

## **Social Media, American Interests, and the Arab Spring**

**Abstract:** The events of the Arab Spring that began in 2010 changed the political face of many countries, including Egypt and Tunisia. The role the Internet played in fomenting activism against authoritarian governments on the Arabian Peninsula has been explored at length in popular media in both the West and the East, with various reports either overstating or underrating its importance. The contribution of the Internet to the events of the Arab Spring has led to support of the idea that open access and a free Internet is necessarily a force for good. This paper contests that idea, exploring examples that highlight the dangers in believing it. The ability of social media to quickly reach large audiences and allow them to contribute information influenced the quick spread of the Arab Spring, but this was only a feature of the uprisings, and not the cause of them.

**About the Author:** A native of Edmonton, Alberta, Jordan Cook completed her Bachelor of Arts at the University of Alberta before moving to Halifax to pursue her Master of Library and Information Studies (MLIS) at Dalhousie University. This paper developed from her interest in the use of Social Media as a facilitator of social change. It was originally written for the Information in Society course from the School of Information Management at Dalhousie University. Email address: [Jordan.cook@dal.ca](mailto:Jordan.cook@dal.ca)

## Introduction

Much has been made of the role of social media and the Internet in fostering democracy. Because social media sites are open access, they are said to promote freedom, and because much of their content is user-generated, they are supposed to encourage participation and interaction (Bratich, 2011). The Internet is said, in its purest form, to be democratic. That is, that any amount or type of information is available through it to whomever uses it. Due to this, it is claimed that its existence and use will facilitate political movements to democracy. This is the rhetoric that pervades a lot of Western thinking on the events of the Arab Spring. The role the Internet played in fomenting activism against authoritarian governments on the Arabian Peninsula has been explored at length. Popular media reports either overstate or underrate its importance in both the West and the East. The assumed and actual effects of the Internet and various social media sites including blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube on the occurrence of the Arab Spring are undeniably important. For example, in the week before Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak resigned, the total rate of tweets from and about Egypt went from 2,300 per day to 23,000 per day (O'Donnell, 2011). Similarly, studies show that twenty percent of Tunisian blogs were discussing "revolution" in the days leading up to the power change in that country (O'Donnell, 2011). These sites provided means of communication and information dissemination, which assisted uprisings in various ways explored here. They are not, however, the reason for the rebellions, and their effect, while significant, should not be overstated. In this paper, the concentration and the examples given will focus on the events that occurred in Tunisia and Egypt. The role of the Internet in the Arab Spring has led to support of the idea that open access and a free Internet is necessarily a force for good, and perpetually supported by the Western world. However, I contest and problematize this theory with reference to Evgeny Morozov's book *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*. Ultimately, though the Internet and social media sites have rallied people in the Arab world and provided them with the means to overthrow their dictators, the Internet does not necessitate democratization, and to believe it does can be a dangerous overstatement.

## Discussion

Social media sites are gaining popularity all over the world as we move to an increasingly networked and online society. The role that these tools of communication and connection play in people's lives and the way people interact with each other is new and interesting. This means social media sites are being explored and analysed by academics, reporters, etc. When the events and activities of social media sites play a role in are significant political movements, the analysis and examination of social media becomes even more intense. This is evident in the numerous articles and reports that surround the role of social media in the events of the Arab Spring. Many of these reports propounded sites like Twitter and Facebook as catalysts of revolutions and social change. As Clay Shirky claims in his article "The Political Power of Social Media," "Internet freedom helps to advance civil society in the long run..." (2011). His

argument is that free access to the Internet is a force for freedom. The information and communication tools available through the Internet are supposed to inspire political change, improve societies, and encourage democracy. However, the idea that access to information via the Internet will create better, more democratic societies is effectively disputed by an ever-growing number of people, as will be discussed below. Yet it is naïve and incorrect to declare that the Internet cannot play a role in producing change in the world. The events of the Arab Spring show how social media and Internet communication can facilitate political movements and activism.

Social media sites are important platforms for distinct forms of communication. They allow users to interact with information, sometimes providing it and sometimes receiving it. Users can talk to each other, share images and video, and create groups and events. Essentially, these sites merge aspects of other communication tools, like the telephone or the television, which can make the ideas expressed more effective. Ed Schipul and Daniel Keeney explore five different roles played by social media in their article, “War of Words: Social Media’s Role in Provoking Revolutionary Change.” These are: 1. Findability: users can locate others who share their interests easily and regardless of where they are physically located. 2. Education: information that people otherwise would never obtain is readily available. 3. Exposure: by seeing the energy and outrage of others, users can be inspired to take their own action. With how quickly a video or photograph can be made public on the Internet, it is difficult for governments to censor or respond effectively in the same short period of time. 4. Expansion: online networks multiply the number of people who are exposed to the news, images, and ideas being shared. 5. Virtuality: leaders of movements can effectively guide activities, even from outside the country (Schipul and Keeney, 2011). The role of social media can certainly be exaggerated, but there can also be genuine effects for individuals and groups using the technologies available to communicate, gather, and plan.

Despite this fact, many Western news sources, including the *BBC* and the *Globe and Mail*, have touted Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, etc. as not just facilitators of activism, but rather as largely responsible for the revolutionary activity in the Middle East. There are a few explanations for this. The online portals that were employed by activists are American companies. By highlighting the websites themselves as tools of liberation, rather than the people involved, Americans can feel as though they contributed to the uprisings. As Morozov asserts, “After all, the argument goes, such a spontaneous uprising wouldn’t have succeeded before Facebook was around – so Silicon Valley deserves a lion’s share of the credit. If, of course, the uprising was not spontaneous and its leaders chose Facebook simply because that’s where everybody is, it’s a far less glamorous story” (2011a). Foregrounding the role of American companies in not only promoting, but creating freedom in countries where the people are oppressed is a self-congratulatory way of reporting on the important events that occurred in places like Egypt and Tunisia. The idea that social media sites are more than mere communication tools or entertainment also helps justify use of the sites by Westerners.

Morozov also explains this idea: “Perhaps the outsize revolutionary claims for social media now circulating throughout the west are only a manifestation of western guilt for wasting so much time on social media” (2011a). This does not simply mean that people feel justified in chatting to their friends, or playing “Farmville,” as Morozov claims. It profoundly affects the way people feel about the interactions they have on sites like Facebook, allowing them to feel as though they are activists and part of a cause when joining a group or “liking” a page. This sense of inclusion is an important result of social media sites’ relation to political causes for Westerners and those in the Arab world.

John Alterman states in his essay, “The Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted,” “while there has been considerable concentration on the role social media played in allowing people to receive content, analysts have not placed enough emphasis on the importance of social media’s enabling people to send content, transforming them from observers of activism to activists themselves with a greater stake as leaders, not just followers, of unfolding events” (2011, p. 104). Joining a Facebook group or writing a blog post is not the same level of protest behaviour as physical action in support of a cause. However, content creation is a form of participation, and those that contribute in this way feel a strong stake in the movement. Thus, social media represents a “lowering of the bar” (Morozov, 2011b), allowing people to join a movement without even using their real names. Learning from and contributing to the online aspect of the movement encourages people to view themselves as activists, giving them a sense of inclusion which can potentially lead to increased involvement in the future.

One of the Facebook groups that garnered attention during the uprisings in Egypt was “We Are All Kahled Said.” Started by Google executive Wael Ghonim, the group honoured the blogger Kahled Said who was beaten to death by two Alexandrian police officers. The name of the group provides an excellent example of the type of activism people on the Internet see themselves engaged in. “We Are All Kahled Said” signifies the fact that since one blogger met with violence and police brutality, all users of social media could meet the same fate, and thus, symbolically did. The name fosters a sense of community and a personal relation to the death of someone whom the majority of members did not know. If one blogger is victimized, all are, and thus all users need to join together to protest about Kahled Said’s death. Yet how much of a role did this group play in the uprisings in Egypt? As Schipul and Keeney point out in their article, at the time of the uprising the We Are All Khaled Said group had approximately 61, 000 members and many of these were from outside Egypt. In a country of 84 million people, this number does not initially seem significant (2011). The group planned a protest for Police Day, January 25, and via Facebook “they encouraged people to attend, posted appropriate chants, and hoped for the best” (Alterman, 2011, p. 110). Yet, out of all of their followers, they were only able to draw a few hundred protestors out that day. Alterman states, “What turned out to make all the difference was going to poor neighborhoods and raising economic grievances” (2011, p. 110). Ultimately, the major influence on people’s participation was not social media, but rather appealing to people face-to-face about other socio-economic issues. Yet this fact

does not diminish the role of social media in this protest. Rather, it demonstrates more precisely the way in which social media functioned at the time of the uprising. This example shows that “Facebook, Twitter, and other social tools may have been instrumental in helping the movement gain critical mass among a relatively small and highly connected segment of the population.” (Schipul and Keeney, 2011). Social media may not have been directly responsible for getting large numbers of protestors out, but those that it did get out were motivated and informed. This allowed them to attract other people, inspiring and motivating them to action, and thus aggregating the protest. Rather than being the sole catalyst, it was the initial one, which brought out people who could encourage others to join in the movement.

A profound effect of Twitter and Facebook in the Arab Spring was that their use engaged a Western audience. While this engagement may not have translated into physical involvement in most cases, the knowledge of an international audience of their struggles and protests was inspirational to many. Peter Beaumont’s article in the *Guardian* quotes two Tunisian girls taking photos with their phones. When asked what they were taking pictures of, they replied: “Ourselves. Our revolution. We put in on Facebook. It’s how we tell the world what’s happening” (2011). Being able to share the events occurring in the country was how these girls were empowered to take part in the uprisings. The tweeting that surrounded the movements was particularly effective in engaging a large international audience, since Twitter is almost exclusively in English, while many other social sites, like Facebook, are not. The profound resonance of the Arabian uprisings with Twitter users was proven when the BBC released the most popular Twitter trends of 2011, and #Egypt was the top trend (“Twitter’s top,” 2011).

In an article for the *Guardian*, Beaumont states that in Tunisia, while Twitter was used by a few people to communicate events, particularly to an outside audience, Facebook was a larger factor in the revolutionary activities occurring within the country. He declares, “In a state where the media were tightly controlled and the opposition ruthlessly discouraged, Tunisia not only exercised a tight monopoly on Internet provision but blocked access to most social networking sites – except Facebook” (2011). With Facebook available to the people of Tunisia, they could share information quickly and efficiently. Beaumont quotes Khaled Koubaa, president of the Internet Society in Tunisia: “Social media was absolutely crucial...[t]hree months before Mohammed Bouazizi burned himself in Sidi Bouzid we had a similar case in Monastir. But no one knew about it because it was not filmed. What made a difference this time is that the images of Bouazizi were put on Facebook and everybody saw it” (2011). Koubaa is referring to Mohammed Bouazizi, the street vendor who set himself on fire to protest his mistreatment at the hands of police and the government. This act is considered the catalyst for both the Tunisian revolution and the wider Arab Spring. The ability to share images and information about the self-immolation of Bouazizi at such an aggregation was not the reason for the uprising in Tunisia, but seeing the images via social media affected the way people reacted to the information, inspiring many to action of their own. Beaumont (2011) asserts that in Egypt, the citizens were even more connected than in Tunisia, and both Twitter and Facebook were

employed by the people to organise gatherings, disseminate information, and connect with supporters. However, the government shut down Internet access across the country for days, though the protests still occurred and the movement did not stop. This indicates that while social media is a significant source of information and means of communication, its role in protest should not be overstated.

Much has been made of the unreliability of information found on the Internet. Since data, articles, and pictures found on social media sites can be posted anonymously by anyone, regardless of their qualifications or intentions, it is impossible to guarantee their veracity. In his article, "The Revolution Will Be Tweeted", Blake Hounshell provides readers with a list of the best, most trustworthy Twitter feeds coming out of the Arab Spring. His list is composed almost entirely of "old media" news reporters who tweeted the latest information they received and that would later be vetted, analysed, and synthesized for their official news reports (2011). Hounshell's foregrounding of Tweets produced by already established news reporters, not Arab activists, is an indication of the unreliability of information found on social media sites. Yet in countries under oppressive regimes, the mainstream news is an even less reliable source of information for people. In the *Guardian* article, "The Truth about Twitter, Facebook, and the Uprisings in the Arab World," Tunisian citizen Nouridine Bhourri explains: "We still don't believe the news and television... I research what's happening on Facebook and the Internet" (Beaumont, 2011). This is another example where Facebook is more popular than Twitter for protestors and activists within the Arab world. On Facebook, they can learn about events from their friends and friends-of-friends, as this is a more dependable source when official channels cease to be trusted. In this way, the social aspect of social media sites becomes a significant way of verifying information.

These media encourage and highlight social relationships and therefore, they are an effective tool for encouraging activism among those who use these sites. Part of Alterman's sociological theory is that: "Building individual ties to other activists makes one's ideas conform more closely to those of the activists" (2011, p. 112). By making connections to other advocates of social change, an individual is inspired to become more involved and more active in promoting social change. The social aspect of sites, particularly in the example of Facebook, increases the effectiveness of the information retrieved therein to incite action. These sites create virtual communities among people that share common interests, a place where they can inspire and influence each other to take certain action. When people access their news through these sites, they are not simply receiving information on current events, they are receiving community news and they are inspired to take action when other members of their community do. The fostering of a sense of community on a national level is one way social media managed to quickly aggregate unrest and dissent on such a large scale.

One of the most important roles of social media in the uprisings was that it provided its users with the means to access traditional media: television. Pan-Arab news sources like Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya, unlike national news sources, were independent from the control of

governments in countries like Tunisia and Egypt. Al Jazeera is known as a platform for dissenting voices due to its editorial style (Pintak, 2011). Alterman also argues that Al Jazeera played a larger role in the uprisings than simply reporting the news: “Through its words and images, Al-Jazeera and many of the other stations sanctified and validated those protests as revolutionary when they were still in their early days” (2011, p. 110). Viewers seeing the actions of protestors and the demonstrations they took part in on television, lent significance and seriousness to the movement as it was beginning. “In this way, television helped to frame and give meaning to the events in Tahrir Square (and simultaneously in Alexandria and elsewhere), legitimizing public participation and giving it an air of support that it did not yet enjoy” (Alterman, 2011, p. 110). When governments scrambled satellite coordinates in an attempt to shut down this important news source, many people used social media platforms to publish new ways to access Al Jazeera (Alterman, 2011, p. 111). Alterman states, “It was not Twitter and Facebook, but television that was absolutely fundamental to the unfolding of events, playing a decisive role in expanding protests of thousands into protests of millions” (2011, p. 103). Yet without the disclosure of new ways to reach this media via the Internet, access to this important source of information and the force for change would have been limited and its effect would not have been nearly so extensive.

“Old media” like Al Jazeera was influenced by “new media” like Twitter, Facebook, and blogs in another significant way: new media is where Al Jazeera obtained much of the material it broadcast. To a large extent, social media provided television networks with continuous up-to-the-minute coverage of the revolution (Alterman, 2011). While access to television was still more widespread and its scope more influential, the images, videos, and information uploaded to the Internet actually supplied the television networks with content. Taking the raw content found on the Internet, more traditional news sources are able to verify it and then project it in a way that ensures its credibility. Hounshell explains, “Networks like Al Jazeera and the BBC have developed rigorous checklists for vetting information they get from online sources, from contacting eyewitnesses over Skype, to authenticating regional dialects and checking new images and videos against verified geocoded ones” (2011). In this way, traditional news media can use the information found online in their news reports and be confident of its legitimacy. The immediacy of the Internet is augmented by the accuracy of television, and together they can work to facilitate revolutions.

The interpretation of information from users of social media by the mainstream media is dependent on management choices. In the case of the Arab Spring, networks like Al Jazeera chose to broadcast the images and data they received from these sources in a way that highlighted the activism, which facilitated the growth of the movement. Sites like Twitter and Facebook are an important source of near-instantaneous information. Yet the large quantity of data and news from social sites “generates substantial noise that must be filtered in order to detect meaningful patterns and trends” (Kavanaugh et al., 2012). Stations like Al Jazeera

managed the overwhelming amount of information found on social media sites and presented it in a meaningful context to support a growing movement.

The type of information made available through the Internet contributed to the factors that led to the protests and inspired people to activism, well before any actual gatherings or demonstrations began. The Internet, including blogs, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, played an important role in showcasing the abuses of power that were occurring in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, etc. Philip N. Howard and Muzammil M. Hussain assert this in their essay “The Role of Digital Media”: “For years, the most direct accusations of political corruption had come from the blogosphere...Most famous is the YouTube video showing Tunisia's presidential jet on runways near exclusive European shopping destinations, with onscreen graphics specifying dates and places and asking who was using the aircraft (the suggestion being that it was Ben Ali's high-living wife)” (2011). Unsanctioned information posted to the Internet is a form of dissent exposes corruption and abuse by governments to citizens. Despite crackdowns on many of the known social media sites, “bloggers and activists pushed on, producing alternative online newscasts, creating virtual spaces for anonymous political discussions, and commiserating with fellow citizens about state persecution” (Howard and Hussain, 2011). The technology used enabled activists to find new ways of ensuring their message got out to the public, and the combination of images and video with discussion and shared experiences was an important factor in fomenting activism and revolutionary ideas in Tunisia and other countries in the Arab peninsula.

Even if these discussions do not lead to an overthrow of the government in power, they can contribute to improving the lives of citizens. Morozov explores this idea in his book, *The Net Delusion*: “The proliferation of... online initiatives may not always be terrifically effective from a policy-planning perspective – charges of slacktivism are inevitable – but the real contribution of Facebook groups to the democratization of Morocco may lie in pushing the boundaries of what can and cannot be said in this conservative society rather than mobilizing street protests” (2011b, p. 212). Though he uses Morocco as his example, the idea could just as easily be applied to the nations affected by the Arab Spring. His claim is that discussions about social media sites might have the power to open up a dialogue or discussion about issues that otherwise might be silenced. Morozov is quick to qualify this statement by stating that what is true in one (socially conservative) country may not be in another (more open) one (2011b, p. 212). Ultimately though, for countries on the Arabian Peninsula under tight social and political control, opening dialogues and increasing openness are both an important effect of Internet communication.

It is naïve and dangerous to assume that openness and access to information via the Internet necessitates democracy. “[The Internet] penetrates and reshapes all walks of political life, not just the ones conducive to democratization” (Morozov, 2011b, p. xvii). That is, people turned to the Internet during the Arab Spring to communicate, share, and view anti-authoritarian information and beliefs, others can just as easily use it to share information to incite hatred or



publish propaganda. This is especially true since, “All by itself the Internet provides nothing certain. In fact, as has become obvious in too many contexts, it empowers the strong and disempowers the weak. It is impossible to place the Internet at the heart of the enterprise of democracy promotion without risking the success of that very enterprise” (Morozov, 2011b, p. xvi-xvii). The Internet is a tool for communication, and does not possess inherent qualities for good. Instead, the people that use it, and their views and intentions, are the factors that determine the effects of the Internet.

Exploring and analysing the ways in which social media has contributed to changing the course of the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt provides important insight into ways social media sites can facilitate democratic movements. This does not necessarily mean, however, that the movements are democratizing the nations in which they take place; it is still too early to tell what new governments will arise now that the old regimes have been overthrown. So while these movements were originally aided by the Internet, its use does not guarantee a positive outcome. This is because, while the Internet played a largely positive role in the Arab uprisings, it is not itself inherently good. As Adam Gopnik so eloquently states, “Thoughts are bigger than the things that deliver them” (2011, p.10). Thus, the Arab Spring was positively affected by technology, but not caused by it and, as these countries move forward from revolt; this technology has as much potential to do harm as to do good.

The events of the Arab Spring show what happens when social media is used effectively towards a greater good, and also what happens when this tool is used in line with American interests. When this is the case, the United States is vocal in their support of these social media sites. The United States has proclaimed its support of complete Internet freedom and total Internet access in the face of censorship in many countries around the world. In her speech quoted in *The Net Delusion*, Hillary Clinton declares: “we stand for a single internet where all of humanity has equal access to knowledge and ideas... the Internet can push back against those who promote violence and crime and extremism” (Morozov, 2011b, p. 232). Yet, this position on Internet freedom often seems to be empty rhetoric. Morozov draws attention to many cases where the Internet and, in particular, social media websites, are being targeted by the US government for their potential to facilitate crime. The US government are supportive of social media sites being used to incite civil unrest in other countries, but not when these instances occur in their own. While the world was paying attention to the events occurring in the Middle East, including the activists being arrested in Iran, most Western observers were unconcerned “when the New York Police Department went after and arrested Elliot Madison, a forty-one-year-old American activist from Queens who used Twitter to help protestors against the G20 summit in Pittsburgh evade the police” (Morozov, 2011b, p. 220). This suggests that while the United States promotes Internet freedom and the use of social media as tools for revolution elsewhere, it criminalises this use in its own country.

America’s very vocal support for social media sites as agents for anti-government activity is more than hypocritical, it is counter-productive. First, it brings excessive attention to

contributors and creators of antigovernment content in non-democratic countries. This increases the persecution of bloggers and Internet users, and causes the introduction of harsher laws against Internet activity. Secondly, it convinces non-democratic countries that they should “keep tight control over the Internet, not only because they fear their citizens may discover the real state of affairs in their countries, but also because they believe that the Internet is America’s favourite tool of starting antigovernment rebellions” (Morozov, 2011b, p. 234). If the United States encourages or supports social agitation in other countries via the Internet, this is just one more reason for those countries to control their citizens’ access to it. This belief means that any of the positive effects of social media mentioned earlier in this paper, such as exposure of power-abuse and opening dialogues, are being prevented because of fear that social media can be used to explicitly promote civil unrest. This is not the only way American involvement in the Internet usage of other countries can stand in the way of the potential of the Internet to be used for freedom.

A major issue with promoting the Internet as a force for freedom is that the websites employed by users to upload content and disseminate information are owned and operated by private American corporations. By giving instances where Facebook has deleted political groups’ pages, Morozov illustrates this problem. He states, “What is clear is that, contrary to the expectations of Western policymakers, Facebook is hardly ideal for promoting democracy; its own logic, driven by profits or ignorance of the increasingly global context in which it operates, is, at times, extremely antidemocratic” (2011b, p. 213). Facebook is a private American business that has its own aims, beliefs, and values. Depending on private corporations to mediate and serve as a platform for international communication and dissent is inherently flawed: private companies can be impartial and independent of crises, but they certainly, legally, don’t have to be.

In addition to the issues of privately owned corporations serving as a platform for political dissent, the dominance of American companies also dangerously reflects the dominance of American interests. The control America has over the software, hardware, and web-based services industry (Morozov, 2011b, p. 236) means that other countries are fearful for the sovereignty of their information. “Many governments are only now beginning to realise how tightly their own communication systems are tied to American infrastructure” (Morozov, 2011b, p. 236). Thus, it is justifiable to worry that American control over the information and communication systems available through the Internet can translate into control over the content of those communications.

## **Conclusion**

Censorship, control, and ownership are important issues surrounding the Internet and its popular social sites. Often American values are propounded, while American interests are pursued. Believing that open access necessitates a more open society is problematic and flawed. The Internet can facilitate increased communication, sharing of ideas, and the

convergence of like-minded individuals, as was the case in the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt. However, as Laurie Penny states, “The Internet is a useful tool, but it is just a tool. HTML does not cause mass uprisings...” (2011). The use of Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and blogs in Egypt and Tunisia allowed activists to come together quickly, promoting their cause to a large number of people that often, in turn, became activists themselves. While the ability of social media to reach large audiences in short periods allows them to not only view information, but contribute to it, influenced the quick spread of the Arab Spring, although this was a feature of the uprisings rather than the cause of them.

When managed correctly, social media was a tool in fomenting activism in the Arab Spring, and this tool can continue to be useful in engaging citizens after the uprisings. As Kavanaugh et al. argue, “The capabilities to facilitate interpersonal and group interaction provide new and unique opportunities for community leaders, elected officials, and government service providers to inform, and be informed by, the citizenry” (2012). The features of social media sites that made them so important to those striving for social change can be useful to governments trying to connect to and interact with the public. The emphasis needs to be on appropriate management of this tool, to enable governments to be pro-active in their response to citizens, leading to greater political efficacy and public trust. It can also provide citizens greater access to information, leading to increased awareness and civic participation (Kavanaugh et al., 2012). In the aftermath of unrest, it is important that countries like Tunisia and Egypt implement social media policies that allow them to successfully address the needs of citizens.

## References

- Alterman, J. B. (2011). The revolution will not be Tweeted. *Washington Quarterly*, 34(4), 103-116.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2011.610714>
- Beaumont, P. (2011, February 25). The truth about Twitter, Facebook and the uprisings in the Arab world. *Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk>
- Bratich, J. (2011). User-generated discontent. *Cultural Studies*, 25(4/5), 621-640.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2011.600552>
- Morozov, E. (2011a, March 7). Facebook and Twitter are just places revolutionaries go. *Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk>
- Morozov, E. (2011b). *The net delusion: The dark side of internet freedom*. New York: Public Affairs.
- Gladwell, M. (2011, February 2). Does Egypt need Twitter? *The New Yorker*. Retrieved from <http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/newsdesk/2011/02/does-egypt-need-twitter.html>
- Gopnik, A. (2010, February 14). The information: How the Internet gets inside us. *The New Yorker*. Retrieved from <http://www.newyorker.com>
- Hounshell, B. (2011). The revolution will be tweeted. *Foreign Policy*, (187), 20-21.
- Howard, P. N., & Hussain, M. M. (2011). The role of digital media. *Journal Of Democracy*, 22(3), 35-48.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/jod.2011.0041>
- Kavanaugh, A. L., Fox, E. A., Sheetz, S. D., Seungwon, Y., Lin Tzy, L., Shoemaker, D. J., & ... Lexing, X. (2012). Social media use by government: From the routine to the critical. *Government Information Quarterly*, 29(4), 480-491.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2012.06.002>
- O'Donnell, C. (2011). New study quantifies use of social media in Arab Spring. *UW Today*. Retrieved from <http://www.washington.edu/news/2011/09/12/new-study-quantifies-use-of-social-media-in-arab-spring/>

- Penny, L. (2011, February 15). Revolts don't have to be Tweeted. *New Statesman*. Retrieved from <http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/laurie-penny/2011/02/uprisings-media-internet>
- Pintak, L. (2011). Breathing Room. *Columbia Journalism Review*, 50(1), 23-28.
- Pontin, J. (2011). What actually happened. *Technology Review*, 114(5), 12.
- Schipul, E., & Keeney, D. (2011). War of words: Social media's role in provoking revolutionary change. *Public Relations Tactics*, 18(4), 10-11.
- Sheila, R. (2011, October 31). Social media one key to the Arab Spring. *Investors Business Daily*. p. A06.
- Shirky, C. (2011). The political power of social media. *Foreign Affairs*, 90(1), 28-41.
- Twitter's top 2011 hashtags: #Egypt and #Tigerblood. (2011, December 6). *BBC*. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-16047918>