

SOCIAL MEDIA AND WOMEN OF THE ARAB SPRING

**Effects of Social Media on Egyptian Women's Participation
in the Revolution**

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Master's Thesis

Social and Public Policy
Department of Social Sciences
and Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

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This master's thesis research explores the role of social media among women during the Arab uprising in Egypt in 2011. Women were vigorously active during the revolts in Tahrir Square, Cairo. This thesis examines women's participation in the revolts from their own viewpoint and pursues an explanation for women's social media use and their opinions about whether it enabled women's participation in those revolts. This issue is also examined from the standpoint of previous research in order to reflect on the findings of the thesis.

The data of this study consists of eight written documents and two YouTube interviews. The research is implemented by qualitative research methods: the empirical data consists of textual documentary data and was collected by a contact person in Cairo during the summer of 2014. The YouTube interviews were collected in Tahrir Square during the revolts in 2011, by utilising semi-structured interview methods. Qualitative content analysis is used as a method of data analysis.

The findings of data analysis show that social media's role in the uprisings varied. It was used as a tool for participating, information, mobilising and organising the events. It also had a deeper role in empowering women.

The conclusion of the research is that while social media worked well as a general tool during the Arab uprising it also empowered the women activists at personal level, which functioned as an encouragement system among the women. Women were eager to participate in the uprising and in the politics of their country when social media offered a place for freedom of expression, increased awareness, and encouragement among women.

Keywords: Arab Spring, social media, women's political participation, civic engagement, online/offline activism, social network, empowerment, democracy.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The idea for this thesis came from my great interest in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Women's daily life in this area is distinct compared to women in Scandinavia, which I find very interesting. Especially the role of women during the Arab Spring caught my attention. The cause for examining social media in the context of revolution was its debatable state as chronicled by the news media during the uprising. What effect did social media really have on the events of Arab uprisings?

Reasons for the unrest in Egypt include poverty, corruption and nationwide unemployment among young people. Protests that lasted eighteen days finally led to president Hosni Mubarak's resignation. The army along with Mubarak had been in power over three decades. (BBC 2013.)

Egyptian intellectuals from various ideological backgrounds created an anti-Mubarak movement – “Kifaya”. Kifaya was one of the first political movements that took advantage of the Internet to mobilise people to protest (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace [CEIP], 2010.). According to Merlyna Lim (2012, 232) “this was followed by the emergence of oppositional activists in the Egyptian blogosphere”. The Kifaya movement emerged subsequent to the 2005 elections. The main target was the end of Hosni Mubarak's rule (CEIP, 2010). Protests were continued by the April 6th Youth Movement alongside other movements, giving Facebook and Twitter significant roles in the January 2011 uprisings (CEIP, 2010). Internet-based social networks that were able to reach people in different areas succeeded in setting off the first spark of the revolution (Osman, Amr & Samei, Marwa Abdel 2012, 14).

The aim of this study is to examine Egyptian women's participation within the political field during the Arab uprising via social media. This thesis pursues a link between women's online and offline involvement in social networks and their involvement in political and social changes, in the form of two research questions.

The method of analysis in this study is ethnographic, focusing on social change in a certain culture. Another manner of approach is netnography, a term that includes 'Internet' and 'ethnography'. Ethnography and netnography share similar characteristics, as they both intend to explore and explain diverse, cultural worlds. (Kozinets et al. 2014, 262.) Netnography is used in order to understand the context, political participation, and online interaction of this study.

Through theories of online participation focusing on social media such as Facebook and Twitter I attempt to explain the role of social media and women's participation during the Arab uprising in Egypt. Data consists of eight written documents, which were collected in Cairo, Egypt, by my contact person and two YouTube interviews. The method of data collection was at first decided due to the nature of the research questions and later because of the obstacles in data gathering. The empirical data enable me to examine these subjects. Each respondent is an individual, and my major target here is not to label them under any movement. That is why, given the limited amount of data, I concentrate on women in general regardless of their age or political background. I am simply interested in women's political participation in Egypt, yet to fully understand the theme I also concentrate on the history women's movements. Interviewees are Egyptian women who were eager for a social and political change in their country.

One of the key challenges related to my identity as the researcher. I am a woman who has been raised in a democratic Nordic country. Finland, presumably a country of high gender equality, is a very different place for girls to grow up than Egypt. Keeping this in mind, the collected data gives me a good, if narrow, insight into women's lives and political participation in Egypt. The language of this study is English, which was selected because the research literature is in English and the language barrier between the respondents and the researcher was best able to be overcome through its use. This decision facilitated the minimization of possible misconceptions in the translation process. This process is described in detail in Chapter 4.2.

Chapter 2 covers the research background and theoretical framework. It deals primarily with studies about the research topic but it also covers the major theoretical approaches. I

begin with women's movements and political participation in Egypt and after that I continue to the conceptual definitions, where I explain the key terms of this thesis. Chapter 3 describes the chain of events of the Arab Spring in Egypt and also covers women's social media use during the uprisings. Chapter 4 enlightens the research process and methods and focuses on women and social media used in the Egyptian uprisings. After covering the data, Chapter 5 contains the results and Chapter 6 offers several conclusions from the data.

2 RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Civil society movements pre-dated the events of the Arab Spring. Merlyna Lim (2012, 232) points out that it is necessary to look beyond social media such as Facebook and Twitter and the timeline from January 2011 to February 2011 in order to understand the phenomenon of the Arab uprisings in Egypt. However, as social media managed to produce more comprehensive news about the uprising, it is interesting to examine the issue from this viewpoint (Hamdy & Gomaa 2012). The culture itself, the regime and control, the political history, and in this case women's status in the society should be examined. This study aims to examine the framework of the Arab Spring, specifically the evolution of politics in the modern Egyptian society that led to the uprising.

The revolution in Egypt was obviously not a Facebook or Twitter revolution but was related to the context of a highly stratified society. Poverty increased constantly, living conditions were increasingly uncertain, and strikes were forbidden as part of the repression against any political opposition. At the top of the highly stratified society, a class ruled with strict control over the political-economic-military complex at the expense of the Egyptian people. The revolution originated from this situation and people revolted against the regime's multidimensional injustices, with social media used as a tool of information and organisation. (Fuchs 2012, 389.)

Social networks are widely known these days, with their essence explored, e.g., by Manuel Castells (1996; 2009) and Jan van Dijk (1999; 2001; 2006). There are many definitions of social networks and social media, but this study focuses more on their role as a tool for communication than on their essence. Chapter 2.2 will focus on their function in this study. This chapter also defines the terms such as social movements, online activism, feminism, women's movement and empowerment. The definitions of these terms are open to debate but this study attempts to show them in their basic element.

2.1 Egyptian women: movements and political participation

Women's movement and activism have existed in Egypt for a long time (Al-Ali, 2000; Baron, 2005; Hafez, 2003). Both secular and religious movements have been a voice for women's rights. In this research, movement is used to refer to both secular and religious, political and non-political movements. Movement can be social participation of any kind.

Critiques have emerged concerning the state of the feminist movement and its particulars in Egypt (Cairo Papers 2009, Vol. 29, 117-118). However, in this study I will not concentrate on to that point. But to be precise I will present an overview of the evolution of Egyptian feminism and the women's movement, understanding the diversity of both definitions.

The first women's organizations developed with the formation of the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU) under Huda Sha'arawi, the pioneer of feminist movements, in 1923. Its purpose was to raise women's awareness to the point of making political and social equality with men a reality. (Sika & Khodary 2012, 92.) The Egyptian Feminist Party was established in 1942 and a few years later Bint al-Nil organization saw the daylight (ibid. 92). There is considerable debate regarding the beginning of the women's movement in Egypt. The debate surrounds the issue of who really instituted the women's movement and the origins of feminism in Egypt. (Al-Ali 2000, 57-58.)

During the Nasser regime the feminist movement made some progress. Women got the right to vote in 1956, for the first time in Egypt's history. Women also received other economical and political rights and gained limited rights to equality in public life. Despite the progress, family laws discriminating against women remained the same. (Sika & Khodary 2012, 92.) The hegemony of the state extended to civil society actors in 1964. Law 32/1964 enabled the state to strictly regulate civil society actors or actions. This quickly led to a point where women's organizations were associated with the authoritarian state, which ensured that women's rights were taken into consideration at the state level. After Nasser's death, the Sadat regime began and the power of the presidential office

emerged. Law 32/1964 remained in place; movements and unions stayed under strict state control. (Ibid. 93.) Sadat's regime was eager to promote women's rights and equality in education, employment and political participation, yet all the progress was permitted within the confines of authoritarianism. Some of the progressive laws considered women's personal status, such as the right to divorce. (Ibid. 93.)

Mubarak's regime shaped non-governmental organizations in the 1990s during Egypt's economic growth. They were harnessed to help the state development process. Women's organizations, along with other civil society organizations, increased exponentially during the subsequent decades. State officials increasingly intervened in the affairs of different organizations. This had an impact especially to women's organizations. (Sika & Khodary 2012, 94.)

During the year 2000 the National Council for Women was established by Mubarak's regime. This council collaborated with different women's organizations and strengthened the regime's support of women's development in Egypt and in its public sphere. (Sika & Khodary 2012, 94.) Women were allowed quota for participating in parliament in 2010, but soon after the January 25th uprising the Parliament was dissolved and the quota system was abolished. (Ibid. 95.)

Despite the opportunity for education, Egyptian women have higher unemployment level than men (Sika & Khodary 2012, 96). Women face discrimination in the private and public sphere. This happens apparently because of the regime; exclusion of citizens from various spheres has been part of the logic of the authoritarian state (Moghadam 2013, 403). These issues were the main reason for women to stand up and to join growing protests in the early 2000 (Sika & Khodary 2012, 96). Militants of Kifaya took to the streets to protest the intention of President Hosni Mubarak to seek a fifth term in office. Kifaya were followed by other groups of Egyptians, such as university professors, journalists, students, and workers who all set up movements for change. They all declared their willingness to promote change in Egypt in the same way Kifaya did, which adopted the name the "Egyptian Movement for Change." (Cairo Papers, 2009, 45.)

Protests that took place in 2004 under the Kifaya movement immediately impacted women activists who then interacted with the political protests. Women activists also joined Kifaya

in May 2005 when it had a small demonstration in downtown Cairo. During this demonstration women participants faced violent harassment from thugs and former NDP (National Democratic Party) adherents. Official authorities did not intervene, and this resulted in a reaction by women activists. Women activists mobilized almost five hundred women demanding the resignation of interior minister Habib al-Adly. Social networking sites gained interest among women who had not previously been socially or politically active, along with women who had experience in developing feminist movement. The regime encountered action from women who were together against it: “women activists were able to generate consensus by combining different socio-political forces together, like Islamists, leftists, feminists, and liberals to contest the power and brutality of the Mubarak regime”. (Sika & Khodary 2012, 96.)

The Women for Democracy movement was short lived but important. It brought the issue of women’s rights with feminist activism to the forefront of public debate within the structure of anti-authoritarianism. Together with other movements, women activists publicly expressed their rage against the regime. New feminist movement grew alongside with the new protest movements. (Sika & Khodary 2012, 97.)

Older groups like the New Woman Organization networked with various activists to develop an alternative to authoritarianism and patriarchy. They also started to break away from the traditional women’s rights movement, which had operated since the Nasser era. They learned new ways to question current situations. Many of the new female activists were not previously part of the feminist movement and as a part of these “they learned from the emerging protests to criticize and contest authoritarian power structures at work in the political sphere”. (Sika & Khodary 2012, 97.)

Egyptian women both previously active and not active took their demands to the streets during the uprising. Their protest did not include demands for women’s emancipation or equality but rather a concern against authoritarianism and a demand for a better life for their families and the whole society. (Sika & Khodary 2012, 97.)

2.2 Conceptual Definitions

Social Network

The term network society, by Manuel Castells (1997, 2009), describes the impact of new information and communications technologies on different levels of interactions in society. The Internet enables communication and connections between ordinary citizens; hence national and transnational network ties are facilitated (Seo & Thorson 2012, 347). Furthermore, the Internet is now a fundamental information infrastructure for contemporary social movements when it is used as communication tool for building and maintaining social relations (ibid. 347).

Social Network is a valid term when discussing themes of social media and its effect on events in society such as uprisings. Social networks have remained under the academic radar for a long time (Castells, 1997, 2009; van Dijk 2005, 2006). Van Dijk (2006, 2) argues that networks as permanent systems of our society have more influence on people's social and personal lives than did the construction of roads for the transportation of goods and people on the past.

Defining social network is a challenge but van Dijk gives two very simple yet valid explanations which are reasonable for this thesis. Social networks are 1) "social systems with concrete ties in abstract relationships" (van Dijk 2006, 25) and 2) "connections between social units made of interactions" (ibid. 26). These units can be for example individuals. He also explains the term media network, which means "media systems connecting senders and receivers and filled with symbols and information". (Ibid. 25.)

In society, social networks supported by media networks exist at all levels. The common sense meaning of social networking is often tied to a level of individual relations, meaning ties to family members, friends, acquaintances, neighbours and colleagues. (van Dijk 2006, 25.) Without the chance to network via media channels in the Arab Spring the participation of women could have been very different. In this thesis I use the term social network to

describe the network consisting of individual level of relations and how people are connected in the society.

As Mark Granovetter (2003, 109) argues, it is often fascinating to form an understanding of how interaction in small groups aggregates to form large-scale patterns. He argues that through interpersonal networks of small-scale interactions, the strength of interpersonal ties (strong, weak, or absent) become translated into large-scale patterns, which then feed back into small groups. “Weak ties” operate as the essential bridge between any two tightly knit groups of close friends and enable them to access information beyond their own social circle. Using this pattern it is possible to examine such phenomena as social mobility and political organization. However, David Krackhardt (2003, 84) argues for the importance of strong ties in situations of severe changes or uncertainty, as “strong ties constitute a base of trust that can reduce resistant and provide comfort in the face of uncertainty”. Strong ties indicate a firm history of interaction between two friends, yet the priority of this study is not to examine the function of specific social network ties in the context of the Arab Spring, but rather to state the existence and meaning of social networks in relation to the Arab uprising generally.

Social Media

According to Christian Fuchs (2014, 6), understanding social media critically means engaging with different forms of sociality on the Internet in the context of society, as the term itself is complex with multi-layered meanings. First van Dijk (2006, 15) divides media to old (face-to-face, print, broadcasting, telephone) and new (computer networks, multimedia). During the uprisings in Egypt both means were used, as the basic nature of each of these media is often social. It is also common to describe social media by identifying specific applications: Facebook, Twitter or YouTube. However social media are naturally social meaning, “beyond a particular proprietary tool, there is very social content”. (Howard & Parks 2012, 362.)

It is argued that the Internet has been transformed from the system oriented to information provision to a system focusing on communication and community building (Fuchs, Boersma, Albrechtslund, Sandoval, 2011, 3). According to van Dijk (2012, 183) the

Internet has returned to its origins, due to the arrival of social media, as it is the network of exchange and cooperation, rather than just a source of consumption and information retrieval.

The definition of social media can be divided in three parts: First, “the information infrastructure and tools used to produce and distribute content”; second, “the content that takes the digital form of personal messages, news, ideas, and cultural products”; and finally “the people, organizations, and industries that produce and consume digital content”. (Howard & Parks 2012, 362.) A more straightforward definition of social media is “Internet applications that enable the sharing of things” (van Dijk 2012, 180). This is the definition that applies when the term social media is used in this study.

Social Movements and Civic Engagement

Social movements are surely born from the need for change. Although the term “social movement” is often used very loosely, there are several key elements that define the term more precisely. One of these is that “Social movements assert popular sovereignty – the right of ordinary people to hold power and limit the actions of rulers” (Tilly 2010, 182). It is the freedom of choice and decision, which almost everyone is eager to have. Regime has an impact on how social movements are able to function, or if there is room for functioning at all.

When it comes to Western countries, social movements tend to combine three kinds of claims: 1) *Identity* claims declare that “we” - the claimants - constitute a unified force to be reckoned with. Such claims commonly include a name for “us”; 2) *Standing* claims assert ties and similarities to other political actors, e.g., as excluded minorities, established trades, properly constituted citizens’ groups, or loyal supporters of the regime; 3) *Program* claims involve stated support for or opposition to actual or proposed actions by the objects of movement claims. (Tilly 2010, 182-184.)

Today, mass media have made the performances of social movements - especially their demonstrations - so visible throughout the world that dissidents in nondemocratic regimes often emulate their forms (Tilly 2010, 188). In this study, civic engagement “refers to the

process through which civil society is invited to participate in on going political, economic and social efforts that are meant to bring about change” (Khamis & Vaughn 2011, 5).

Online Activism

According to Joss Hands (2011, 6) the definition of activism consists of three terms: dissent, resistance and rebellion. Each one of them is a perspective on different dialectical moment of struggle. Online activism differs from conventional activism. It is often tied to offline activist organizations but comparing to them, online activism has a few key elements of its own. Online activism is able to “afford opportunities for issue-focused efforts that allow activists to identify with and support specific aims, for promotion of goals and activities that can reach further and more quickly than is the case with traditional activism, potentially reaching beyond its contained status”. (Newsom & Lengel 2012, 32.)

Online spaces, where feminist activism occurs attempt to provide the possibility for presenting the ideas of gendered issues. In addition, these spaces enable a standpoint for building a discourse of gendered identity and dialogue online. (Newsom & Lengel 2012, 33.) However, the existence of civil society under authoritarian regimes adds an additional layer of difficulty for any form of activism. The technical issue refers to accessing to social media networks and the conceptual issue refers to an understanding of agency under authoritarianism. (Newsom & Lengel 2012, 35.) The possibility of political gathering or formation of opposition in authoritarian societies is complex due to the control and surveillance from regime’s quarter. This matter is further examined in the chapter 2.3.

Feminism, Gender-equality and Women’s movement

Since this thesis aims to study women in the middle of the Arab Spring in Egypt it is crucial to bring up the term feminism. In this thesis, discussion about women and their rights are explored because of the situation they live in due to their gender. Accordingly feminism in this study means exploring women’s rights. In Egypt, activists themselves disagree on the definition of women’s right (Al-Ali 2000, 209). With that indication it is clear that this study does not and cannot focus on feminism in its deepest level but instead

simply acknowledges its presence. It also had to be noted that I as a young western woman researcher, raised with Christian values, can not fully understand lives of Egyptian women from different religious backgrounds, nor their daily struggles, which are born from the oppression of their society (Bowden & Mummery 2009, 99). Using the concepts feminism, gender-equality, and women's movement in their very plain signification hopefully avoids misconceptions.

It is well-known reality that gender equality as western societies see it does not exist in North Africa. The patriarchal society and its factors, secular or religious (Islam), brings their own challenges to women. In Egypt, western values and their impact on human rights and their universalization has been criticized (Al-Ali 2000, 209). It has been discussed that Egyptians should reach the same level of development but by their own terms (Al-Ali 2000, 209). I was not able to ask participants to describe feminism and gender equality from their point of view and due to that, this thesis uses gender equality at a very universal level, meaning women should have the same rights and opportunities as men from the moment of birth.

Issues that Egyptian women's movements fight for and struggles with differ from their western counterparts. Structures and details of these movements depend on their basis and may even vary in the same society. The term women's movement is used in a very solute way to describe organizations that work for women's rights. I do not focus on how these improvements of women's rights are possible to achieve, but I will discuss what sort of development is desired from the viewpoints of the participants.

Empowerment

When women's life in Arab and Muslim countries is under examination it is often compared to western women's life without detailing the differences between the countries in the MENA region. Talk about women's empowerment seems typical for western countries but its content might vary in societies where women are excluded, e.g., from state freedoms. The term is problematic in this context but it is used hence its media coverage during the Arab Spring and the respondents' answers.

Roy, Blomqvist & Clark define the term empowerment in a gender context as “arming or endowing a woman with instruments (power and authority) to take control of her own life“ (2008, 24). When the term empowerment is used in this study it refers to this definition of gender empowerment. Furthermore the term empowerment is used to describe the development of women’s situation in the society, meaning equal possibilities for education, health and political participation. However this definition does not mean the exclusion of personal empowerment, as it surely is the root for enduring empowerment.

2.3 The Internet: a Tool for Democracy?

The topic for this chapter comes from Jan van Dijk’s book *The Network Society* (2012) where he discusses the possibility of the Internet to operate as a tool for democracy. First, it is necessary to define what democracy means in the context of this study, as the definitions vary. An explanation is offered by John Markoff (1996, xvi) when he states the almost impossibility to define the term democracy, as it “has been continually defined and redefined by the people challenging government in the streets and by the powerholders writing new laws and constitutional documents”. Markoff (1996, xvii) emphasizes that democracy is not a collection of procedures that, once achieved, remains in place unaltered. However, a few key democratic breakthroughs that form our understanding of the democracy, such as self-identification of a social movement with ‘democracy’, constitutions explicitly describing and limiting the authority of powerholders, political parties that compete for votes, responsibility of all powerholders to an electorate, elimination of property or wealth qualifications for voting and women’s right to vote (Markoff 1996, 121-122). This is a very interesting standpoint for examination of the Internet as a tool for democracy.

The rise of mass- and telecommunication networks during the 1980s and 1990s had a great impact on Eastern Europe, as the communist regimes collapsed. Similarly they facilitated the rise of movements fighting for democracy in developing countries. But the Internet is also effectively used by the authoritarian regimes for control and surveillance, which results in opposing views concerning the effects of the Internet. (2012, 104-105.) However, the Internet, with its potential for free expression, has been seen as an instrument of

democracy. From this viewpoint it is not surprising that such views appeared in the context of the Arab Spring. (Ibid. 108.) The sense of free expression of opinion existed in social media platforms, as it was easy to produce content in it, and furthermore the sense of lack of control enabled effective social media use.

The standpoint that presumes that the Internet is a tool for democracy often dismisses the actual users, the actual usage, and the social and political content of use. A second mistake is to ignore the negative effects of the Internet concerning democracy. (Ibid. 109.) According to Evgeni Morozow the people who ignore negative effects are cyber-utopians who fail to anticipate how authoritarian governments respond to the Internet, viewing it as a tool for surveillance, control, propaganda, and sophisticated censorship (2012, xiv). Van Dijk also notes the manipulative side of the Internet concerning the supply-side as he states that most use is still relatively passive (2012, 109).

The example of digital democracy operating is e-participation, which, according to van Dijk, operates as agenda-setting, policy preparation, decision-making, policy execution and policy evaluation (ibid. 111-116). This form of democracy clearly functions only in countries that value the political participation of its citizens. In the context of Arab Spring, pro-democracy movements and their demands existed both in online and offline. However, according to Moghadam (2013, 395) “whether or not a pro-democracy movement succeeds depends on a complex of factors, including the capacity of the state and its responses to the movement, the strength of the coalition, and the movement’s ability to resonate with the population at large as well as with world society”.

3 SOCIAL MEDIA IN EGYPT DURING THE ARAB UPRISING

3.1 The Media Before the Arab Spring

The role of social media is one of the debatable issues when examining events and causations surrounding the Arab Spring. Nevertheless Habibul Khondker argues that the role of social media was crucial given the absence of an open traditional media and conventions of civil society. (2011, 675.) Peter Beaumont came to the same conclusion after examining the subject in the Middle East region during the Arab uprisings (2011).

A crucial matter considering the Arab Spring and its events is to understand the role of the media in the Arab region before the Arab Spring uprisings. Before 1990 most of the media in the Arab world were under government ownership, and most of the media were held under strict governmental supervision and control (Khamis & Vaughn, 2011). During the 1990s the Arab world was not able to avoid Internet penetration (ibid. 2011). Khamis and Vaughn (2011) continue, “The rise in social media usage in the Arab world followed a rise in overall Internet and mobile phone penetration in the region”. As the Internet spread in Egypt, liberals, minorities and religious groups soon took advantage of it to express dissent against the Mubarak regime. According to Tufekci and Wilson, online activism first emerged in the form of blogs and later on Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. They continue by recognizing the fact that few bloggers were even jailed after their targeting, while the Internet was not censored entirely in Egypt. (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012, 364.)

For such a long time Arab media has been recognized for its conservative and comparatively strict approach towards its contents. According to Khamis and Vaughn (2011) “For a number of years, the Arab media landscape has been witnessing a perplexing paradox, namely: a gap between the vibrant and active media arena, where many resistant and oppositional voices could be heard, on one hand, and on the other hand the dormant

and stagnant political arena, which did not exhibit any serious signs of active change, popular participation, or true democratization”. Habibul Khondker (2011, 667) argues that the role of new media became more relevant because of the control of conventional media. In a closed country such as Egypt, space like the Internet gives a certain feeling of freedom. The first Egyptian political bloggers were mainly connecting with each other, while Facebook provided a way for them to share information with their whole social network (Tufekci & Wilson 2012, 366). Tufekci and Wilson argue that this was actually the first time in Egypt’s modern history when political activists and others were able to have political discussions across vast social networks (2012, 366). It happened among the youth, too. Given the difficulty of government monitoring of social networks on the Internet and the sense of anonymity of their members in many forums, these online networks provided an environment where young people were able to express and discuss ideas, share information, and formulate demands with unprecedented freedom (Osman & Samei 2012, 14-15). Via modern technology people had the access to these networks especially through the use of cell phones (ibid.14-15). This certainly had an impact on the atmosphere of Egyptian dissidence.

3.2 The Media During the Uprising

In western countries when people seek social change it is effortless to promote issues in any media. It is not necessary to use new media to gain a hearing, yet it has become one of the main ways to promote issues. Even though Egyptians used social media and the Internet for information and to confront the regime, Khondker (2011, 677) indicates conventional media had a crucial role in representing the uprisings to the larger global community who then supported the transformations.

Social media tools, such as Facebook and Twitter, are based on the idea of sharing and discussing with other people. Khamis and Vaughn (2011) show below how different tools of social media were utilised during uprisings in Egypt:

Facebook, for example, is built on linkages between —friends, whereas Twitter allow anyone to comment on a subject. Google Moderator allows for commentary and voting on subjects by all users. Twitter allows users to create a subject for discussion and post a comment, or —tweet, about that subject

(which could include a link to other content), which can then be picked up by other users and —re-tweeted multiple times, until it becomes widespread.

These social networking applications were used to organize social protests (Khondker, 2011, 677).

One of the events antecedents to the uprising was Khaled Said's unfortunate death. On 6 June 2010 Khaled Said, an Egyptian blogger, was dragged out of an Internet cafe and beaten to death by policemen in Alexandria, Egypt (Khondker 2011, 677). After a filmed interview of café owner Mr Hassan Mosbah was posted online in which Mosbah gave the details of Khaled Said's murder, Mr Said quickly came the face of injustice (ibid. 677). Wael Ghonim, Google's marketing representative in the Middle East, established a Facebook page called We are all Khaled Said (Osman & Samei 2012, 3). Digital media in Egypt was used in general to report on police brutality, violence, and blatant injustice (Khondker 2011, 678) but the role of the Internet was not limited only to online networks. Electronic journalism as well as bloggers offered extensive coverage of the protests and the information of events before and during the revolution (Osman & Samei 2012, 17).

The online networks achieved success for several reasons. In Egypt, Internet use had been concentrated primarily among young people in middle and upper class groups in urban centres. However, the presence of Internet cafés made participation possible for those without private access to use the Internet. Thousands of members of these online networks, mainly young people, had not previously been actively in political life. (Osman & Samei 2012, 14.) Research regarding the portrayal of the uprising on three different news media showed significantly different portrayals, prompting researchers to conclude that the presentation may have had an effect on individuals who viewed all three. While social media adopted a human interest framework the semi-official newspapers often relied on conspiracy as a definition of the event (Hamdy & Goma 2012, 201-202).

While examining the events of the Arab Spring in Egypt, Habibul Khondker (2011, 678) came to the conclusion that although the role of social media was significant in the political movements in Egypt, it should not be overstated: especially the role of television was crucial. Satellite channels contributed to the information spread: as a matter of fact, they may have played one of the most important role when Internet and phone services were cut in Egypt during the uprising. During the camping time spent in Tahrir Square, a

huge screen was provided to the protesters. A radio channel was also created to broadcast news. (Osman & Samei 2012, 17.) Even though social media offered vital tools for protesters in the Egyptian revolution, it must be stated that social media was only a catalyst. Social media were able to be effective because of the large numbers of people who were willing to physically engage in and support peaceful social protest. This sometimes happened at a great personal cost. As a conclusion, social media were not causes of revolution, but vehicles for empowerment. (Khamis & Vaughn 2011.) According to Khondker “the most important underlying factor was the presence of revolutionary conditions and the inability of the state apparatus to contain the revolutionary upsurge” (2011, 678).

It is an oversimplification to argue that the Arab Spring, and specifically the Egyptian revolt, was either a “Facebook revolution” or a “people’s revolution” (Lim 2012, 232). Wolfsfeld et al. argue that at a general level a significant increase in the use of new media is more likely to follow a significant amount of protest activity than to precede it (Wolfsfeld, Segev & Sheaffer 2013, 120). This means that during significant political events, people tend to turn to a variety of media to find out latest developments (ibid. 120)

According to Wolfsfeld et al. the previous has always been the case with traditional news media and is probably accurate in this case too. In nondemocratic countries when such action is prevalent, a lack of faith toward domestic media occurs. Furthermore, as these events tend to have a major impact on peoples’ lives, they are likely to search for explanations and information from their social media contacts and from foreign news media. (Ibid. 120.) As Wolfsfeld et al. argue, political change leads to changes in the use of social media, which means more people sign up and use social media for political purposes (2013, 121).

3.3 Women, Social Media and the Uprising

It has been stated that as a result of relatively low Internet penetration in the Middle East and North Africa, the population of online networks and protests consisted mostly of well-educated citizens and other privileged people (Newsom & Lengel 2012; Tufekci & Wilson

2012). According to the ICT statistics from 2013, 43% of Egyptian households had a computer and, 34% of Egyptian households had Internet. Furthermore, the amount of individuals using the Internet was 49%. (ITU 2013.) The stereotypes linked to computer use and gender has been under the examination, which indicates that the divide between genders considering the computer use still exists (Cooper 2006).

Newsom and Lengel have argued that online activism offers tools for empowering marginalized voices besides its ability to provide the opportunity for cross-boundary dialogue; in this way it provides impetus for social change (Newsom & Lengel 2012, 33). Yet it is debatable if these new media are capable to empowering people who live in nondemocratic countries or allowing them to adopt new strategies. The counter-argument states that these new tools might give people a false sense of participation and keep them from engaging in actual physical protest. (Wolfsfeld et al. 2013, 117.)

Although gender issues were apparently part of the uprisings in Egypt, many Arab women who were active during the protests were mainly concerned about the lack of freedom. Women joined actively as a part of the group effort. The main concerns of the demonstrators were issues of democracy, calls for free and open elections, and attacks upon long-held dictatorships. However, the main focus was not gender rights, but “issues of gender equality in the Arab Spring were largely contained to street protests” in Cairo’s Tahrir Square. (Newsom & Lengel 2012, 34.)

According to a study of participation in political protests in Tahrir Square during the uprisings (Tufekci & Wilson 2012) the majority of protesters interviewed were male (75.4%) but there was also a notable female presence (24.6%). Female protestors tended to be a few years younger than male participants. Female attendees were somewhat better educated and were more likely to have Internet access on their phones and in their homes. (Tufekci & Wilson 2012, 369.) The largest difference between genders was the use of Facebook and Twitter. In general, females reportedly used Facebook more than males for communicating about the protests (60% vs. 48%). Women were also significantly more likely than men to use Twitter for communicating about the protest. These differences were statistically significant. (Tufekci & Wilson 2012, 369-370.)

With women comprising an impressive 25% of the sample, this highlighted the significance of women's participation in the political process. Other observers of these protests noticed this as well. According to analysis, women participants were better educated and had greater economic resources than male attendees in Tahrir Square protests. Women also used more social media, especially for protest activities. Men were more likely to take part in the protest, January 25th, the first day of the protests. This might have led women to use alternative tools. Many of the women interviewed in Cairo mentioned that Facebook enabled them to express their opinion and participate in political activity when women were not allowed to attend meetings or when participation and speaking up seemed too discouraging. (Tufekci & Wilson 2012, 375.) In many cases Arab women face additional challenges because of their traditional social roles and their invisibility within the public spheres of their cultures (Newsom & Lengel 2012, 35). Other preliminary results suggest that social media have influenced the empowerment of women in the Arab World (Odierno 2013, 14). Social media raised awareness about sexual harassment against Egyptian women in public leading to parliamentary action to define and criminalize sexual harassment (ibid. 9-10).

The Arab uprisings introduced a new image of women in the MENA region. The West saw women, who are courageous, independent and technologically intelligent. (Eltantawy 2013, 765.) However, it is important to acknowledge how the Western media's description of the female protesters and activists in the MENA region was problematic; it often implied that women have been almost entirely excluded from the political sphere and, therefore, must be granted political agency. Furthermore, it also created a misleading image that female politicians were either non-existent or were seen as a novelty. (Ibroseva 2013, 871.) This image is obviously misleading as women's rights movements has existed and exists in the Egyptian society.

3.4 Social Media and Protest Behaviour

An interesting question considering the Arab uprising is the link between social media and the behaviour that led to the protests. As the sceptical viewpoints question the effect of

social media, Valenzuela (2013, 921) emphasizes that the primary issue is how the new digital platforms relate to citizen activism and protest politics and, under what conditions. Valenzuela came to a conclusion of social media's effect on protest behaviour as he studied the protests in Chile, 2011. His study indicates that social media is not able to create new forms of protest but strengthens traditional forms of protest and, thus these new platforms are capable to aid offline forms of citizen participation (2013, 936). Rather than a cause, social media operates as a facilitator of protest (Wolfsfeld et al. 2013, 120). In Chile the more frequent use of social media platforms predicted more frequent use of social media for information, opinion expression, and joining social causes (ibid. 934). Evidence also shows "that participation in opinion-based groups produces psychological transformations that impact on behaviour, beliefs, and emotions" (McGarty 2013, 5). This would indicate that for example participation in political discussions on social media platforms has an effect on people's attitudes considering actions.

Brym et al. distinguish Arab Spring social media users in Egypt into two categories, "sympathetic onlookers" and "demonstrators". The latter group supported the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak and took part in the demonstrations, whereas the previous group supported the overthrow as well but did not participate in the demonstrations. (2014, 270.) In their study, Brym et al. found out that demonstrators favoured new media sources of information more than sympathetic onlookers. Furthermore, research shows that social media use for the purpose of surveillance and news acquisition is positively associated with different forms of political activity and that use related to private entertainment and diversion have a negative or muted effect (Valenzuela 2013, 935-936).

Wolfsfeld et al. (2013, 199) argue that people who live in societies with uncensored access to the Internet are more likely to use it, and social media too, for entertainment and are likely to have lower interest in politics. In other words, the higher the level of the Internet and social media penetration, the lower the level of protest (ibid. 119). However, it is important to evaluate the political environment, in which these changes occur, as the link between social media use and political participation or protest behaviour is rather negative in the former countries of Soviet Union (Pearce & Kendzior 2012, 234). This is indeed what Wolfsfeld et al. (2013, 119) mean by stating "one cannot understand the role of social media in collective action without first taking into account the political environment in which they operate".

4 RESEARCH PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY

As Social Media played a part in the uprisings I became curious about the perspective of the women themselves concerning the link between social media and the uprisings. In this study I wanted to focus on people who had certain experiences to analyse these using qualitative methods (Flick 2007, 2).

The evolution of the research process took two years in total while the active writing process took less than a year. However, two years passed in the process trying to collect the data in various ways. This research faced multiple obstacles which are elaborated in Chapter 4.1, but I chose to continue because of the important research literature I continued to encounter. The reason for choosing English as the research language also developed from the literature, more precisely the academic journals available. Deliberation of this decision took several months because of the issues related to it, but after encouragement from my parents, professor, and fellow students I decided to write the thesis in English. This posed challenge for data analysis and is the reason for using both Finnish and English literature in order to avoid misconceptions and misunderstandings.

There are many studies that discuss the linkage between Social Media and the Arab Spring (Hamdy & Gomaa 2012; Brym et al. 2014), even cross-methodological studies (Groshek 2009). Social media use is amenable to quantitative research methods because it can be summarized in numbers and statistics. However, my intention was to examine participants' perspectives, knowledge, and experiences (Flick 2007, 2), hence I chose qualitative research method. Moreover, while “quantitative research is focused on summary characterizations and statistical explanations, qualitative research offers complex descriptions and tries to explicate webs of meaning” (ten Have 2004, 5).

4.1 Gathering the Data

While quantitative research focuses on creating statistical generalisations, it is not the intention of qualitative analysis (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 85). Qualitative research intends to describe phenomenon and comprehend certain actions. It also aims to present theoretically valid interpretation for a phenomenon and therefore it is essential for participants to possess significant knowledge of the researched matter. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 85.) This is why I carefully considered the features of participants (gender, activity and education) to ensure that these women were similar to the women who participated in revolts in Tahrir Square.

Data gathering was demanding in many ways. At first I contacted various people from Egypt to get information on the women who participated in the uprising. I contacted many organizations before I discovered The Finnish Institute in the Middle East and sent an e-mail to its director. He suggested that I should be in touch with their representative situated in Cairo, Egypt.

The representative helped readily and after I received information (Sadek, e-mail 11.3.2013) and a few contacts from him I was ready to begin. However things did not proceed effortlessly, and I had to send quite a few e-mails before I got any replies. One woman agreed to a Skype-meeting but did not show up. Later I received answers in English by e-mail (20.1.2014) from a woman who was politically involved in the revolts. This e-mail document is the one that I used as a pilot version to make sure that my questions were understandable and valid for research purposes. After that I got new contact information from the representative, but I did not receive any e-mails regarding the interviews. This process took a year, during which time I realised that it would not be manageable to collect the data by myself via Skype interviews. I began to rethink my thesis. I was not sure if this was a feasible topic to continue to pursue.

Eventually I decided to contact my parents' local friend. I received a delighted e-mail (16.4.2014) where he offered his help. Due to the delicate nature of his job I am not allowed to use his real name, therefore in this thesis he is called Emad Nour. He translated

the interview questions from English to Arabic and by using his own contacts was able to get answers from seven women. Emad administered the questionnaire (Annex 1) to the women, and they wrote down their answers in Arabic. He then translated them in English and sent me both Arabic (pdf document) and English (Word document) versions by e-mail. This written data was collected during June-August 2014.

At the beginning of my work on this thesis I contemplated that fifteen to twenty interviews would be sufficient. Since Emad was able to collect only seven documents, I weighed my options for acquiring more data. I discovered a YouTube channel consisting of interviews with women in Tahrir Square during the uprisings. Therefore I decided to use them as a part of the data. Questions in these interviews were quite similar to mine with few exceptions.

Later I learned that the women who I tried to contact in the first place were still very active in social media. Some of them still post topics and issues on their Twitter accounts multiple times each day. I came to the conclusion that these women had their hands full. For now I am delighted that the women who took part in my research were ordinary middle-class women who, as I was interested in the beginning of this study, were simply concerned about the situation of their home country.

4.2 Research Methods and Empirical Data

Research Questions and Methods

Two research questions were formed at the beginning of this study. The first research question aims to find an explanation for the link between social media use and the uprising in Egypt. This question has been largely studied before; however, in this thesis this question is examined from the women's point of view. The second research question examines women's participation in the events of the Arab Spring and how social media use affected their participation. The questions are as follows:

1. According to Egyptian women, what was the role of Social Media in the Arab Spring in Egypt?
2. According to Egyptian women, did social media enable women to participate in the events of Arab Spring in Egypt?

As I answer these questions I seek to use a method appropriate to this issue and open enough to allow an understanding of a process or relation (Flick 2007, 2). I also focus on recent studies on the subject to explore whether my data coordinates with them.

From early on I had in mind to interview Egyptian women about the issues stated in the research questions, and this led me to conduct the research with qualitative methods. After a few unsuccessful attempts to collect the data by myself via Skype and because of the many obstacles I faced reaching people directly, I finally worked through a contact in Cairo, Egypt. The research's empirical data is comprised of eight primary textual documents and two YouTube interviews. All the respondents lived in Cairo at the time of this study and each one of them were linked to revolts in several ways.

Since the contact person was engaged in other full time work, he was not able to conduct interviews but did have a large contact network because of his work in the civic organization. This enabled him to collect the data in written form at a grassroots level. This is the reason the data in this study is referred to as documents. I am answering the research questions based on this data.

The respondents answered a questionnaire which was translated into Arabic. The respondents' replies were then translated into English by the contact person. The respondents were women who were involved in the Arab Spring via social media, while seven of them participated in the revolts. These women were eager for a social and political change in their country. They are from different backgrounds but it is accurate to emphasize the social status of these women as middle class and well educated. The marital status and the existence of children emerged from the answers of respondents; nevertheless, it is not included in Table 1 because of the small sample size.

Table 1 shows the detailed features and general participation of the respondents (written documents and YouTube interviews). The youngest ones were two university students

aged 21-25 and the eldest were 41-45. Except for one, all of the respondents used at least Facebook as a tool for participation. One of the respondents is a member of political party, three of the respondents are political activists, and three respondents mentioned using their right to vote, while the rest defined their political status and participation in various ways, summarised under the expression of ‘influenced by the Arab Spring’.

Women	Age Group	Hometown	Political Status/Participation	Education/ Job	Use of Social Media
R1	36-40	Cairo	Influenced by the Arab Spring	Financial manager	Facebook
R2	31-35	Cairo	Voted in elections	Head of software development	Facebook, Twitter
R3	36-40	Cairo	Voted in elections	Executive secretary	Facebook
R4	26-30	Cairo	Influenced by the Arab Spring	English teacher	Facebook, Twitter
R5	21-25	Cairo	Influenced by the Arab Spring	University student	Facebook
R6	36-40	Cairo	Voted in elections	Accountant	Facebook, Satellite Channels
R7	41-45	Cairo	Member of a party	Accountant	Facebook
R8	31-35	Cairo	Political activist	Coordinator	Facebook, Creator of online group
R9	21-25	Cairo	Political activist	University student	Facebook, Twitter
R10	-	Cairo	Political activist	Activist	-

TABLE 1. The respondents according to their background features and political participation.

Data analysis is one of the key steps in qualitative research (Flick 2014, 3). Because of the constant changes in the field of research methodology (Flick 2014, 3) this can be very challenging for a researcher. After I read the data multiple times without making any marks and after weighing various ways to process the data, I decided to analyse it by using qualitative content analysis (chapter 4.3) because of its flexibility (Schreier 2014, 170) for analysing text data.

Written Documents

Part of the empirical data is collected through written documents consisting of interview questions created for the intended semi-structured interviews (Annex 1.). These are called documents as they document social practices and life (Coffey, 2014, 367). However, there is a distinction to make between found and made documents, as the latter are produced explicitly for research, which is how they occur in this study (ibid. 369).

Documents are versions of reality; they are literary, textual or visual devices that share the information and present stories. Coffey argues that though all documents are artefacts, created for a specific purpose and crafted according to social convention to serve a function, it is important to discuss which documents are valid for research use. However, if documents are produced, shared, and used, they are social facts. (Ibid. 369.)

When creating interview questions the crucial matter is to determine what one would like to discover. I gained an overview of the issue of Egyptian women's social media participation in the Arab Spring by reading many studies about the issue. I selected a method of data collection primarily because of my intention to gather the data via Skype interviews. After this attempt did not succeed, I revised the questions. The goal of getting women's individual opinions highly influenced the form of questions. Therefore the questions were created in order to allow women to answer on the basis of their own experiences.

The questions existed in a logical order and thus the interview began with questions situated in time before the Arab Spring. These questions ascertain the level of activity and involvement of respondents in politics and social media usage prior to the uprising. The latter questions concentrated on respondents' overall participation in the events of the Arab Spring and centred on the details of their social media usage. Additional questions related to respondents' perceptions regarding the benefit of social media to the evolution of the Arab Spring, as well as to situations where social media tools did not work.

Written documents consisted of answers to eleven questions. Answers varied considerably among respondents in most cases, however they also contained similar expressions and

observations. A risk of written data is the expectation of receiving valid content. Unfortunately, respondents' answers to the questionnaire were quite short. The length of the answer sheets varied between two and three pages, with an average length per question response of five or six lines. However, the positive side of the answers was the diversity of expression among respondents.

YouTube -videos

As the quantity of interviews remained limited I decided to seek additional data. I found YouTube videos that were collected by a grassroots level human rights channel. These videos included interviews with women in Tahrir Square in 2011 during the revolts. The participants were between the ages 20-35, which is about the same age group that took part in the written form of interviews. These interviews are also a type of document, as I transcribed them in the same form as the written documents.

The questions regarded reasons for participation and the role of social media. The interviewer gave the interviewees considerably latitude to answer his/her questions. While the interviewer asked quite elaborate questions, the respondents answered freely and sometimes included information irrelevant to the question asked. The duration of the YouTube interviews was under fifteen minutes. Even though the interviews were conducted at Tahrir Square while the crowd was yelling slogans and catchphrases in the background, they were easy to follow. The language of these interviews is English.

Although the use of audio-visual data raises an issue impacting methodology, I found these interviews valid for inclusion in this study. Yet the special qualities of electronic data needs to be discussed. In the analysis of the YouTube interviews I approach the data from a netnographic viewpoint. The ethics of these methodological matters are discussed in Chapter 4.5.

4.3 Data Analysis

As documents are able to describe social settings or individual life, it is important to approach the analysis of documents for what they are and for what they are used to accomplish. The knowledge of documents can be found from their content of setting, but also from their role and place. There is also the cultural aspect to consider, as well as the values attached to them. Due to this, it is essential to establish a methodological framework for documentary analysis. (Coffey 2014, 370.) Even though it is possible to approach documentary data in various ways, this study mainly focuses on the theme and content of the gathered documents (Coffey 2014, 370; Prior, 2003, 19). The documents are handled as information resources.

The scope and genre of documents available for analysis are broadened, e.g., by the Internet and social networking sites (Coffey 2014, 378), which is why I decided to use the same method of data analysis on YouTube interviews as on the textual documents. It is preferable to use traditional approaches to netnographic data analysis, while some important prescriptions exist (Kozinets et al. 2014, 269). In a netnographic research, concentration on a very constrained data set is able to create a deep cultural sense of events in a particular social space. Another prescription valid to this study is to consider the communication exactly as cultural members experienced it. (Ibid. 269.)

The theoretical concepts of recent studies guide the qualitative content analysis used in this study. The American tradition, comparing to the Finnish tradition, does not mention distinction between content analysis led by theory and the inductive content analysis where theoretical concepts emerge from analysis of empirical data. The inductive content analysis focuses on discovering theoretical concepts in the data, whereas theory-led analysis utilises existing concepts to guide analysis of a phenomenon. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 117.) However, when the coding frame is in creation, in the American tradition this is possible to execute in a concept-driven way (Schreier 2012, 84). In other words, the knowledge is utilised from different sources: from a theory, from previous research, or from logic (ibid. 85). This thesis utilises theory-driven content analysis. This method of analysis can be completed in the same way as inductive content analysis, with few

exceptions (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 117). This study also utilised the concept-driven method in creation of the coding frame.

The progress of theory-driven content analysis

I started the analysis by reading the documents without strong preconceptions, however, qualitative content analysis method requires focusing on aspects that relate to the overall research question (Schreier 2014, 170). Naturally some preconceptions existed based on the theoretical framework. These aspects are perceivable from the questions of the research questionnaire. Keeping this in mind I started to read the data again.

After a few readings I tried to perceive how to analyse the data, because of its relatively small size. Keeping the two main research questions in mind I began to examine the data. The main emphasis of qualitative content analysis is on capturing definitions, meanings, processes, and types (Altheide 1996, 26-27). First, I organized all the answers into an order by grouping them under the questions of the research questionnaire. This was simple, as the data was already in written form. Grouping them in this way assisted in finding possible similarities and repetitive expressions. Second, I printed the answers and used colour coding on similar expressions. At first the colour coding led me to focus on irrelevant matters, but I quickly noticed this, which led to renaming a few codes and rewriting the definitions (Gibbs 2007, 48).

Subsequently the data started “to speak” and I was able to find valid expressions considering the research problem/questions. After this I created a coding frame, where I segmented the expressions under the structured list of codes. It might be confusing to use the term ‘coding frame’ in qualitative analysis, since in quantitative methods this is “used to refer to the listing of what numeric value to assign to different answers in surveys so that they can be counted” (Gibbs 2007, 39). In this study the term is simply used to refer to the categorised list of codes, the thematic content of data (ibid. 144). The coding frame consisted of five categories: original expression, simplified expression, subcategory, main category and unitive category. The original expressions are simplified, which means reduction of data and pruning away of irrelevant information (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 109). Main categories are the aspects of the material about which I wanted more

information and subcategories specify what is said in the material with respect to these main categories (Schreier 2014, 174). These main categories covered one aspect of the material (ibid. 175), for example “tool of encouragement” and “tool of knowledge”. For example, the previous category applies if the respondent argued that social media managed to function as an encouragement to participate. In other words, main categories describe the different roles of Social Media in the uprising. Subcategories elaborate the dimensions of these roles. Every relevant expression found in the data was separated in its own category (ibid. 174), which was named by a definite code (Gibbs 2007, 41). The definition of the code followed the analytic idea, which was created by the data.

Previous paragraph shows that the analysis started as a conventional content analysis and later moved to concept- and theory-driven analysis. In this study, the last category is called unitive, which means that these themes are brought from theory, thus they are concept-driven (Schreier 2012, 60). In this study, (unitive) codes represent categories that come from previous study (Gibbs 2007, 44-45). This does not mean that any new ideas or new ways of categorising the data (ibid. 45) would be avoided. Further, all relevant aspects of the material must be covered by a category (Schreier 2014, 175). The function of this categorising and the coding frame is to enable the answers to the research questions. This process took about three weeks to develop in autumn, 2014.

In Chapter 5 the analysis is presented along with the findings of the data. The empirical findings are categorised under four subheadings. Furthermore, the reliability of these findings is compared to knowledge created by recent studies.

4.4 Validity and Reliability of the Research

Ethical challenges occur whenever social research is conducted. They can emerge especially when a researcher works in diverse contexts with diverse populations. It is necessary to take into account the variety of ethical challenges and anticipate these as far as possible. Social research requires flexibility from the actors, especially from the researcher, but it is also necessary to maintain sensitivity to the research context. The commitment to scientific validity and participant protection are integral to the process.

(Fisher & Anushko 2008, 106.) The ethical issues of this study are stated in this chapter, including themes of data gathering, documents, language barriers, and anonymity.

Conflict of interests is a matter to emphasize in this thesis from two angles: 1) a differing culture is studied, and 2) a contact person rather than the researcher has collected the data. This can mean many obstacles in the research, not only to the validity of it, but also to its reliability. This can lead to a conflict of professional, personal and legal interests and, further, on the objectivity of analysis or interpretation (Fisher & Anushko 2008, 97). This was the reason to carefully prepare the ethical steps for this research process in order to avoid any exploitative conflicts (ibid. 97). Ensuring the objectivity of data gathering and data analysis was one of the key issues and was considered in implementation.

One of the important elements in social research is ensuring the rights of those recruited for research participation. All participation should be voluntary, and that prospective participants should be provided with all information about the study that would be expected to influence their willingness to participate (Fischer & Anushko 2008, 99). This includes any privacy agreements as well. The anonymity of the respondents is discussed in the designated chapter.

The contact person, Emad Nour, performed the data collection. The data gathering took four days in total. No payments occurred in the exchange of the data though it can be ethically justified in a few situations (Wendler et al. 2002), e.g., when a fair compensation for time and inconvenience is involved in research participation. Without his assistance this study would not exist, therefore to point out my appreciation, some kind of compensation is justified afterwards. The question of credibility is valid since I have not collected the data myself, yet there is no reason for me to doubt my contact or the authenticity of the data content. I received participants' e-mail addresses, which would have enabled me to verify any obscurities or confusions.

Another matter to point out is that the contact person chose the respondents. This might result in a very homogeneous group of answers, as the contact person and the respondents might share the same philosophies and ideology. Yet, recognizing this gives a certain level of healthy criticism towards the produced data. Furthermore, it is important to

acknowledge that the produced data is from the viewpoint of people who engaged with social media as an informant.

It is also important to consider when analysing documents, because of their solicited nature, by whom the documents are produced. Participants of the revolts wrote these documents for an outsider researcher. How this affects the content of the answers is a question which is better to only acknowledge than to figure out in this study. (Coffey 2014, 37.)

A language barrier exists between me as the researcher and the participants, since neither of us shares the same native language. This means that I as the researcher should use strategies that recognize these deviations, which are born from language and culture differences. Being aware of this allows the researcher to work with humility and in a way that acknowledges participants' stronger understanding of the relevant cultural and social issues. English was used as a common language, which brings challenges to the accuracy. Participants answered in Arabic, and their answers were translated into English. The ability to answer in their native language probably fixed some of the issues that the language barrier created between the researcher and the participants, as the answers are written down and able to be examined. (Kozinets, Dolbec & Earley 2014, 268.)

Religious beliefs or religious reasons for political participation were not made a subject for inquiry since they were not comprehended within the research questions. The respondents may be Muslims or Christians, as it is unusual to born without a religion in Egypt. Definite questions about Egyptian culture were not included either because of the differing characterisations for the term and unavailability to examine its multiple dimensions.

Anonymity of the Interviewees

It is said that ethical concerns are perhaps most significant in relation to the treatment of human research participants (Lincoln 2009, 152). The themes of this study are circumstances and opinions of a gender in another culture and the status of media in the particular period, both of which are value-laden constructs (Mertens 2014, 510) and opinionated territories. In the beginning of creating this thesis I was aware of the key

characteristics of the respondents. Therefore when I started to collect the data I promised anonymity to the participants. These women were active online using their real names but a few of them also participated in the revolts, which made me weigh the possibility of using pseudonyms considering the sensitive nature of the events and women's often-troubled political situation in the MENA region.

When anonymising qualitative material, concrete possibilities for and potential consequences of identification need to be considered in order for the data to be modified sufficiently but not considerably (Yhteiskuntatieteellinen tietoaarkisto, 2009). In this case, the use of pseudonyms and the employment of a few replacement terms do not distort the data or its validity. Some of the replacements were even made by participants themselves regarding, e.g., profession.

Another matter that needs to be explored here is the ethics of using online data, e.g., YouTube interviews. Research ethics related to this data are complex. This sort of practise should be grounded in consideration of potential benefits and risks to individuals and communities. When dealing with online data one must acknowledge the types of risks that influence matters such as privacy. This is why, e.g., direct quoting from YouTube-interviews is not included in this study (Kozinets et al. 2014, 268.)

To avoid any harm or unexpected consequences, the handling of this information and data has been implemented cautiously. In this study the ethnographic tradition of pseudonymization is applied also to the YouTube videos, even though they are public and possible for anyone to explore. (Kozinets et al. 2014, 268.) The protection of identities is practiced in this study, especially since I do not own the rights to these interviews. Participation in the revolts of the Arab Spring was not viewed in a positive light by the regime and in this sense protecting participants is a crucial matter (Hamdy & Gomaa 2012, 198).

5 THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA – FINDINGS FROM THE EMPIRICAL DATA

This chapter consists of the findings of the empirical data, the collection process of which was described in Chapter 4. The sub-headings of this chapter categorise the data in four different topics that arose from the data with the assistance of previous studies and theories. The present findings are then placed in dialogue with the previous theories of the issue. The aim of this dialogue is to find answers to the research questions and examine if these findings have any robustness. The main discussion and analysis of the key findings are addressed in Chapter 6.

Five of the ten respondents were politically active before the uprising. One of them was/is a member of a political party, three of them were political activists, and one of them tried to be aware of the differing political situation in the country. The rest of the respondents were not politically active or involved, mainly because they thought politics belonged only to the politicians and to the regime.

During the uprising all of these women used Facebook as a tool for information and communication. Three of them used Twitter. Four of them also mentioned TV and satellite channels as a form of information gathering, and three of them mentioned different websites. Two of them were not using social media (Facebook) before the uprising. The respondents agreed that the Arab Spring changed their social media use; it became more essential and the use of it became more active. The rapidly spreading information was the main cause for the social media use (Facebook, Twitter) during the uprising.

As the categories were created, the social media's role as a tool became clear. Every category consisted of a different idea of how social media was used within the period of the Arab Spring. According to these ideas, Table 2 (p. 36) was created as it is supposed to enlighten the content of each category. The first category was formed because of the

expressions considering the respondents own participation, as the second category consists expressions of how the respondents used social media during the uprising. The third category enlightens the respondents' opinions of social media's effects on women during the uprising, while the fourth category is focusing on time after the uprising. Table 2 presents the four main categories and their sub-categories that the data uncovered.

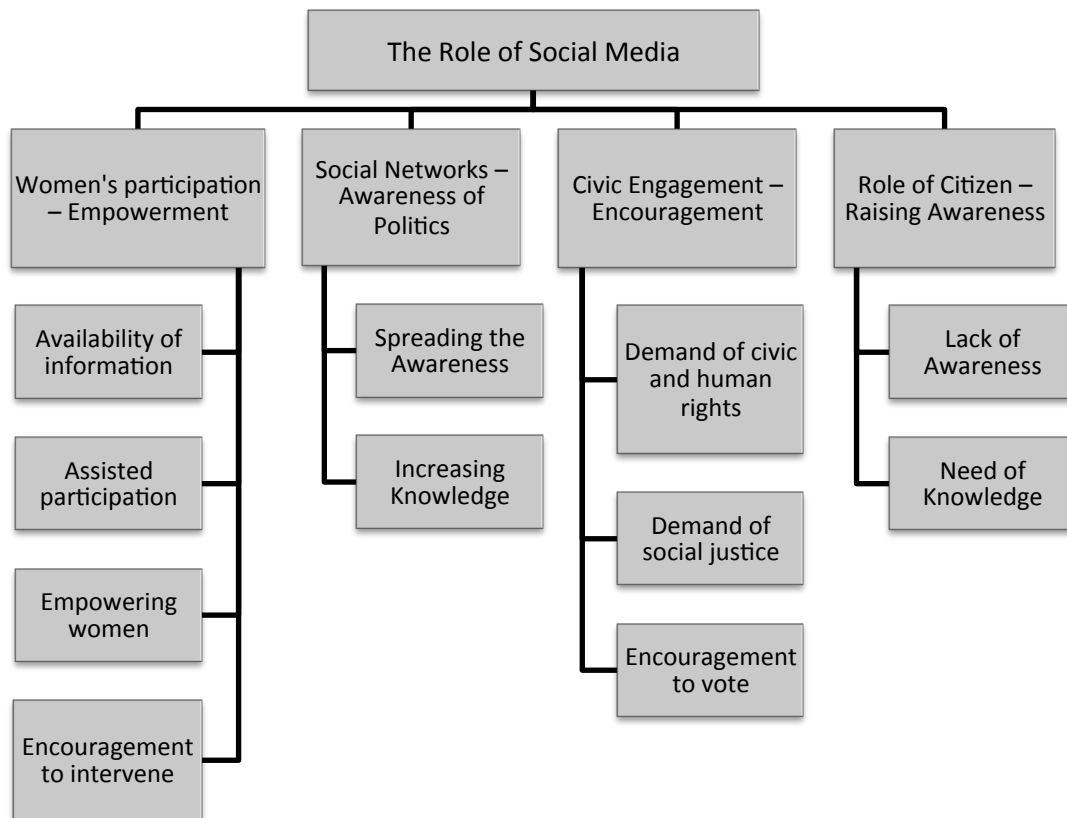


TABLE 2. The categories of the concept-driven content analysis.

5.1 Women's Participation – Empowerment

...Through social media, we became more interested to follow up all the political events and to participate in the political sphere in the country. R5

The first issue that the data indicated was the use of social media for personal political participation. All eight respondents agreed that social media use grew their interest toward politics. Before the uprising only four respondents used social media for political action. The rest of the respondents used social media for updating their social life. They did not feel an interest in politics, nor an inclination to participate in politics. After the revolts began, their use of media changed. Women began to follow the situation in the country through various news media. According to the respondents, social media platforms were able to give a truthful picture of the revolts and the uprising in general. The respondents mentioned how all the official information sources did not distribute reliable information about the uprising. This is not surprising, as the news media in Egypt had been under governmental control for so long. The information available through social media increased their personal interest towards politics.

...I became more interested to be aware of the political situation in my country. I also became interested in understanding events which before I felt was none of my business. R4

It is understandable for people to search for the news of the events that impact strongly on their life. Women were eager to find out the latest developments from various media. Demonstrators themselves produced the information in social media platforms, which added a personal touch to the information gathering. Though social media tools assisted the growth of respondents' personal interest towards politics, it should not be misapprehend as a cause for such interest, as the same respondent continued:

The uprising in Egypt has encouraged and empowered me to share my opinion. R4

Another theme the data indicated was how social media worked as a tool for encouraging women to take part in the uprising. These women had previously felt excluded from the

political sphere and now felt like they were able to be involved. Yet it is debatable if these new media are capable of empowering people who live in nondemocratic countries or allowing them to adopt new strategies. However, according to all the respondents, they felt that social media encouraged them by enabling their participation even if they were staying home:

These tools helped woman to take her role in the uprising even while she was home! R2

...in most cases, family would not accept her participation in the revolution or demonstrations. But through social media, women were encouraged to intervene. R1

The previous means a lot to the women who had no means to participate otherwise. Although women's organizations have existed in Egypt, the respondents did not mention them at all – this even though they all live in Cairo, which should mean they have knowledge of these groups. The marginalized role of women in Egypt might explain this as in some cases it is impossible for women to take part in the political life. The social media tools also enabled some of the respondents to convince their families of the importance and necessity of women's participation, as well as offering information about where the demonstrations were held and how to get protection if needed. This was also pointed out by one of the YouTube interviewees, as she had to ask permission from her parents to join the demonstrations.

Some women were not able to go to different squares to participate in the revolution because of our traditions. But through social media women were able to participate and express their opinion freely and later they became able to participate by going to the squares and join the demonstrations. R3

Before women had no right to get involved in the political situations like that... but the social media tools renewed the role of women once again and women were encouraged to participate in the uprising! R4

Even when women participated in the uprising, the demands for improvement of women's social status were not successful. The traditions of male-dominated and patriarchal culture are hard to change. The development of equality in Arab region remains modest, but it is important to underline the fact that women were demonstrating in Egypt along with men,

which would not have been possible in the past. This certainly raises the question of the possibilities that Egyptian women will have in their future.

The next sub-heading focuses on how respondents used social media tools during the uprising.

5.2 Social Networks – Awareness of Politics

I was using social media tools to spread political awareness among the youth. R7

The second theme emerging from the data involves the ways that respondents used social media during the uprising. Social networks belong to everyday life, not only in the local level but also at national and international levels, as they cross these levels easily. The social network sites provide the possibility of keeping in touch with people nearby, but they also offer the opportunity for wider social action through almost endless contacts. There is a reason they are called social. Respondents expressed similar thoughts regarding raising awareness among their networks, as well as opinion exchanging in general, political awareness, and importance of the effective participation (see quote below).

...Help in spreading the awareness to everyone I met, to let them understand the importance of effective participation. R4

Participants used social media for political expression. They shared thoughts with people in their networks, both online and offline. Women especially mentioned how important was the discourse of politics with people they met online and offline (in the street, at coffee shops, etc.). They felt the need to discuss the situation with people and exchange thoughts about certain matters. They felt that the country had been taken away from them. A few even felt ashamed how the nation had been under the authoritarian regime. This was one of the reasons for spreading awareness of positive political participation. One respondent mentioned that she felt it was her responsibility to be aware of changing political situations and then share the information in her community. She said that not every woman had access to these tools and the information they offered.

I was sharing my opinions on Facebook, listening for others' opinions about the constitution preparation, and also paying attention to the opinions of the people in the streets, buses, and markets. R6

I also participated in the uprising through writing my thoughts in Facebook and Twitter. R2

Another reason for social media use was the possibility of spreading information rapidly. The information flow was seen as beneficial because it happened in real time and the possibility for cross-national communication existed. A few respondents also mentioned how the communication made them feel surprisingly safer, as the governmental control was not able to reach everywhere. For some of the respondents, social media provided a strategy for sharing their opinions, raising awareness, and promoting participation. Strategic thinking might not have been the first thing in mind during the demonstrations, but it observes well the participatory nature of the respondents in the uprising.

Communication between these networks is easy to maintain for those who have access to the technology, but as several respondents mentioned indirectly, it excludes numerous people (those who do not have access) from the same events. This leads to inequality between people in the same society.

5.3 Civic Engagement – Encouragement

The third theme consists of the respondents' sense that social media functioned as a tool of encouragement for civic engagement. As participants responded to questions regarding their political activity before the uprising, none believed they could do anything in the political sphere. A few of the respondents mentioned the fear that citizens felt towards the regime as a reason for being passive. A few of the respondents also mentioned how in the past people became passive because the regime did not take their previous demands into account.

...Because the regime ignored the people in the past. It never listened to us and never reacted to our requests. R6

...Reason is that we didn't have much freedom in our country. There is no freedom of opinion, particularly in the political sphere. We were thinking that only politicians have the right to get involved. And we were also thinking that normal citizens have no rights to say their opinions. R2

The respondents felt that citizens, especially women, became encouraged to ask and demand their rights. According to the respondents, people demanded social justice and human rights. When the uprising started, seven of these women actually took part in the demonstrations. Two women were actively mobilizing the demonstrations and offering logistical support to the protesters. All of these seven women actively used social media tools (Facebook) to share information updates. Reasons for participation differed, but motives included exposing the corruption that existed and eliminating the authoritarian regime. Four participants mentioned love for the country and the feeling that the country and its authority had been taken away from the citizens. Social media helped them to act together as a unit in demanding their rights. This matter encouraged the respondents to join in demonstrations. Other reasons cited for participation were the future of their children, safety, terrorism, the political and social situation, religious persecution, health of citizens, future of the country, the economic situation, unemployment, education, women's situation, liberty, and equality.

I felt my country had come to a serious point, so I had to participate in the uprising as many already did in our country. R2

I felt the burden inside me as a citizen of this country to participate. And I felt every Egyptian should wake up and stand against the wrong... R4

Involvement in civic life begins with the person herself/himself. Other actors can affect it, but the decision of joining in the public sphere rests with the person. It is easy to opt out from civic life if the sense of powerlessness exists. This is possible to see in Egypt, as demonstrations started in early 2000 and existed well before the Arab Spring. Not until 2011 were people ready to demonstrate on a larger scale. It is important to realise the depth of the grievances of Egyptians in order to understand the basis for their participation. These reasons had an impact on every citizen, not differentiated by gender. The demands were presented jointly. The next category presents the problematic state of citizen role.

5.4 The Ambiguous Role of Citizen

The last theme from the data is the ambiguous role of the citizen, which refers to situations where social media did not work, according to participants. The role of a citizen in a democratic country differs from its corresponding role in a dictatorship. This theme clearly focuses on the time following the uprisings. Some of the respondents felt like social media, awash in information, did not manage to clarify all of the aspirations of the uprising. While demonstrators protested against living conditions and against the political situation in the country and as the citizens called for social justice and human rights in general, many of those goals remained unmet. Furthermore, nonspecific demands emerged on social media platforms, and very few of them were shown in a practical light.

...it did not help to make clear for people the specific role of citizen. R4

Except for one, all respondents felt that as social media raised the awareness of citizens' rights, it did not manage to raise awareness of citizens' responsibilities. The respondents called for education regarding the role of the citizen. One respondent specified how through social media citizens became convinced of the ability to protest against any regime that does not satisfy them but at the same time did not focus on the responsibilities of citizens and the modes of civic action. After the uprisings, the misconception of the citizens' role and a lack of awareness of how to obtain rights were seen as a few of the biggest problems.

...not helped to be aware of their responsibilities. R7

Another issue was the lack of women's rights. Although human rights were indeed a demand of the demonstrators, the demands often lacked specificity. Respondents mentioned that achievements remained very low in relation to women's rights, and sexual harassment against women is still on the rise. One of the respondents acknowledged the public ignorance with regard to women's issues that still exists in large measure. They also

felt that authorities did not take this problem seriously as the violations of women's rights continue.

In the new situation where the country and its citizens should embrace new models, the transition period can be a struggle. In Egypt this period did not begin, as the traditions remained stronger than the pressure for change.

While everyone agreed that social media has its place assisting the Arab Spring and enhancing women's participation, their opinions varied between the achievements of the Arab Spring and the situations where social media did not work. One of the major achievements was the elimination of the old regime and eradication of the corruption. Awareness of citizen rights also increased and people became encouraged to demand them. One of the interviewees did not notice any situation where social media tools did not work. Others pointed out many: while social media offered the platform to share information and demand rights, it did not "teach" what to do with and how to use new responsibilities. The new, more responsible role of citizen was not communicated clearly, and there is still a large degree of public ignorance when it comes to, e.g., women's rights. The main recurring concern for respondents was women's rights, which did not advance.

6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study was inspired by the discussion of the role of social media in the Arab Spring. The literature guided this study through its entire process. Especially Jan van Dijk's (2012) *The Network Society* guided the process of ideas. It focuses on networks as the nervous system of our society (ibid. 2) and the findings of study are compared to his thoughts of the Internet as a tool for democracy. According to van Dijk the social media are perfect illustration of the network society, which interested me in the context of Arab Spring.

At first it might seem odd for people in the MENA region to use social media for communication and mobilization as much as the recent news of the Arab Spring describes, as it is a common conception to think that in these societies a high level of tight community networks exists and therefore the need for new network tools would not be that significant. However, this is misleading reasoning, of course. The networks in these societies work in both positive and negative ways.

Three years have passed since the first signs of what we now call the Arab Spring. In many countries in the region the end results of the uprising are not what citizens hoped for. On the contrary, Syrians are struggling with civil war and disorder continues in Tunisia. The latter is the case in Egypt, too.

The exclusion of women has continued for centuries in Egypt, and causes and motives for this vary (Baron 2005, 1-2). Women face discrimination in the society from the government and from their communities. Egypt is a diverse country, and women's lives differ considerably in different regions of the country. Egypt's citizens have become accustomed to the strong presence of the army, and its position has stayed relatively stable even after the fall of Mohamed Mursi's regime. After yet another presidential election, which was boycotted by many, ex-military leader Abdel Fattah al-Sisi came to power. The nation is under strong monitoring, where everyone's lives are controlled, not just women's.

Social media had its role in the Arab Spring, yet not everyone had access to them. However, as many demonstrators belonged to the middle class, utilisation of social media for demonstrations was pronounced. As people effectively used social media for political participation, mobilizing and raising awareness, it is valid to include social networks in an examination of related issues.

The first subheading opens up the theoretical viewpoint to the findings of the data, while the second subheading (6.2) contains the conclusion and further research ideas.

6.1 Findings in Relation to the Research Questions

The research questions of this study considered the role of social media from the viewpoint of Egyptian women during the Arab Spring, asking specifically if social media enabled their participation in the events. This chapter discusses the key empirical findings in relation to the research questions.

The link between women's online and offline involvement is problematic to define and describe but the first finding that the data brought out was the growth of respondents' personal interest toward politics, which social media positively affected. The intention was also to focus on social networks and their impact on the situation as such. The second key finding regarded social media's impact on political awareness in social networks. Encouragement for civic engagement appeared as the third finding that describes awareness evolving into engagement. Finally the data brought out the ambiguous role of the citizen, which highlighted the imbalance between rights and responsibilities.

Women's Participation – Empowerment

According to women who participated in this study, social media enabled their participation in the revolution. The complex status of women in Egypt leaves very little room for women to engage in societal matters. Politics are still seen as an arena for men. Even basic human rights for women are not always fulfilled in Egypt, let alone political

and social rights. Egyptian women have been semi-active in the society, as women's movements have existed and continue to exist, though this is largely the province of educated women. This is the case with the respondents, too – they are educated, and possibilities exist for them to gain awareness of politics. The social networking sites gained interest among women who had not previously been socially or politically active (Sika & Khodary 2012, 96). The social media was one of the possibilities to gain awareness of politics. The respondents pointed out that social media encouraged women to participate; thus, the information supplied by the social media platforms functioned as encouragement. The cause for this was the evolution of the political situation in the area, which led people to search for new tools for information gathering. Women both previously active and not active participated in the uprising and took their demands to the streets (ibid. 97).

The people that had access to these media tools used them effectively. Many people exploited this chance, including the respondents. Social media also managed to produce more comprehensive news about the uprising (Hamdy & Gomaa 2012). The sense of unity (for example “we are all Khaled Said”) against the authoritarian regime raised the willingness to participate, and the participation felt significant compared to the past when, according to respondents, women and politics did not interact.

The policy of the regime of citizen exclusion describes the ordinary life of individuals living under authoritarianism. “Silence is golden”; otherwise the regime monitors every move of the citizen. But as the protests against the regime started, women felt encouraged to participate. The participation began in the social media platforms, from whence it moved to the public squares. Social media has enabled the social networking for housewives, while staying at home, but it can easily reveal the existing gendered inequalities, and challenge them too (Tacchi et al. 2012; Fortunati & Taipale 2012). The possibility to demonstrate was gained easily by some of the respondents, whereas a few of them had to convince their families in order to be able to participate personally. The social media tools also enabled some of the respondents to convince their families of the importance and necessity of women's participation. This feature cautiously indicates that for some women, social media enabled the participation.

The focus here is the possibilities that social media provide for women in nondemocratic countries, at least as tools for awareness and information gathering. This is possible to see

as sort of an empowerment, as Roy, Blomqvist & Clark define the term empowerment in a gender context as “arming or endowing a woman with instruments (power and authority) to take control of her own life” (2008, 24). In addition, when women activists adopted social media practices that enabled them to articulate their identities in the public sphere and to participate in the uprisings in multiple ways, resulting in a sense of personal empowerment and collective potentiality that was fundamentally linked to the communicative platform (Radsch & Khamis 2013, 887).

Social Networks – Awareness of Politics

After the participation began women were effectively using social media as a tool for raising awareness among their social networks. Social media functioned as a platform for opinion expression and enabled sustained interest among networks. The importance of sharing information and raising awareness in the community resulted from efficiency. Women strategically shared thoughts everywhere they went; thus, this shows the utilization of both strong and weak ties in their networks. As van Dijk (2012, 31) notes, networks exist at all social levels, individual creating ties to closest people, group and organizational relations, societal relations and global relations. One of the network society’s most important characteristics is the dissolving of boundaries of social life (ibid. 177). The respondents utilized this effectively, as they informed their social networks. Inside their countries, women activists used social media mainly to raise awareness about the causes of the revolutions, but also to share and spread information about the revolts (Radsch 2011).

Women felt the need to raise awareness, as some of them were ashamed that the country had been taken away from its citizens. An interesting fact is that as a majority of the respondents were dissatisfied regarding the political and social situation, one respondent pointed out how many people were totally satisfied. As these women are from Cairo, it is not possible to evaluate the situation in the rest of country. However, some people were not eager for a change of political situation in Egypt; thus from this standpoint women’s efforts to raise awareness is comprehensible. Another factor was fear of the regime, which served as a reason for not participating.

The women also raised awareness of effective participation, as they did not settle for sharing things but tried to involve others in the uprising as well. Another reason for social media use was the possibility of spreading information rapidly, not only for information sharing in general but also for mobilizing, organizing the revolts, and apprising demonstrators of coming revolts and possible threats. None of this would have been possible without the new technology, which was effectively utilized via social networks. The safety of social media that was mentioned by a few of the respondent is, however, a false sense. These women felt that social media was a safer environment for sharing; thus, many were arrested in the beginning of the uprisings because of their protests on social media.

Encouragement for Civic Engagement

The third finding from the data was that social media was seen as a tool for engaging people. The women mentioned ordinary citizens, especially women, becoming encouraged to demand their rights. Civic engagement, as a term, “refers to the process through which civil society is invited to participate in on going political, economic and social efforts that are meant to bring about change” (Khamis & Vaughn 2011, 5). The key element in the demonstrations was the demand for social justice, freedom, human rights, corruption, and the elimination of authoritarianism. These were not gender-specific concerns, as the demands were presented together. Seven of the ten respondents joined the demonstrators, and two of them were actively mobilizing the revolts. According to Tilly (2010, 182) one of the key elements of social movements is the right of ordinary people to hold power and limit the actions of the regime, in other words these movements assert popular sovereignty. This operates as an encouragement as well.

As women were empowered by a sense of unity, it encouraged them to join in the revolution. The social media pictured the demonstrations as oppositional power against the regime and represented the revolts from a human interest view (Hamdy & Gomaa 2012, 201-202). This is reasonable, as the demonstrators themselves produced the majority of the information in social media. This might have functioned as an encouragement when people familiarised themselves with the goals of the demonstrators.

Evidence for social media's positive effect on protest behaviour exists (Valenzuela 2013). People who use social media for opinion expression and joining social causes are positively, and significantly, associated with participation in protest activities. This is possible to see in the context of this study, as women's interests developed and led to participation. It is also argued that social media seem to reduce the cost of collective action and facilitate the creation of the critical mass; yet this is a problematic issue, too, as it excludes certain people from influencing situations. This was acknowledged by some of the respondents as they pointed out the significance of the grassroots level organizing of education and awareness.

Tilly focuses on social movements in Western countries, though he states that dissidents in nondemocratic countries often emulate their Western counterparts, as mass media have made the performances of demonstrators of social movements more visible throughout the world (Tilly 2010, 188). According to Tilly (ibid. 182-184) social movements tend to combine three kinds of claims. The first one is 'identity' claim, which includes an idea of "we", who constitute a unified force to be reckoned with. Tilly also uses the word claimant to define the "we" and continues that such claims commonly include a name for "us". The idea of "we" is notable feature in the answer sheets of the respondents, as they describe reasons for participation. The second claim "standing" assert ties and similarities to other political actors, e.g., as excluded minorities, established trades, properly constituted citizens' groups, or loyal supporters of the regime. The program claims involve stated support for or opposition to actual or proposed actions by the objects of movement claims. These are possible to find from the social movements actions during the uprising.

Respondents felt that not only social media platforms encouraged them to participating, but also the sense of 'unity' played a considerable role.

The Ambiguous Role of Citizen

According to Bellamy (2008, 3) the traditional understanding of citizenship has consisted a certain set of political practices, which involves specific public rights and duties with respect to a given political community. As citizens began to understand their rights, the education and awareness of citizens' responsibilities did not follow. This is reasonable, as

people in the authoritarian regimes do not have the rights and responsibilities of citizens in countries with democratic traditions. They rarely have equal right for education, voting rights, or political participation in general. The possibility to influence on government policies with others who share more or less equal status, is one of the key elements of citizenship in democracies, as people who lack this opportunity in their country are “at best guests and at worst mere subjects” of authoritarian regimes (ibid. 4). To be “at best guest” is problematic when guests usually do not share the same rights as actual “members” of the society. Of course in democracies, the rights of foreign labour force are guaranteed, but in authoritarian regimes the exclusion of its citizens creates an ambiguous space. People do not know the correct modes of participation in situation where the authoritarian regime is overthrown.

In democracies, or at least in an ideal situation, citizens by participating in politics are able to shape the framework of their political community. Moreover, in the opposing situation – where people do not have the possibility to engage themselves, express their views and be counted – people lack self-respect and possibly respect for others too (ibid. 11). The regime does not see people as equals, “as entitled to opinion expression and have their interests considered on the same terms as everyone else”, which leads to exclusion, while as democratic citizenship changes the power-structures and the attitudes of citizens to each other (ibid. 11). The exclusion of citizens has been a visible part of the Egyptian authoritarian regime. The exclusion also creates distrust toward the regime, which was seen during the revolts in 2004, when women demonstrators faced violent harassment and official authorities did not intervene (Sika & Khodary 2012, 94). Furthermore, from this standpoint the value of more democratic citizenship is insignificant because it is shown as vague.

Bellamy states membership, rights and participation frame the term democracy and he also mentions the “dilemma” considering the rights (“The right to have rights”). He emphasizes that citizens in democracies also have duties. (Ibid. 17.) A citizenship requires activity in democracies otherwise it does not operate. However, this was not an intention of Egyptian authoritarian regime, as it effectively used oppression as a weapon against people who objected the regime or presented too differing political views. In this context it is hard to understand the meaning of the citizenship, because participation of the people is not

valued. In this sense, it is reasonable not to understand the concept of citizenship, which requires participation.

However this does not necessarily mean Egyptians want to see Western democracy as a model, because political activism against the regimes has taken place in the Arab region in various ways over the years: demonstrations, petitions, hunger strikes, coalitions and associative networks, which were not accompanied with the idea of regime's overthrow (Beinin & Vairel 2013). In other words, they might pursue democratic values considering the citizenship, not the democracy itself, but in this context it is necessary to examine the universal understanding of democracy's content. The development of the civil society has been a topic for discussion in Egypt. Western values are not appreciated thoroughly and the criticism of their impact on the Egyptian society continues. According Al-Ali (2000, 209) Egyptians are reaching the same level of development but by their own terms.

As women felt encouraged to participate and believed that social media enabled their participation, many issues considering the citizenship remained ambiguous. This last category was a surprise finding and, was formed from the answers to question considering situations where social media did not work. It does not directly fall under the radar of the research questions of this study, yet it emphasizes interestingly the unconventional and extraordinary situation that was created by the uprising.

6.2 Conclusion and Future Research Consideration

The key finding of this study is that it seems to establish the results of recent studies of social media's role in women's empowerment during the Arab Spring. Social media played a crucial role in the uprisings, yet it was only an enabling tool rather than a cause for participation. It also enabled tools for women's empowerment by providing the "instruments (power and authority) to take control of her own life", as Roy et al. states (ibid. 24).

The first intention for data gathering was to collect it by using Skype. After facing many obstacles, the data was collected as written documents, which was complemented with two

YouTube interviews that were modified into written documents. The data gathering succeeded only because of the contact person. As documents, the data provides a valid record of life experience of women during and after the Egyptian uprisings of 2011, but the fact that the data was not collected directly by the researcher may affect its reliability. The data collecting should have been organized logically immediately at the beginning of the study, as delays and difficulties in this area prolonged the study needlessly.

Qualitative content analysis was applied in this study. The choice was obvious as the method was familiar; however, if the aim had been critical, discourse analysis would have probably been more suitable. Because the focus of content analysis is description, it may lead to too great presumptions. But as the size of the data remained relatively small, the content analysis was executed as concept-driven, which exploits, e.g., theories of recent studies. The data was at times problematic to organize as themes overlapped; however, once it was organized properly it was not an issue to find valid points.

For further study it would be interesting to include the circumstances of document production and their effect on it, e.g., if any discussion occurred as the respondents wrote the answers down. Then the possible recognition of how respondents, as social actors, make sense of the world (events) could be perceived. To broaden the angle of the research, civic organizations' viewpoint on social media utilisation during the Arab Spring might uncover new aspects for analysis.

As Egypt is now under the new regime, which claims to be working on the reform of the political system, it is to be seen what the future holds. As Egypt's leaders proclaim that they are creating a more democratic and accountable Egypt, the fear is that the situation in the country stays the same. However, the desirable outcome is that the new leaders are capable of creating a constitutional system that respects the hopes and demands of the Egyptian people.

Finally, the question that has to be asked is, what is the role of women in Egypt today? Is there any room for women's rights to evolve and develop or do cultural traditions suffocate such development? Are some long-standing traditions related to gender roles maintained by both women and men, since the demonstrations occurred in large cities only? Was the uprising a prelude for further reform? How does the anxiety of women about their rights,

expressed during the uprisings, manifest now? As Wolfsfeld et al. has stated, it is indeed hard to avoid the conclusion that politics comes first and last.

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ANNEX 1 RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Before the Arab Spring in Egypt, were you politically active and/or involved? If so, how? If not, why?
2. In general, how did you take part in the uprising in Egypt?
3. What were your reasons for taking part in the uprising?
4. Which forms of social media did you use?
5. How often did you use social media before the uprising in Egypt?
6. Did participating in Arab Spring change your way of using social media? If so, how?
7. Why did you choose social media as a tool for participating?
8. Did social media tools assist the uprisings in Egypt?
9. In your opinion, did those tools enhance women's participation in uprisings?
10. What were the achievements of the Arab Spring in Egypt? Did social media tools enhance your goals?
11. Did you notice any situations where social media tools did not work?