Social Media in Social Movements: Online Activism Subject to Environmental and Societal Conditions in the Egyptian Democratization Proces

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Introduction

With the expansion of the internet and the use of social media, contemporary social movements (SMs) come in various forms. While SMs produce diverging outcomes and evolve differently, modern day protesters use a variety of digital tools such as smartphones and laptops, all interconnected through global social platforms (Mattoni, 2017, p. 494). SMs can be defined as a network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and organizations involved in the political or cultural conflict based on collective identity (Diani, 1992, pp. 7-8). This definition stresses the importance of the collective, which is outlined as crucial in SMs (Hwang & Kim, 2015, p. 480). The willingness of a collectivity to take action in accordance with the costs and benefits of participation in a SM largely determines its success (Leong et al. , 2019, pp. 176-177). Scholars outline the argument that new technologies of communication lower individual's costs of participation in SMs (Leong et al., 2019; Tufecki, 2014). One of these new technologies is social media, which can be conceptualized as a new form of web-based media tool which extensively involves interactive participation (Manning, 2014, p. 1158).

The Arab Uprisings (AUs) is considered as a pioneer example of a contemporary SM involving the use of social media. During this period, online activism was still experimental, and not systematic (Bayat, 2013, p. 589). The AUs are therefore a compelling case study in relation to social media as they account for the first greater scale SM which tremendously applied online activities (Bayat, 2013, p. 587). Numerous scholars have explored the role of social media in the AUs (Allinson, 2014; Danju et al., 2013; Sorrour & Dey, 2014). While social media in the AUs contributed to sustaining the democratization movement in Tunisia (Danju et al., 2013, p. 679), it appears as having played a differing role while shaping the Egyptian SM's outcome (Allinson, 2014, p. 294). The role of social media in the Egyptian Revolution remains academically disputed, and this stems from the lack of academic consensus on whether social media is a crucial factor actively contributing to shaping SMs outcomes. To fill this gap in the literature, this paper aims to answer the following research question:

Under what conditions do social media influence the outcomes of social movements ?

The paper firstly provides an overview of existing theories on the role of social media in influencing SMs' outcomes. Subsequently, these findings are applied to the case of Egypt. This is done by process tracing on the Egyptian Revolution to uncover the role social media played in influencing the SM's outcome. In the final section, this paper lays out a discussion of the findings on the Egyptian Revolution and whether they are generalizable to other SMs. Ultimately, the limitations of the paper are pointed out and suggestions are made for future research.

Literature Review & Theoretical Framework

This section aims to analyze existing literature on the conditions under which social media contributes to influencing the outcomes of SMs. This allows this paper to select and segregate different arguments from the academic debate and subsequently build possible theories regarding the topic.

A necessary condition for a SM to bring its desired outcomes is sustainability (Woliver, 1996, p. 140). Sustainability can be defined as the set of dynamic processes which are involved in maintaining a SM vibrant and allowing it to achieve its objectives (Selvanathan & Jetten, 2020, p. 81). Selvanathan & Jetten (2020) point out that these processes include the promotion of a cohesive group identity (p. 81) and the increase in support in a SM (p. 82). Additionally, the authors argue that an efficient mean to gather support and bring disparate groups to share a superordinate identity is social media (p. 81). Nevertheless, scholars do not present unilateral views on the sustaining role of social media in SMs in the achievement of their objectives. Academic literature is divided between social media supportive, social media disproving and mixed approaches (Kidd & McIntosh, 2016, p. 785). In the following sections, this paper lays out the academic debate and provides arguments for the three approaches.

Supportive role of social media in SMs

The first set of academic literature presents supportive views regarding the role of social media in SMs. This approach stresses the role of new technologies in shaping and transforming political outcomes (Kidd & McIntosh, 2016, pp. 785-786). The supportive approach mostly describes social media as a tool in the democratization processes of states.

Moreover, it lays out social media contributions in terms of political communication, mobilization and reinforcement of participation in SMs (Ravanoğlu Yılmaz, 2017, p. 150).

Leong et al. (2019) explore social media impact on the individual level. A widespread assumption on personal participation costs developed by Olson (2015) argues that humans avoid engaging in coordinated actions for the benefit of a group, as these require personal costs (Olson, 2015, p. 53). As free-riders also benefit from the common good, this increases the incentives for individuals to withhold personal costs of collective action (Olson, 2015, p. 54). However, social media facilitates participant involvement at a reduced cost through the diversity of possible actions, ranging from liking, sharing, creating events, adding photographs or openly expressing opinion (Leong et al., 2019, p. 187). As this minimizes the costs and risks of coordinated action, social media can be perceived as a new channel offering a trustworthy safeguard for participation in SMs (Leong et al. , 2019, pp. 176-177). The free-rider problem becomes thus less important in the case of social media, as even the smallest digital actions contribute to sustaining a SM (Tufekci, 2014, p. 207)

Furthemore, Leong, et al. (2019) argue that social media is useful in low-intensity periods of SMs. When the engagement in a SM decreases due to short-term indignation, social media maintains the overlap between personal and private spheres which encourages the preservation of the network. Since little individual effort is required to maintain social media connections, this is sufficient to sustain a SM in achieving its goals (Leong et al. , 2019, p. 187).

On the societal level, Halpern & Gibbs (2013) emphasize the current structure of the society which is essentially constituted of interconnected networks (p. 1159). Based on the work of Howards (2015), Kidd & McIntosh (2016) describe this organization as the “new empire of interconnection” in which social media plays three important roles during periods of upheaval. Accordingly, social media (1) allow interpersonal communication, (2) offer a space to deliberate and take positions and (3) facilitate access to information (p. 788). From this point of view, social media became a logical form of communication and are particularly useful in the context of cyberactivism (Halpern & Gibbs, 2013, p. 1162). In addition to increasing communication between citizens, social media put considerable pressure on governments by offering citizens a platform for greater surveillance of a state’s playing field and its corporate powers (Kidd & McIntosh, 2016, p. 788).

Expanding on the aforementioned ideas, Leong et al. (2019) introduce the concept of "connective action". By contrast to "collective action" which emphasizes organizational resources and collective identities, connective action can be conceptualized as a new form of collective engagement. Connective action includes the interaction of multiple actors based on self-motivated and personalized social media content although no common purpose is necessarily identified (Leong et al., 2019, p. 174). Therefore, the main distinction of connective action from collective action is that it begins with personal action frames which are later diffused through social media to create large-scale and fluid social networks (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p. 750; Leong et al., 2019, p. 196). In this setting, social media plays the role of a linkage between overlapping networks (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p. 750), and clarifier of relationships between individuals and organizations (Leong et al., 2019, p. 174). Furthemore, connective action is particularly efficient at providing visibility to politically oppressed individuals, evading government censorship, and informing the international community (Torres Soriano, 2013, pp. 334-335).

Constraining role of social media in SMs

The second set of academic literature suggests arguments challenging the view of social media as a tool for citizens in SMs (Kidd & McIntosh, 2016, p. 788). Furthemore, this approach points out that social media could even be counter-productive in sustaining SMs (Ravanoğlu Yılmaz, 2017, p. 153).

Zhuravskaya et al. (2020) emphasize the environment in which social media operate: while communication technologies and social media are powerful tools in democratic settings, authoritarian regimes considerably limit their scope of action (p. 416). In turn, access to the internet offers authoritarian regimes a supplementary instrument to monitor, infiltrate and silence SMs (Zhuravskaya et al., 2020, p. 417). A possible counter-use of social media is, for instance, the propagation of misinformation about protests by autocratic governments to confuse the population (Torres Soriano, 2013, p. 342). Worse instances which discourage participation in SMs include the cyber-tracking of the population, and the use of torture (Torres Soriano, 2013, p. 339). In this aspect, autocratic governments benefit from social media to reinforce repression (Torres Soriano, 2013, pp. 341-342).

Regarding the society, Gladwell (2010) as cited in Kidd & McIntosh (2016) challenges Leong et al. (2019) position on the minimized costs of participation in SMs through social media. Gladwell (2010) stresses the success of "high-risk activism" instances where strong interpersonal relationships were built (p. 44). High-risk activism is defined as actions involving great personal consequences, such as the possibility of being arrested, or even killed in worse instances (McAdam, 1986, p. 67). By contrast to online activism, Gladwell (2010) claims that offline SMs create numerous opportunities for greater group contention and homogeneity, which increases participants' willingness to make greater sacrifices for the interests of a cause. Contrastingly, activism on social media accounts for "low-risk activism" as liking and sharing posts does not directly expose an individual to danger, such as physical violence (p. 789).

In the context of online activism, Christensen (2011) argues that the performed activities are thus minimal for the SM, and leave a misleading feeling of accomplishment (p. 156). Besides gratification and social recognition in online activism, Christensen (2011) outlines only limited participant's incentives to promote a cause. This considerably reduces the intensity of a protest, as fewer participants engage in high-risk activism (pp. 156-157). In this setting, online activism is considered as gathering passive SM members and failing to create substantial commitment (Hwang & Kim, 2015, p. 480). Christensen (2011) posits that increased tendency of online activism only produces small changes in SMs, which decreases their efficiency (p. 156). However, disentangling online from offline activism becomes increasingly challenging with evolving channels of SMs, with the inclusion of new technologies for instance (Hwang & Kim, 2015, p. 480). The principal concern arising from online activism is that it increasingly replaces more conventional and effective forms of participation (Christensen, 2011, pp. 156-157).

Ultimately, Torres Soriano (2013) explores the academically overemphasized power of social media in SMs (Torres Soriano, 2013, p. 337). This became apparent in the case of Iran's 2009 protest movements which were believed to be "revolutionary through the use of the internet" (Naghibi, 2011, p. 56). However, it has been later proven that the majority of social media posts regarding the movement were emitted by diasporic communities, with the use of Virtual Private Networks (Torres Soriano, 2013, pp. 337-338). Although cyberactivism allowed the participation of the Iranian diaspora, it mostly undermined local protestors. This is because the local power of social media was overestimated in the overthrowing of Iran's

regime (Naghibi, 2011, pp. 58-59). Consequently, this delegitimized the SM in Iran and increased the state's repression (Naghibi, 2011, p. 60). Based on these findings, Torres Soriano (2013) claims that cyberactivism generates illusional activism from distance, however, this is not sufficient if movements are not adequately supported locally (p. 337).

Mixed role of social media in SMs

The last set of academic literature builds a theory on a mixed approach to social media. This theory regards social media as playing a role in sustaining SMs, however outlines fundamental limitations of such communication technologies (Kidd & McIntosh, 2016, p. 789). The dominant argument of this theory is that social media should not be analyzed from a binary perspective of fostering or fragmenting the sustainability of a movement. By contrast, social media should be considered as a factor contributing to the sustainability of a movement but not fully explaining it due to social media limitations (Murphy, 2013, p. 112). Following this logic, Kamel (2014) argues that although social media play a crucial role in the mobilization of SMs, it does not necessarily foster cohesion and group homogeneity within the population. The sustainability of a movement mainly emanates from human passion and not the devices that communicate grievances (Kamel, 2014, p. 78).

Modern social media technologies provide new ways of social interactions in which users can easily access information but also contribute to it by sharing, discussing and modifying its content (Hwang & Kim, 2015, p. 478). In contrast to mobilization through traditional channels, such as historical workers unions, social media amplify interaction between people on a larger scale and thus more effectively collectivize and transmit information (Hwang & Kim, 2015, p. 479). Nevertheless, due to population heterogeneity, these new social interactions only have superficial effects on SMs (Hwang & Kim, 2015, p. 478). It can be highlighted that a successful mobilization for a movement does not necessarily assume its achievement of desired outcomes. While some groups show compatibility in terms of goals, the heterogeneity of a society may cause problems in building long-term alliances (Flesher Fominaya, 2010, p. 401).

Another important determinant of the strength of social media interactions is social capital, which can be divided into bonding and bridging capital. Accordingly, bonding capital can be found in close relationships such as in circles encompassing family and friends

whereas bridging capital links members from different backgrounds. However, while social media facilitates the creation of bridging capital, it does not tighten the gap between differing ideologies between group members. As a result, the use of social media does not always generate homogeneous ideas regarding a SM (Hwang & Kim, 2015, p. 480). Although bridging capital fails to produce strong social ties, it broadens opportunities to acquire new information and resources. Therefore, the main advantage of social media remains its ability to attract a large audience in a reduced amount of time (Hwang & Kim, 2015, p. 481; Ravanoğlu Yılmaz, 2017, p. 149). Hwang & Kim (2015) point out that social media can be efficiently used in sustaining movements when participants (1) not only rely on online activism, but also actively participate in the SM offline and (2) when participants develop sufficient bonding and bridging capitals (Hwang & Kim, 2015, p. 486).

Olorunnisola & Martin (2013) acknowledge the positive effects of social media on SMs. The authors argue, however, that social media supporters as well as disprovers fail to examine external factors to social media, such as internet penetration (p. 276). In fact, although social media offer a platform in which information circulates beyond borders (Hwang & Kim, 2015, p. 481), this information remains inaccessible in internet deprived zones. While internet and social media are available in richer, better educated, younger and male communities, these are predominantly located in the West (Zhao, 2014, p. 2). Olorunnisola & Martin (2013) primarily focus on the African continent where only one fourth of the population has an internet connection (p. 286). Although the reasons for this lack of connection are multiple, including the oppressiveness of certain authoritarian regimes, some democratic African countries simply lack the financial means to increase their internet penetration (Olorunnisola & Martin, 2013, p. 285).

Mutsvairo (2016) complements these findings by pointing out that scholars have a tendency to apply a Western model of SMs and democratization to remaining world counterparts. As a result, some regional specificities are overlooked while analyzing social media effectiveness in SMs (p. 6). In the African context for instance, regional complexities, power relations and contradictions greatly affect the ways through which social media are used (Mutsvairo, 2016, p. 7). Additionally, Mutsvairo (2016) argues that scholars promptly assume the positive effects of new technologies for political and social emancipation. However, the author indicates that although some regions have free access to the internet, not

all internet users use social media for political purposes (p. 8). As a result, the effects of social media positively influencing SMs outcomes might be overestimated (pp. 8-9).

Social media in the context of AUs in Egypt

As demonstrated in the theoretical framework, scholars present differing arguments on the role of social media in sustaining SMs. In the context of the AUs in Egypt, Lawson (2015) identifies regime oppression and societal fragmentations as incremental in the SM's outcome (Lawson, 2015, pp. 14-18). Based on this finding, this paper outlines two relevant dimensions in exploring the mechanisms which led social media to shape the outcomes of the SM in Egypt. The first dimension is environmental, and stresses the importance of the political conditions in which a SM occurs. The political environment of a state encompasses its tolerance of free media (Zhuravskaya et al., 2020), but also whether the state offers a sufficient internet penetration to its citizens (Olorunnisola & Martin, 2013). The second dimension is societal, and emphasizes the influence of social media users' diversity on the effectiveness of digital tools. Academic literature points out that homogenous societies increase the effectiveness of social media in SMs (Flesher Fominaya, 2010; Hwang & Kim, 2015). Consequently, the paper expects that Egypt's authoritarian regime as an environmental condition and the fragmentation within the population as a societal condition significantly decreased the efficiency of social media in sustaining the SM. In turn, social media contributed to the fragmentation of the Egyptian SM and the failure of its objective, democratization. In other words, the two following hypotheses are formulated :

- H_1: a SM's use of social media in an autocratic political regime limits the movement's ability to reach its goals.
- H_2: a SM's use of social media in a heterogeneous society limits the movement's ability to reach its goals.

Methods

This section aims to indicate the method through which the theories outlined in the theoretical framework section are applied to the context of the AUs in Egypt. This paper firstly points out the academic relevance of analyzing Egypt when studying the conditions under which social media influence the outcomes of SMs. Secondly, the paper expands on the

research design that is utilized to conduct this analysis and the ways through which data will be collected.

Case selection

To investigate the conditions under which social media influence the outcomes of SMs, this paper focuses on Egypt, as a single case study. There are several reasons for which Egypt is particularly relevant. Firstly, in terms of structure, a single case enables the collection of a great amount of empirical data, which favors the focus on the conditions under which social media influence SMs outcomes. Secondly, in relation to the emergence of contemporary movements, Egypt and other countries of the AUs can be considered as one of the first SMs including an extensive use of social media (Bayat, 2013, p. 587). However, Tunisia and Egypt can be distinguished from all other states of the North African regarding their pre-movement conditions. These differences occurred within: (1) the role of the militaries which were defenders of the nations rather than a support to the regimes, (2) high levels of ethnic and sectarian heterogeneity, and (3) extended economies (Hinnebusch, 2015, p. 211).

While the Tunisian revolution was partially successful due to social media, the case of Egypt requires further investigation as social media have failed to bring a sustainable path to the democratization of the country (Allinson, 2012, p. 294). As a result, this finding suggests that other factors have altered the effective use of social media in producing the desired outcomes of the SM. By selecting Egypt as a study case, this paper aims to reveal the environmental and societal conditions under which social media influenced the failure of the Egyptian Revolution.

Operationalization

To adequately measure the effects and consequences of the use of social media in the outcomes of the Egyptian Revolution, all variables are operationalized. Consequently, this paper firstly conceptualizes *authoritarianism* and *population heterogeneity* conditions under which social media influenced the outcomes of the Egyptian SM. Subsequently, the paper indicates how these environmental and societal conditions can be measured. Finally, the dependent variable *SMs outcomes* is also conceptualized and operationalized.

- *Environmental condition : Authoritarianism (independent variable)*

Authoritarian regimes can be conceptualized as political systems lacking free, fair and competitive elections, undermining civil liberties such as the freedom of expression and providing seemingly democratic institutions for public legitimization, controlled nevertheless by authoritarian rule and practises (Köllner & Kaillitz, 2013, p. 6). This paper operationalizes autocratic regimes based on the presence of all of the aforementioned criterions in a regime. The regime's evolution is measured with the use of Polity IV index and the analysis of the Egyptian regime from 1964 to 2013 (Scott & Carter, 2014, p. 19). (See Figure 1 & Table 2, Appendix A).

- *Societal condition : Population heterogeneity (independent variable)*

Population heterogeneity can be conceptualized as the result of ethnic, religious, sectarian and political divides within the Egyptian population. In the context of the Egyptian uprisings and in line with various scholars (Elsaid & Elsaid 2012; Hafez, 2016; Lawson, 2015; Sorour & Dey, 2014), this paper considers political fragmentation as the major consequence of heterogeneity within the Egyptian population. Accordingly, political fragmentation emanates from political instability, conflicts, diversification of political parties, but most importantly, from cultural divides (Elsaid & Elsaid, 2012, p. 1). These directly translate to different preferences of leadership style and behavior (Elsaid & Elsaid, 2012, pp. 1-2). Political fragmentation is measured with the use of Rovati's (2020) operationalization of *Islamic Traditionalism* and *Secular Politics* indices, laid out in Figure 2 (see Appendix B).

- *SM's outcomes (dependent variable)*

Finally, in the context of the AUs and for the purposes of this research, *SM's outcomes*, the dependent variable is operationalized in a dichotomous manner. In the scope of this paper, *SM's outcomes* are considered as successful if a SM resulted in the democratization of the country. In turn, *SM's outcomes* are regarded as unsuccessful when a SM did not result in the democratization of the country. As Egypt did not democratize (Allinson, 2014, p. 294), the outcome of the Egyptian uprisings is considered as unsuccessful.

Research Design & Data collection

To fully capture the conditions under which social media contributed to sustaining and constraining the AUs in Egypt, this paper suggests applying process tracing as a research design. This method allows the unpacking of causality, and studying the relation between two variables under scope conditions (Trampusch & Palier, 2016, p. 438). The cause-effect link that connects an environmental or societal condition to the outcome of Egypt uprisings is unwrapped and divided into smaller steps. Data in the form of interviews, focus groups and speeches retrieved from academic literature and YouTube videos is subsequently applied to each of these steps. Additional explanations regarding data collection are provided further in this section.

Process tracing is particularly suitable for Egypt's single case study, notably as this case has been outlined as an outlier of the AUs in the case selection (Hinnebusch, 2015, p. 211). As the environmental and societal factors are unique to the case, process tracing allows the in-depth focus on these factors, and the isolation of specific mechanisms which caused social media to influence the outcomes of the Egyptian uprisings. Following this research design, this paper firstly lays out the context of the Egyptian uprisings, including important sequences of events. Subsequently, this paper identifies specific environmental and societal conditions within these sequences of events. These conditions are: *political regime* and *population heterogeneity*. These conditions functioned as causal mechanisms throughout the complete sequence of events of the Egyptian uprisings with varying effects on influencing the role of social media in the SM's outcome. Process tracing contributes to capturing the functioning of these mechanisms, their influence on social media and thus, the outcome of the SM in Egypt. In this context, process tracing is used in a deductive manner to test and refine existing theories (Trampusch & Palier, 2016, p. 437).

The data required for this investigation is based on academic articles to provide an in-depth analysis of Egypt uprisings' context and sequence of events. The selection of academic literature to discuss the conditions is based on the inclusion of critical junctures in relation to social media during the 2011-present period. In turn, evidence to prove the impact of the environmental and societal conditions on social media is chosen from interviews, focus groups and speeches of Egyptian activists discussing their post-2013 observations.

Analysis

This section provides a comprehensive analysis of the conditions under which social media influenced the outcomes of Egyptian uprisings. First, this paper outlines an introduction to the political context of the Egyptian Revolution. Thereafter, the environmental and societal conditions are identified within the process. This is done in the form of an analytic narrative, in which the conditions are explored in-depth to explain their role as causal mechanisms in the sequences of events, and under which social media influenced the outcomes of the Egyptian uprisings.

Political context of the Egyptian Revolution

Mubarak's presidency debuted in a state of emergency, following Sadat's assasination in 1981. The reimposition of the Emergency Law in a time of political chaos provided a great advantage and opportunity for Mubarak to set the permanence of the emergency rule throughout his presidency (Ardovini & Mabon, 2020, p. 464).

In the 1990s, Mubarak's regime experienced considerable pressure from international institutions to adopt neoliberal policies. Although Egypt seemed to be progressing towards international openness, national living standards heavily declined and stimulated opposition to the regime. In fact, misleading assumptions of international institutions for a Western democratization model led to the implementation of an Egyptian *façade democracy* (Lawson, 2015, p. 8). As a part of its component, Mubarak allowed the participation of opposition parties in 1987 and 2000 elections and allowed the legitimization of his regime (Ardovini & Mabon, 2020, p. 464).Consequently, both religious and secularist opposition groups became a systematic threat to Mubarak's rule (Ardovini & Mabon, 2020, pp. 464-465).

In the late 1990s, satellite television opened a new flow of political information and contributed to unifying the Arab political space (Salanova, 2012, p. 19). Its effects did not last long, as Mubarak's regime systematically censored satellite television (Lynch, 2011, p. 302). Instead, Mubarak's regime relied on a governmental and manipulated broadcasting systems which depicted traditional values but also prevented the interference of external messages (Salanova, 2012, p. 22). Despite an unfair political playing field and media

censorship, in 2005, a religious organization named *Muslim Brotherhood* (MB) won parliamentary seats and introduced an election candidate (Lawson, 2015, pp. 8-9).

Nevertheless, this event fueled threats to Mubarak's regime and further increased human and constitutional rights breaches, along with an increased censorship (Ardovini & Mabon, 2020, p. 465). Non-governmental political activities were forbidden and around 30.000 political prisoners were detained. Consequently, authoritarianism in the Arab states led to the rise of anti-government sentiments and an accumulation of grievances among the population. A crucial event to the beginning of the AUs was the self-immolation of a Tunisian citizen which was recorded and propagated through social media (Salanova, 2012, pp. 17-18). This marked the beginning of a revolution against authoritarian repressiveness which quickly spread to other countries, including Egypt (Abdullah, 2020, pp. 7-8; Salanova, 2012, pp. 17-18). This also represented a first and major step-in of social media in voicing grievances of religious as well as secular groups (Ardovini & Mabon, 2020, p. 466). The speed and interactivity of these emerging social platforms have significantly encouraged collective action through the formation of a sense of community and collective identity. Furthemore, it allowed the inclusion of several socio-political groups, including marginalized group members and the global community, which made the Egyptian revolution gain support on the international level (Abdullah, 2020, p. 8).

The first social media page created in Egypt which had a greater impact is "We are all Khaled Said" on Facebook, gathered over 100.000 followers after only 3 days (TED, 2015). Its biggest success is illustrated by Ghonim, its creator and an Egyptian activist: *"An anonymous administration was inviting people to join the page [...] everyone became an owner of this page, everyone started contributing photos and videos to denounce the atrocities in Egypt and ideas of what to do next"* (TED-Ed, 2013).

Mubarak's period and successful overthrow

- *Environmental condition : authoritarianism*

After the provision of a political context, the paper proceeds by analyzing the environmental and societal conditions in the following sections. While social media is often assumed as beneficial to citizens (Ravanoğlu Yılmaz, 2017, p. 150), the Egyptian political

regime demonstrates multiple instances where social media were used against Egyptians by the government through the dissemination of propaganda and false information (Salanova, 2012, pp. 15-16). Social media increasingly offer the opportunity to autocratic regimes not only to repressively filter information but also co-opt and modify social media content for their own purposes (Gunitsky, 2015, p. 42). In this aspect, Egypt and other autocratic regimes use two strategies: repression during the Mubarak period and cooptation after his overthrow. Repression consists in the use of threats or/and physical sanctions against an individual or an organization in the purpose of deterring certain activities (Sika, 2019, p. 679). In turn, cooptation occurs when an individual or an organization is given benefits for the acquiescence of certain actions (Sika, 2019, p. 680). Both of these features are considered as specific to autocratic regimes, according to this paper's conceptualization (Köllner & Kaillitz, 2013, p. 4).

During the protests of January 2011, the Egyptian authorities still lacked knowledge on social media developments. Therefore, as a rapid repressive response, the regime started with banning internet and mobile phone networks (Sorour & Dey, 2014, p. 510). Nevertheless, Egyptian activists overcame this blockage through the use of alternative media and satellite phones (Salanova, 2012, p. 46). Iskander (2011) provides evidence of this successful mobilization despite the internet shutdown through the conduction of an interview with a Facebook activist (p. 1232).

"The internet was shut down [...] but organization had been put in place [...] and created enough momentum to demonstrations to continue without the tool of the internet."

- Interview, March 2011 (Iskander, 2011, p. 1232).

The quote stresses that the internet shutdown did not have greater implications on population mobilization. Furthermore, the quote depicts that the use of social media was not essential to continue demonstrations. It implies, however, that social media was useful to consolidate organization in the mobilization stage, which confirms Kidd & McIntosh (2016) and Leong et al. (2019) theories on information speed and the consolidation of connective actions. Therefore, the SM's use of social media in an autocratic political system did not limit the SM at this stage of the democratization process.

Consequently, Egyptian authorities attempted a co-optation strategy through the use of cell phones and social media in order to mobilize pro-Mubarak supporters to counter the demonstrations (Gunitsky, 2015, p. 46). Arguably, the government's attempts to respond mostly failed due to the lack of a strong cooptation strategy, and public opinion remained heavily skewed towards the revolutionaries (Gunitsky, 2015, p. 50). In this aspect, the first authoritarian attempt to use social media against the demonstrators interests failed, as Mubarak officially resigned the 11th February 2011 (Lawson, 2015, p. 13).

The empowerment of the the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) and MB

Once Mubarak's regime was dismantled, the SCAF took the role of the executive. In order to ensure its own survival and overcome the remainings of Mubarak's weak institutions, the SCAF allied with the MB as an attempt to become legitimate to the Muslim population. Moreover, as it became clear to the authorities that social media constitute a major communication force of the population, the SCAF created official social media pages to *"remain close to the Egyptian people"* (El-Khalili, 2013, p. 1) Although the initiative of SCAF was welcomed with excitement by part of the Egyptian population, it was not free from counter-revolution propaganda (El-Khalili, 2013, pp. 1-2; Sika, 2019, p. 682), and is described as a cooptation strategy (Sika, 2019, p. 680). Evidence regarding the presence of repression and cooptation is collected by Sika (2019) with the use of 34 semi-structured interviews and focus groups including 70 Egyptian activists (pp. 681-682).

The creation of social media network by the SCAF had three propaganda objectives: (1) mobilizing hatred against activists and revolutionaries, (2) acquiring friendship from the population through glittering strategies and (3) demoralizing and deterring revolutionary activities (El-Khalili, 2013, p. 4). The two first objectives heavily relied on co-optation in order to successfully apply repression, as a part of the third objective. All three propaganda objectives can be depicted in the SCAF's social media communiqués. The first objective was achieved when the SCAF re-published bloody images from the 25th of January and portrayed the *Egyptian Youth* as "*hungry murderers"* (El-Khalili, 2013, p. 7). Furthemore, the SCAF social media pages often depicted the contrast between the "*terrorist, violent and immoral*" youth and the "*protecting, guardian and legitimate*" army (El-Khalili, 2013, p. 4). As a part of the second propaganda objective, this was accompanied by population glittering techniques, honouring religious citizens supporting the army. This simultaneously

deteriorated the perception of the *Egyptian Youth*, which caused the masses to turn away from political activism, but also encouraged some citizens to rally with the SCAF's ideology (El-Khalili, 2013, p. 5-7). To securize its economic interests, the SCAF eventually delegated its power to the MB by justifying it as a *"smooth transitional process to democracy"* (Sika, 2019, p. 682). As a result, Morsi, a MB candidate was elected as president in June 2012 (Sika, 2019, p. 683). Sika (2019) examines the betrayal feeling in the discourse of young activists (pp. 685-686):

"Morsi co-opted many MB adherents through providing them positions in the government [...] the MB youth were willing to accept the use of repression against their previous"friends"

- Focus group, May 2015 (Sika, 2019, p. 683).

"I used to mobilize people to sign petitions [...] today [...] exactly the same citizens who used to listen to me, would now call the police and try to imprison me"

- Interview, September 2015 (Sika, 2019, pp. 685-686).

Both quotes illustrate the presence and repercussions of cooptation, a component of the authoritarian condition which contributed to the weakening of population alliances. The use of the terms "*previous friends*" in the second quote outlines cooptation as successful in fragmenting activists. The process of cooptation within the SCAF discussed by El-Kalili (2013) are clearly depicted in the observations after Morsi's election made by Sika (2019). This demonstrates that processes of cooptation were inherited by Morsi's government. Accordingly, when the Egyptian public became sufficiently co-opted and fragmented, this allowed the regime to systematically apply repression to pursue its existence (El-Khalili, 2013, p. 6). Processes of repression explored by El-Kalili (2013) within the SCAF can similarly be portrayed in Sika's (2019) observations on the growing fear among young activists after Morsi's election (p. 684):

" I feel insecure because the government can shut us down anytime [...]"

- Interview, October 2015 (Sika, 2019, p. 684).

[...] we just froze because of the security issues and political situation which threatens young activists, [...] I am not interested by participation anymore, people have either been jailed or had their reputation tarnished by the media"

- Interview, October 2015 (Sika, 2019, p. 684).

Following the successfully applied *cooptation*, these quotes show the insecurities authoritarian *repression* created on online and offline participation. Both quotes demonstrate the transformation of online activism into high-risk activism as activists fear prison and negative reports in the media. In this aspect, both cooptation and repression were successfully yielded by the SCAF to the MB. This led social media to become an authoritarian tool to actively restrict the Egyptian SM in achieving its desired outcome, democratization. Furthermore, the authoritarian condition contributed to the creation of fragmentation between groups (Sika, 2019, p. 688), but also increased participation costs as such as it discourages high-risk activism (El-Khalili, 2013, p. 5) This therefore confirms Zhuravskaya et al., (2020) theory claiming that the political environment in which social media operate limits a SM's ability to reach its goals (p. 416).

- *Societal condition : population heterogeneity*

Although ethnic and sectarian divisions were already a characteristic of the Egyptian society in the pre-revolutionary era (Hinnebusch, 2015, p. 211), social media significantly contributed to amplifying this heterogeneity (Salanova, 2012, p. 38). This stems from the assumption that social media do not systematically promote assimilation and unity, but an increased engagement with groups sharing similar culture and beliefs (Ali et al., 2019, p. 461). Under the authoritarian condition, the environmental mechanism was firstly outlined as having opened a window of opportunities to demonstrators, however, the Egyptian government quickly transformed social media as a propaganda tool to its advantage. Similarly, the population heterogeneity condition is firstly analyzed as beneficial in the societal mechanism, however later became a challenge to maintaining group cohesion in the long-term, which caused the SM to fail democratization, its ultimate objective.

The use of internet for political change in Egypt started with the use of blogs and forums in the 2000s. Consequently, it can be argued that the construction of bridging capital (Hwang & Lim, 2015) debuted several years before the revolution (Ali et al., 2019, p. 466). The common feeling to change among Egyptians constituted the principal triggering factor which initiated the construction of bridging capital between various socio-political groups. In addition to being less controlled by the regime than traditional media, social media played a

crucial role in spreading awareness about coming demonstrations, providing information about the logistics and encouraging people to be part in the collective action (Ali et al., 2019, p. 467). Toppeling authoritarianism as the main objective between different socio-political groups was sufficient to develop large-scale mobilization and successfully end Mubarak's rule (Ali et al., 2019, pp. 467-468). However, during this mobilization phase, social media simultaneously contributed to amplifying differences between the groups, and fostering acculturation and fragmentation (Ali et al., 2019, p. 467; Hafez, 2016, p. 3).

Further fragmentation during Morsi's rule

Accordingly, as measured by Rovati (2020), the *Islamic Traditionalism* and *Secular Politics* indices in Egypt were both comparably high after Morsi's election (Rovati, 2020, pp. 217-222) (See Figure 2, Appendix B). Sectarian divides regarding the political future of the country can therefore be explained by the overlap of religious and secular politics after the election of a MB candidate (Sorour & Dey, 2014, p. 510). Nevertheless, as indicated by Rovati (2020), secularism in Egypt was as prominent as Islamic traditionalism during the revolutionary period, which caused the Egyptian population to separate into smaller groups (Rovati, 2020, p. 218).

The advantages of social media, such as its speed and low participation costs therefore transformed into a "*battlefield of misinformation*" which only enhanced the verbal war and divisions between supporters and opponents of president Morsi (Ali et al., 2019, p. 469). Social media pages actively voiced opposing discourses which strengthen one's positions rather than stimulating interaction (Hafez, 2016, p. 7). This distracted both polarized groups from processes of institutionalization and political reform, causing the SM's goal, democratization, to become an illusion (Hafez, 2016, pp. 1-2). This phenomenon is clearly illustrated in Ghonim's quote: *"The same tool that allowed us to topple dictators, eventually tore us apart […] We failed to build consensus and the political struggle led to intense polarisation. Social media only amplified that state by facilitating the spread of misinformation, rumours, echo-chambers and hate speeches* (TED, 2015).

Ghonim's quote points out the presence of political fragmentation and the role of social media in amplifying it. The first part of the quote demarcates the progressive transition of the role of social media during the revolution. Accordingly, bridging capital between

opposing groups was strong before the common objective of Mubarak's overthrow, however, once it was achieved, it created different dynamics characterized by strong in-group collectivism, but weak societal collectivism (Elsaid & Elsaid, 2012, p. 6). Ghonim claims: *"While it is true that polarization is primarily driven by social media, by our human behavior, social media shapes this behavior and magnifies its impact"* (TED, 2015). This second quote therefore suggests that social media are heavily influenced by the human factor and the behaviors of fragmented groups. The advantages of social media including its speed and interconnectivity yielded space to the aforementioned negatives, such as *rumors* and *hate speeches*.

This finding confirms Flesher Fominaya (2010) finding that social media is less efficient in heterogeneous societies. Moreover, due to social media's failure to maintain a cohesive SM in Egypt (Ali et al., 2019, p. 469), Hwang & Lim (2015) observations on the failed ability of social media to maintain bridging capital in the long-term can be claimed as consistent. Based on the data, this paper stresses that it is the human factor in heterogeneous societies which has the greatest impact in the way social media shapes SMs outcomes. As a result, the use of social media in a heterogeneous society limited the SM to reach its goal.

Al-Sisi period and vacuum

- *Reinforced effects of the environmental and societal conditions*

As the MB defected in upholding Egyptian upheavals and fulfilling the military's interest, the SCAF took over Egypt in a military coup and later introduced Marshall Al-Sisi as a president candidate, who was elected in May 2014 (Sika, 2019, pp. 683-684). However, Egypt's generals realized that the promise of restoring security will not legitimize their oppressive rule and termination of democratic opening. Consequently, to justify state-sponsored violence and human rights abuses, the Al-Sisi regime relied on propaganda techniques, including the use of social media and the internet (Hamzawy, 2018, p. 491). Similarly to the pre-Morsi era (El-Khalili, 2015), the SCAF uses social media to divulge conspiracy theories, defamation campaigns and hate speeches against opposition of the regime (Hamzawy, 2018, p. 494). Nevertheless, due to previous cooptation and fragmentation, numerous disagreements arose within the opposition regarding whether to

condemn the SCAF's violence against protestors, or in turn, support the military (Sika, 2019, p. 686).

Moreover, the regime introduced strict surveillance systems, which extensively controlled public opinion and expression on social media (Herrera, 2015, p. 355). The regime justified its actions as tools eliminating *terrorism* and *extremist behaviors* in the country, which threatens its political stability Hamzawy, 2018, p. 493). This instance can be illustrated by a quote of Said, an activist for Rights and Freedoms: *"There is no space for any kind of political movement [...] even social media that has been used before by Egyptian activists became very dangerous as they* (the government) *closely monitor internet and other means to build social movements"* (Al Jazeera English, 2020). The quote depicts the transition of social media to authoritarian cyber-tools, as predicted by Torres Soriano (2013, p. 339). Its consequences are further demonstrated in quotes retrieved by Sika (2019):

"I am uncomfortable to mobilize people on the streets or online, talk negatively about politicians or mainstream media"

- Interview, May 2015 (Sika, 2019, p. 685).

Repression through social media also has repercussions on participation, as seen in the following quote :

"Whoever is not supporting the regime is either imprisoned or killed. Therefore, I am frustrated and am not even interested in becoming politically active anymore"

- Interview, June 2015 (Sika, 2019, p. 685).

As the later quote mentions "imprisonment" and "death", it illustrates the dangers of online activism in Egypt. Furthemore, the dangerosity of online activism combined with tremendously high fragmentation within the country, skewed the advantages of social media towards Al-Sisi's regime. The authoritarian condition therefore contradicts Halpern & Gibbs (2013) observations on facilitated access to information and communication (p. 1162) as the regime monitors and filters out the content of social media (Herrera, 2015, p. 355). Additionally, it also opposes Leong et al. (2019) findings on the minimized participation costs through social media, as under Al-Sisi, online activism became "high-risk activism". By contrast to Leong et al. (2019) prediction, sustaining the movement online generated high

personal costs, which caused a progressive disengagement. In this aspect, the authoritarian condition again has a greater impact on social media, and it can be claimed that a SM's use of social media in an autocratic political regime limits the movement's ability to reach its goals.

Democratization, the expected outcome of the Egypian Revolution did not occur and Egypt's democratic Polity IV index decreased from -2 to -4 between 2011 and 2014 (Scott & Carter, 2014, p. 19). This corresponds to the label "closed anocracy" (Marshall, 2014), which indicates that Egypt cannot be considered as democratic (See Table 1, Appendix A). This paper therefore demonstrates that the use of social media under the *authoritarian* and *population heterogeneity* conditions limited the Egyptian SM in achieving democratization. By contrast, the authoritarian rule further adapted to the use of social media and reinforced repression.

Conclusion

In conclusion, although social media highly contribute to SMs nowadays, their influence on a SM's outcome is subject to certain conditions. In regards to the research question "*Under what conditions do social media influence the outcomes of social movements?,* this paper explores the Egyptian Revolution between 2011-2014 and traces its impacts.

Three main findings can be derived from this paper's research. Firstly, this paper explores the environmental condition, *authoritarianism*. Social media provided numerous benefits such as facilitated access to information and increased communication to the Egyptian population. Nevertheless, with the use of quotes as evidence, this paper demonstrates the process through which the authoritarian rule adapted to social media use and transformed it as a tool to co-opt activists and repress the SM. Until Mubarak's overthrow, the authoritarian condition did not have a significant effect on social media and the SM's achievements. However, with the acquisition of knowledge on social media, the regime also took advantage of its benefits by pursuing cooptation and repression online. As these two elements participated in the SM's fragmentation and failed objective of Egypt's democratization, H_1 claiming that a SM's use of social media in an autocratic political regime limits the movement's ability to reach its goals, is confirmed.

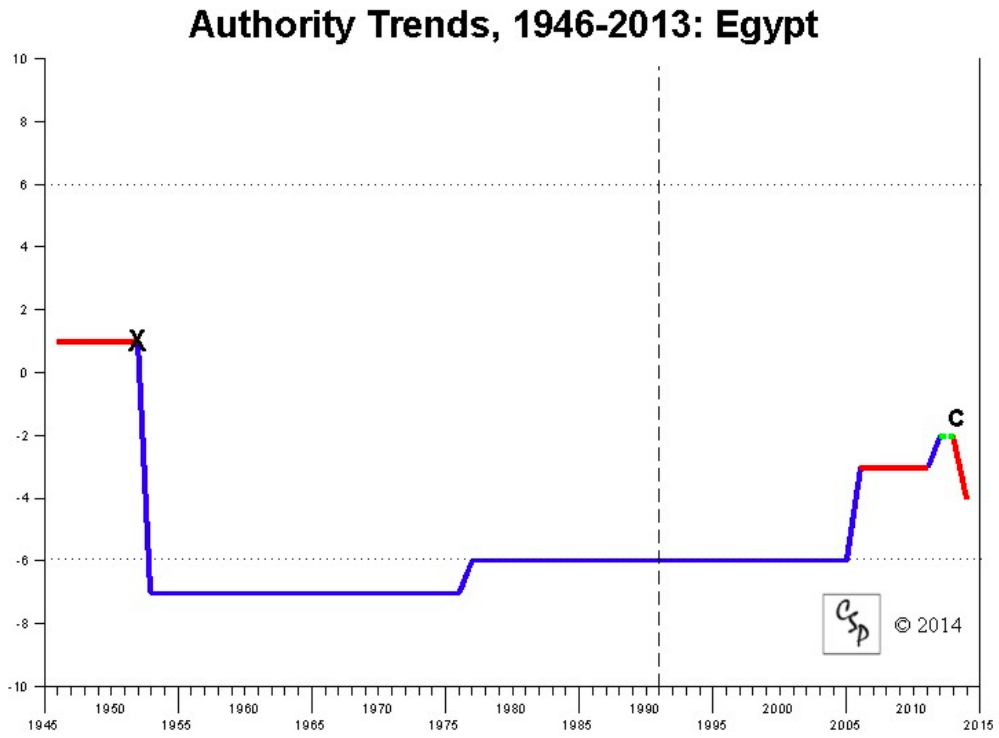
Secondly, the paper examines the societal condition, *population heterogeneity.* While social media allowed the creation of bridging capital for Mubarak's overthrow, it also participated in the reinforcement of in-group collectivism. Based on evidence derived from activists quotes, this paper argues that the connective action of social media eventually became a weakness in the context of population heterogeneity. This is because social media amplified the propagation of opposing voices, which fragmented alliances and distracted Egyptian from democratization processes. Consequently, this paper confirms H_2 stating that a SM's use of social media in an heterogeneous society limits the movement's ability to reach its goals.

Finally, the last main finding is the observed impact of the environmental condition on the societal condition. Accordingly, this paper demonstrates that the online use of cooptation and repression by the authoritarian rule was further facilitated by the additional fragmentation which social media produced on the pre-fragmented society. Thereafter, this enabled Al-Sisi's regime to remain in power until presently and further repress the Egyptian society in online as well as offline activities. As democratization, the ultimate objective of the Egyptian Revolution did not occur, the SM can be concluded as unsuccessful. From a positive perspective, social media contributed to raising awareness about authoritarian injustices in Egypt on the international level.

This paper's findings on the Egyptian Revolution fall in line with Lawson's (2015) observations of scopes conditions, which shows a certain degree of academic consistency. However, this paper also encounters crucial limitations. Firstly, it is limited to the analysis of one environmental and societal condition. However, the democratization failure may be explained by alternative conditions, which should be explored in future research. Subsequently, the analyzed data is solely retrieved from interviews and speeches of Egyptian activists, which do not depict propaganda discourse and the repressive actions of the Egyptian government. An interesting prospect for future research could be the examination of governmental social media pages and the depiction of their contrasting discourses in comparison to the observations made based on the activists. Ultimately, to generalize the effects of *authoritarianism* and *population heterogeneity* to other SMs, the findings of this paper should be replicated on other case studies.

Appendix A

Figure 1 : Authority trends (1946-2013), Egypt - Polity IV measurements (Scott & Carter, 2014)



Source: Scott, J. M. & Carter, R. G. (2014). From Cold War to Arab Spring: Mapping the Effects of Paradigm Shifts on the Nature and Dynamics of US Democracy Assistance to the Middle East and North Africa. In *Democratization, 22*(4), pp. 1-26.

Table 1 : Interpretation of Polity IV scores

Regime Type	**Polity IV Score**
Full democracy	10
Democracy	6 to 9
Open Anocracy	1 to 5
Closed Anocracy	-5 to 0
Autocracy	-10 to -6

Source: Marshall, M. G. (2014). Polity IV Project: Country Reports 2010. Societal-Systems Research Inc.

Table 2 : Authority trends (1946-2013), Egypt - Polity IV measurements (Scott & Carter, 2014) with Interpretation of Polity IV Scores (Marshall, 2014).

Period	Polity IV Score	Regime Type
1946-1952	1	Open Anocracy
1952-1976	-7	Autocracy
1977-2005	-6	Autocracy
2005-2011	-3	Closed Anocracy
2011-2013	-2	Closed Anocracy
2013-2014	-4	Closed Anocracy

Source : Made based on Scott & Carter, 2014 & Marshall, 2014

Appendix B

Figure 2 : Islamic Traditionalism and Secular Politics Indices (2012-2014) in Egypt (Rovati, 2020)

TABLE 7.10 *Islamic Traditionalism Index* by sex and age (score: min = 1, max = 3)

		Sex		Age		
	Total	Male	Female	Up to 29	30–45	46 and more
Egypt	2.76	2.79	2.74	2.79	2.74	2.76

TABLE 7.17 *Secular Politics Index* by sex and age (scores: min = 1, max = 4)

		Sex		Age		
	Total	Male	Female	Up to 29	30–45	46 and more
Egypt	3.27	3.32	3.22	3.19	3.26	3.39

Source : Rovati, G. (2020). Chapter 7: Religious Affiliations and Social Coexistence in the Islamic Middle East Countries. In Zafrini, L. (ed). Migrants and Religion: Paths, Issues and Lenses. Brill, pp. 205-230.

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