Triggering Factors for Social Revolutions

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Abstract

In the last decade Arab masses accomplished unthinkable social and political changes by forcing out of power leaders who ruled for decades. These changes provide an opportunity to study the effects of technology and globalization on transnational policies. The paper examines the role of social media and global impact in the 2011 Arab Spring. These events demonstrated that in order to achieve the goals of a social revolution there needs to be critical triggering factors that could mobilize large groups of people. In examining the triggering factors that are required to start a popular uprising, we need to look at the main factors that are required to start a social revolution and the reasons that it can be inflated. Although a social revolution could be rapid or slow and violent or peaceful, in order to achieve such tremendous political goal, there would need to be triggering factors to start a popular uprising. Examining the impact of these triggering factors in this research looks at the way they are implemented through social, political and global issues.

Keywords: social revolution, global impact, social media, Arab Spring, Yellow Vest, Arab World

INTRODUCTION

Social scientists have long debated the factors responsible for revolution. Social revolution is a popular uprising that aims to demonstrate against an existing socioeconomic and political order (Tiruneh, 2014) and results in a far-reaching goal of regime-changing political process (Davidson, 2015). The key characteristics of a civil revolution are long-term causes and the popularity of a socio-political

ideology at odds with the regime in power coupled with short-term triggers of widespread protest. The success of a revolution is in influencing the political power and achieving a new political order (McPhee, 2019). Revolutionary situations occur when massive and rapid social, economic and political factors reshape the people's sociopolitical value systems and affect their economic welfare (Foran, 2005). But although a social revolution could be rapid or slow and violent or peaceful, in order to achieve such tremendous political goal, there would need to be triggering factors to start a popular uprising.

In examining the triggering factors that are required to start a popular uprising, we need to look at the main factors that are required to start a social revolution and the reasons that it can be inflated. According to Triuneh (2014), these are economic development, regime type and state ineffectiveness. Economic development fosters people's demand for political reforms and makes some groups to become discontent with their economic condition, and state effectiveness or lack thereof, aside from regime type, would matter for avoidance or presence of political violence. But the fourth factor may be the most important one: for a revolutionary uprising to start, an ignition have to be provided by a triggering factor or factors, which could mobilize large groups of people. The research argues that the triggers for the social uprisings that swept the Arab World were social and global media (for example: Brown and Gusking and Mitchell, 2012; Ghannam, 2016; Mourtada and Salem, 2012), although a debate exists about the actual role of social media in the uprisings (for example: Boulianne, 2017; Cavatorta, 2017).

The triggering factors in the popular uprising of the 2011 were related to the role of social media and the global impact on the political changes that occurred during and after the Arab Spring. The events in the Arab World changed the way contemporary politics is undertaken in the age of social and global media. It is fair to say that while examining the real impact of social media on the events that occurred throughout the Arab World we can see that while the roots of the civil uprising had already existed, it was the availability of digital media that could allow the revolutionary forces to flourish. It is also evident that social and digital media allowed the civil demonstrations to spread across the Middle East and North Africa, creating a global movement. Studies by both the United States Institute for Peace (USIP) (Sean, Farrell, Lynch, Sides and Freelon, 2012) and the Pew Research Center

(Brown, Guskin and Mitchell, 2012) indicated that social media played a bigger role in communicating the Arab Spring protests to the outside world than in causing these uprisings in the first place.

The paper examines the role of social and global media in the outbreak of the social revolutions that occurred in 2011 in the Arab World. It is claimed that following the social media revolution in the Middle East and North Africa, the role of social media is now investigated in broader approach, as a tool which led to widespread enthusiasm of Arab protesters about their alleged role for the mobilization of democratic resistance in current times. According to Cavatorta (2017), while online activism played a crucial role in the Arab Spring, it was not simply a "Facebook revolution" or "Twitter revolutions", but an instrument that brought street mobilization and face-to-face social networks. Further research shows the overly positive assessments about the role of the Internet in the mobilization of popular protests on a global level. According to Breuer (2012), the role of social media in mobilizing the political process in the Arab World united a broad coalition of social forces. She explains that social media allowed a "digital elite" to form personal networks and circumvent the national media blackout by brokering information for outside mainstream media. Social media also facilitated the formation of a national collective identity which was supportive of protest action and transcended geographical and socio-economic disparities by providing a shared and mobilizing element of emotional grievance across the Middle East and North Africa – and this would not have been possible without modern global communication technologies.

The Impact of Social Media

Social movements see their success as correlated to their ability to mobilize large groups of people. Throughout history, social movements have been created by small groups that have been loosely connected but united by a shared purpose, with the aim of creating transformational change. In these movements, protest played an important role, highlighting the ability for ordinary citizens to make their disapproval heard (Satell and Popovic, 2017). The protest in the spring of 2011 was a series of pro-democracy uprisings that in the Arab world, mainly Tunisia, Morocco, Syria, Libya, Egypt and Bahrain, organized by activists which used the Internet as a dynamic vehicle to maintain

broad based support in the streets (Hemple, 2016). The nature of each pro-democracy uprising varied wildly from country to country, and yet they had one defining characteristic in common: social media. (Shearlaw, 2016).

The strength of social movements in the Arab World since 2011 was in their ability to form formal and informal networks that allowed them to mobilize larger groups and advance their objectives through social media (Abdalla, 2018). The revolutions in the Middle East proved that social networking sites became popular tools to engage citizens in political campaigns, social movements and civic life (Boulianne, 2017). Leonardi (2017) suggests that social media is useful for knowledge sharing in providing the range of activities to capture internal knowledge and promote its transfer to and its re-use by others. Researches see a positive correlation between the volume of Facebook and Twitter usage and major public events (Habes, Alghizzawi, Khalaf and Salloum (2018). This can serve as evidence that Facebook and Twitter usage played a major role in starting and sustaining these uprisings.

The question that arises here is: what was the triggering role of social media in the events of the 2011 Arab Spring that changed the Arab World forever?

There can be no argument that social media played a central role in shaping political debates during the Arab Spring and since then throughout the decade (Howard, Duffy, Freelon, Hussain, Mari and Maziad, 2019), although the question remains if the political upheaval occurred as a result of the digital revolution or as a consequent of an array of events that were only intensified by new technologies. It is evident that the impact of these media services was influential in spreading ideas of freedom and democracy to the people, motivating them to take their protests onto the streets, assisting in the planning and organization of demonstrations, communicating with the outside world and contributing to the proliferation of a young generation that has the technical means and social enthusiasm to demand social and political change. The new media landscape allowed the people to spread news and information regarding the uprisings, as opposed to the traditional reporting via mainstream media outlets that dominated and manipulated the news.

Many researches argue that the events that occurred in the Arab Spring provide evidence that social issues have become influential

through social media. Hemple (2016) argues that the result of the political and media changes was that a new style of public debate developed, where ordinary people spread news and information, opposing the traditional mainstream media. This argument is emphasized by Wolsfeld (2017), who argues that the media doesn't initiate policies but intensifies them. Further emphasis of the supportive but not leading role of social media is provided by Abdel Hamid (2011). He explains that social networking is a communications tool, not in itself a triggering event or an underlying cause of revolution. Accordingly, the Middle East uprisings stemmed from the anger of ordinary people, however throughout the Arab World and particularly in Egypt, the protest was initiated by well-educated youth people and not by the poor or by the masses of unemployed. For that reason, overwhelming majority of the population supported the demands of the protests, as political rather than economic grievances were at the forefront of the protesters' demands.

These arguments can explain the role of social media in civil revolutions: it can be regarded as contributing to the development of civic engagement by providing the people with the means to participate as citizens and activists. It can also be regarded as developing activism by encouraging users to join the street protests. Shirky (2011) sees a positive role for social media as a public sphere that can generate offline activism. These characteristics came into play in the Arab Spring, as the people could use social media to plan, communicate and organize after they had joined the demonstrations, thereby reducing mobilization costs. It is evident that specifically in the Arab Spring, which can be defined as the first-ever social media revolution, digital media helped to turn individualized, localized, and community-specific dissent into structured movements with a collective consciousness about both shared grievances and opportunities for action, allowing Arab democratization movements to develop new tactics for catching dictators off guard (Howard and Hussain, 2011). Shirky (2011) and Castells (2015) argue that social media functions as both a public sphere and as a communicative/organizational tool. They claim it was influential in spreading ideas of freedom and democracy to the people of the Middle East, motivating them to take their protests onto the streets, assisting in the planning and organization of demonstrations, communicating the truth to the outside world, and contributing to the generation of social and political change. This is where digital media

took the form of ordinary people by spreading news and information regarding the uprisings, as opposed to the traditional reporting via mainstream media outlets – which totally controlled the information provided to the public. Lynch (2011) suggests that Facebook was effective as a public sphere and Twitter was especially supportive in terms of citizen journalism. According to Shearlaw (2016), social media provided opportunities for organization and protest that traditional methods couldn't achieve. He suggests while that Facebook managed to schedule the protests, Twitter helped to coordinate, and YouTube provided the means to tell the world. Clarke and Kocak (2018), movement recruitment through Facebook helped bring about the protest's significant size and live updating on Twitter facilitated seemingly leaderless protester coordination and movement.

This position is challenged by Fuchs (2012) who argues that this type of analysis does not offer specific evidence that digital media was used to successfully mobilize users to participate in the street protests. He explains that the Egyptian revolution was against capitalism's multidimensional injustices, in which social media were used as a tool of information and organization but were not the cause of the revolution. In examining the Egyptian uprising, it is evident that there were vast numbers of people online and even in poor urban and rural areas people could access the internet through shared connections. Mobile phone use also grew exponentially prior to the uprising, reaching around 80% of the population. However, the uprising in Egypt also proved that online organizing does not automatically bring people onto the streets, while the protesters used a range of different media to communicate with each other and to get their message across. This was demonstrated when censorship was unsuccessful. The Egyptian security forces set up a special unit to monitor internet activists and the Egyptian government reacted quickly and blocked social media sites and mobile phone networks. The blackout did cut off news of the demonstrations and stop protesters communicating with each other, but protest leaders had already agreed to call for demonstrations starting from key mosques and marchers that rallied at Friday prayers before heading for the city centers and key government buildings. Additionally, satellite channels - particularly Al-Jazeera - broadcasted live coverage all day, constantly updated by telephone reports filed from landlines connections by its network of correspondents across Egypt.

Other researched also advocate the triggering role of social media. Alexander (2011) explains that the fact that an internet and mobile phone blockade failed shows clearly that the social movement was not based on the web. Lynch (2017) explains that although social media had a starring role in the Arab uprisings of 2011, it was only one part of the array of political, economic, social, and institutional factors that shaped regional politics. He claims that traditional media and social media evolved together into a complex and interdependent ecosystem, and Al-Jazeera served as a common public sphere for Arabs across the region. Thus, he concludes that social media helped to accelerate and intensify protest movements through the rapid sharing of information that galvanized protesters and helped them organize, but mobilization to protest was only one dimension of the transformative impact of the new media as activists developed new ways to communicate, to challenge state domination over the flow of information and to organize. However, this brings up the question of the actual impact of social media on the events that led to the tremendous political changes in the Arab World. Although these views allow us to challenge the notion that contemporary social movements are a consequence of new media and the internet (Fuchs, 2012), it is impossible to deny that the Internet provided effective and innovative tools that allow social movements to mobilize supporters and to counteract hegemonic media trends (Quijada, 2014). For example, drawing on evidence from the popular protests in Russian Federation of 2011-2014, social media allowed a "digital activists" to form personal networks that initially circumvented the national media narrative by brokering information for outside mainstream media. In addition, social media contributed in the formation of a collective identity supportive of protest activity. However, this internet based social networks failed to produce the results exemplified by Twitter and Facebook revolutions of the Arab Spring and, create an effective impact for regime change in the Russian Federation or make tangible impact on domestic policies (Remmer, 2016).

The Global Impact of the Arab Spring

The phenomenon of social and political revolutions caught the attention of researchers in the wake of the uprisings in the Arab World (Moro, 2016). Since the 2011 Arab Spring research on the role of social

revolutions in the transformation of political power has focused on the way that social media can facilitate the organization and the spread of social movements. The impact of the Arab Spring on global politics was enormous, as social movements have become the most striking feature of the present history of post-social media human society across the world – in terms of frequency, mobilization, popularity and impact (Sen Madhavan, 2016). The events marked the end of the traditional form of social revolution. Fox (2011) argues that the Arab social media uprising changed the world, as digital tools such as YouTube, Twitter and Facebook defined social movements by giving rise to a new generation of activism. Indeed, the uprisings in the Arab World had a long-lasting global effect. After the fall of the authoritarian regimes in 2011, new forms of civic engagement have flourished under the label of "civil society" (Sigillò, 2016). The emergence of this new social activism was developed in a dual process of internal and external networking that furnished the immediate resource-base that was required to support these new social entrepreneurs (Soll, 2016).

The question that arises here is: what was global impact of the Arab uprising on the way social movements and political issues are presented to the world?

The research claims that a triggering factor for social revolution in modern age, which is additional to social and digital media, is global impact. In examining the impact of global media on the turn of events in the Middle East, we can see that with global flow of cultural media products and television content, cultural distinctions have become less powerful than the free flow of information and the spread of global policies (Adsina and Summers (2017). In covering the events that started on Facebook or Twitter, global media focused heavily on young protesters with smartphones mobilizing in the streets in political opposition. The importance of social media was in communicating to the rest of the world, as Twitter and Facebook data informed international audiences and mainstream media reporting (Aday, Farrell, Lynch, Sides and Freelon, 2012). They allowed to speed up information exchange and provide unprecedented waves of spread that changed global citizen behavior and a new vision of democracy where ordinary citizen might be more empowered than ever before (Marzouki, 2012).

Despite the fact that the tremendous political implications were limited to the Arab World, the global implications of the Arab uprising

changed the way people around the world consume information and form political opinions. The events proved that social media can be a triggering factor that can mobilize large groups of people to demand political changes. The demonstrations were inspired by social movements across the Arab World, who used social media to bypass local governments and reach people all over the world on top of old policies and traditional media. The uprisings resulted in long-term political changes and led to new forms of open and democratic governance in the region (Kurtzer-Ellenbogen, 2011). They also changed the public agenda and politics around the world, emphasizing the power of the public and social media in the global political discourse. Brown and Gusking and Mitchell (2012) suggest that the global importance of social media in the Arab uprisings was in communicating to the rest of the world what was happening on the ground during the uprisings.

The Arab Spring resulted in long-term global political changes. It led to new forms of open and democratic governance in the region (Kurtzer-Ellenbogen, 2011). The political changes in the Arab Spring changed the way political issues are presented to the world and had a long-term political implication to the world. Examination of the role of social revolutions in the transformation of political power in the Middle East demonstrates that social media played an instrumental role in the success of the anti-government protests that led to the resignation of dictatorial leaders in Arab countries (Wiest and Eltantawy, 2011). Social media provided the masses the information needed to mobilize social movements and created profound significance for the politics of the region (Dalacoura, 2012). The uprising was organized by activists which used the Internet as a dynamic vehicle to maintain broad based support in the streets. The protests across the Arab world seemed to have appeared from nowhere, organized by Internet activists with a powerful social agenda (Hemple, 2016). As the world had witnessed, the nature of each pro-democracy uprising varied wildly from country to country, and yet they had one defining characteristic in common: social media.

The term Arab Spring became interchangeable with "Twitter uprising" or "Facebook revolution", as global media tried to make sense of what was going on. The demonstrations were inspired by global movements, who used social media to bypass local governments and reach people all over the world on top of old policies and traditional

media (Shearlaw, 2016). The impact of the uprising was huge: the world was thrown into the chaos of social movements through online activity, as millions of tweets on Twitter, hundreds of hours of YouTube and countless posts on Facebook told stories of the revolution from citizens who needed to get their voices heard. Social media was critical in the spreading of revolutionary messages and posed a serious challenge traditional to policies (Lynch, 2011).

Following that, the turmoil in the Middle East continued with the Israeli Social Justice movement of summer 2011, which was identified as a "social media revolution". It began as a private initiative on Facebook and turned into an unprecedented wave of socio-economic protest featuring tent encampments and mass rallies. Hundreds of thousands took to the streets calling for "social justice", following the Arab Spring and associated too with the impact of social media – bypassing the traditional media and turning directly and without filters to the government (Schejter and Tirosh, 2015).

The role of the Internet in the Arab Spring demonstrates the impact of technology and social movements on politics (Marzouki, 2012). It also provides an evidence to the impact of technology and global media on the media landscape in the Middle East. The revolution provided the initial and most important impact of the Internet on social movements worldwide, and the growth of social media usage changed the way in which governments interact with societies in the region (Mourtada and Salem, 2012). The demonstrations throughout the Arab World demonstrated that the days of government-sponsored or politically allied newspapers having a media monopoly have been eclipsed by the advent and adoption of social media. Social networks informed, mobilized and created new communities – which were not limited to geographical differences. Social media increased transparency and allowed ordinary citizens to hold governments accountable (Dalacoura, 2012). Digital media allowed democratization movements to develop new tactics for catching dictators off guard (Howard and Hussain, 2011). The true impact of social networks was evident in the number of Facebook users, which increased significantly in most Arab countries during the first three months of the Arab Spring. The most notable increase was in the countries where protests have taken place. Twitter usage in the Arab world grew throughout 2011 as well, both in terms of the number of users and the volume of tweets they generated (Mourtada and Salem, 2012). In the last decade,

social media is an integral part of the daily lives of the people all over the world, and people in the Middle East are today the most frequent users of social media, according to a study by the Pew Research Center (2017). The impact of social media has grown consistently in the Arab World and the median percentage of social media use in the Middle East is significantly higher than the global average (Massimilliano, Donatella and Sanders, 2018).

There is no doubt that the Arab Spring had a global impact, although the extent of this impact is still to be seen. Assburg and Wimmen (2015) argue that substantial change occurred in the composition of actors involved in political decision making and agenda setting and in relations between them. Idowu and Oladiti (2016) claim that although the Arab Spring was not a unified revolution but a series of national uprisings in response to regional intra-national socio-economic grievances, it attributed to globalization by spreading ideas of modern democracy and human rights. According to Beissinger (2017), Arab politics changed as non-democracies witnessed the rapid growth of social media that became the vehicle for civic activism. As a result, we can see the extent of the social and political changes, as Arab people have become exposed to global influence and Arab governments are no longer in full control of the information that is provided to and consumed by their people. The impact of the social revolution is significant since Arab countries today have well-educated and politically active young population but with few employment opportunities (Riise, 2019) and the emergence of a new generation of websites and social networks allows them to find new areas of communication (Iribarren, 2019). As a result, today people in the Middle East are the most frequent users of social media, according to a study by the Pew Research Center (2017). The use of the Internet and social media in the Middle East is significantly higher than the global average (Massimilliano, Donatella and Sanders, 2018) and people in the Arab world can influence global political issues by bypassing the monopoly of the political establishment and traditional media on the political discourse (Simons, 2018).

The Second Wave of Social Revolution

In order to understand the magnitude impact of social media on the politics of the Arab World since 2011, it needs to be explained that the

2011 revolution developed despite extreme limitations on free speech and on top of the traditional media and governments, through social media. The Arab Spring was based on the desire for democracy and resulted from protests and revolutions that spread across Muslim countries with limited freedom of speech and lack of representative government institutions (Mourtada, Racha and Salem, 2012). Arab societies had limited channels for interactions, with no real civil society, limited media freedom and a lack of representative government institutions - and in this environment Arab people could not discuss social and political issues that were forbidden by their governments (Shirky, 2011). Social media contributed to the development of civic engagement mainly in Tunisia and Egypt by providing the people with the means to participate in the uprising and join the street protests. It had a global effect, as the uprising was transformed into other Arab countries (for example: Dalacoura, 2012; Howard and Hussain, 2011).

The political changes in the Middle East can be explained in the way that social media forced changes in the traditional policies of the mainstream media and Arab governments. Although independence and autonomy from political power are core values among professional journalists in most western societies, research has shown that news media organizations rely heavily on official actors for the construction of news (Shehata, 2010). Levi (2014) claims that although free speech has become essential and a fundamental right, traditional media have a long history of being closely associated with government interests. The impact of global media and social networks forced changes in the policy of governments (Ahren, 2016), as new technology and social developments created a new reality of media dominance of global issues. New media informed international audiences and mainstream media reporting around the world (Aday, Farrell, Lynch, Sides and Freelon, 2012) and changed the way modern civil revolutions develop.

Looking at the impact of social media and global politics in the decade that followed the Arab Spring, significant changes in the balance of power of social forces and political regimes are apparent. The latter part of the second decade of the 21st Century brought a second social revolution that called for social reforms in the Arab World. Nevertheless, although this revolution was spread and influenced by global media, its impact on the Arab World was limited. The Yellow Vest demonstrations started in 2018 in France, ceased off and then continued in 2019. This revolution started with social media and had

social goals – but had not succeeded to breakthrough into the Arab World, with the result that things were different in 2018 than they were in 2011. Whereas the uprisings in the Arab World were connected to social media and had global impact, and despite unprecedented technical advancement compared to 2011 - the 2018 uprising did not start in the Arab World. It started in France, and despite the leading role and accessibility of global media (which was much more influential than seven years ago) – the uprisings remained local (in France) and could not breakthrough into other parts of the world, especially not the Arab World.

The 2018 wave of revolution started with social media. After an online petition posted attracted nearly a million signatures, mass demonstrations began in France. The movement was motivated by rising prices, a high cost of living and claims that tax reforms did not benefit the working and middle classes. The French Yellow Vest movement began as a protest an increased fuel tax and evolved into a broader stance against President Emmanuel Macron's economic policies. The same as in the Arab Spring of 2011, although the revolutionary movement was spread by social media, it was not until demonstrators went out to the streets that the movement started to influence. And yet, different from 2011 in the Arab World, its impact in France was insignificant and did not shake the political leadership. For about 6 months, tens of thousands of people wearing yellow vests demonstrated across France, blocking highways and clashing with security forces. The high-visibility security jackets that became emblematic of the movement stem from the ones French motorists must always carry in their vehicles. It was sparked by the French government's decision to increase fuel taxes and continued into wide scale protests the rising cost of living. The protest was fuelled by often-violent protests and did not vanish until President Macron announced a package of measures to lower taxes. But the revolutionary movement could not develop into a global revolution. Despite attempts to rerun the 2011 revolution in 2018 too, and although the Internet is much more developed and influential today in the Arab World than almost a decade ago – this social revolution failed to make significant impact in the Arab World.

The question asked here is: what was the different role of social media and global impact in the second wave of Arab upheaval?

To answer this question, we must look at the different social and digital environment at the start and at end of the century. The earlier upheaval started from the people against the will of governments while the latest revolution was supplemented by political changes encouraged by governments, which seek to advance their competitive position in the global environment through he uses of social and digital media. The 2018 demonstrations demonstrated that the impact of the Internet is turning from developed to developing countries and social media can facilitate social and political changes in countries that have traditionally been underdeveloped, mainly in North Africa and the Arab World.

The most transcendent difference is that countries changed dramatically in less than 10 years, and so has global politics. A major difference between the two civil protests is in the impact of social media on global issues. The 2011 social media revolution was determined by profound changes in most Arab countries. The Arab Spring was the first- time social media was used to get a political message out (Brown, Guskin and Mitchell, 2016), after young educated Muslims did not trust their political institutions. With the Internet, the world could see what was truly going on under military or dictatorship regimes. Politics changed as non-democracies have witnessed the rapid growth of new social media that have become vehicles for civic activism. In contrast, the 2018 protests were organized by social goals in a modern democracy. Demonstrators in the Arab World were inspired by the events in France and demanded economic reforms, but the protests could not maintain the momentum necessary to have a long-term impact in the region as they lacked the triggering factors necessary for a civil revolution to flourish.

Both Arab Spring and Yellow Vest movements were spontaneous and motivated by the mass without a pre-organized leadership. They both gained momentum without any government consent - in fact by bypassing the rule of governments, but the nature of the protests differed in all that relates to the Arab World. The Arab Spring was a political protest old regime that ruled for over a century, while the Yellow Vests movement was based on social demands which did not match the goals of Arab revolutionaries and thus did not receive global support.

The unsuccessful revolution of 2018 can also be attributed to the global involvement in the Middle East, led by the United States,

which supports Israel, Saudi Arabia and Egypt and is military involved in Iraq, Syria and the United Arab Emirates (Riise, 2019). With the geo-political changes that identify the Middle East, Israel and Arab nations face a radically altered landscape and many of the old political notions no longer apply. The new regional geopolitical rivalries in the Middle East have implications for the world, with forces greater than local interests of local social and political changes (Geranmayeh. 2018). In 2013, President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi asked for Israel's assistance in his war against terrorism in Sinai, by obtaining permission to increase the Egyptian military force in Sinai, exchanging intelligence information and using Israeli drones. Jordan was also assisted by Israel in various ways to confront internal and external threats. Following that, the nuclear agreement with Iran, signed by the permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany in July 2015, during Obama's presidency, encouraged alliance between Israel and the Sunni Arab states (Podeh, 2018). The relationship between Israel and Sunni Islamic nations led by Saudi Arabia is based on the conflict with the Islam's Shiites led by Iran. Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and other countries in the Gulf now look to Israel as a powerful supporter in the confrontation with Iran (Bahar, 2018). These ties have dramatically improved due to the shared security interest of neutralizing Iran's expansion and potential nuclear development (Geranmayeh, 2018). The Trump administration started a significant policy change toward Saudi Arabia and Egypt and established increased alliance between Israel and the Sunni Arab states (Hilala, 2019). Israeli's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told on June 9, 2018, during speech at American Jewish Committee Global Forum that Israel's relations with Arab nations were "improving beyond imagination". He predicted that "this will ultimately help achieve peace with our Palestinians neighbors."

The research concludes that the role of social media is far greater than the social issues that triggered the upheaval. The further impact the new geo-political era in the Middle East means that the old political notions related to the old Arab-Israeli conflict no longer apply (Bahar, 2018). It is the impact of social media that allowed the people in the Arab World to turn from dealing with the military conflict with Israel to concentrating on social and economic issues.

This process has accelerated into global dimensions. With the globalization of politics and the political changes in the Arab World that resulted from the social revolution, the relationship between Israel and

many of the Arab states are based on global and economic interests rather than military and religious conflicts.

Conclusion

The main question examined in this paper is: what has been the real role of social media in the social and political changes in the Middle East – is it still the main vehicle for the civil movements or simply an online tool that only escalates social and political developments through new technological means? Looking at the social revolution that commenced in 2011 – the Arab Spring, and the events that occurred then, we can see that the role of social media in dealing with social revolutions and political issues is a topic that has received a great deal of scholarly attention, especially with the advent of the digital media that bypass limitation on freedom of speech. This is particularly since the effects of social media on political participation and social movements can provide triggering factor to start a popular uprising. This was evident in 2011, as the triggering factors in the popular uprising were social media and global impact, which allowed the civil demonstrations to spread across the Middle East and North Africa, creating a global movement.

The research also examines the global impact of the Arab uprising on the way social movements and political issues are presented to the world. Although there can be no debate that global media and social networks forced changes in the traditional policies of governments in the Middle East, the question remains whether social revolutions could continue to enforce political changes to a region that has long been plagued by authoritarianism. The research examines the different role of social media and global impact in the second wave of Arab upheaval, which occurred in the Yellow Vest movement in 2018, advocating that the triggering factors that had been in play during the 2011 Arab Spring are still vital today. Arab countries have well-educated with a politically active young population but with few employment opportunities and the emergence of a new generation of websites and social networks allows ordinary citizens to find new areas of communication. People in the Middle East are among the most frequent users of social media, according to a study by the Pew Research Center (2017) and can also influence global political issues by

bypassing the monopoly of the political establishment and traditional media on the political discourse.

The Arab Spring resulted in long-term global political changes, although the unsuccessful second wave of social revolutions in the Arab World proves that the triggering factors of social media and global impact did not support the social and political aspirations of the people. The Yellow Vest movement of 2018 was based on social demands for modern democracy and human rights which did not match the goals of Arab revolutionaries and did not receive global support. This leads to the conclusion that civil revolutions need to operate today in a different digital and global environment, as the impact of the Internet is turning from developed to developing countries. This conclusion demonstrates the changing role of governments in social media and their ability to coordinate social demonstrations. Thus, Freedom House (2019) suggests that innovative alternatives to state-controlled media can spring up on social media and policymakers in democratic nations should support social media as an alternative outlet for free expression in repressive environments.

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