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The revolution will be tweeted

***An investigation of the role of Twitter in
spreading direct democracy during the Arab
spring***

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Abstract

Social medias have changed the way we obtain information about current events in the world. Regular people have the opportunity now more than ever to voice their opinions and tell their stories over the net. Direct democracy proponents are calling for a paradigm change using the Internet to spread direct democracy. The recent revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa have been called Twitter and Facebook revolutions in media because of the heavy use of social medias throughout the riots. The question is: can social medias simplify the spread of direct democracy?

Using democracy theories and postcolonial theories I have analyzed the consequences and problems associated with social medias when it comes to democratizing information online. Focusing on the social media Twitter and the Arab revolutions I have conducted a critical discourse analysis to investigate the types of ideas about democracy that are present in the platform as well as a supplementary analysis to find out which democratic actions that have been taken. The final results showed that Twitter is an effective tool for spreading information as well as a secure environment where the risk for propaganda issues is quite minimal. Also the democratic actions that were taken by the tweeters fit well into the theoretical framework of direct democracy. Hence, I concluded that Twitter enables the spread of direct democracy. However, it is difficult to understand the extent of the democratic changes using the method in this essay. Further studies need to be done on the subject.

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Introduction

“If we can bank online, we can vote online.” (Celente)

This is a catchphrase that can be found visiting the website of the global movement Direct Democracy Now. Similar sayings are spreading like wild fire throughout the Internet. The goal is to make the public realize that they have the potential to be active participants in politics. In other words movements like Direct Democracy Now are advocating for direct democracy globally. The concept of direct democracy isn't a new one, however, what is new in the context is the use of the Internet and in particular social medias as a tool to reach the goal.

Since the dawn of the Internet revolution during the beginning of the 90's, the system has been used as a platform for the formation and spread of political ideas. With the rise of social medias such as Facebook, Blogger and Twitter, this has become even more evident. We are currently experiencing the age of the so-called “net activists”. States have always gone to great lengths to control the media, but this is something that has been hampered significantly by the emergence of social medias (SIDA, 2011). Social medias have changed the way we obtain information about current events in the world. Regular people have the opportunity now more than ever to voice their opinions; this is a clear contrast to the past where the public has generally had the role of passive readers (The Social Media Guys, 2010). Nowadays people are putting up everything from videos to blog posts in real time, letting others get direct access to events all over the world just seconds after they have unfolded.

In Syria, we are unbelievably dependent on social media. For organizing, you create a Facebook group. For calling a protest, you create a Facebook page. For reporting news, you create a Twitter account. For communicating with other activists, you use Skype. For showing the protest to the world, you use Youtube. There are signs in Syria that say, “Thank you, Youtube.”(Al-Jabri, 2012)

“Because the protests came together largely through informal online networks, their success has also raised questions about whether a new opposition movement has formed that could challenge whatever new government takes shape.”(Kirkpatrick, 2011)

Many of the recent events in the Arab world received a lot of attention in different social medias. Social medias have been used both to mobilize people for demonstrations and to spread information. In fact, both the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings have been called Twitter and Facebook revolutions because of the wide use of social medias by its participants (Zuckerman, 2011). The Swedish government recently invested 30 million crowns into five different projects for increased freedom on the net. It is a part of the government's initiative for democratization and freedom of speech (SIDA, 2011).

Clearly the subject of social media and its role in democratization processes is a hot topic. Within the field of development studies this topic is also relevant to study because democracy and human rights are important issues. In this essay I will analyze the consequences and problems associated with social medias when it comes to democratizing information online.

Purpose of the essay

The aim of this essay is to determine if the existence of information technologies such as social medias have simplified a more direct citizen participation in political decision-making processes. I have chosen to study the subject by focusing on the social media Twitter and the events of the Arabic revolution that took place during the first quarter of 2011.

The core question: Can twitter simplify a more direct democracy in the Middle East and North Africa?

Sub queries:

Which type of democracy is promoted within twitter?

Which democratic actions have been taken within twitter?

The first sub query relates to the main question in that it provides an answer to what type of democracy that is allowed to spread within Twitter. Considering that social medias such as Twitter are believed to be decentralized medias where users are allowed to freely express themselves it is interesting to investigate the type democracy that in fact is articulated to verify the belief. I chose to include the second sub query because it can give a concrete picture of democracy in practice within the Twitter societies.

Delimitation

There are many ways to investigate the subject of this essay and it was initially difficult to decide upon a specific strategy. Earlier work on the same subject has tended to study the matter from a theoretical point of view, that is to say they discuss the opportunities with direct democracy through social medias. This is partly due to the fact that most studies done on this topic were written before the social medias had become as popular as they are today. I wanted to conduct an empirical study to find out what has happened since then. In this essay I will solely focus on the events that unfolded during the first three months of 2011. Although the theory presented in this essay involves many different social medias and also the Internet as a whole I will only investigate the social media Twitter. Another delimitation is my focus point that is described in the purpose of the essay, I have chosen to solely focus on two sub queries to answer my core question. Naturally one could have broadened the queries for example to include which types of actors that are present in the community.

Background and concepts

In this section I will give a brief historical account of the Arab spring, highlighting important events and developments. Following that I will define and classify social medias with a closer look into Twitter. Additionally I will explain the main differences between social medias and traditional medias. Lastly, I will go through data and figures that demonstrate the Twitter usage in the Middle East.

The Arab spring

Ash-shab yurid isqat an nizam! ("the people want to bring down the regime") (Misra, 2011).

During the year of 2011 protestors all over the Middle East and North Africa (short form: MENA) have heavily chanted this phrase. To understand the reason behind the mass demonstrations, we have to go back to the 17th of December 2010 when a young Tunisian man named Mohammed Bouzazi set himself on fire to demonstrate his dissatisfaction with the Tunisian government (Ryan, 2011). This action was the spark that ignited a wave of protests and demonstrations throughout the Arab world, and what eventually became known as the Arab Spring. The day after Bouzazis protest, people gathered in the city of Sidi Bouzid creating riots. These events went largely unnoticed in the industrial media (see Industrial Media vs. Social Media), but they attracted the attention of users within social medias such as Twitter, Facebook and Blogger (Ryan, 2011). The Tunisian demonstrators shared their experiences during the riots by putting up videos, status updates and photos onto the news feed of different social networks. Because of these updates, the rest of the world could understand the magnitude of the situation. In Tunisia the revolution was very successful and eventually made the president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali flee to Saudi Arabia on the 14th of January. On the 23rd of October the Tunisian people held an election to form a new government. Because of the Tunisian peoples achievements the protests continued to spread throughout the rest of the MENA region (Guardian, 2010-ongoing).

The protests are still ongoing, until now there have been revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen. In Egypt the long time president Hosni Mubarak resigned on the 11th of February. In Yemen the president Ali Abdullah Saleh formally stepped down and an election was held where the vice president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Al-Hadi took over his reign. Hadi was the only candidate in the election the 21st of February and received 99,8 percent of the Yemeni citizens votes. In Libya there was a civil war, which led to the fall of the Libyan government and the death of former president Muammar Gaddafi. In Syria there is currently a civil war going on as a result of riots that have been in motion since the 26th of January 2011. Also there has been an uprising in Bahrain that is still ongoing, initially these protests started out as a plea for greater human rights without the aim of taking down the monarchy. However, as the riots have been met with great violence and hostility some of the protestors have changed their objectives and are now struggling to bring down the monarchy (ibid).

There have been major demonstrations in Jordan, Iraq, Algeria, Kuwait, Oman and Morocco as well as minor demonstrations in Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Mauritania, Sudan and Western Sahara. In both Iraq and Sudan, the nation leaders Nouri al-Maliki respectively Omar al-Bashir have announced that they will not seek re-election when their terms end (ibid).

The demonstrations have been met by a lot of violence from the affected governments and government militias. The different protesters have used similar methods of opposition; these involve demonstrations, marches, strikes and rallies (Stott & Nakhoul, 2012). They have also taken great use of social medias to spread information about upcoming and ongoing protests. All over the world people have been following the events and a lot of attention has been given to the cause. In fact Tawakel Karman from Yemen was one of three women that received the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize for her activism during the Arab Spring (Nobel Prize, 2011). Also, the yearly elected “Person of the Year” at Time magazine 2011 was “The protester”(TIME, 2011).

Social medias

Previously the Internet had the same type of functions of any other media; its consumers used it solely to gather information and to use different services available. The consumers did not have an active role in the construction of the content on the different sites. This all changed with the introduction of social medias. Social medias can be defined as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0¹, and allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). There are many different types of social medias: Internet forums, magazines, Wikipedia, blogs, podcasts etc. Kaplan and Haenlein have created a classification method for different social medias. They took use of theories within the field of media studies and social processes to form the system. The social media types were divided into six different groups(Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010):

1. Collaborative projects (Wikipedia)
2. Blogs and microblogs (Twitter)
3. Content communities (Youtube)
4. Social networking sites (Facebook)
5. Virtual game worlds (World of Warcraft)
6. Virtual social worlds (Second Life)

Social medias have heavily changed the landscape of the medias and communication world, partly because of their accessible nature and partly because it provides means for users to make connections with people all over the globe. The features that are used are amongst others: picture sharing, email, instant messaging and music sharing. In some social medias services like for example Facebook all of these functions are integrated(Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Twitter

¹ Web 2.0 gives its users the opportunity to participate and contribute to the site's content.

An online micro-blogging service where users (or tweeters) send and read text-based posts of up to 140 characters that are called “tweets”. Twitter was launched in July 2006. In the beginning of 2010 Twitter had more than 19 million users, however only about 25% of the users were active. Twitter is the social media service that rapidly became the most frequent in use in strategically communication campaigns. Typical tweets are updates from the users everyday lives, where they are, what they are doing, who they are with, links to sites they recommend etc. As a member of Twitter you can choose to follow other tweeters and they can follow you. When visiting somebody’s Twitter page you can see all of their followers as well as the Tweeters they follow; this way it is easy to estimate the popularity of a tweeter. Every Twitter member gets recommendations of tweeters that they can follow; these recommendations are especially tailored for the user taking into consideration the types of users that they already follow. So for example if an individual follows a Tunisian blogger that writes about the Tunisian revolution, they will get recommendations about other similar Tweeters. An important concept within Twitter is the concept of hashtags, which essentially is a way to categorize the tweets. During the Egyptian revolution for example many of the tweeters took use of the popular hashtag #Egypt so that readers easily could recognize the tweets as messages regarding the revolution. What a tweeter does is to tag the tweet with a hashtag, and then another user who writes about the same subject can also tag their tweet with the same hashtag. This way many tweeters can jointly collect information on any subject. Another common function on Twitter is retweets, this function permits the users to share their favorite tweets of Twitter members they follow. Retweets can also be used as a parameter to understand the influence of a certain tweeter and tweet. If a tweet is heavily retweeted then either that tweeter is popular or the tweet itself has a message that many agree with or both. (Twitter, 2012)

Industrial Media vs. Social Media

Industrial media is defined as the category of media and communication that existed before the emergence of the Internet. Examples of medias that match this classification are: radio, television and the majority of print publications. The

main difference between social medias and industrial medias is that social medias are consumer-generated medias; the consumers produce the information obtained in social medias. Within social medias nearly everyone can publish and access information easily, industrial medias on the other hand generally have more well defined, sometimes even hierarchical structures and typically require a lot of resources in the publishing process. Moreover, traditional media isn't always technologically based in clear contrast to social media that permanently is. The technological platform makes it easier for the public to get access to the content of social medias (The Social Media Guys, 2010).

Some common features/differences between social medias:

- 1) A common feature of social medias and industrial medias is that they have the ability to reach small and regional as well as large and global audiences. Nevertheless, within industrial media the information produced is often by centralized and hierarchical groups whereas social medias usually are decentralized allowing virtually anyone to publish a text, picture, movie etc.
- 2) To publish something within industrial medias usually requires specific skills whereas social medias in practice only requires you to have an Internet connection. The same counts for the creation of social media versus industrial media. Industrial medias are commonly state or privately owned and a lot of costs are usually involved with establishing an industrial media. In contrast social medias are generally open for everyone at almost no cost.
- 3) Industrial medias are difficult to alter; once something is printed it is very difficult to change that publication. Whilst either editing the text or posting comments can easily change the content of social medias.
- 4) Within social medias texts are published continuously, corresponding to the activity of its participants. Industrial medias tend to lag behind with updates. This of course depends on the type of media, for example daily news reports on television are always up to date and provide information about events as they are happening. However, a quarterly magazine for

example will not be as quick to respond to daily events, therefore the time lag between social medias and industrial medias can be very large (ibid)

Twitter usage in the Middle East and North Africa

“Advertising enjoins everyone to consume, while the economy prohibits the vast majority of humanity from doing so... This world, which puts on a banquet for all, then slams the door in the noses of so many, is simultaneously equalizing and unequal: equalizing in the ideas and habits it imposes and unequal in the opportunities it offers.” - Eduardo Galeano (McMichael, 2007)

“Both when they agree and when they disagree on the general definition of globalization, people have often held widely different assessments regarding the extent of the development... many Internet enthusiasts have regularly overstated the number of online connections and the scale of electronic commerce.” (Scholte, 2005)

In light of the topic of this essay it is relevant to include statistics of the Twitter usage in the MENA-region. A direct democracy seeks to obtain the consent of a majority of its citizens (see: direct democracy). Social medias are being promoted as tools to collect the votes and opinions of the greater majority; therefore we must verify the frequency of usage of social medias and Twitter in the Middle East. If the use of social medias isn't that widespread, asymmetries will exist which in turn should affect the success rate of the spread of direct democracy in the region. According to a report released by the World Bank in 2010 the total population in the Middle East and North Africa amounted to approximately 0,3 billion inhabitants (The World Bank, 2010). A study of Twitter by the Dubai School of Government during the Arab Revolution, estimated Twitter users from MENA in the first quarter of 2011 to about 6,6 million people (DSG Governance and Innovation program, 2011). The same study concluded that the number of active tweeters were roughly 1,5 million people as can be seen in graph 1. This means that a total of 2% of the inhabitants of MENA during 2011 used Twitter where about 0,4% were active users. What they consider as an active user in the study is a user that posts a tweet at least once every two weeks. The many “passive” tweeters use Twitter as an information source rather than a forum to

express their own ideas and thoughts. This implies that although these users are not active in the sense that they tweet themselves, they are active readers of other people's tweets. The total amount of tweeters around the world at that time was 200 million people.

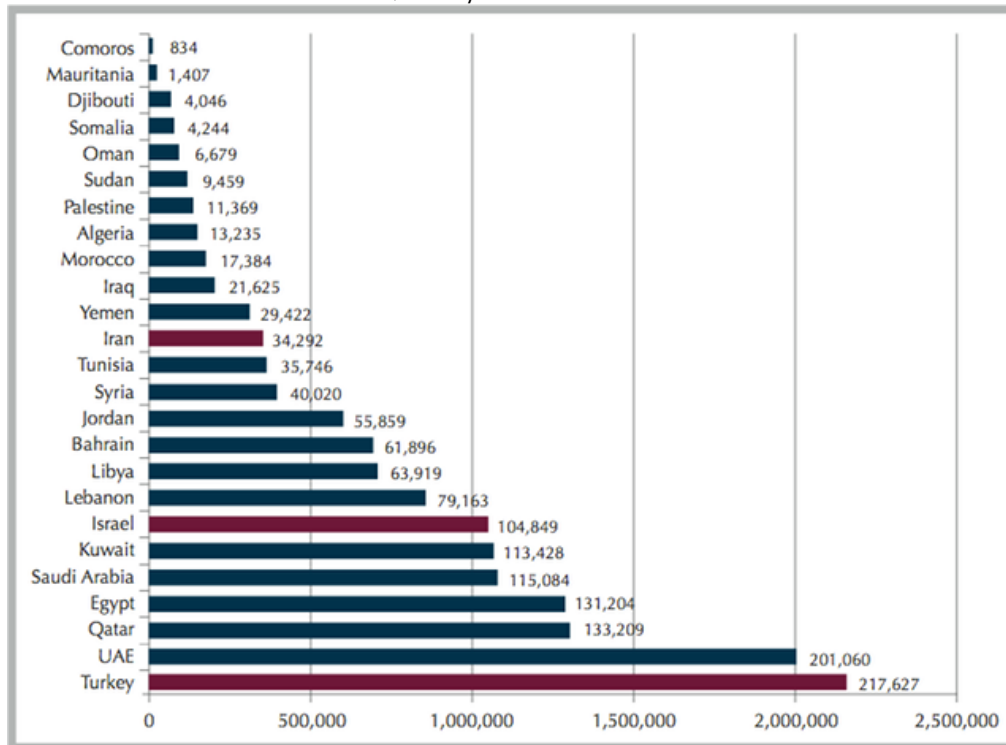
Looking at graph 1 we can see that there is a lot of variation in the active Twitter usage between the different countries of MENA. Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar have the largest group of members with Egypt trailing closely behind. Whereas countries such as Comoros, Mauritania and Djibouti lie far behind. Of course one must consider that a country like Comoros has a population of about 798 000 people compared to Turkey with a population of almost 75 million (CIA GOV, 2012). Investigating the amount of tweets posted during the same period, the number has rapidly increased from 55 million tweets a day the year before to 155 million tweets. This is an increase of about 182%, hence there is an indication of a fast growing Twitter development in MENA(DSG Governance and Innovation program, 2011). This same trend can be observed looking at the total Internet usage in the Middle East; it is predicted that 260 million inhabitants in MENA will be online by year 2020, in contrast to the 65 million users 2011(The Content Factory, 2011). The figures below only consider the Twitter users and not the total amount of social media users in the Middle East. For example there were 18 million Facebook users in MENA during the same time(DSG Governance and Innovation program, 2011). As can be seen in graph 2 the calculated number of posts in Twitter generated in MENA in the initial months of 2011 by active users was 22,750,000 tweets. The calculated numbers of daily tweets is 252,000 tweets per day. Graph 2 also shows that the amount of tweets in the different countries correspond to the number of active users within that country.

It is very clear that the most popular tweets have been related to the Arab spring, this evident in graph 3 that shows the top trends in hashtags. The most recurrent hashtags across the Arab region during the first three months of 2011 were #egypt (1.4 million mentions), #jan25 (1.2 million mentions), #libya (990,000 mentions), #bahrain (640,000 mentions), and #protest (620,000 mentions). All of these

hashtags are directly linked to the Arabic revolution.

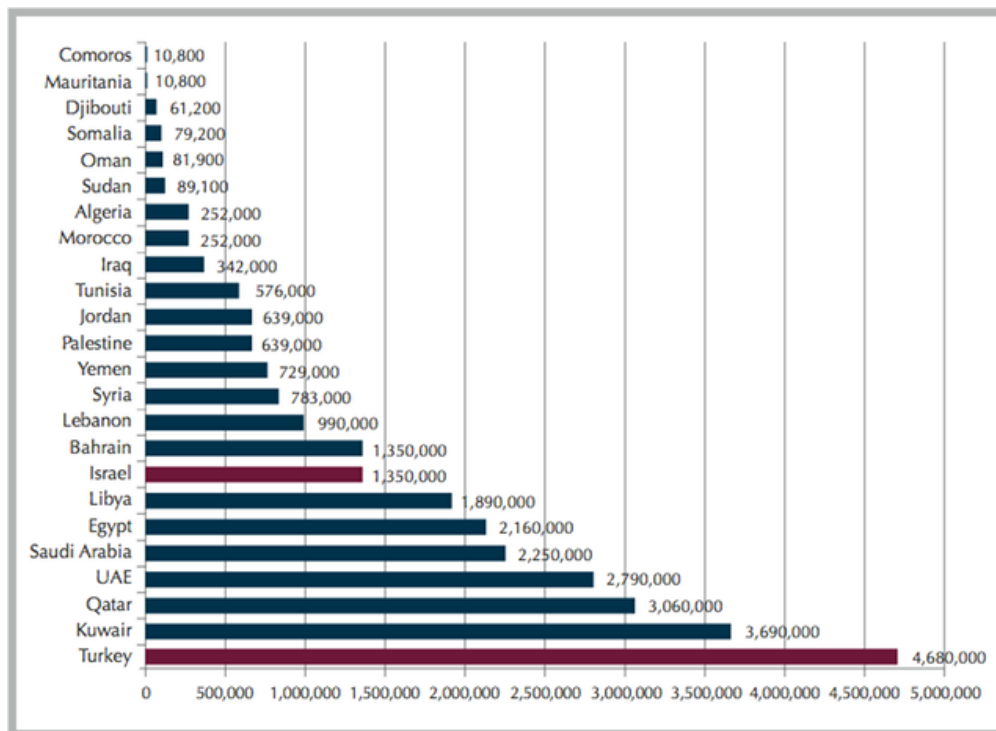
All of the graphs below are taken from the Arab Social Media Report from 2011 (DSG Governance and Innovation program, 2011)

Graph 1: Number of active twitter users in the MENA region (Average number between Jan. 1 and March 30, 2011)

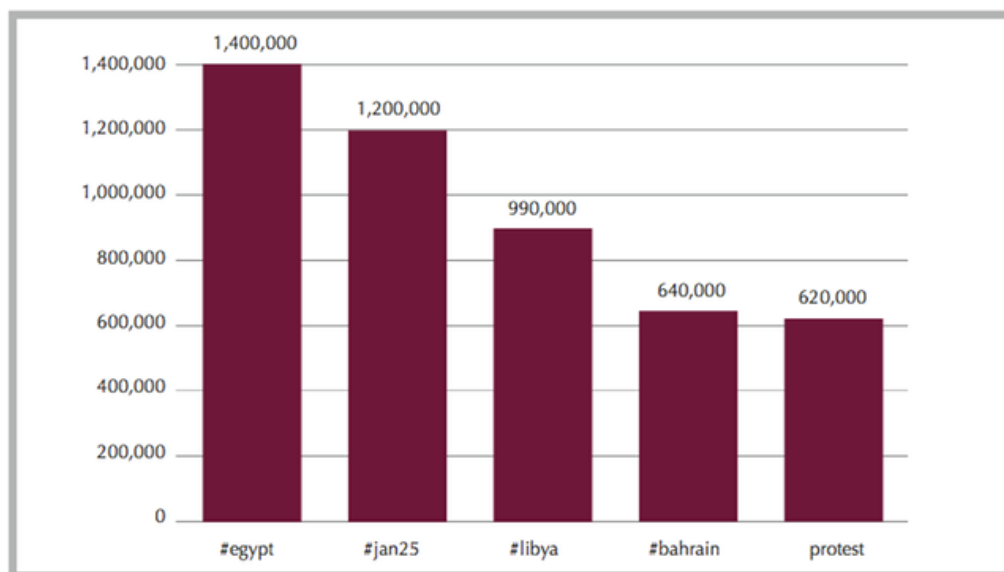


Turkey, Israel and Iran that are marked with a purple color instead of blue are the MENA countries where the official languages aren't Arabic.

Graph 2: Number of Tweets in the MENA region (Jan. 1 – March 30, 2011)



Graph 3: Top hashtag trends in the MENA region first quarter of 2011



Theoretical framework

The theories that will be presented in the essay are general theories about democracy, a deeper look into different forms of direct democracy as well as a section with postcolonial theories.

The definition of democracy

The term democracy comes from Greek and basically means 'government by the people' derived from the words people (demos) and rule (kratein). However, this definition is very general and to get a deeper grasp of the term we need to clarify what a government by the people actually implies. In this essay I have chosen to take use of the democracy criteria's as defined by Dahl (2000) in which he includes the following points:

- (a) Effective participation - Citizens must be able to voice their opinion
- (b) Voting equality - Each individual must be guaranteed his or her decisions will be regarded as equal in weights to the decisions of others
- (c) Enlightened understanding – Citizens have enough time to learn about alternative policies.
- (d) Control the agenda – The people have the ability to decide which political matters are of importance.
- (e) Inclusion – All citizens of a certain age (adults) are equal and have the right to vote.

Generally most democracies try to meet these criteria, however, there is a difference in how these criteria are met. For example there are democracies where the citizens are strongly involved in all political decisions, these are so called direct democracies. Then there are other democracies such as minimalist democracies where citizen participation is low because citizens are assumed to be incapable of effectively participating in government decisions and it is believed that citizens don't want to take part in the decision-making process. Also there are in-betweens where the democracy is chiefly representative (people elect representatives who make political decisions) however there are also some elements of direct democracy included. Throughout history, the word

“democracy” has been mainly referring to what we today call direct democracies. Another word that has been used is “republic” which refers to a representative government where people elect representatives to take carry their voices. Up until recently and sometimes still today these words are used as synonyms (ibid).

Direct Democracy

What defines a direct democracy? A direct democracy is a system where the citizens are highly involved in all political decision-making processes. The system in its purest form gives individuals the right to vote on policy proposals directly, however, there are variations to this form (Moberg, 1994). The two most popular forms of direct democracy are participatory democracy and deliberative democracy.

Participatory democracy

In this form of democracy, which is considered pure direct democracy the emphasis is put on maximum participation from the citizens of a society in order to model a direct democracy. The goal is to increase the scale of participation and give the entire population the opportunity to voice their opinions. In a participatory democracy all of the adult individuals are considered to be a part of the legislative body that vote on and construct new laws in society. Democracy depends on informed citizens; if the general public lack the knowledge of the political situation within their country as well as globally, they will face difficulties in taking meaningful stands. Moreover, they might not be aware of how to take a position or when. For individuals to obtain democratic competence they need access to relevant information. This involves: knowledge about political procedures, principles and issues. In a participatory democracy it is important to enlighten as many citizens as possible to be able to obtain full participation within the society. To accomplish this many proponents propose the use of technologies such as the social medias(Aktiv demokrati).

Deliberative democracy

Deliberation is to try to include many different perspectives when making a decision, in order to make an as informed choice as possible. The same idea runs

through a deliberative democracy. In this variant of direct democracy individuals from all ethnical backgrounds, classes, ages and geographies form an assembly that collectively makes political decisions (Bessette, *Deliberative Democracy: The Majority Principle in Republican Government*, 1980). Instead of including the total population in all political processes it is assumed that one can capture the wider community through the use of a smaller representative group. This group can differ in size, from a dozen to a couple of thousand individuals. A deliberative democracy doesn't necessarily have to be a direct democracy; the same idea can also be applied to a representative democracy if the representation of different social divisions within the society exists.

An option from having a fully established direct democracy is to include aspects of direct democracy, two important aspects are: the popular referendum and the initiative. A popular referendum is an institution where the people of a society are given the opportunity to make a political decision on a specific issue, this can be anything from a new law to the decision of whether to join EU or not. The referendum can be compulsory or voluntary. An initiative on the other hand is an establishment where it is possible for any citizen to present a request either to a legislative body or to the citizens of a society so that they in turn vote for the proposal to be accepted or declined. If the request is presented to a legislative body then it is an indirect initiative whereas if the request is presented to the citizens it is called a direct initiative (Moberg, 1994).

Direct Democracy and the Internet

“When the United States and other modern democracies adopted representative institutions, they had no real choice. Direct democracy of the ancient Greek variety was simply not feasible for an entire country. Nations were too large and transportation too primitive for the citizens to gather together to debate and vote. If citizens were to make their views felt, it would have to be through representatives. Now, however, nearly universal access to the Internet makes it possible for the people to gather in cyberspace to express their views, as millions now do. The internet opens up opportunities for direct democracy that were not even imagined when the United States was founded.” (Bessette & Pitney, *American*

Government and Politics: Deliberation, Democracy and Citizenship, Election Update, 2012)

With the developments of information technologies, proponents of direct democracy are becoming more and more certain that elements of direct democracy can be realized in practice. Prior to the emergence of the Internet it was difficult to collect the votes of the vast majority, now the Internet provides a solution to this issue. Furthermore, it is possible to find representatives from many different social segments on the net, hence the voices of the silent can be heard. This fact has made information more decentralized on the Internet. However, even though information is becoming decentralized on the net, propaganda still exists. Just as propagandists are present in industrial medias (see Industrial Media vs. Social Media), many of them can be found online in social medias trying to manipulate public opinion (Acland, 2003).

Post colonialism

Post colonialism holds many different theories with the common notion that colonialism was realized by depicting the colonized countries as fundamentally different and lower than western countries. Postcolonial thinkers also believe that colonialism is something existing still today and there are even those within the field of post colonialism that object to the prefix post(Loomba, 2005). The use of colonial thinking can be found in literature, art, politics etc. For example the post colonial thinkers believe that much of the media today is portraying western values as better than other values or that the western countries are exploiting countries in the south. The west accomplishes this by using the same methods that were used during colonial times. At that time western culture and science was the norm against which all other cultures were measured and evaluated. The colonized countries, and the people who inhabited were attributed with properties that radically distinguished them from their colonizers. The basic idea of post colonialism is based on establishing dichotomies, where the western identity is considered to be rational, enlightened and liberal whilst the colonized people “other people” and their culture is represented by the opposite qualities (ibid).

The relationship between power and knowledge is evident in post-colonial theory as it is from this relationship that different conceptions were established in society. The production of knowledge about “the others” during the colonial period was an expression of the dominant groups’ power because the very act of defining what one is, and is not, is an expression of power. Certain groups and people cannot and must not define themselves and they must therefore be defined by others who know more about them than they themselves do. This absolute power that the colonial power had in controlling the knowledge of the other was a type of domination. The knowledge produced was largely a single-track one from the colonial power and there was little room for counter images. The knowledge that was created was considered normative and became something natural. So much so that is still in use today.

Said has written about “othering” and how this process has come to influence the world today (Said, *Kultur och Imperialism*, 1995). He believed that the single most important practice out of all colonial processes was the construction of identity of others. This justified and supported the colonial economic, political and religious domination in the colonies because it created the image of the other as inferior and in need of a ruling power. This way even if “the other” would object to this image it would be of no use since “the other” lacks knowledge and thus his or hers objections are baseless. The construction of the other, i.e. people from countries outside of the west, was to assign them negative properties such as violence or pettiness. Afterwards the western identity could be put in contrast to these negative traits and the western world could thus be considered as better and raised to a superior civilization. The establishment of confrontation between the west and the others is even the founding base of European culture and values (Said, *Orientalism*, 1993). The same applies to national identities in states, which were not directly involved in colonial conquests. The postcolonial theory simply states that all countries have been influenced by the produced identities during the colonial period. The way for example being an Arab is defined must therefore also be understood from the colonial history and global processes within that context. From a postcolonial perspective, today’s society is the remains of the colonial heritage since the colonial period identities, prejudices and stereotypes

have been passed on and the knowledge system, which reproduces superior and inferior relationships, still remains.

Methodology

In order to carry out my study Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis was used (Winther, Phillips, & Vrå, 2002). What is discourse? A broad definition of the concept is "a certain way of talking about and understanding the world (or a segment of the world)" (ibid). Discourses similar to post colonialism is a form of a social practice that is fundamentally about power and exerting power over others. Taking post colonialism as an example, "the others" are considered to be strange with unusual traditions, and since "the others" are the direct opposites of "the westerners" then logically "the westerners" must be normal with healthy traditions. This is a direct result of how language has been used to dichotomize to create a new reality. Discourses grant authorization to certain groups to speak on particular issues, while others may not. The way we use our language is structured in certain defined patterns that have been influenced by existing discourses. These patterns in turn create systems that legitimize certain knowledge and classify other knowledge as baseless. The ones that have the authority to define the scope of discourse, that is to say what knowledge that is of importance or even allowed. Consequently language can't be said to be a neutral tool for communication, because language can create unequal power relationships. One can say that there exists physical reality but this reality is only given meaning through discourse. Through language we decide what realities that are of importance and thus the way we understand them. So there are exclusion mechanisms, which impose restrictions on certain groups and opportunities for others. Hence, discourses not only create a picture of reality but also constitute social identities and relationships. In order for discourses to continue to exist in a society they must be constantly reproduced and sustained through repetition. It is first when we criticize the discourses around us that changes can be made and new ideas can be generated. In the field of critical discourse analysis, there are several different approaches. However, there are certain basic features that they all have in common. For example in all of the

different forms of critical discourse analysis language is seen as both constituted but also constitutive. That is, discourses are not eminent above any influences from other social practices and social processes, but are both shaped and shape the world around them. We must find and reveal how these interactions are created through language. Also, in all of the analysis approaches the production and consumption of texts, how it is received and interpreted is regarded as something that forms the reality we take for granted. The production of discourses thus is considered to create unequal power relationships within different groups (Winther, Phillips, & Vrå, 2002).

Fairclough's method is a text analysis that highlights the linguistic structures, which are found in discourses. In Fairclough's method, discourse is considered to be exclusively composed of linguistic elements. The practices that create discourses are thus only related to the linguistic practices and not to other social practices. According to Fairclough, discourses construct: social identities, social relationships and knowledge and relevant systems.

Fairclough has developed a three dimensional model in order to analyze and distinguish these three levels. In every case, language is said to have three distinct dimensions: it is a text, it is a discursive practice, and it is a social practice. The model separates these three dimensions and analyses them separately, text analysis focuses on the text's linguistic features, which are said to construct identities and discourses. The discursive practice analysis examines how existing discourses are used in the production and consumption of text. The way discourses operate in a larger social context is examined in the social practice analysis. Fairclough's critical discourse analysis is thus attempting, by focusing on different aspects of text structure, production and consumption to show how language and social structures and processes are linked.

Data

The data used in this investigation was found by analysing some of the most influential hashtags during the Arab Spring (see Twitter usage in the Middle East and North Africa). These hashtags were: #Egypt, #Jan25, #Protest, #Bahrain and #Libya. The analysis of the hashtags was done by the twitter software topsy

(Topsy) that shows the trend of the hashtags as well as its most prominent users and tweets by frequency. Examining the hashtags I could find fifteen of the most influential tweeters during the Arab Spring. Using the Twitter archiving service favstar (Favstar) I found the most favorited and retweeted tweets from the tweeters, the tweets that have had the greatest impact over the net, I also read tweets beyond the most favorited to get a better grasp of the types of dialogue that can be found in the social network. Since the scope of my essay is restricted, I didn't have the time to go through the massive output of tweets that was produced during the first quarter of 2011. Instead a total of about 500 tweets were used and broken down into different types of discourse. I chose only to analyse tweets written in English since the essay is written in English and I didn't want the meaning of the tweets to be lost in translation. I found evidence of two different discourses that I am going to analyse more closely in the next section.

Democratic actions

In addition to Fairclough's critical discourse I will also conduct a supplementary analysis on my data to categorize the democratic actions that have taken place on Twitter, I will take use of the democracy theories included in the theoretical framework to identify these actions.

The analysis

This section is divided into two parts, in the first part I have conducted a critical discourse analysis and in the second part I have performed an analysis on the democratic actions that were taken by the group of influential tweeters that I have chosen to study. For a more detailed reference list of the tweets see appendix I.

Critical discourse analysis

As was brought up in the background section of this essay: social medias are decentralized medias. Practically anyone with an Internet connection can go in and express their opinion. This reality made my task significantly complex because I was met with a spectrum of different discourses on Twitter. There were mainly two problems that I struggled with when I conducted my critical discourse analysis. Firstly, when investigating an extremely heterogeneous platform it is difficult to recognize general discourses. Secondly, even when finding a trend one must be quite cautious especially if the amount of observations that are used in the analysis are limited. Taking into consideration these difficulties I managed to identify two typical discourses that applied to a majority of the influential tweeters that were included in my analysis. These were: a discourse for democracy and a discourse against the west.

“Freedom for the people” - Discourse for democracy

What is interesting to note in the discourse amongst the most influential Arab revolution tweeters is that the majority of the influential tweeters do not express any specific political orientation. Instead what is common in all of the tweets is a general contempt of the ruling government and a strong conviction that changes need to be done. No explicit course of action in terms of possible new political paradigms is proposed. Most of the tweeters post very general tweets in which the importance of what can be considered as elementary democratic values such as for example “a government of the people for the people” is emphasized.

RT @RamyRaouf: People Should Not Be Afraid of Their Governments, Governments Should Be Afraid of Their People <http://flic.kr/p/9hp4MX> #Egypt #Tunisia

The tweet above is a typical example of a democratically oriented tweet that is being spread on Twitter. A striking tone amongst the Arabic spring tweeters is the hopeful and idealistic one. The tweeters take use of solemn phrases to bring forward their messages. The communication that takes place is very inspiring as they take use of moving expressions such as “democracy from below”, “I am also willing to give my life to Tunisia” and “history is being written by the people”. Protestors are depicted as heroes and dreamers that will change the world.

Freedom is a bless that deserves fighting for it. #Jan25

WE WILL FOLLOW! RT @SultanAlQassemi: Tunisians are the heroes of the Arab world.

this is people's power. This **democracy** from below. This is the most beautiful thing i have ever seen in my life.

"We anticipate **democracy** in the country. We will be proud to have **democracy**. I am also willing to give my life for Tunisia"

despite Hosni Mubarak shut down the internet & communication means, we are still able to deliver our info, footage and pics. #Egypt #Jan25

The Tunisian revolution is being twitterized...history is being written by the people! #sidibouziid #Tunisia

They underline the successes that have already taken place, for example by referring to other countries where the government has failed to stop the people. Also there are cries for persistence, to keep on fighting because the coming change is near. Furthermore there is a lot of solidarity between the protestors both domestically and internationally. Protestors from Egypt write about the admiration they have for protestors in Tunisia. They praise their compatriots and revere the people that have been wounded or even died for the cause. There is also a strong sense of community in general; there is a longing to include everyone in the struggle no matter what race, geography, religion or social status you have.

Thank you **#Tunisia** for showing all of us the power of people. You've inspired all of us in the Arab world.

Christians & Muslims are standing by each other, giving us a lesson, refuting all claims of sectarian divisions in [#Egypt](#) [#jan25](#)

This creates a sense of community both with protestors from other regions but also with the rest of the world because a lot of individuals can identify with democratic values and thus they can all be included in the revolution. That isn't to say that there is no critique against for example the western world (see Discourse against the west). Nonetheless, in theory there is room for practically anyone to join the movement.

Whilst protestors in industrial media have been portrayed many times as valiant and brave often they are also seen as helpless in need of a stronger power to take control and help them reach their goals. However, this type of discourse was not apparent in the tweets I analyzed. Instead the protestors are all considered as the most important actors of the revolution. They are highly praised and the revolution is understood as a direct result of their commitment. In many tweets there are complete disregards to authorities that want to meddle, help is taken but primarily it is believed that the people lie behind the positive changes and without their dedication the cause would be lost.

Discourse against the west

There is a strong discourse against the west in a majority of the tweets that acknowledge the west. There is heavy spread of links to western media corporations; however, one can also find a lot of criticism against the west, western politics and politicians as well as western ideas. Mostly what is expressed is a strong belief that the western authorities are a threat to the revolutionary process. The different spokesmen describe a certain fear of politicians from the west taking over the course of action in the revolution. There is a strong discourse of a "we" against a "them", which has created a dichotomy between "the Arabic revolutionaries" and "the west". Postcolonial ideas seem highly present in this context but the difference lies in that the "the Arab world" which has always been measured against the west and considered as a counterpart is now holding the discourse. This radically changes who is allowed to speak on particular issues. It also changes the value of knowledge; western knowledge is considered baseless which is justified by for example referring to history.

Dear Western Governments, You've been silent for 30 years supporting the regime that was oppressing us. Please don't get involved now #Jan25

In this tweet the message is loud and clear. Already in the first word “dear” one can detect a patronizing tone that immediately forms an unequal relationship between “the Arab revolutionaries” and “the western governments”. What this tweeter is trying to prove is that they “the Arabic revolutionaries” are not lower in relation to the west as they have been regarded many times but rather higher. Thus instead of changing the existing postcolonial discourse, the tweeters try to transfer some of the properties that historically have been assigned to them over to the western regimes. They use the same type of dichotomy, however, this time they are in charge of the discourse. This tweet is a brilliant example of victimization and condescendence at the same time. The tweeter expresses bitterness over the fact that the west has been passive over the past 30 years thus signaling that the west should have acted differently and helped them. Simultaneously there is a strong resentment against the idea that “the west” would step in now and help. Because “the west” are not trustworthy, they have never helped “the Arabic revolutionaries” before, in fact they have been against them supporting the governments that oppressed them. Also one can recognize that this tweeter believes that the help that is being offered is not needed, that the people are strong and independent.

Much like the colonizers have done in the past, the tweeters criticizing the west take advantage of regarding “the west” as inferior and can therefore legitimize their exercise of power. The same type of discourse is constantly reproduced and repeated. The Arabic revolutionaries are almost as underdogs that have to prove themselves to be better than their counterpart that always held the power. There is also a certain paradox in the way that many tweeters express themselves about the west, on one hand they look down on the west expressing a superiority towards them. For example by ridiculing or criticizing the events that take place in the west, examples can be found below:

RT [@ashrafkhalil](#): Cynical/worrywart question of the day: will the **#egypt** government try something while all of **America** is watching the **super bowl** tonight

If Mubarak left during the Super Bowl, would anyone in America know? #jan25 #egypt

G.morning. want to send a big fuck u to the #royalwedding &their wasted millions, and lots of solidarity w #Syria, #yemen #libya #Bahrain

In this case the three tweeters feel within their frame of reality that the two big events Super Bowl and the Royal Wedding aren't important. The latter tweeter expresses his/her criticism with a lot of hostility. Clearly they feel that the allocation of resources in terms of money is going to all the wrong places and also that the attention of the world media is misguided. There are also other types of discourses where western democracy is being evaluated:

It's not that we have to "bring" **democracy** to the "Arab world". Our challenge is remaining and reinventing **democracy** globally.

In this context western democracy is being criticized and challenged and it is interesting to see that there are other new ways of perceiving democracy and perhaps these ways don't oblige with western values. Additionally there is a criticism against the imposing of western democracy.

Gotta leave now and head back to the protests. Down with Mubarak. Down with Obama the hypocrite. Long live the Egyptian revolution.

the tear gas canisters thrown on us in Tahrir r made in the USA. Probably the same ones used on #OWS

Also exposed: western **democracy** double talk. Lip service for **democracy** but...real support for autocrats. [#Tahrir#Jan25](#) **#Egypt**

Wow, UK foreign minister actually said 'we wouldn't want to see a government based on the Muslim Brotherhood' #jan25

In the last tweet a strong critique is being posed towards UK foreign minister that apparently has expressed negativity towards a possible new government ruled by the Muslim Brotherhood. It is interesting to see that in contrast to many discourses in traditional media where democracy has been seen as incompatible with the Muslim Brotherhood (even if that government would have been elected by the Egyptian citizens) on Twitter one can find other voices.

Supplementary analysis of direct democracy

What we actually can observe with the revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa is democracy in practice. The act itself of going against a dictatorial government to demand for democracy is an act of democracy and more specifically direct democracy. Taking use of the theory that was presented in the theoretical framework one can identify certain actions as democratic actions.

When I performed my analysis I could distinguish three different types of actions that fit under the category of democratic actions:

- 1) Mobilization of forces
- 2) Live reports as events are unfolding
- 3) Practical information and instructions

Mobilization of forces

The use of tweets has been prevalent in mobilizing protestors both as a method to inform people about upcoming events but also as a means of protection. When it comes to mobilization as a means for protection it has been to give attention to special causes. For example mobilizing forces outside of a prison to help a protestor that is held captive. I have read tweets from people while they were imprisoned; these tweets have been very revealing and put immense pressure on the government from different groups. Because of such tweets many of these people have been released, therefore twitter has in a sense been a life saving tool.(Daily Mail reporter, 2011)

thousands of demonstrators in #TahrirSquare are planning to stay over there the whole night, in the square. #Egypt #Jan25

Live reports as events are unfolding

The most significant reason to why the Twitter wave has been considered so powerful is because of the fact that the tweeters have tweeted their impressions live as the events have taken place. This has given a greater insight into what these people have suffered and what is happening a second after it has happened. Many of the tweets have been warnings about high-risk places where demonstrators risk injuring or imprisonment.

Lots of gunfire in central Tunis NOW. #TUNISIA

RT @Raafatology: Dont go to #tahrir now. they will arrest you because of the curfew. Tomorrow, we will rock #tahrir sq again#mubarak #jan25

Practical information and instructions

In many of the tweets there are further references to Facebook groups, critical news stories, blog posts, inspiring images, YouTube videos. This adds yet another dimension to the tweets as well as a spread of more information. The materials that the tweeters have linked have contained everything from raw protests in form of footage or photos to instructions on what do when the police use teargas. In the blog posts linked there has been citizen commentary as tweets are quite limited because of their short length. Also there has been links to maps showing locations for meetings and demonstrations. This step increases the democratic competence of its users.

Conclusion

The aim of this essay was to investigate if social medias enable direct democracy. I conducted this investigation by focusing on the social media Twitter and the events from the three first months of 2011 during the Arabic revolution. I carried out my study by exploring two queries: Which type of democracy is promoted within Twitter and which democratic actions have been taken within Twitter? Using direct democracy and post-colonial theories as theoretical framework I performed a critical discourse analysis and a supplementary analysis to map out the democratic actions within Twitter.

Regarding the democracy that is promoted within Twitter, using a critical discourse analysis I could identify two discourses: a discourse for democracy and a discourse against the west. The results from my analysis showed that the major pillars of the twitter revolution are discourses about very elementary democracy values. This type of discourse appeals to a great majority of individuals independent of race, geography, religion or social segment. At the same time there is a strong discourse concerning westernization where the tweeters have a strong concerns about being imposed with “western values” or “western democracy”. Additionally there is a lot of critique against western types of democracies, which are believed to be non-pure democracies or at least systems with faults.

When it comes to democratic actions that are taken within the Social media platform my analysis showed that these can be categorized into three different groups:

- 1) Mobilizing of forces
- 2) Live reports as events are unfolding
- 3) Practical information and instructions

What I can conclude from these results is that the current revolutionary activities and ideas on twitter are very democratically oriented. Looking at my first sub query; the democracy that is being promoted within Twitter is a democracy of

direct action. The different users tweet about the importance of the government listening to the people instead of vice versa, that the people take control over the situation, that the people are involved in the decision-making processes. Another conclusion I could make was that although the democracy that is promoted within twitter is very elementary it is a democracy that has been reflected upon. Most of the tweeters that I studied strongly reject the idea of having a western type of democracy or any involvement from the west. It is clear from their tweets that they want to have control over their situation and will not settle for any half-measures or an external force taking over.

One could assume since Twitter is a western produced social media that many of the democratic discourses even amongst tweeters from the MENA-region would be influenced by western ideas, such as for example the unwillingness of letting the Islamic Brotherhood take over the regime even if they are democratically elected. However, since Twitter is a social media, the Arabic revolution tweeters have succeeded with making the forum into a forum of their own, where they can freely express their opinions. Of course I used a rather small test-group and thus my results must be taken with some care.

Looking at the second query about democratic actions, the listed actions also had very strong direct democratic traits. I believe that this something that could change over time when the political systems have become more developed and the need for going out to demonstrate against an autocratic power decreases. However, as it is now we can see tweeters mobilizing and spreading information continuously, there is a lot of action backing up the strong discourse expressed in Twitter.

Essentially regardless of how well Twitter works in spreading democracy in the platform the problem still lies in the fact that the total MENA twitters are a very marginal part of the total population. We have quite low usage numbers and as was brought several times in the theoretical section of this essay a direct democracy depends on high participation from its citizens or at least high deliberation. An additional study could be done on what type of tweeters that are to see if there are representatives from all different segments, socially,

geographically and economically. I have focused mainly on how many followers the twitters I have included in my test group have rather than their background.

One thing that should be recognized is that although this study has focused on Twitter, many other social medias also have a strong affect on the democratic actions that are taken and most importantly that Twitter is not an isolated forum. Many tweeters also have Facebook and Blogger accounts and if they don't they have contact with individuals that do. Thus even though the amount of active tweeters counts for only 0,4% in the MENA, the total affect can be larger.

To conclude, in my essay I have mostly focused on the ideas that have been communicated by the users on Twitter. I found that Twitter is an effective decentralization tool and a good platform for spreading information in a rapid way. To answer my question: can twitter simplify a more direct democracy in the Middle East and North Africa? My investigation has showed that to some extent it does, because individuals are taking direct action and at the same time the environment in Twitter is a safe environment where they can freely critique both western powers and their own dictatorial regimes. However, the extent of the changes that have been made possible due to Twitter is difficult to understand using only my method; further studies must be done on the subject.

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Appendix I

In the following appendix the links to the tweets that were presented in the analysis part of this essay are given. All of these tweets can be found using different links but I have chosen to use the links from the software Topsy where one can clearly see the original tweeter as well as the retweets and how influential these tweets have been in the social media Twitter.

Freedom is a bless that deserves fighting for it. #Jan25

[\[http://topsy.com/s?q=Freedom+is+a+bless+that+deserves+fighting+for+it.+%23Jan25\]](http://topsy.com/s?q=Freedom+is+a+bless+that+deserves+fighting+for+it.+%23Jan25)

WE WILL FOLLOW! RT @SultanAlQassemi: Tunisians are the heroes of the Arab world.

[\[http://topsy.com/s?q=WE+WILL+FOLLOW%21+RT+%40SultanAlQassemi%3A+Tunisians+are+the+heroes+of+the+Arab+world.\]](http://topsy.com/s?q=WE+WILL+FOLLOW%21+RT+%40SultanAlQassemi%3A+Tunisians+are+the+heroes+of+the+Arab+world.)

this is people's power. This democracy from below. This is the most beautiful thing i have ever seen in my life.

[\[http://topsy.com/s?q=this+is+people%27s+power.+This+democracy+from+below.+This+is+the+most+beautiful+thing+i+have+ever+seen+in+my+life.\]](http://topsy.com/s?q=this+is+people%27s+power.+This+democracy+from+below.+This+is+the+most+beautiful+thing+i+have+ever+seen+in+my+life.)

"We anticipate **democracy** in the country. We will be proud to have **democracy**. I am also willing to give my life for Tunisia"

[\[http://topsy.com/s?q=We+anticipate+democracy+in+the+country.+We+will+be+proud+to+have+democracy.+I+am+also+willing+to+give+my+life+for+Tunisia\]](http://topsy.com/s?q=We+anticipate+democracy+in+the+country.+We+will+be+proud+to+have+democracy.+I+am+also+willing+to+give+my+life+for+Tunisia)

despite Hosni Mubarak shut down the internet & communication means, we are still able to deliver our info, footage and pics. #Egypt #Jan25

[\[http://topsy.com/s?q=despite+Hosni+Mubarak+shut+down+the+internet+%26+communication+means%2C+we+are+still+able+to+deliver+our+info%2C+footage+and+pics.+%23Egypt+%23Jan25\]](http://topsy.com/s?q=despite+Hosni+Mubarak+shut+down+the+internet+%26+communication+means%2C+we+are+still+able+to+deliver+our+info%2C+footage+and+pics.+%23Egypt+%23Jan25)

The Tunisian revolution is being twitterized...history is being written by the people! #sidibouziid #Tunisia

[\[http://topsy.com/s?q=The+Tunisian+revolution+is+being+twitterized...history+is+being+written+by+the+people%21+%23sidibouziid+%23Tunisia\]](http://topsy.com/s?q=The+Tunisian+revolution+is+being+twitterized...history+is+being+written+by+the+people%21+%23sidibouziid+%23Tunisia)

Thank you #Tunisia for showing all of us the power of people. You've inspired all of us in the Arab world.

[\[http://topsy.com/s?q=Thank+you+%23Tunisia+for+showing+all+of+us+the+power+of+people.+You%27ve+inspired+all+of+us+in+the+Arab+world.\]](http://topsy.com/s?q=Thank+you+%23Tunisia+for+showing+all+of+us+the+power+of+people.+You%27ve+inspired+all+of+us+in+the+Arab+world.)

Christians & Muslims are standing by each other, giving us a lesson, refuting all claims of sectarian divisions in #Egypt #jan25

[\[http://topsy.com/s?q=Christians+%26+Muslims+are+standing+by+each+other%2C+giving+us+a+lesson%2C+refuting+all+claims+of+sectarian+divisions+in+%23Egypt+%23jan25\]](http://topsy.com/s?q=Christians+%26+Muslims+are+standing+by+each+other%2C+giving+us+a+lesson%2C+refuting+all+claims+of+sectarian+divisions+in+%23Egypt+%23jan25)

Dear Western Governments, You've been silent for 30 years supporting the regime that was oppressing us. Please don't get involved now #Jan25

[\[http://topsy.com/s?q=Dear+Western+Governments%2C+You%27ve+been+silent+for+30+years+supporting+the+regime+that+was+oppressing+us.+Please+don%27t+get+involved+now+%23Jan25\]](http://topsy.com/s?q=Dear+Western+Governments%2C+You%27ve+been+silent+for+30+years+supporting+the+regime+that+was+oppressing+us.+Please+don%27t+get+involved+now+%23Jan25)

RT [@ashrafkhalil](#): Cynical/worrywart question of the day: will the **#egypt** government try something while all of **America** is watching the **super bowl** tonight

[\[http://topsy.com/s?q=RT+%40ashrafkhalil%3A+Cynical%2Fworrywart+question+of+the+day%3A+will+the+%23egypt+government+try+something+while+all+of+America+is+watching+the+super+bowl+tonight\]](http://topsy.com/s?q=RT+%40ashrafkhalil%3A+Cynical%2Fworrywart+question+of+the+day%3A+will+the+%23egypt+government+try+something+while+all+of+America+is+watching+the+super+bowl+tonight)

If Mubarak left during the Super Bowl, would anyone in America know? #jan25 #egypt

[\[http://topsy.com/s?q=If+Mubarak+left+during+the+Super+Bowl%2C+would+anyone+in+America+know%3F+%23jan25+%23egypt\]](http://topsy.com/s?q=If+Mubarak+left+during+the+Super+Bowl%2C+would+anyone+in+America+know%3F+%23jan25+%23egypt)

G.morning. want to send a big fuck u to the #royalwedding & their wasted millions, and lots of solidarity w #Syria, #yemen #libya #Bahrain

[\[http://topsy.com/s?q=G.morning.+want+to+send+a+big+fuck+u+to+the+%23royalwedding+%26+their+wasted+millions%2C+and+lots+of+solidarity+w+%23Syria%2C+%23yemen+%23libya+%23Bahrain\]](http://topsy.com/s?q=G.morning.+want+to+send+a+big+fuck+u+to+the+%23royalwedding+%26+their+wasted+millions%2C+and+lots+of+solidarity+w+%23Syria%2C+%23yemen+%23libya+%23Bahrain)

It's not that we have to "bring" **democracy** to the "Arab world". Our challenge is remaining and reinventing **democracy** globally.

[<http://topsy.com/s?q=G.morning.+want+to+send+a+big+fuck+u+to+the+%23royalwedding+%26their+wasted+millions%2C+and+lots+of+solidarity+w+%23Syria%2C+%23yemen+%23libya+%23Bahrain>]

It's not that we have to "bring" democracy to the "Arab world". Our challenge is remaining and reinventing democracy globally.

[<http://topsy.com/s?q=It%27s+not+that+we+have+to+%22bring%22+democracy+to+the+%22Arab+world%22.+Our+challenge+is+remaining+and+reinventing+democracy+globally.>]

Gotta leave now and head back to the protests. Down with Mubarak. Down with Obama the hypocrite. Long live the Egyptian revolution.

[<http://topsy.com/s?q=Gotta+leave+now+and+head+back+to+the+protests.+Down+with+Mubarak.+Down+with+Obama+the+hypocrite.+Long+live+the+Egyptian+revolution.>]

the tear gas canisters thrown on us in Tahrir r made in the USA. Probably the same ones used on #OWS

[<http://topsy.com/s?q=the+tear+gas+canisters+thrown+on+us+in+Tahrir+r+made+in+the+USA.+Probably+the+same+ones+used+on+%23OWS>]

Also exposed: western **democracy** double talk. Lip service for **democracy** but...real support for autocrats. [#Tahrir#Jan25](#) **#Egypt**

[<http://topsy.com/s?q=Also+exposed%3A+western+democracy+double+talk.+Lip+service+for+democracy+but...real+support+for+autocrats.+%23Tahrir%23Jan25+%23Egypt>]

Wow, UK foreign minister actually said 'we wouldn't want to see a government based on the Muslim Brotherhood' [#jan25](#)

[<http://topsy.com/s?q=Wow%2C+UK+foreign+minister+actually+said+%27we+wouldn%27t+want+to+see+a+government+based+on+the+Muslim+Brotherhood%27+%23jan25>]