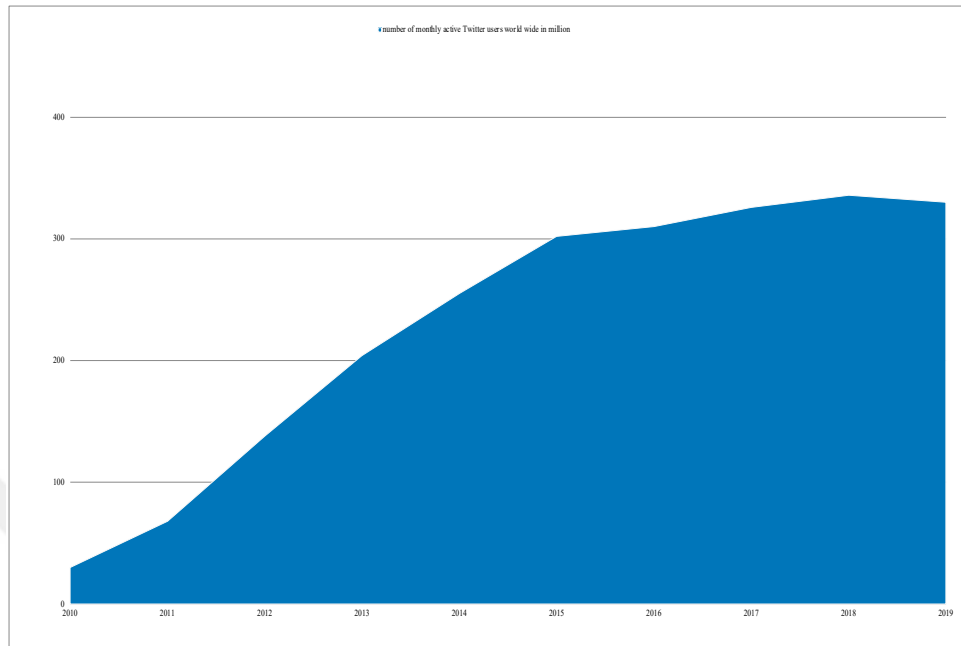


Figure 2.2 Number of Active users on Twitter between (2010-2019)
(Source: Statista.)

2.2 Arab Spring

The last decade's, 'Arab Spring' is the term that has become frequently used from the Far East to the far west. It can be used to refer to the political change, economics change and the change in media as a result of the nations' uprising. Lopes de Souza and Lipietz (2011) defined Arab Spring as the revolutions that had sparked in Tunisia in December 2010, and then spread to include some countries in the MENA region. Tariq Ramadan added that the Arab Spring is an ideological and social uprising (2012). He defined it as an uprising, as for him it is an "unfinished revolution" -- before the emergence of fully-fledged political revolutions. So, it is the hope that stems from the realization of people's power that changes governments and systems in which has been controlled by the Western, that's why Ramadan label it "Arab awaking". Meanwhile, in politics, the main cause of change in the Arab world in 2011 was the popular mobilization, which overthrew the long-ruling authorities in Tunisia and Egypt, and stirred the uprising in Libya, Syria, and Yemen (Ramadan 2012).

Hence, “Arab Spring” as a political concept, refers to the extraordinary series of social movements of anti-government uprising, massive popular mobilization, pro-democracy civil protests, and armed rebellions against the authorities, leading to critical social, political and financial outcomes. The Arab Spring movement appeared in 2010 as the first revolution in the MENA region; and then spread across the Arab world (both in violent and non-violent manner).

Historically, the word ‘Spring’ held deep meanings, alluding to the wave of European revolutions between the 1848 and 1851 which was labelled “The Springtime of the People”, or “Spring of Nations” that started in Sicily, Italy, then moved on to France with the only successful revolution, and onwards to Germany, Italy, and the Austrian Empire (Sperber 2005; Todd 2000). It even encompasses the popular attempt of political liberalization in 1968 in Czechoslovakia while it was under the domination of the Soviet Union, the so-called “Prague Spring” (Peeva 2015). So, the word “Spring” obviously is linked to the revolutions to overthrow political regimes by one man, one family, or one party in different regions. As a result, after the success of the Tunisian revolution and some uprising that sparked in other Arab countries, such as Kuwait, Jordan and Egypt, the political scientist Marc Lynch labeled the revolutions and uprisings as the Arab Spring. Thereafter, the concept Arab Spring had been commonly used by the Western media (Lynch 2020).

2.2.1 Social movement and social media

There is substantive literature on the role that social media played during the social uprisings that took place between 2010 and 2012 in the MENA countries (Howard et al. 2011; Wolfsfeld, Segev and Sheaffer 2013; Bruns, Highfield and Burgess 2013; Markham 2014). This section briefly summarizes the developments of the major uprisings and the effect of social media in these political upheavals which provide some details in order to address the first research questions (What are the effects of the Arab Spring revolution on women’s activism on social media?).

Tunisian revolution, Jasmine revolution:

Grocery vendor Mohamed Bouazizi sat himself on fire in December 2010 in the small Tunisian city of Sidi Bouzid, this horrifying event marked the start of the Arab Spring fire. It all started when a policewoman slapped him and threw his groceries and confiscated his wheels forcefully, creating the impulse that made him kill himself in front of the municipality building (Abdulsattar 2015; Chaabani 2017). After that tragic event, the public in Sidi Bouzid went down the streets to protest against undemocratic practices and economic and social inequalities such as high unemployment rates, corruption, lack of social justice, police violence, violation of human rights, and lack of political opinion freedom (Kaboub 2013).

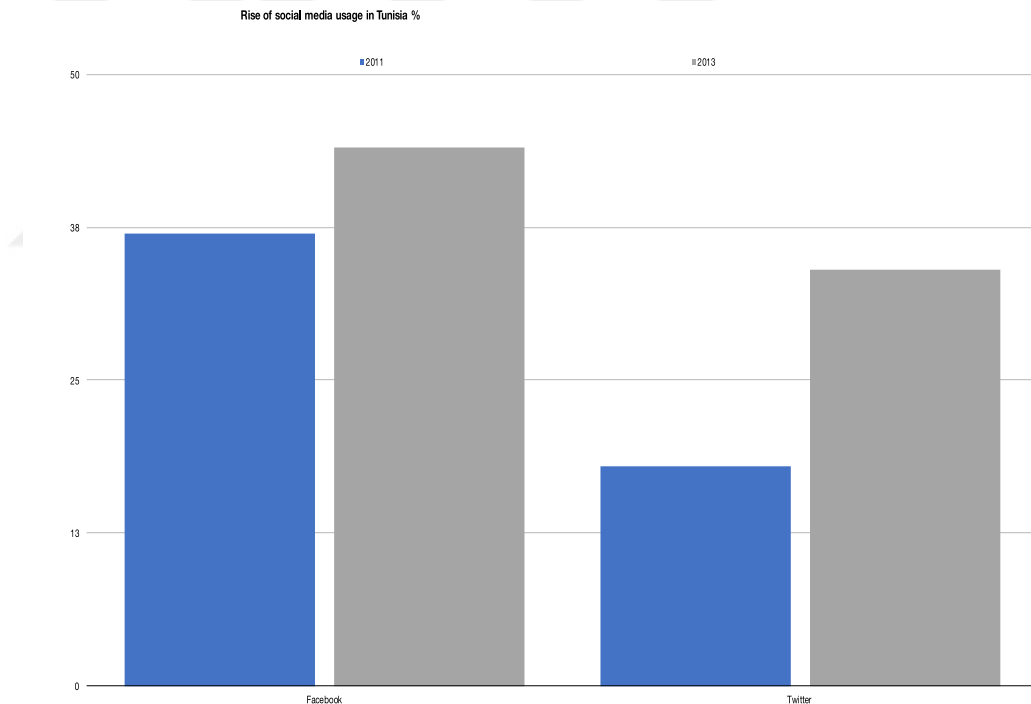


Figure 2.3 the difference between the number of users in Twitter and Facebook between 2011 and 2013

(Source: Kavanaugh et al. 2016)

Moreover, photos and videos of Bouazizi's body and the protesters in Sidi Bouzid were spread on YouTube and Facebook which played an effective role during that event for

public mobilization. The users of social media have increased from about 100,000 Facebook users in 2000 to 1.6 million users in 2010 (22.49% of the country's total population) (Salanova 2012) (see Figure 2.3).

Hashtags such as #bouazizi, #sidibouzid, and #Tunisia became trending topics on Twitter. But, since the internet services were controlled by Tunisian Internet Agency (ATI), owned by the government, the sites were blocked, thus, the ATI hacked the activists' accounts of those who are spreading content against the government to deter them.

However, *Al-Jazeera*, the Arab TV network, published the whole events by using satellite television networks which helped international journalists follow the developments of the Tunisian revolution. Accordingly, after 28 days on January 14, 2011, Ben Ali, the president fled to Saudi Arabia and his democratic party Rassemblement Constitutionnel Democratique (RCD) was ousted after 23 years ruling the country, when the Tunisian army backed the protesters. As of now, it is the most successful revolution and it can be considered one of the least damaging revolutions in the Arab Spring (Momah 2013). As Howard and Hussain's graphical pattern (degree's strength) that discusses the six phases activists must move on while using social media for mobilization: (1) the preparation phase: when activists used digital media to build identification of collective identities and goals, by sharing grievances. Then, (2) The ignition phase: activists using media to publish the events and increase the awareness of rights, but the authorities ignore these changes because they do not realize this dangerous stage like in the case of Mohammed Bouazizi in Tunisia. After that, (3) the protest phase: the organizing for offline protests, by mobilizing popular to join streets. Then, (4) the international buy-in phase: The extension from the local coverage to international broadcast networks via digital media, when activists internationalize their issues. Then (5) the climax phase: regimes tumbled, either harsh repressive actions or welfare packages from the authorities as maneuvered to appease public dis-content. Finally, (6) the information warfare phase: The challenge when activists try shape civil society and information infrastructure (Howard and Hussain 2011) (see Figure 2.4).

So, social media played a significant role in distributing protest news and informing people about protests even while it was shut down, as some activists used proxy and VPN protection to unlock the social media webs.

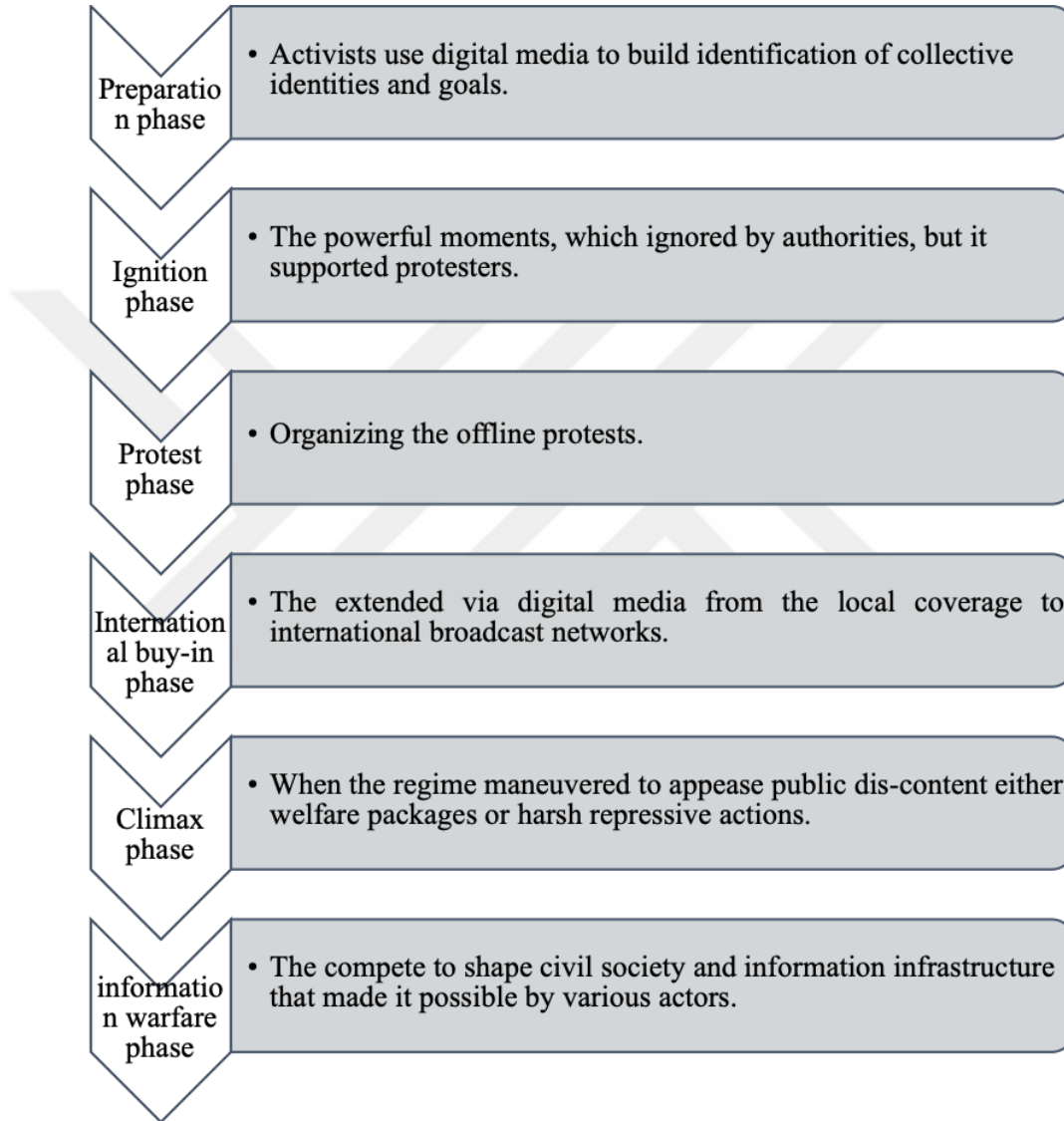


Figure 2.4 Degrees of Strength

(Source: Howard and Hussain 2011)

Egyptian revolution, January 25th revolution or Web 2.0 Revolution:

In the case of Egypt, the spark that activated the revolution was Khalid Said's being killed on the 6th of June 2010 by two policemen when they took him out of a cybercafe in Alexandria, one of the major cities in Egypt, and beat him to death. Khalid Said was a computer programmer who published videos on YouTube and Facebook, showing evidence of drug dealings by the police that threatened the authorities (Alaimo 2015; Sudeep 2014). After his murder a Facebook page called, "We Are All Khaled Said" was created by an anonymous activist (BBC News 2014; M. Emon, Lust and Macklin 2011; Preston 2011). More than 470,000 users joined the page, including activists such as, Wael Ghonim, a computer engineer, Google executive and political activist in Egypt - the one who called it web 2.0 revolution in his book who published about fighting corruption and police brutality (Hamanaka 2018; Shehabat 2015), and many other political heavyweight influencers with national recognition. The online community that makes the activists share the grievances with youths optimistic after the success of the Tunisian revolution sparked the offline mobilization. Based on Castells 'Networked Power' hypothesis the power of social protestors affected the other social members on the network. Thus, on 25th January, labeled as the "Day of Rage". Approximately 30,000 Egyptians from all cities, and even small villages across Egypt were down the streets, chanting 'Bread, Freedom, and Social Justice' (Ketchley 2017). They were tweeting, uploading videos on Facebook and YouTube and texting (SMS) using their phones. During that time, "Arab Spring" was trending in both Eastern and Western media.

People gathered in Tahrir square and other main squares of the city on January 28 (Friday of Anger) and the number of protesters still increased, Ketchley argued that before the social media the demonstrated numbers would not reach more than 2000 (2017). The authorities realized the role of social media on empowering mobilization. Similar to Tunisia, the Egyptian regime cut off the internet access, SMS and cellular phone services were banned, meanwhile, Egypt totally thrown into online information darkness (see Figure 2.5) (Momah 2013). But, the activists found their way by using Proxy software that mediates access between the machine and the server (Pannu et al.

2016) - which even brought a bigger force towards the movement and elevated the requests to overthrow the regime.

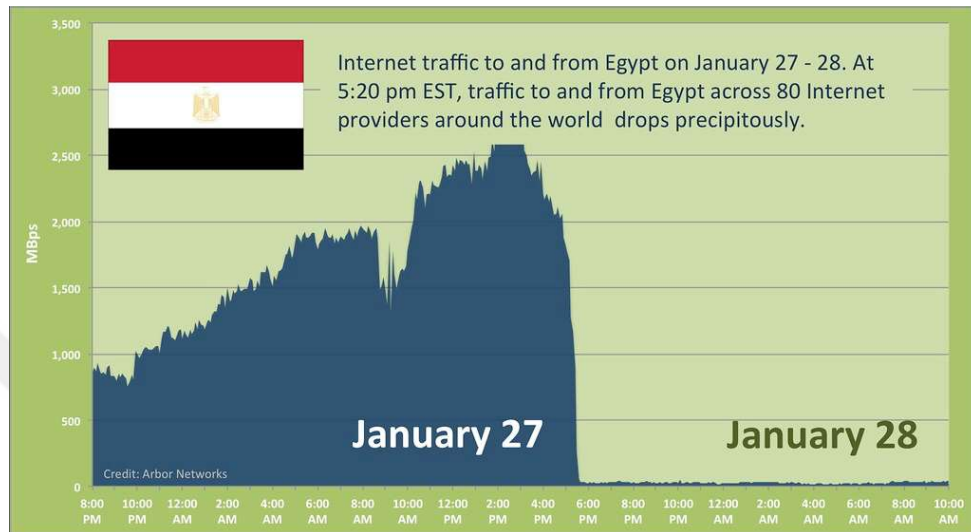


Figure 2.5 the dropped off the internet on January 27 at about 5:00 P.M (Source: <https://www.wired.com/2011/01/egypt-isp-shutdown/>.)

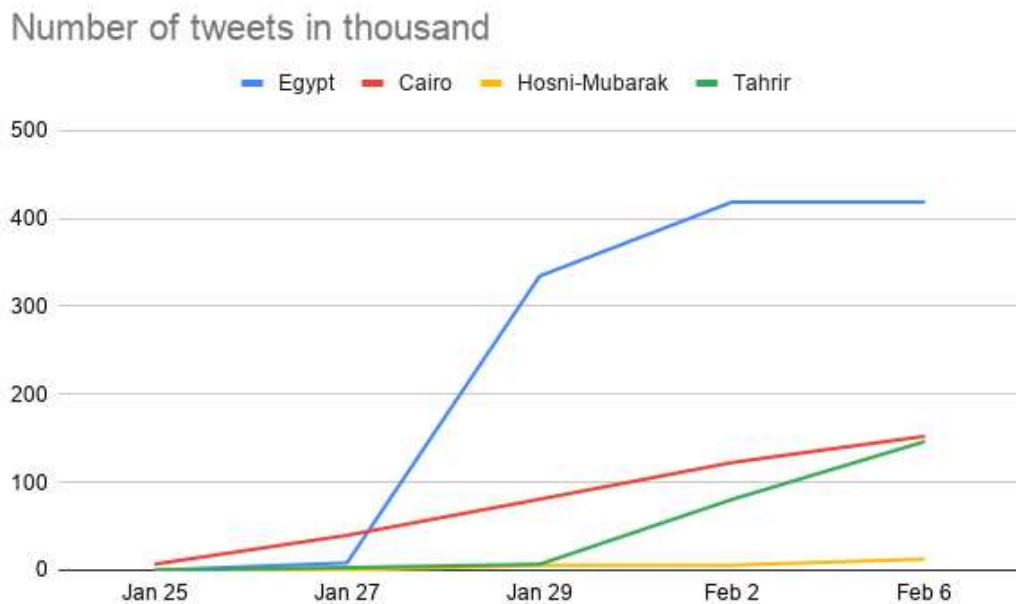


Figure 2.6 Number of tweets used this word, related to the uprising (Source: Choudhary et al. 2012).

Nevertheless, international channels like; Aljazeera and CNN were broadcasting live from Tahrir Square. Thus, by February 2, the internet connected again (Eltantawy and Wiest 2011). Figure 2.6 explain the increase of the tweets using the trending topics related to the uprising (Choudhary 2012). Indeed, Egypt's president Mubarak stepped down after 30 years of ruling on the 11th of February, 2011, after 18 days of protests in the streets and over than one million protesters (Bakr 2016; Clarke and Kocak 2018).

So, it can be concluded that both Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions were triggered by published destructive photos and videos on social media which draw the public to the streets to protest against the authorities. During the uprisings, sometimes, the broadcast media might have played an even greater role than social media, due to the internet banning by the governments.

Yemeni revolution, Youth uprising of 2011-12:

Yemen had a bad standard of living also, 43% below the poverty line, in Arab countries. The unemployment rate reaches (40%). Additionally, the dictatorships for over than 33 years, and the security forces (Durac 2018; Thiel 2012). Prior to the uprising, youths were raising the awareness about human rights. In fact, Tawakkol Karman, "The Mother of the Revolution"- political and human right activist - organized with several politicians, median, human right activists and a wide range of students on January 16, 2011 via Facebook, Figure 2.7 represents the growth of the usage of Facebook by the start of the Arab Spring revolution in Tunisia. A meeting in front of the Tunisian Embassy to celebrate the success of the revolution, and after a week of peaceful demonstrations Karman was arrested by the security forces, according to Karman "This was to become a defining moment in the Yemen revolution: media outlets reported my detention and demonstrations erupted in most provinces of the country. The pressure on the government was intense, and I was released after 36 hours in a women's prison, where I was kept in chains" (Karman 2011, 5).

Karman was released after 36 hours. She launched via her social media a ‘day of rage’ protest - inspired from Egyptian revolution. The protests against the regime were gathered in Sanaa and several Yemeni cities.

In Yemeni revolution, not only social media was affected, although, it was the most important tool that helped the activists for mobilizing the population. But, also radio and word of mouth contributed to reach many people in rural areas in Yemen (Hassan 2015).

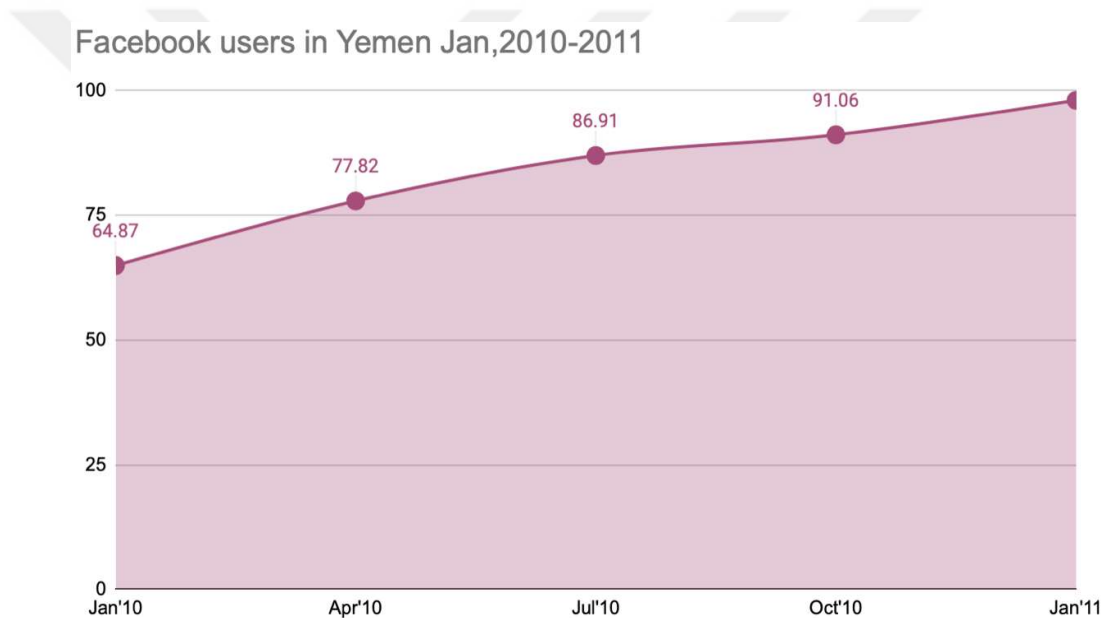


Figure 2.7 Facebook users between Jan, 2010 – 2011

(Source: Statecounter.com.)

Libyan revolution, Libya Revolt of 2011:

While in Libya, the situation has been substandard for over than 40 years, with the living conditions under ruthlessness standards of Qaddafi’s authorities. And the unemployment crisis that Libya had, with the highest rate in North Africa (20.7 %), moreover, the revenues of the country’s fortune like oil were controlled by the Qaddafi’s dictatorial regime. All of the mentioned and more causes left the public with a desire for change (Elmahjub 2014). Additionally, the traditional media was owned by

Gaddafi’s son Saif al-Islam, which supposedly means that the Libyans lived in a closed circle (Dowson-Zeidan, Eaton, and Wespieser 2014).

Therefore, the revolution virus outbreaked. The Libyan revolution was followed up by the rest of the world day by day on YouTube and supported on Facebook pages along with Tunisia and Egypt revolutions (Elmahjub 2014). So, when the political events had published on social media, the youth started to speak up, with a new perspective being shaped they began to shout out for their human rights. By the end of January, 2011, the Facebook page, The Uprising of the 17th of February, the fear of the regime was overcome when some activists posted about massacres such as; 1996 in Tripoli, the killing of 1269 political prisoners at Abu Salim prison by Libyan security forces (Elmahjub 2014; Worth 2011).



Figure 2.8 Comparison between the uses of Facebook in Arab Spring countries

(Source: Mourtada and Salem 2011).

Accordingly, on Wednesday 15 of February, some Libyans went down the streets. Alike similar events, they faced the security forces that arrested most of the protesters and

killed two men. And just like, Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia and Khalid Said in Egypt, Khaled Elnaji Khanfar and Ahmad Shoushaniya were the spark of the revolution in Libya. On 17th of February, the streets of Benghazi -the second largest city in Libya- were full of protesters (Al Jazeera and Agencies 2011).

As usual, photos and videos -were published on the social network platforms especially YouTube and Facebook - the rate violence from Qaddafi's regime. By 3rd of March 2011, the internet was blocked by authorities.

Figure 2.8 shows the growth of Facebook usage in most of the Arab Spring Countries Except for Libya it was decreased, and that because of the civil war that happened between pro-government party (security forces) and the anti-government (oppositions party) (Mourtada and Salem 2011), however, youth never quit trying to get rid of the dictatorial system. About 8 months later, after a long civil war the 20th of October 2011 marked the end of Qaddafi's ruling who was killed in a street fight (Nsir 2014).

Though, Facebook in Libya was more effective before and on first months of the revolution. The banning of the internet by the Qaddafie's authorities, and the ruining of the city's infrastructure as a result of the civil war decreased the social media usage until this day.

Syrian revolution, the Dignity revolution:

Like a Domino, Syria too followed the footsteps of the other Arab countries that had been led by dictatorial regimes. Initially, on March 2011 the bloodiest demonstration against the president Bashar Al-Assad launched when a group of a children in Daraa (a southern city) - influenced by the slogans of Arab Spring protests on TV - made an anti-government graffiti on their school's wall. Hence, the angry posts as a respond to the photos of children's bodies with physical signs of torture by the security forces awakened the Syrian public. In response, people in Daraa moved from the graffiti creation to the actual streets on the 'Friday of Dignity', which made the military escalate the violence by killing four of the protesters and arrest some of them (Al-Saleh and White 2013; Bhardwaj 2012; Hassan 2015).

As Marger Evers said: “you can kill a man, but you can’t kill an idea”, the growth of the protests population - sometimes it became thousands – and the strict organizing by; (1) determining the time for gathering and (2) the usage of new media, like; Facebook, Twitter and YouTube by Local Coordinating Councils (LCC) and youth activists to document the numbers, photos and videos either for demonstrators or the violent of the military regimes - that had become harsher.

The situation in Syria was different therefore, the protests has been transformed to a civil war, which took more than 7 years. There are many reasons behind such oscillation in events: (1) repression-from the government by using unlawful weapons, like: chemical weapons, indiscriminate strikes and limited helps, (2) the supported by Alawite (internally), Russia, Iran and China (externally) for political interests, and (3) the religious, ethnic and cultural diversity generated another issues and conflicts (Ahmad and Hamasaeed 2015; Al-Faqir 2018).

	2011	2012
INTERNET FREEDOM STATUS	n/a	Not Free
Obstacles to Access (0-25)	n/a	23
Limits on Content (0-35)	n/a	25
Violations of User Rights (0-40)	n/a	35
Total (0-100)	n/a	83

* 0=most free, 100=least free

Figure 2.9 the measurement of internet statues in Syria.

(Source: freedomhouse.org.)

Overall, Assad’s authorities made lots of barriers to cut the path of the protests by: (1) the Syrian Telecommunication Establishment (STE) the owner of internet in Syria

which is controlled by the government. It shut down the internet many times either locally or nationally, (2) hack-activism, filtering and blocking the opposition’s content on social media platforms, and SMS; like: human rights groups, LCC, Muslim brotherhood, even the websites to gather information were blocked, and (3) targeting the pro-democracy users by surveillance malware, arrested and attacked some of them, and killed others, Figure 2.9 shows the decrease of internet freedom in Syria.

2.2.2 The ambivalence of social media: Dangers and opportunities

In summary, the comparison of internet usage in Arab Spring countries between Dec 2000 – 2011 (see Table 2.1):

As a result, we cannot deny that social media played a significant role in the Arab countries as a helping tool to reach democracy. However, the emerging media has been used by the dictatorial governments through imposing surveillance and violating the privacy of citizens (Toumani 2016). The following section discusses both the positive and the dark sides of using social media during social change.

Country	Population (2011 est.)	Internet usage (dec. 2000)	Internet usage (31 dec. 2011)	Penetration (% population)
Tunisia	10,629,186	100,000	3,856,984	36.3
Egypt	82,079,636	450,000	21,691,776	26.4
Yemen	24,133,492	15,000	2,609,698	10.8
Libya	6,597,960	10,000	391,880	5.9
Syria	22,517,750	30,000	4,469,000	19.8

Table 2.1 Comparison between the numbers of the users between (2000 – 2011)

(Source: Internet World Stats.)

Digital media raise the public-awareness about the abuses of authorities and grievances that ordinary people face, specifically the activists, as well it helps them know about human rights. On the other hand, it can be used sometimes by others to mislead the masses by distorting information, like; in Tunisia, Bahia Nar - the co-founder of social media club - said: “No one really knows what happened with Bouazizi” (Dhillon 2014, 11), that because of spreading lies, it had been difficult to get the true story. In Libya, too, Nsir mentioned that social media turned to be used for spreading rumors after war and that give a chance for irresponsible people to attack others under free speech/free Libya (2014). Also, Antoun Issa - the journalist and commentator on Middle Eastern affairs - talked about the difficulties in the media in the first year of the uprising in Syria which were the lack of trustworthy, professional independent media on the ground (Issa 2016).

While the traditional media like TV and radio had been controlled by governments, media platforms created a new community by connecting people from different genders, ages, classes and ideologies. They built trust by sharing information about the common issues such as overthrowing the government, then starting to organize, coordinate and mobilizing the public out of the authority’s sights (free landscape) (see Figure 2.10). While doing all this, they kept reporting the situation on the ground to the world outside (Shehabat 2015). Mostafa, an activist from Egypt, said: “Before this social-media revolution, everyone was very individual, very single, very isolated and oppressed in islands, but social media has created bridges, has created channels between individuals, between activists, between even ordinary people, to speak out, to know that there are other who think like me. We can work together, we can make something together” (Sudeep 2014, 45). But authoritarian can be as fast as activist by using censorship to target the opposition movements. Najem, the executive director of digital rights organization SMEX, said: "The online sphere we used to go to in the Middle East to express ourselves, to talk about politics, has started to close down slowly because of all these regulations, now, People were prosecuted, thrown in jail, or they had to flee the country”, to become refugees in a more democratic country from his point of view, and as a result, they picked a media war with the authorities or created an online community that tried to inform and support young people in many areas. (Al-Jazeera, 2019).

However, this debate about the role of social media on the social movements has not ended. , it is a positive tool when people use it in the right way and time. In the next section, the use of social media by Arab women activist in Arab Spring is discussed.

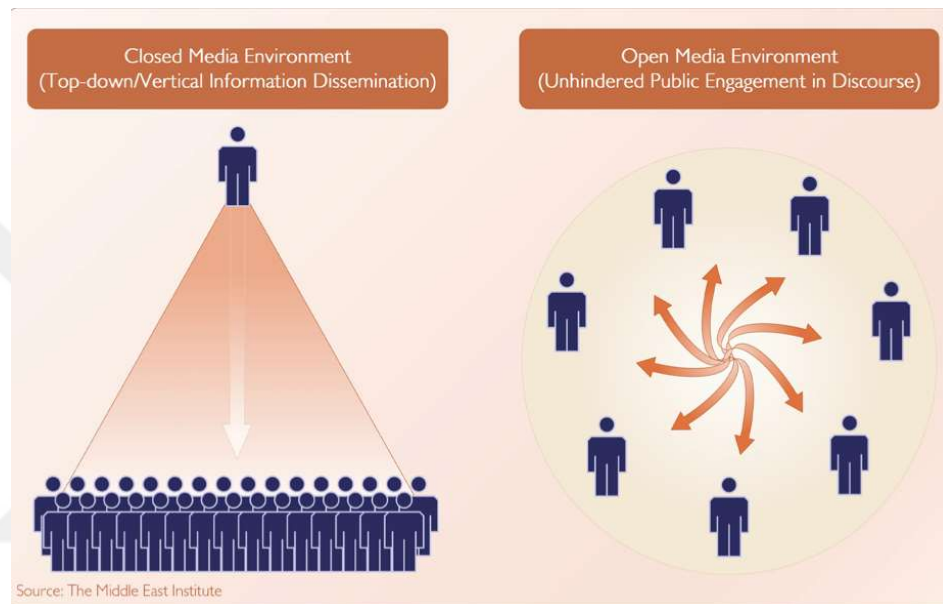


Figure 2.10 Portrayal of the difference between closed and open media, traditional and new media

(Source: The Middle East Institute.)

2.3 Arab Activist Women in the Arab Spring Uprisings

This offers the existing research literature to address part of the second research question: What are the opportunities and challenges granted to Arab female activists by social media during the Arab uprisings (January 2011 – December 2018)?

Previous studies were linked between Arab Spring and women studies either in the context of empowering women politically (Bargain, Boutin, and Champeaux 2019; Radsch and Khamis 2013) or in the context of gender equality (Khamis and Vaughn 2013; Newsom and Lengel 2012 ;). Thus, this study tries to fill the gap on the

researches, that relate Arab Spring, social media and Arab activists women, by exploring the opportunities and challenges that Arab women faced on social media platforms during and after the Arab Spring.

2.3.1 Definition of Activism

For the sake of the study, Joyce give the nominational definition of activists that the positive individuals ‘effect’ or ‘impact’ or ‘outcome’ or ‘consequence’ that make a change in the current state (economic, human rights, political, media, environment, ...etc) in society or maybe in the world (2014). According to ‘Rhize’ report - activists means: “those active in social movements, community organizing, blogging, legal activism, investigative journalism, and forms of civil resistance that are nonviolent” (Miller-Dawkins 2017, 2).

So, if we understand it well, we will realize that activism and activist people are everywhere maybe must be noticed that each person is an activist. Sometimes instead of exploring the wide types of activism -bellowed- studies still focusing on some experiences or some famous persons (Joyce 2014).

However, there were scholars’ classified activists’ types as following:

Political activist: quoting from the categories that David Resnick clarified of Internet politics that; ‘Internet or Net activism’ as the different political used by technology - specifically network to impact or change the people opinion or society ideas and culture (Meikle 2014). Though, Earl and Kimport called Web activism ‘e-mobilization’ or ‘e-movements’: collective actions, organizing mass mobilization and engaging or bringing protesters to streets by using internet for effecting issues or changing something that citizens care about it (2011). Meanwhile, the measure of activism in the political field influencing the governments either directly by being one of the decision-makers, or indirectly by effecting on mass opinions – which policies implemented.

Social activist: According to Briscoe and Gupta, Individuals or with others who gathering – either organizational or non-organizational - trying to solve social problems or support some changes in the society like; green groups (2016). Though, social activists worked on education, economic, environmental and health care sides who aim to make life in their countries more safety and healthy.

Human rights activist: the persons who taken up self-involvement for protecting and promoting the human rights of others, included journalists, writers, and human rights lawyers who defend political prisoners and detainees, arbitrary arrest and detention, discrimination, employment issues, forced evictions or publicly challenge the repressive regimes (Wiseberg 1991). Furthermore, some of them vowed him/herself handle on the rights of categories, like; the rights of sexual, national and minorities, the rights of refugees and internally displaced persons, children's rights, and women's rights.

Digital activism: is described the activists who depended on computers, mobile phones, digital technologies, and other Internet devices. It's included political, social and human rights campaigning that use digital network basically (Sivitanides and Shah 2011). Therefore, over the past decade most of activists labeled as 'digital activism' because of the incorporated of network services in all aspects in life, and the prevalence of different types of emerging media.

2.3.2 Women in Arab Spring

Previously, in the Middle East, women have been taking a significant place on mass revolutions, social mobilization, political councils and parliaments like in the first Intifada in Palestine in 1987 (Kuhlow 2013).

In 1997, the Inter-Parliamentary Union published statistics for the participation of women in parliaments at the international level, as follows: Asia: 14.3%, Northern Europe: 38.8%, North and South America: 15.3%, Central and Southern Europe: 13.3 %, Sub-Saharan: 11, 5%, Pacific region: 11, 6, and the entire Arab region 3, 7% (Bin

Talal 2004). It is shown by numbers that the weakest percentage that Arab countries occupy in women's participation.

One of the most important reasons for Arab women to move away from media and political participation:

1. Social customs and traditions that nurture male dominance, which makes a woman subordinate to either her father or her husband, even in the smallest details of her life.
2. Lack of awareness of legal rights, political and media work, at the level of governmental and non-governmental organizations, so that the women involved did not know how to claim this (Almiqdad 2004).
3. Media discrimination against women, media programs focused on the negativity of women, even if they focused on their positivity, in a narrow framework that includes the home, school, and family, and did not work to defend the minority of women activists and their rights (Union 1997).

Currently, Arab Spring supported women-more than previous- to spread their messages which had been affected the private life as much as the public sphere which make a big threat for norms, cultures and political system (Roth and Horan 2001).

Lots of women broke social taboos, became activists, raised the awareness and empowered in new spheres. Some had been participated offline by graffitied or took photographs or political participation, and some by online discussions tweeted or blogged as Sahar Khamis (2011) argued, "The prolific online and offline political activities of Arab women over the last several months have contributed a new chapter to the history of both Arab feminism and the region" (p 748).

Women were joining the street not just for participating men in the protests anti-regime (Johansson-Nogués 2013) also numbers were increased day by day in order to be

targeting by security forces who tried breaking women's morals either by attacks on their honor or bodily integrity.

2.3.3 Opportunities and challenges granted by social media for Arab activist women

In general, social media has been used on two scales: (1) social: summarized in entertainment, group formation and friendships for social purposes, (2) political: which seeks to integrate reality with the virtual world, which is the focus of the research topic. Social media has had a lot of features that made female activists choose it as a platform instead of other platforms in several aspects:

Mobilization of public opinion: The female activists succeeded in turning the spark of anger in the virtual world into reality, by taking advantage of the presence of thousands of young people, and inviting them to come out to fields of protest (Kalyango Jr. and Adu-Kumi 2015), for example, the Syrian activist Suheir Al-Atassi, who had a role in establishing Hari forum that was discussing intellectual, Cultural and political issues in 2001, it was closed by the authorities, then it was turned into an electronic forum on Facebook, and had an important role in the 2011 Syrian revolution, Al-Attasi was elected as Vice-President of the Syrian Coalition Ahmed Khatib in 2012 (Aljazeera 2011).

Coordination and Organization: Activists have worked to make social media a coordination directorate to organize places and times for gatherings, and to plan slogans that will be written and said by protesters (Steinert-Threlkeld et al. 2015), as Lina bin Mehani, who was known, through her blog "Beni Tunis", meaning Tunisia's girl, for human rights activism, and her participation in campaigns to release the arrested students. During the reign of former President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, she opposed blocking Internet sites, including her blog, which was blocked more than once before the "Jasmine Revolution" (Pedersen and Salib 2013).

Alternative media platforms: Because of the governments' control over traditional media platforms, activists have turned to social media to make them a reliable platform to spread news, photos, information about protests, and the scandals of violations by repressive dictatorial regimes (Fenton and Barassi 2011), as was the Egyptian human rights activist Nevin Malak, who was always exposed Violations of the coup government in Egypt, both on social media platforms, and on Al-Jazeera TV.

Raising the level of political awareness: The presence of many young people on social media opened them up to the political field, both in thought and action - which was a monopoly for the ruling regimes and parties, encouraging young people to form political parties and discussions that were not available before (Mavrodieva et al. 2019), as Yemeni doctor Arwa Aoun who has not been absent from the fields of protest in Yemen Since the revolution began, she has remained to raise the awareness of the political youth despite all the difficulties that the Yemeni revolution has faced, and continues to this day.

To obtain the support of the international community, the female activists resorted to disseminating and internationalizing their political and social issues, to weaken the legitimacy of the ruling regimes internally and externally, such as: the Libyan activist Alaa Murabit, who founded the "Libyan Women Voice" organization through which she seeks to empower and enhance the capabilities of her country women at the political, economic and cultural levels ("Igniting The Spark For Women's Leadership And Engagement In Libya And Around The Globe - Equitas" 2020).

Highlighting the role of the public: breaking the monopoly of the state and the authorities on social media platforms (Fenton and Barassi 2011).

Despite all the opportunities provided by social media for the activists mentioned above, they have also caused threats and harms to some of the activists as following:

The online surveillance programs used by dictatorial regimes, after which the idea of privacy and secret communication between activists and the masses is almost non-

existent, which led to the so-called cyber terrorism overcoming cyber activity (Mason and Magnet 2012).

The spread of lies and rumors, especially on the Facebook platform, which made the lack of credibility of the news apprehend many of any revolutionary or protest idea and caused a significant decline in trust in what is reported on the communication platforms, as in Libya. (This is already mentioned in the section of the Arab Spring).

Women still face male discrimination, as men advance as an activist on communication sites and in the political fields over women, although women are more efficient than men, women are also exposed to the phenomenon of electronic harassment, which increased significantly with the spread of communication sites (Sreberny 2015).

Political violence, and the weak support from parties and parliaments for the participation and marginalization of women, which created an aversion and indifference among some women towards participating in political issues, which made communication platforms merely entertainment and entertainment platforms (El-Ibiary 2017).

Illiteracy, depriving women from learning especially in the small cities and rural areas, women there don't have the same opportunities available to men that caused a decline in women's participation on networking sites, such as Yemen, for example (Skalli 2014).

Hence, in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Syria; women played influential roles in the Arab Spring uprising. These women were fighting for women's rights as much as they can, as they were hoping for a regime change. While facing lots of cultural, political and digital barriers, activists' women still worked for their country specifically for women rights. Although, some women had reached their goals, others still fight to make the world safer and better.

3. METHODOLOGY

In-depth interview, a qualitative method, has been chosen to address the research questions. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were holding and talking about the effects of the Arab revolutions on women participation in social media which was the basis for this research. The exchange of information between the interviewer and the interviewee enabled the interviewer to get deeper in details by observing the natural languages and discover the small differences between the interviewees which give important outcomes and new insights to reduce bias in the research (Gall, Gall, and Borg 2003).

This method was implemented to explore the opportunities provided to the activist female by social media and the threats they faced, which was not spotted on the researches that linked between the content of social media and social movements. All that to discover the impact of social movement in social media content, especially, the effects of the Arab revolution on the women participation in social media by analyzing their narratives and contextualizing the statues of the Arab women pre-during-post the Arab Spring period. On the other hand, interviews are more cumbersome process on a large scale, and require more time than other methods (Daniel W. Turner 2010).

The study is based on thirteen Arab female activists, aims to understand the effects of the Arab revolution on women's participation in social media.

In general, qualitative research used to collect data by observation, visual or textual documents (content analysis), and open-ended interviews. For the sake of clarity, qualitative data focus on people's actions, that's why it is a good way to have an integrated context for the phenomenon under the surrounding circumstances (Patton 2005). Usually, the data used directly without any changes for understanding the differences and respecting impartiality and objectivity. Qualitative studies applied on a small range comparing with quantitative studies, to analyze the information given by

participants deeply, and contextualize the perspective (Patton 2005). For the sake of this study, qualitative methods, specifically interviews will seek to offer answers to the research question.

Especially, through this method, the cultural, technical, as well as political opportunities that social media provided to Arab activist women and the threats they faced.

However, this study is the first of its kind in: (1) inquiring the impact of Arab Spring in women's participation in social media, and (2) investigating the combination of social media, Arab Spring and Arab activist women.

3.1 Data Collection

In this section, the interview in general, and the sample will be explained.

3.1.1 Interviews

Interviews -generally- based on social interaction. That is why it is the best method to investigate the different factors such as the environment activists lived in, their experiences and their way of dealing with social media all the way to understanding the opportunities and the threats they received through social media.

It should be noted that semi-structured interviews are easier in analyzing data comparing to structured interview. Interviews in this case depended on some details that might have gone missing if unstructured interview was conducted instead of the semi-structured interview. Additionally, listening carefully to the interviewee is an important part in semi-structured interview sessions (Clifford and Valentine 2003).

Also, semi-structured and structured interviews ask prepared questions, while the small difference is that semi-structured interviews are more flexible and interviewers have more space to ask more questions (Harrell and Bradley 2009; Ritchie et al. 2014).

For this research, fifty activists were contacted via private email, Facebook messenger, twitter message, linked in, Instagram and WhatsApp messages. A standardized email

was created and was adjusted to each activist. The email introduced who the researcher was, the department of the study, what the topic of the research was and the way they were found, appreciating their incredible work and asking them if they were willing to be interviewed. Out of the fifty activists, only twenty-four replied, six of which could not be interviewed in the time laps needed to address this thesis, while thirteen agreed to make an interview. Two agreed to meet face-to-face, eight via Facebook messenger, two through WhatsApp calls and only one using signal messenger. The interviews lasted 40 to 70 minutes each. Answers were recorded using ‘voice memos’ – recorder application- and by taking notes. The age of the interviewees varies between the twenties to mid-fifties.

Each interview is divided into six parts. It started by thanking the interviewee for allowing the researcher to interview and for being a part of the research with an apology for taking part of their time and a small paragraph to each interview giving brief explanation about the study.

The first question aimed to start the interview in a relaxed and comfortable environment, so, they were asked about their names, nationalities, and their place of residence and the sector they were active on. As Jacob argues, when asking an open question that includes the phrase “tell me about”, the interviewee would feel at ease. This strategy provides flow of information, which gives more details that benefits the study (2012).

The second section related to the purposes of using social media before the Arab Spring, this question was asked to make the comparison between the content pre, during and after the social movements. Inquartation the reasons for taking part in the social movements and discuss the internal factors, meaning, and the spark that made these activists join the social movements.

The third section talked about the reasons for choosing social media platforms, and the ways of participating in social media during Arab Spring. It should be mentioned that every question has its own focus. Turner clarified that it can be confused for the

researcher if they include too many concepts in one question, which might lead to an unclear answer from the interviewee (Turner 2010). The investigation was ended briefly; it showed the relationship between the social movement and the social media. Whether the social movements affect the content on social media, or vice versa. In this question, the researcher took into consideration the environment of each activist.

The fourth section is about social movements goals, considering both the social and the personal scope. This section was to understand the role of social media in the social movements generally; with activists' opinion whether it was a positive or a negative tool and projects that they worked on.

The fifth section attempts to offer an explanation to the research questions to fill the research's gaps. The relationship between social media and enhancing women, which talked about the opportunities that social media provided for the activists.

The last section directly answered a part of the research questions. Technically, the blocked off social media and the shut off of the internet, and it shows social media's power that pushed the people to face the political oppression (Howard et al. 2011). Political, social and digital barriers activists faced. Also, it investigated the challenges that social media faced in some Arab countries.

These questions were used in the interviews as a thematic guideline. However, not all interviews followed the same path. Meaning, while interviewing, there were different questions added for each interview in order to address some topics that have formulated from the details in each interview.

3.1.2 Sample

In order to gain a better insight into the effect of social movements on women's participation in social media, semi-structured interviews were conducted with thirteen female Arab activists from the Arab Spring countries: Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Libya

and Syria. The activists were defined as someone who had a social, political, human rights and media activism during/after Arab Spring revolutions. As follow:

The first activist who agreed to being interviewed Face-to-face is Zahraa G. Zahraa is a Yemeni, youth activist and a photographer. During the period March 2013 - January 2014, she represented the Independent Youth through her membership in the Comprehensive National Dialogue Conference as a member of the south Yemen case team. In the 8+8 (16) committee, a small team of the south Yemen case team which is concerned with the discussion and the history of the most complicated and important Yemeni issue. She took place in the youth revolutions by covering the different events in 2011 in Change square, Sana'a by taking photos using her camera and posting it on Facebook. Between (March 2011 to May 2012), Zahraa worked in "Yemen youth" channel as an editor and coordinator of the political shows. Also, she works now as an Undersecretary of the Ministry of Youth for the Women's Sector in Yemen. At the meantime, Zahraa travels back and forth between Yemen and Turkey, where she is doing her PhD degree. She has about ninety thousand followers on her Facebook page.

The second activist who agreed to being interviewed via WhatsApp is Nagham Z. Nagham is a Yemeni journalist and activist. She was an editor at the Yemeni Media Center, which covers politics and human rights. She is one of the five activists who still live in their countries. Nagham has first-hand experience on how photography could risk one's personal safety. She has about thirty thousand followers on twitter and Facebook.

The third activist who agreed to being interviewed via Facebook messenger is Shaimaa F. Shaimaa is an Egyptian Journalist specializing in politics and human rights pre, during and after 2011 revolution. She works as a supervisor of Media Studies Unit at the Egyptian Institute for Political and Strategic Studies. Also, Shaimaa was a former Brotherhood official in her 30s; she was in Rabaa al-Adawiya Square at the August 14, 2013, massacre, when the security forces and Egyptian military killed close to a thousand democracy supporters, in Cairo (Abdelaziz 2019). Since 2013, she has been

the Media Spokesperson in Women against the Coup movement. She moved from Egypt to Turkey, and then she moved again after five years to New Zealand.

The fourth activist who agreed to being interviewed via Facebook messenger is Raghad A. Raghad is a Libyan journalist, news producer, photographer and filmmaker in many Libyan and international media outlets such as Reuters, Libya TV, Alassema TV and Alnabaa News TV. She worked as an international correspondent for Libya's Channel. Currently, Raghad is working as a news correspondent in the EU. She is one of the authors of a book about the Arab women journalists named "Our Women on the Ground", a first-of-its-kind collection of articles, with the help of Christiane Amanpour the chief international correspondent at CNN. Now, Raghad lives in Malta now, because the authorities are after her, which became a threat to her and to her family. She has about twenty-five thousand followers on twitter.

The fifth activist who agreed to being interviewed via Facebook messenger is Basma A. Basma is a Syrian activist and co-founder of the Families for Freedom, she led a movement of Syrian families for all the detained and missing people. She was arrested in Syria in the 90s; she stayed in prison for two years because she was active in a left-wing party. Also, she is a wife and a mother whose husband and son went missing on 20 September 2012, while she was preparing lunch and waiting for them at home. Basma was threatened with her kids to give information about her friends. Basma is the eldest activist in this study as she is fifty-six years old.

The sixth activist who agreed to being interviewed Face-to-face is Yasmin M, a Syrian journalist, producer, news editor, reporter and a host of political news and programs in Saderat magazine, Al-Sharq TV, Al-Raed media network and Yemen youth channel. Yasmin used social media while she was in Syria in campaigns and activities against the regime. Currently, she works in the Syrian opposition TV in Istanbul. Yasmin studied MA Journalism at Marmara University after she moved from Syria to Turkey in 2013. After that, she stopped using social media to share her political views. Yasmin is interested in media and social research. She has about eight thousand followers on Facebook and about twenty-seven thousand on Instagram.

The seventh activist who agreed to being interviewed via Facebook messenger is Ruba M. Ruba is an Egyptian informative activist who had been arrested by Egyptian security forces together with her small family on March 24, 2018 and was taken to an unknown place, even their relatives couldn't know where or why they were arrested. They were released after few months. Additionally, Ruba was the mother of the youngest detainee in Egypt, Alia Mudar. She has about four thousand followers on Facebook.

The eighth activist who agreed to being interviewed via Facebook messenger is Esraa M. Esraa is a Tunisian activist specializing in human rights. In 2015, she was arrested in the City of Kef on December 16th, when she was protesting against the demolition of a local historical site will be replaced with a guest house. Despite being a minor, she was kept under arrest all night without allowed to contact either with families or even lawyer. Esraa was sexually harassed verbally and physically by some officers in the police station for her posts on Facebook. Esraa still lives in her country. She has about fifteen thousand followers on Facebook.

The ninth activist who agreed to being interviewed via Facebook messenger is Hanaa G. Hanaa is a Libyan activist who had been working as a volunteer since 2011 at Together We Build It (TWBI) in Tripoli, Libya. "Now, she is a co-leader and organizer of the association. Since she was 15 years old, Hanaa has been working on women's rights. Hanaa is a member of the UN Women Youth Gender Innovative Agora. Through her work, she supported the ability of young stakeholders to speak and play active roles in decision-making processes within the framework of United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) 1325 and 2250" ("Why Are Women And Youth Still Not In The Picture? – Together We Build It" 2020). At the mean time, she is studying Political Science majoring specialization in International Relations and a minor in Public Policy and organization at the American University in Cairo, Egypt.

The tenth activist who agreed to being interviewed via signal messenger is Zainab J. Zainab is an Egyptian activist in the field of human rights, specifically women's rights,

specifically a researcher in the field of gender equality. Studied social work and she is doing her master's degree on mental health at Helwan University. She was arrested on May 12, 2018 from Sadat Metro Station while she was in protests against raising the prices of metro tickets, the prosecution accused her of participating in a terrorist group, disturbing national security, obstructing the constitution and the law, participating in a demonstration to disrupt public transport, harming public interests of citizens and using social media to incite terrorist acts. Zainab was released one day before the interview and that is why she preferred to use signal messenger instead of Facebook messenger or Skype because of the censorship. Currently, Zainab is trying to prepare for a feminist initiative to help and empower women to express the violence they are subjected to through art.

The eleventh activist who agreed to being interviewed via Facebook messenger is Taghreed R. Taghreed is a Tunisian blogger, civil society activist specializing in political and human rights. She launched a non-profit platform named Entr@crush for future entrepreneurs, while she was 16 years old, to contact with donors for supporting them in their projects. Therewith, the platform also provides the opportunities to take courses online in management and accounting. The young woman (23 years old) also works with the UN in Tunisia, where she is responsible for gender equality initiatives. In 2019, Taghreed was nominated for the 100 most influential and inspiring women in the world list at BBC.

The twelfth activist who agreed to being interviewed via Facebook messenger is Roaa. Roaa is a Tunisian blogger, writer, translator and correspondent. She has held positions at a number of international media outlets including The Young Feminist Fund (FRIDA) , Arabic Post, Aljazeera Blogs, Global Voices, African Union and Afrika Youth Movement. Also, Roaa is a political and human rights defender and is a feminist. Roaa participated in the Tunisian constitution 2014 Law 58, to combat violence against women. She has about twenty-four thousand followers on Facebook.

The last activist who agreed to being interviewed via WhatsApp calls is Seba H. Seba is one of the most famous females who lead during the Syrian revolution a member of

the Duma City Council in Eastern Ghouta. On March 25, 2011 Seba was arrested while she was participating in the Syrian social movement. In 2012, she was arrested again while she was working as a correspondent to cover one of the demonstrations and document the violations of the regime with a foreign journalist. Seba founded many groups that launched a women's magazine, formed paramedic's team, established the civil defense team, and founded Iqra (read) educational institution for the children. Seba moved to Turkey in 2018 because of Security pursuits by a number of military factions. Then, she moved to Germany. She is still working in human rights field. She is still working in human rights field. She has about four thousand followers on Facebook.

3.2 The Approach to Analysis

The interviewees answered the questions which were translated to Arabic. The interviewees were women involved in the Arab Spring via social media and on the ground. These women were eager for social and political change in their countries. They are from different backgrounds, but it is accurate to consider the social status of these women as middle/high class and well educated. So, this study represents just a point of view of their perspectives and experiences within a particular time frame.

As mentioned before, the study relied on interviewees' perspectives. Analytical categories were created from the gathered data.

The notes had been written during the interviews to highlight ideas that might attract the researcher's attention. Then, the audio-recordings were transcribed in detail. After that, throughout the reading of transcripts, the researcher produced a preliminary code to lay out all subjects provided by the interviewees. In this stage, the researcher creates a list of sub-headings and categorizes all aspects of the content while removing the similar and repetitious headings, taking into consideration the context to be closer to the meaning. Then, the codes were re-organized to illustrate the points of agreement versus the points of disagreement among the interviewees. Then, these codes were sorted into categories. This step helped answering the research questions. Note that the records of the interviews are kept in a memory.

It should be noted that my own assumptions and position had been formulated to guide the analysis and link the examples together. The following chapters are structured around the themes which emerged most strongly throughout the analysis.



4. FINDINGS

This chapter reports the findings based on the data collected through the in-depth semi-structured interviews. The research questions examine the participation of women in the

Arab Spring using social media. And in line with that, the findings reported contextualize the opportunities that social media provided to women and the threats that women faced it under cultural, technical, as well as political conditions. The research questions are as follows: (1) What are the effects of the Arab Spring revolution on women's participation in social media? (2) What are the challenges and opportunities granted to Arab female activists by social media during the Arab uprisings (January 2011 – December 2018)?

4.1 Social Media and Women before the Arab Spring

To address the first research question (What are the effects of the Arab Spring revolution on women's activism on social media?) the situation of the activists before Arab Spring and the environments that contributed in creating them should be known.

4.1.1 Uses of social media by Arab activist women in the pre-Arab Spring period

There were three ways regarding use/not use social media before the Arab Spring:

(1) Four of the interviewees do not have social media accounts, either they do not care about these kinds of platforms, they are still young or because of cultural barriers such as excessively conservative families not allowing female members to participate in any online activities.

Esraa states that "I couldn't open an account on Facebook because my brother did not allow me." She even confirmed that her brother was one of the protesters in Tunisia revolution. The paradox is that Esraa and Taghreed -other activist women- are from the same country and are at the same age. Yet, Taghreed was active on Facebook keeping in mind that also Taghreed's father was joining the protests, just like Esraa's brother. So, it is concluded that this was more of a family issue rather than a cultural barrier as Zainab mentioned "my cousins were participating in discussions on social media, meanwhile I could not even watch television, because it was forbidden by my father. On the other hand, Basma talked about the surveillance in Syria. "Some of the youths who have been arrested, have been given a print out of their participation on social media as a reason

for detention, which made me use other platforms for communication such as phone calls or anything that did not involve writing.”

(2) Five of the interviewees used it as a social platform for communicating with friends and families, entertainment, memories documenting, sharing thoughts, poetry, prayers. It was also used for sharing casual pictures without writing the real names. As Ruba mentioned “I was from Asyut, in the middle of Upper Egypt, and most of the families are excessively conservative, so it’s a blemish to publish your picture or write your real name.” On the other hand, Seba had the freedom to use her real name, yet she was inclined to using a nickname that expresses her views “in Facebook names should be describing me, that’s why I used nicknames” Moreover, Raghad talked about privacy “I used nicknames as Facebook’s privacy policy was not assuring.”

(3) Four activists who used it in advocating and participating on many campaigns against the regime’s brutality and violence and to raise the youth’s awareness. For instance, Nagham talked about using it for specific types of political mobilization against some of the authority’s actions (Hooghe et al. 2010), and in advocacy when journalists or citizens faced abuse or violations of their rights by regimes. Also, Shaimaa added that, two years before the Egyptian revolution, the youth focused on social media because they could find the truth there, unlike traditional media which was controlled by the government. Just as Wolska emphasized, social media is a free and positive way to express opinions (2011).

Furthermore, Roaa mentioned that she was one of the activists in Amnesty International and in UGET (General Union of Students of Tunisia) and in the opposition party. Roaa was using Proxy to access social media platforms that the government blocked. She was writing jokes that criticized the government.

Meanwhile, the reason why women are not involving in media or politics is because of the cultural, social norms, and male discrimination.

4.1.2 Motivations for participating in the social movement

There were many kinds of motivation words when the activists were asked about the reasons for taking part in the social movements; such as 'injustice', 'requesting social justice', 'desiring change', 'anti-dictatorial', 'one's impact' and 'creating a civil state'. Regarding the brutality of the government, Shaimaa mentioned "it was really hard for us seeing young innocents such as Sayyed Belal and Khalid Sayyed cases where they were victims to the brutality of the ministry of interior who defamed them after killing them."

Zainab, while laughing, said one of the reasons she participated in protests was "just seeing the police scared from the unarmed protesters made me really happy." Raghad expressed anxiously "it was normal in Libya to find yourself detained for no apparent reason, without informing or contacting your family unless you had a friend working with the government."

Yasmin, Ruba and Taghreed talked about growing in families who had a political and financial awareness about the situation in their countries. "It was impossible to not participate" Yasmin said. Ruba added "my grandfather was one of the Muslims Brotherhood who had been arrested during Abdunasser's government."

Moreover, Hanaa, Roaa and Seba argued that the corruption and favoritism even reached schools, "while we were students in the university, the only groups that were allowed to do social activities were the groups rooting for the regime" Roaa mentioned. Also, Hanaa said "I knew my rights and privileges that were taken away from us."

On the other hand, from a religious origin, Zahraa added that "I believed everything will change for the better as our history suggests, the Islamic civilization will prevail at the end resulting in justice and equity. Also, if we change, I believe that we will be ready for Palestine issues, but we should take the first step towards change." Also, Seba talked about the stereotypes that described Hijab as an old fashioned and idiotic woman on TV series on Syrian Television, which motivated me to prove that we were not.

4.2 Use of Social Media during the Arab Social Upheavals

After the explanation of the ways of using social media before Arab Spring movements, the following section is an attempt to answer the first research question (What are the effects of the Arab Spring revolution on women's participation in social media?) by comparing the change of use of social media between before Arab Spring, during Arab Spring and after Arab Spring revolutions. This analysis helps us understand the effects of social movements on social media.

4.2.1 Ways of using social media during Arab Spring

To reach to a clear understanding of the first research question, it should be explained how using social media by Arab activists' women changed between before December 2010 and after it.

The most used platform was found to be Facebook, because: (1) Presence of youth, easy to contact with lots of people in the same place safely. So, Yasmin added "even participating by using fake names so authorities in Syria could not find out our identities." (2) Easy to express and publish your ideas, as Nadkarni and Hofmann considered (2012). (3) One of the most places where you could find information despite the integrity of it "there are as much rumors as the real news on social media" Raghad commented. (4) More common in Arab countries as Facebook was the first populated social media platform around the Middle East. The interaction was higher there than other platforms. It has "lead the movements" as Ruba described it.

Nagham and Taghreed also used Twitter. Taghreed talked about tweeting in English believing that international issues should be published on twitter. Ruba assumed that "trusted news can be easier to find on Twitter however; it was more difficult to use. Twitter was also assumed to be a platform for the elite in Egypt. Meaning the audience on twitter came from a higher social class."

Despite their different environments and backgrounds, twelve activists out of thirteen used social media during Arab Spring and the following social movements. The only

one remaining was Basma, and as we mentioned Basma was the eldest interviewee in this study. So, she talked about being extra cautious since she was arrested during the era of Hafiz al-Assad. Although she did was not active on social media, she was still under surveillance which made her consider all platforms dangerous.

Though, interviewees talked about different kinds of social media usage during the social movements, as follow: (1) Documenting the protests, events and the victims. Zahraa preferred to share photos instead of writing posts as Fred R. Barnard said “a picture is worth a thousand words” likewise, Shaimaa and Nagham. Although, Yasmin and Esraa used for writing news about the violation that the opposition faced. Raghad faced lots of problems while she was in Tripoli “we were trying to take photos and record videos while the city was as if it was occupied by the military forces. Then, we would try to send an SD card with all recordings outside the city, so it reaches the media.” Surprisingly, Seba was the first activist who tried the selfie phenomena in Syria during the civil war in 2017.

(2) Expressing opinions and criticism, defending the revolution and supporting protesters as Zahraa and Shaimaa mentioned. In this case, Basma told us previously that she does not use social media, but she also noted that she used it after leaving Syria for supporting social movements and being a voice for the detainees. Seba wrote in a sarcastic tone “I remember in 2013, after the Ghouta chemical attack, children of the ruling family in the Army of Islam died. They made a huge funeral ceremony. I wrote on my Facebook ‘our sons were not fighting, they were just playing football when they died, that is why they did not get such a ceremony, I guess. Their sons will go to heaven, but ours? I criticize anyone who would not treat the people equally, even if they were on the revolution side.

(3) Political mobilization calling for people to join protests. Ruba was not in Cairo when the revolution started. So, she was calling for people to join the revolution after it started. After that, she was ardently sharing posts that protesters in Tahrir square published. Roaa said “writing on social media was considered to be some form of

resistance.” The more brutal the regimes were against protesters the stronger the opposition got both on the ground and on social media platforms.

(4) Contacting with people from different ideologies, classes and different places as Shaimaa stated. Raghad also used it to contact people who she could not talk with using phone.

(5) Observation and interaction. For instance, Raghad said “silently, just watching, assuming all platforms are under surveillance. But we understood later that it was all propaganda to scare people off using social media.” Zainab gave some benefits of interacting on social media “we can discuss, criticize, argue and interact on social media” unlike traditional media.

4.2.2 Motivations for using social media

In this part, “free”, “open”, “known”, “widespread”, “available” and “fast”, were the most used words. Also, there were comparisons between the news on the TV and the real news from the ground. This made Zainab believe and trust social media. Nagham argued that the radio was not available for all people to voice their opinion.

Additionally, Raghad told us about the dangers of talking on TV. Hanaa talked about the impossibility to make movements or unions outside social media for safety concerns. Roaa argued that “even if traditional media was a kind of open media, we, my generation, would not use it, because Facebook related to us more.”

Yasmin made ambivalence that even though there was surveillance; it was the safest place that you could use to gather people. She added “One of the benefits of using fake names was so even if somebody was arrested, none of their social media contacts would be endangered as nobody is aware of their real names.”

4.2.3 The effect of social movements on social media

This is the main part which addresses the first research question by explaining the differences on the activists on their writing styles and tones in social media, time spent on media, and how their positions as activists affected their activism on social media.

Many measures were taken, as the following:

(1) Ways of usage: Zahraa and Yasmin, talked about the impact of their current positions after the revolutions and the increased number of followers. Zahraa said, “Social media has become a political platform for me.” She added “I work now in the ministry, so using social media has become more official than how it used to be in the past. This means I have to be careful about what I say.” Yasmin added, “We feel shy to publish personal opinions or social activities, because I am working now as journalist, so, what I write represents me.” Seba started to be more selective, “I know the people who I interact with and I choose the posts or the cases that I am supposed to share my opinion on.”

(2) Timing: Ruba talked about Facebook seasons “it was influenced by the situation. When there were events or protests, social media was burning. On the other hand, when everything settled, people would make poetries about their love for Egypt.” Nagham argued that since lots of things are happening now, browsing social media must be every day, every hour. Yasmin was writing non-direct anti-regime posts until her sister was arrested. Then, she started writing about her sister every day.

(3) The tone and the writing style: in this part, activists shared how Arab Spring changed the way they used social media. Shaimaa changed from being someone that would only talk with people who had the same ideologies to an open-mind person who would have a friendly talk with everybody. As one grows, their content and prudence grows as well. Zainab mentioned, “In the past, I would curse or write in a sharp tongue. Currently, I am using it professionally; I am choosing the words that attract people to interact.” Taghreed preferred to publish sarcastic videos in 2012 and 2013. Then, she started documenting and sharing events. Finally, she was influenced by some intellectuals in the post revolution government. This made her try to make a connection

between the public and the government resulting in the change in the language she used on social media, more serious to find solutions instead of ridiculing the government.

4.2.4 Arab Spring movements and social media, which became first

This part concludes the discussion of the first research question. It is also a connection to research questions two and emphasizes the role of social media in women's participation in the Arab Spring and their activism.

There were mainly three groups of answers when the interviewees were asked about the relationship between the Arab Spring movement and social media, namely which one affected the other.

The first group believed that the presence of people in the streets gave social media its value by changing the online discussion as Howard stated, "a spike in online revolutionary conversations often preceded major events on the ground" (Howard et al. 2011, 3). Ruba and Zahraa argued "social movements affected my content on social media and my character." Ruba emphasized "the myth of virtual world and its impact was refuted when the internet shut down. In the 25th of January, only the street was talking. But in the 14th of August -the coup-, it was the opposite of the 25th's movements, social movements were controlled by social media." Zahraa added, "People in Tunisia and Egypt did not join the streets because of calls or posts on social media. But after that, social media started to be the place for revolution. For instance, when UEA attacked the Yemeni army, about half a million Yemeni made an 'Electronic army' by joining Twitter and reporting Emirati accounts. This forced twitter to close about four thousand fake Emirati accounts." Esraa noted that "we couldn't forget that without social media - revolution would have been suppressed quickly."

Naghham and Yasmin inquired that even without social media, revolution would have still had traditional media support by few TV channels such as Aljazeera channels and few radio channels. Yasmin mentioned: "we should not forget that social media kept the continuity of the revolution, gave its goals some depths, and helped it spread." Yasmin

added, “Alaroor -religious man ‘Sheikh’- appearances on TV had some impact. These people who had been affected by him did not have smartphones or Facebook.”

Meanwhile, sometimes it is not about the platform ideas are published on, it is about the speech or the content.

The second group believes that revolutions were started by social media. Raghad, while smiling, answered: “it is kind of asking about which came first, egg or chicken; but in Libya, the content on social media such as videos on YouTube that showed the abuse on people were encouraged them to protest on the street.” Also, Zainab emphasized, “social media did not just start revolutions, it also helped gathering people for protests.”

Roaa and Seba argued, without social media there would be absolutely no revolutions, social media discussions always came before actual protests. Roaa mentioned: “we can (generally) agree with the fact that social movements were affecting the content in social media but that was only before the Arab Spring.” Seba added “when the revolution started in Syria, we were voting to decide on the naming of the protests. One time as a reaction to the attempts to cancel The National Assembly, the following protests were named ‘the National Assembly represents me’ after discussing the issue on social media and making the decision of adopting this matter in the protests. She also argued that arming the revolutions started from Facebook. When the answer of the other group was mentioned to the activist she replied, “They come from different areas in Syria, north might be different from south on this matter.” As Howard stated, “social media played a central role in shaping political debates in the Arab Spring” (2011, 2).

The last group believed that both influenced and completed each other it is affected by many factors; Shaimaa mentioned while discussing the change in ideologies and ideas added to the distrust of traditional media which is usually controlled by governments. Then, “there were lots of crises and problems covered and published on social media, which fed the social movements.” While Hanaa talked about the impact of Arab Spring on transforming the social media into a political platform. Also, social media impacted some international decisions, like; in 2011, the requests for air forces ban in Libya started on social media and were accepted later.

Basma and Taghreed investigated on what the revolutions would have been like without social media. Basma added “In the 80s, there were some events and protests that caused Hama massacre.” Taghreed added, “Mejba revolution in 1864 and bread riots in 1984 proved that Tunisian people are revolutionary people if they do not get what they need. They would never accept that silently” (Biagini and Motta 2014). So, it is about people and their characters and the conditions they created to empower themselves, social media is just a tool.

4.3 Activists’ Opinions on Social Media Participation in Arab Spring

This section illustrates the activists’ opinions on the effects of social media participation, its advantages and disadvantages. This helped offering a conclusion to the first research question.

Activists were talking about the revolution goals as their own. Briefly, it was changing regimes, having freedom of speech, achieving social justice and creating democratic civil states. Activists interviewed are divided into three groups when they were asked about the role of social media and its effects on the societal goals of the social movements whether it was positive or negative:

First group interpreted social media as a positive tool. Zahraa labeled it as “open book” to understand people “it helped sorting or rating people, you can understand from their posts or tweets, whether they were supporting Arab Spring, revolutions and democracy or the opposite.” Ruba added, because it is kind of open media, “social media provides evidence, in the past, we would only hear of hospitals that expels poor patients, or sank ferries without ever seeing them.”

Second group believes it was a negative tool. Nagham considered social media to be a sort of battlefield. There were groups that supported dictatorial regimes against people that opposed them. Basma talked about the sectarianism which was a product of social

media discussions. Esraa added that the surveillance issues and the violation of privacy make it a negative tool.

Third group, some activists took social media as a tool of two edges, it is up to the user which edge they end up using. As beneficial social media was to activist as it was an easy tool for governments to use to identify activists from the opposition party. Shaimaa mentioned “As much as it is an open media and an accessible platform for us to use, as it is a tool for authorities to hunt the opposition people.” Raghad added “open media, likewise, open door.”

On the other hand, some activists had some personal goals for which they utilized social media to achieve their goals to empower women. For instance, Raghad talked about a TV show discussing women rights: “in 2013, I was producing a show, named Hawwa, a long discussion took place before the launch of the show between me and the channel on how to make a program that targets female audience without resorting to typical subjects such as fashion, decoration or cooking. The show discussed different women rights topics.” She added, “Social media helped us with collecting audience inputs to choose the topic of the next episode, reach to them and know their opinions” which shows the role of social media on some social TV shows in supporting women’s voice.

Also, Zainab worked on empowering women, especially, the illiterate: “I worked on educating women who work in factories, and I believe that I reached my goals when women protested for equality with men in salaries” She added, “in this case, social media helped me distinguish between activist women and bureaucrat feminists.” It gets to fill the gap between social classes by reaching women from many different classes, environments, and backgrounds.

4.4 Social Media and Women Empowerment

The second research question asked: What are the opportunities and challenges granted to Arab female activists by social media during the Arab uprisings (January 2011 –

December 2018)? So, activists here were talking about the advantages of social media in empowering women during and after Arab Spring.

So, based on Tatomir's opinion, online feminist activists increased the empowerment to marginalized voices, the motivation for social change and the opportunities for cross-border discussion (2014). About 70% were positively affected by social media, Seba claimed, women appeared as a human, "we do not need TV or other kinds of media to represent us. I am talking using my own words, my own style." Roaa argued that the language used on social media has become feminine. Nagham discussed how before social media, women would only care about fashion and appearances. Zahraa added to the cultural barriers issue that some families do not allow women to have male online friends and their page would be controlled by their brothers or their parents.

Esraa, Hayfa, and Basma talked about being women activists in the past. They did not have an impact like they do now due to their insignificant amount in the past. These women are now an inspiration and considered to be role models to the new generation.

In Egypt's case, there was an important overview that Shaimaa provided. The two images of women in traditional media before the revolution were: (1) The Bureaucratic women on the political field; like Suzan Mubarak and the likes, who did not have any effective role. (2) Decadent ladies without any manners or respect. These stereotypes were refuted with social media and the revolution. Ruba agreed adding, before the revolution, most of the women were not supposed to be out of their homes or schools. Now however, society recognizes women's abilities.

Zahraa also was thankful to social movements and to social media which helped her become the undersecretary of the Ministry of Youth for the Women's Sector in Yemen. While Hanaa focused on the change on the community, "many women are running for different elections. They utilize social media as a platform to advertise their programs." Zainab published lots of workshops and events to empower women on social media. She made a research discussing the importance of women's role in dictatorial regimes. "For instance, a comparison can be made between the numbers of women that had been

imprisoned in Mubarak's era with the number of female prisoners during ElSisi's era. It will be clear that even the regimes realized the women's strength."

So, women from all classes, places, ages and different disciplines broke the horror barrier by participating on public and in decision-making positions, demanded their rights, and voiced their opinions either on social media or on the ground which have been silenced for years. All this resulted in creating independent confident women. Not to downplay the impact of one's surrounding environment but since 2011, social media had a clear influence.

4.5 Arab Activist Women, Social Media and Facing Threats

Research question two initiated an examination of the threats and challenges that social media posed for activist women during and after Arab Spring movements. This section below addresses these responses the activist women interviewed gave regarding the threats and challenges they faced due to the usage of social media during the political upheavals.

4.5.1 Digital barriers: social media block off and internet shut down

All activists interviewed talked about the centralization of the internet and the monopolization of it by governments. Raghad said, "The one who has the weapon, the one who rules. In Libya, there was only one Telecommunication Company which was owned by the government." Zahraa added "regarding the control of the internet connection in Sana'a, Houthis have now shut down the internet many times. They tend to do that whenever they are committing war crimes or doing massacres to prevent the people from sharing the incidents with the world."

Thus, Activists talked in Detail about the ban and the block of social media. As Ghannam stated, most of the Arab countries are ruled by dictatorial governments which despises social media as it is harder to control (2011). Shaimaa agreed "in Egypt, from the 28th of January until the 2nd of February, telecommunication was cut-off", Zainab

confirmed “up until now they cut off the internet whenever some high-profile official from the government moves around as a security measure. Also, on Fridays, the surveillance on social media would be higher as protests usually start after Friday prayer.” Hanaa added “in Libya, the internet was randomly and continuously cut off without any reasons.” Seba adds “whenever the regime was making a move such as storming an area or massacring protesters, all the telecommunication would be stopped.” Zahraa mentioned that “in Yemen, there were no internet shutdowns because the regime used it in the same way activists did by encouraging protests that support the government and creating pages to advocate for them.”

There were also some social media sites blocks. For instance, Nagham told us that “WhatsApp and Facebook were blocked when Saleh was killed.” Esraa added, “YouTube and Facebook were banned during the revolution, but now it is left accessible with extensive monitoring.” Yasmin and Zainab agreed that, “authorities keep the network now just for surveillance to spot activists.”

When researcher asked about alternative tools they used, Raghad and Hanaa talked about satellite internet, and TV. Hanaa mentioned “without internet connection, communication was almost completely stopped as face-to-face was never an option for safety purposes.” Basma used her telephone because she believed other communication tools were monitored, while Yasmin and Seba used VPN and Proxy. Ruba added that she would use a protected internet connection. Shaimaa on Tahrir square protests “we preplanned what our actions would be if there happens an internet or communication shutdown and informed the people beforehand, so they know of the plans regardless of what the government does.”

Hence, these alternatives were not as effective as social media. However, they are a good replacement for when social media sites would not be accessible. This shows that social media is prominent in this field as other alternatives would only be considered only if social media was blocked.

4.5.2 Challenges

For activist women living in Arab countries, there are many political, social and digital barriers to overcome. The threats that interviews mentioned are as follows:

On the part of social media, starting from hackers and online threats continuously via social media accounts, as a result of opposing the government, as Zahraa, Nagham and Shaimaa mentioned “Since the coup, I have been sharing violations against women in Egypt and contacting foreign journalism outlets. Now, this is my 17th account on Facebook, specialists told me the others have been deleted because of reports from security forces” Zainab said, as Hussain and Howard talked about the depended of technology firms with new applications that were introduced to serve the public and capture market share (2011). Raghad and Seba talked about electronic armies and electronic incitement that governments create to abuse and attack the activists. Which made Raghad and Seba leave their countries fearing for their safety? Seba added “they started creating fake accounts that impersonated me.” Ruba, Esraa and Zainab have been arrested regarding their participation on social media. Ruba told her story, “in 2018, we, my husband and I, were working in an opposition media office” she then added that nine of their team had been arrested as well. Esraa talked about more than one arrest, “one time I stayed in prison for more than six months, forced to pay a fine, but I kept asking for the ruling to be returned.” Zainab also talked about the subject to torture, harassment, abuse, and theft when she went to the police station for two years because she had been arrested without a court order.

Even in real life, there have been lots of threats and raids as Zahraa and Basma mentioned. Sometimes the arrests or the threats reached irrelevant family members as Basma pointed out when she talked about the detention of her husband and her son. On working scope, Raghad talked about the closing of their office. The rumors had been spread about activists denied them from employment opportunities. Roaa argued, “Most of the activists on social media work as freelancers” as they were interpreted as people who make problems. On the cultural frame, Yasmin and Raghad mentioned that just because of being a journalist or a presenter talking and discussing with men about rights, politics and economics would create a huge fuss for some families. In family

cases, some families have rejected the activist women, because of the difference between their image of a common woman's social role and what the female activists do which Zainab and Roaa experienced. Finally, on the international framework, some foreign parties have used few junior female activists for spying, but most of the activists do not know about that.

Some activists interviewed talked about the challenges that the use of social media pose now or might pose in the future: (1) Traditional media, like in Yemen, radio is more effective and available in most rural areas, so, activists cannot reach to all people as Nagham mentioned, (2) Technical barriers, when asked about the decline on using social media, in Libya and Yemen, the slow internet connection and the high cost of the internet added to the devastation of the cities' infrastructure, (3) The constant spread of negative content/news results in increasing the depression and the insecurity of social media users. This was argued as the phenomena of taking a rest from social media has become a frequent habit. This means if taking a break from it helps, then using it can be depressing. Raghad added that there was some cyberbullying that successful women faced. (4) The censorship and surveillance applied by dictatorial regimes made people wary of using social media. Taghreed said "doubting when the governments are going to accept any kind of posts as freedom of speech." Then regarding the loss of trust in social media "I guess people started to leave social media slowly after Mark Zuckerberg's scandal" referring to the case in 2018 when Facebook allowed some companies to access users' information (Wichter 2018). Roaa mentioned here that "even there was surveillance; we can find something to protect ourselves." Social media is the era's language. So, like everything, it can be a negative tool for a period of time, and then people would try to coexist and look forward.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, previous studies had discussed similar concepts such as the role of social media in Arab Spring revolutions, the political participation development of Arab women after Arab Spring and Arab women's digital activism, which were essential to contextualize the data. The implemented scope of this study was the effects of Arab Spring revolution on the women participation on social media, the role of social media in women's participation in the Arab Spring, their activism using qualitative method. The goal was to explore the opportunities provided to the female activist by using social media and the threats they faced.

The activists interviewed were living, working in different environments that deal with the theme of women empowerment. Thus, they do have few similar answers regarding to the driving forces that motivate them to be one of those who encourage the empowerment of Arab women. Sometimes, families, cultures and environments affect the activist in ways like; some activists grew in an educated family which made them aware of the situation in their countries which encouraged them to take actions. On the other hand, other activists grew in overly conservative families which lead to a backlash response from the activists to help the cause they believe in.

Moreover, the answer of the first research question which asked about the effects of the Arab Spring on women's activism in social media; before the uprisings, women were using social media either for communicating with friends and families, entertainment or memories documenting. After the Arab Spring, it became their official media, spending most of their time for: (1) documenting the protests, events and the victims. (2) Expressing opinions and criticism. (3) Political mobilization calling for people to join protests and (4) Contacting with people from different ideologies, classes and different places. Also, the dominant tone is the sharp one and the writing style had been changed

to be for advocacy and for supporting the protesters in the street generally and the women in their issues specifically.

Responding to the second research question, which investigated the opportunities and the challenges that social media provided activist women after Arab Spring, women from all classes, places, ages and different disciplines broke the barrier of fear by participating on public discussions and in decision-making mechanisms, demanded their rights, voiced their opinions either on social media or on the ground which had been silenced for years. Therefore, all of these contributed in creating independent confident women. Social media together with Arab Spring changed the character of women activists in many ways, while also giving them new experiences which made them plan for future and think critically.

On the other hand, the challenges and threats that Arab women faced due to their use of social media, which led to arrests, banishments, social media bans, violations of privacy, piracy, discrimination by males, political violence and lots of cultural, technical, as well as political challenges that most of women in these countries tried to confront and overcome. They sometimes succeeded and failed at other times.

But it should be kept in mind that this research does not aim to generalize the results of all the opportunities and challenges that activists faced, but to overview the point to find insights on this topic that had not been researched thoroughly (as explained above) before. With this expansion, this study involved women activist from the Arab Spring countries, in the first wave (2011 -2012).

5.1 Limitations of the Study

This study has limitations. First, many activists are still scared about making interviews because they are worried about spies and most of them are followed by authorities. The interviews covered sensitive political issues. Thus, it took too much time to find activists, hence limited the number of interviewees. However, three measures had been taken to fix this problem: First, activists were informed about the researcher and the

scope of the study. Second, they were asked the permission to record the interview for the researcher to be able to recover all the information. Third, the researcher tried to increase the trust with the interviewees by answering the questions they asked and discussing the researcher's true intents from this study.

Secondly, collecting data had been affected by a few circumstances such as; the slow internet connection in online interviews interrupted the flow of the conversation. This resulted in some missing details. In this case, the researcher asked the interviewees to repeat their answers to make sure it was perceived correctly. Also, the language was a big barrier, because all the interviewees were Arabic people and most of them preferred to answer in Arabic. Translating their expressions of some cases cost a lot of work. It is worth mentioning that the researcher should be taught the essentials of translating to avoid violating the meaning of the words or losing the context because of the translation.

5.2 Recommendations for Future Research

As mentioned, this study relied on the information that had been taken from the interviews. However, to have a better understanding of the opportunities provided to Arab women, especially activist women by social media, as well as the challenges they faced because of it, a content analysis for posts and tweets shared by the Arab activist women can be conducted.

In the case of the interviews quantity limitation, more time needed to reach more activists which would help reach deeper and better results. Also, future studies should interview activists from the second wave of Arab Spring countries such as, Algeria, Iraq, Lebanon and Sudan.

Lastly, because the interviews have been conducted in Arabic, some of the details could not be translated as from Arabic to English in the analysis and the write up of the results. Therefore, future studies can make use of working with a translator to avoid this obstacle.

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CURRICULUM VITAE



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To bring a change in the perspective lives of the minorities and neglected societies through media that includes filmmaking, script writing and content creation, focus on peace and knowledge awareness

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- Assistant Project Manager 2016
TAM DEVELOPMENT LLC
- Course Trainer for Youth 2013/2014
SIDDIQUA CENTRE AND WATAN ESTABLISHMENT
- Secretary 2013
WASSL ESTABLISHMENT
- Primary Teacher 2013
AL-FAISAL INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL
- Supervisor
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TRAINING COURSES

- Twenty Methods for self development.
- Public speaking Skills.
- Law and Islamic law course.
- Human communication Course.
- The measurement of Herman test.
- Self-enrichment and motivation course.
- The 5 principles of change.
- The art of poetry and the musical element of it.
- Photography and photoshop course.
- How to teach Arabic to non-native speakers.
- The contradictions between religion and reality.

CERTIFICATES AND AWARDS

- Experience and recommendation letter from Alfaisal international school.
- Excellent teacher in Alfaisal school for my participation in the activities.
- 2nd place winner over Jeddah in Arabic calligraphy.
- 2nd place winner in a Quran contest.
- Award of the outstanding project.
- The best student award in Albanian school.
- Award of princess Anood Bint Abdullah Alsaud for academic excellence.
- Award of princess Itab Bint Sultan Alsaud for academic excellence.
- Award of princess Adelah Bint Abdullah Alsaud for academic excellence.,
- 2nd place winner in scientific research under the 6th annual conference.

VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITIES

- Arranging and meeting with the Austrian delegation.
- Organizing tours and orientation for freshmen at KAU.
- Planning Events and courses in a volunteer group called Watan- whose primary focus is Syrian refugees.
- Planning an event for Ghiras foundation.

APPENDIX A

A.1 Interview's Questions

Hello dear X, thank you for agreeing in taking part of this interview. I read about your activities on X revolution, which I really appreciated. And I would be really interested to know a little bit more about your activities. I am writing a thesis about the opportunities that social media provide it and the threats that Arab women faced during/post Arab Spring revolutions.

1. General information:

I would like to start asking you to tell me a little bit about yourself. Who is Activist X? Your nationality? Where are you living (optional)? Which sector are you working on (women rights, political, media, social or other)?

2. Before the Arab Spring/social movement in your country, were you active in social media?

1. If so, how?
2. If not, why not?

3. What was the social movement in your country?

1. The most popular?
2. The one you had been participated on?

4. What were your reasons for taking part in the social movement?

5. used social media during the social movements

1. Did you use social media during the social movement?
2. If yes to question 5.1, In general, how did you use social media during the social movement?
3. Which platforms have been used? Why?
4. If yes to question 5.2, why did you use social media?

5. Did your participation in the social movement change your way of using social media? If so, how?

6. In your opinion, did social media content influence the social movement or vice versa?

1. How?

2. Examples?

7. What were the achievements of the social movement in your country? Did social media platforms enhance protester's goals?

1. Personal goals?

2. Social goals?

8. Did you notice any situation where social media did not work?

1. alternative tools?

9. In your opinion, did these platforms enhance women's participation in social movement?

1. Chances that social media provided?

10. Were there any threats/challenges that you faced during/after the social movements?

1. Do you find social media as a positive or negative tool?

Thank you for this very interesting interview. Listening to you were such a learning journey. Thanks again for your time. And, if you are interested in the ending results, it will be sent to you when everything being ready.

A.2: Interview's question (in Arabic)

أسئلة المقابلة:

أهلاً عزيزتي س، كل الامتنان والشكر لقبولك بأن تكوني جزءاً من هذا البحث. كنت قد قرأت عن الأنشطة التي قمت بها في الثورة س، والتي أكن لها كل التقدير. أكتب رسالتي عن الفرص والتحديات التي واجهتها المرأة العربية من خلال مشاركتها على مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي خلال الحركات الاجتماعية (الربيع العربي)، وسيكون من الممتع لي أن أتعرف قليلاً على أنشطتك فيما يخص هذا الإطار.

١. معلومات عامة:

أود أن أسأل عن اسمك؟ جنسيتك؟ ومكان الإقامة (إن رغبت)؟ والمجال الذي تنشطين فيه (حقوق، سياسي، إعلامي، اجتماعي، أو أخرى)؟

٢. هل كنت ناشطة على مواقع التواصل قبل الحراك الاجتماعي الحاصل؟

١. إذا كانت الإجابة (نعم) فكيف؟

٢. إذا كانت الإجابة (لا) فلماذا؟

٣. ماهو الحراك الاجتماعي في دولتك؟

١. الأكثر شهرة؟

٢. الذي كنت مشاركةً فيه؟

٤. ما الأسباب التي دعتك للمشاركة في الحراك؟

٥. استخدام مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي خلال الحراك

١. هل شاركت في الحراك عبر مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي؟

٢. إذا كانت الإجابة ب (نعم) على السؤال السابق كيف كان استخدامك لها؟

٣. ما الموقع الأكثر استخداماً؟ لماذا هذه المنصة تحديداً؟

٣. إذا كانت الإجابة ب (نعم) على السؤال (٥ . ١)، ما الأسباب التي دعتك للمشاركة عبرها؟

٥. هل كان لمشاركتك في الحراك دور في تغيير طريقتك على مواقع التواصل؟ كيف؟

٦. هل ترى من وجهة نظرك أن الحراك الاجتماعي هو من كان له دور في تغيير المحتوى على مواقع التواصل،

أم العكس (أي أن مواقع التواصل كان لها تأثير أكبر على الحراك) ؟

١ . كيف؟

٢ . أمثلة؟

٧ . ماهي أهداف الحراك؟ هل ساعدت مواقع التواصل في تنمية أو تعزيز هذه الأهداف؟

١ . أهداف شخصية؟

٢ . أهداف اجتماعية؟

٨ . هل حصل أن قطع الإنترنت أو حظّر أحد مواقع التواصل؟

١ . ما البدائل التي تم استخدامها في ذلك الوقت؟

٩ . برأيك، هل كان لمواقع التواصل دور في التعزيز من مشاركة المرأة في الحركات الاجتماعية؟

١ . الفرص التي قدمتها؟

١٠ . هل كان هناك أي تحديات أو تهديدات واجهتها سواء فترة الحراك أو بعده؟

١ . هل تصنفين مواقع التواصل كأداة إيجابية أو سلبية في الحركات؟

أشرك على هذه المقابلة الرائعة، كنت مستمتعة جدا، وأشرك مرة أخرى على إعطائنا قليلا من وقتك الثمين.

وأعدك بأن يتم إرسال النتائج النهائية لك فور انتهائها، إن أحببت؟