

Globalization, Social Media and the Arab Spring: 2010- 2015*

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Abstract

Mass communication, especially its subset the social media, has played a very significant role in the process of globalization. Means of mass communication – print media, radio and television – have undergone revolutionary transformation in recent year. With the advent and subsequent proliferating usage of Internet for over a decade has virtually knit the world much more closely. Satellite cable and cellular mobile phone technologies, along with Facebook, twitter, blogs and You Tube as means of social media have turned the means of communication into global communications. There has occurred a twin process of globalization of the local and localization of the global. The tools of social media facilitated the dialogue amongst a network of activists who were then able to instigate calls for reform; social media also directly helped in protesters' ability to organize and coordinate their activities. In quickly disseminating not only information but sensational pictures and video clips, social media played an important role in attracting both national and international attention to protesters' plights and subsequently swaying international opinion and policy.

1. Introduction

- I. Subject of the Study: The subject of study is “Globalization, Social Media and the Arab Spring: 2010-2015.
- II. Problem of the Study: Globalization has become a catchword with almost all the countries. It is to be seen how the means of mass communication especially social media have helped in mobilizing support for the developments that ultimately culminated in Arab Spring.
- III. Limitations of the Study: While analyzing the role of different mass communication media, the major thrust has been focused on tools of mass media, especially Facebook, Internet, Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and You Tube. The traditional means of communication like print media and radio have been given only peripheral touch.
- IV. Theoretical Framework of the Study: The concepts of mass communication and social media have been analyzed within theoretical paradigms to demonstrate it's utility and bringing into sharp focus linkages between globalization, mass communication and social media in mobilization of mass support.
- V. Methodology of the Study: Basic tools of research used in this research study are historical, comparative and analytical. Both primary and secondary sources have been relied upon. Maximum care has been exercised to present an objective analysis.
- VI. Previous Researches etc: Globalization, mass communication and social media *vis-à-vis* Arab Spring is an emerging area, which has started attracting attention of scholars and academicians. There is lack of serious, in-depth and analytical academic studies in this field. This article is a modest attempt in this field.
- VII. Results and conclusion: Trends emerging from this research study show that the process of globalization is closely dependent on mass communication, especially on Internet and social media. The social media has played significant role in the developments leading to Arab Spring. The medium of social media should be utilized for the benefit of the people and its abuse can result in chaos and instability.
- VIII. Bibliography. A select bibliography is shown in the endnotes.
- IX. Outline of the study. This study has been outlined as follows:
 1. Preface.
 2. Concept of Communication.
 3. Mass Media or Mass Communication.
 4. Print and Broadcasting Media.
 5. Role of Television.
 6. Role of Internet.
 7. Role of Social Media.
 8. Tools of Social Media
 - 1) Facebook
 - 2) Twitter
 - 3) You Tube

- 4) Blogs
9. Social Media in Arab World.
10. Arab Spring
11. Conclusion.
12. References

1. Preface

Advent of the twenty-first century can be said to be a symbolic turning point in human history. Presently, the world is perilously divided by a razor-thin margin between self-destruction and self-renewal. Problems like nuclear holocaust, environmental catastrophe, growing ethnic violence, burgeoning population, yawning gap between the rich and the poor, rapid proliferation of small weapons, drug trafficking, and terrorism etc. are all distinct possibilities leading to the road to self-destruction. Concomitantly, achievements in science, technology, telecommunication, information technology and education etc. have ushered in new vistas in Civilizational history of humankind. These achievements have enabled humankind to overcome the problems of ignorance, poverty and suffering to some extent. Besides, new vistas have also been envisaged for promoting harmony among nations, between nature and humanity and the development of a new awareness of world community.

Globalization is the process by which regional economies, societies, and cultures are being integrated through a network of communication, transportation, and trade. It is how society, particularly our economies, works today. Technological innovations in the means of mass communication have knit the world closer.

Global news networks have brought the news into the homes of people in over 150 countries and in most of the countries millions of people are logged on through the Internet, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn in a global discourse on contemplating over world problems. In recent years, Internet, Facebook, Twitter and Youtube along with other similar networks have emerged as potent instruments of what is called 'Social Media.' These networks have enabled Social Media play a very crucial role in our globalized world.

This brings into focus the inter-linkages between globalization and Social Media. While focusing on the inter-linkages between globalization and Social Media, this article presents a brief overview of theoretical paradigms of mass communication, various media of mass communication like press, radio, television and with specific focus on instruments of Mass Media like Internet, Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, and mobile cellular phones in the developments leading to the emergence of Arab Spring in the Arab World.

2. CONCEPT OF COMMUNICATION

Apart from their basic requirements like food, cloth and shelter, human beings also nurture an innate desire to communicate with their fellow beings. This desire for communication is primeval and in today's globalized world it has emerged as *raison detre*. In common parlance, communication is construed as an art of transmitting information, ideas and attitudes from one person to another. The term 'communication' is the derivative of Latin *Communicate* which means to make common, to share, to impart or to transmit. Through communication people interact with each other, convey their feelings and receive other's thoughts. Thus, it is via communication that human interaction is facilitated.

Communication is generally seen as 'social interaction through messages' and these messages are formally coded, symbolic, or representational events of some shared significance in a culture generated with the objective of eliciting or gaining significance (Gerbner, 1958:Pp.85-90), The differentiation between the communication approach and other approaches to the study of behaviour and culture is dependent on the fact as to what extent or limit messages bear relevance to the processes studies, dealing with the production, content transmission, perception and the use of messages primary to the approach. In other words, a communication approach is distinct from other approaches because it makes the nature and role of messages in life and society as its avowed primary objective.

3. Mass Media or Mass Communication

The media of communicator are the instrumentalities, which are capable of assuming forms that detail prerequisites of messages. Mass media, as defined by Gould and Kilts, comprises all those impersonal means of communication by which visual or auditory messages or both are transmitted directly to the audience (Gould and Kolb, 1964: P.413). Television, radio, motion pictures, newspapers, magazines and books fall within the purview of mass media. Joseph T. Klapper finds mass media as a process in which a mechanism of impersonal reproduction intervenes between the speaker and the audience (Klapper, 1949:P.3). According to this criterion, the radio, the screen, books and other media of impersonal communication fall in the category of mass media. G.D. Wiebe cites two main prerequisites of media: (i) easy availability of the product to maximum number of people; and (ii) easily affordable cost of the product (Wiebe, 1952: Pp. 164-165). This criterion lays stress on the size of the audience and excludes not only personal communication but also more expensive communication products. Wide-ranging and far-flung reach of the mass media is emphasized by Sherif and Sherif (Sherrif and Sheriff, 1956: P. 562).

Emphasis on mass media transcending the barriers of peculiar interests and preoccupations of the societal and segmental organized groups is stressed by L. Wirth (Wirth, 1948:P.10). Among the essential characteristics of mass communication, as listed by C.R. Wright, are included distinctive operating conditions like the nature of the audience and the communication experience of the communicator etc (For details see, Wright, 1959:Pp.12-15), Under this criterion, the mass communication is directed towards a relatively large heterogeneous and anonymous audience. Mass communication may be characterized as public, rapid and transient. It is axiomatic that the communicator in mass media generally operates through a subtle corporate organization embodying an extensive division of labour and an accompanying degree of expense.

Undoubtedly, the mass media are technological agencies operating as corporate organizations, engaged in the creation, selection, processing and dissemination of messages that are produced at speeds and in quantities possible only with mass production methods. This makes mass media as the broadest common currencies of public interaction in a society. There is no denying the fact that the mass media are the organized means of reaching larger numbers of diverse kinds of people quickly and efficiently. The mass media or mass communication may be said to include the print media comprising newspapers, magazines and books, electronic media comprising radio, television, Internet and mobile cellular phones, and the movies. Social media comprising Internet, Facebook, Twitter, You Tube and mobile telephony etc. has emerged as potent instrument of electronic media for formal and informal communication. An analytical appraisal of the linkages between globalization and mass communication calls for a brief overview of the print media and electronic media with specific emphasis on the role of social media vis-à-vis the Arab Spring.

4. Print and Broadcasting Media

Prior to the advent of the era of mass media, the recording of the cultural imagery was closely linked to the power of the religious institutions and the aristocracy. The industrial revolution in Europe followed by the invention of the printing press led to the printing of books, magazines and newspapers. With the gradual spread of literacy, there also grew demand for the printed material. Gradually, the print media started gaining importance as a potent tool of influencing public opinion. Until the sixth decade of the twentieth century, the print media reigned supreme as the sole arbiter of public opinion. Technological advances in telecommunications during the past half century have brought revolutionary changes in television viewing through satellite and cable network, Internet and cellular mobile phones. But print media still retains its significance as the moulder of public opinion.

Foreign Affairs (quarterly, New York), *Time*, *Newsweek* (Weeklies, New York), *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, *The Times* (London), *Survival* (monthly, London), *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro* (France), *Al-Ahram* (Egypt), *Pravda* (Russia), *Ashai Shinbhum* (Japan), *People's Daily* (China), *International Herald Tribune* (international edition) etc. are some of the leading journals and newspapers which enjoy international reputation as leaders of public opinion. Besides, reputed publishers like Oxford University Press, Praeger, Macmillan, Alfred Knopf, Sage, Kegan Paul, Random House, Croom Helm, Westview Press, Cambridge University Press, Harper etc. publish quality books on different subjects which have global readership. Thus, print media still have its sway over international readership despite the challenges thrown by television and the Internet.

The growth of cinema from the start of the twentieth century had by the 1920s spawned a whole new cultural habit of regular cinema going. Arrival of the sound by the end of the 1920s led to the construction of a whole new generation of cinema halls. The newsreel was an important element in the programme, thereby providing the vast majority of the audience their first glimpse of moving action. As the newsreel provided movement, radio provided immediacy. During the Second World War, Hitler made extensive use of broadcasting media by launching propaganda war against the allied nations. The post-War period which witnessed the inauguration of the Cold War rivalry between Soviet Union and the United States was characterized by broadcasting media playing key role in the propaganda war waged by rival powers. Radio Moscow, BBC, Voice of America, and Radio Beijing etc. beamed propaganda broadcasts through various frequencies to reach the audience in different parts of the world. Even in the post-Cold War period, broadcasting medium continues to enjoy favour with the audience. According to broad estimates, the global technological capacity to receive information through one-way broadcast networks more than quadrupled during the two decades from 1986 to 2007, from 432 exabytes of (optimally compressed) information, to 1.9 zettabytes, which is the information equivalent of 55 newspapers per person per day in 1986, and 175 newspapers per person per day by 2007 (Hilbert, and Lopez, 2011: Pp.60-65).

5. Role of Television

Television, though first launched in the mid-1930s, did not reach a large audience and it could be received within a radius of few kilometers. Technological revolution during the decade of 1960s was accompanied by the rapid introduction of video recording and editing (1961), the first communication satellites (Telstar in 1962), action replay (1966), slow motion (1967), colour (1968), and new light weight mobile cameras (1970) transformed the

medium. By the middle of 1970s, the audience had come to expect as a matter of course that high quality live pictures in colour could be received from virtually anywhere in the world. By 1970, the modern television era could be said to have been established.

From the 1970s onward, a network of satellites covering the globe began to be established. Cable had long been established in United States and during the 1980s cable networks began to flourish more extensively in Europe. However, it was the establishment of satellite channels and the linking of satellite and cable that really triggered a new transformation. Multiple outlets enabled the establishment of generic channels. There was a rapid growth in subscription television in the early 1990s. Digital television launched in 1998 has been instrumental in introducing new channels. Satellite and cable are playing a major role in the deregulation of broadcasting, the commodification of television and the fragmentation of audience.

Television has shifted our perception and understanding of geographic space. Technological advances now provide live pictures from all over the world with seamless switching between events in different places. Australia, Bosnia and California, Shanghai or Cairo all seems tantalizingly close and real, whereas perversely our own closer surroundings become largely invisible. International television networks such as CNN, BBC World Service TV, Star TV, MTV and Al-jazeera have become hot favorites. The media events of the past few decades have been able to inject a new global consciousness of the common human destiny. Such well-televised events as the landing on the moon, the Tiananmen Square demonstrations, the Gulf War, Afghanistan war and Iraq War, demonstrations in Arab countries under the influence of Arab Spring etc., have heightened a sense of globality in locality, (The term 'from globality to locality' is borrowed from : Dayan and Katz,1992).

The CNN came into being in 1985 and since then it has recorded a steady growth to emerge as world's leading global news network. It has been providing live broadcasts in English, Spanish, Japanese, Polish, French and German. CNN's internationally distributed satellite signal is within reach of the bulk of world's population and it has emerged more than a news medium, also serving as a via media for public diplomacy, generally working faster than the private channels of traditional diplomacy.

MTV beams musical programmes having post-modernist American cultural values to Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America. Though having global reach and appeal, MTV is following a localization strategy wherever it goes. It is engaged in the creation of an intended or unintended global, post-modernist subculture. Star Television, acquired by Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation in 1993, covers most of Asia through direct broadcast satellite (DBS). It also beams programmes in regional languages apart from English.

Al-Jazeera is another satellite channel which has registered rapid strides in recent years. Having its headquarters in Doha (Qatar), Al-Jazeera was initially launched as an Arabic news and current affairs satellite TV channel and it has since expanded into a network with several outlets, including the Internet and specialty TV channels in multiple languages. Al Jazeera is accessible in several world regions. In January 2003, the BBC announced that it had signed an agreement with Al Jazeera for sharing facilities and information, including news footage. Al Jazeera's broad availability in the Arab world, operating with less constraint than almost any other Arab outlet and remaining the most popular channel in the region, has been perceived by many experts as playing a part in the Arab Spring. During the last week of January 2011, the New York Times reported that the protests rocking the Arab world "this week have one thread uniting them: Al-Jazeera... whose aggressive coverage has helped propel insurgent emotions from one capital to the next." (*New York Times*, 27 January 2011 and the World's Technological capacity to Store, / <http://ideas.economist.com/video/giant-sifting-sound-0>).

Television is a powerful medium of communicating message with symbols and pictures. Unlike print and broadcast media, its impression is more instant, deep, direct and clear.

6. Role of Internet

The Internet is a global system of interconnected computer networks that use the standard Internet protocol suite (TCP/IP) to serve several million users round the globe. It is a 'network of networks' comprising millions of private, public, academic, business, and government networks, of local to global scope, that are linked by a broad array of electronic, wireless and optical networking technologies. Recent decades have witnessed phenomenal growth in Internet users. During 2005, about 16 per cent of the global population was using the Internet and by 2010 this percentage grew to 30 per cent and by the close of January 2013, about 39 per cent of world population was using the Internet. The number of Internet users in the developing world grew from 8 percent in 2005 to 31 per cent in January 2013 and concurrently the percentage of Internet users in the developed world which stood at 51 per cent in 2005 increased to 77 percent in January 2013 (International Telecommunication Union (ITU), 2013/ http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/statistics/2012/ITU_Key_2006-2013_ICT_data.xls).

The development of Internet has been a historic and revolutionary achievement of technology, which has influenced other technologies. It has opened new vistas in the realm of ideas by creating a space in which new forms of expression are taking place. The Internet provides access to vast field of information and has a reach to those sources of information, which may not be accessible through print media. Online users can influence, discuss and tackle issues and exchange views on matters that bear impact on their different communities. Many

countries that have permitted the use of Internet access seem to have tolerated freer expression online than is allowed in the local news media. The events on news items, which are denied publication in the print media owing to political pressure or other reasons, find free circulation on the Internet.

The Internet is fast emerging as a hub and nerve centre of every form of political action ranging from contemplated moves of corporate boycotts to tactical deliberations and even by underground groups. International disputes and vexing issues spread in different parts of the world, ranging from Peru to Ecuador to the Tibetan Information Network out of London disseminating information to Tibetan exiles, and even outlawed terrorist groups like *Al Qaida* have been found making extensive use of the Internet.

The prevalent language for communication on the Internet has been English. This may be a result of the origin of the Internet, as well as the language's role as a lingua franca. After English (27%), the most requested languages on the World Wide Web are Chinese (23%), Spanish (8%), Japanese (5%), Portuguese and German (4% each), Arabic, French and Russian (3% each), and Korean (2%) (Internet World Stats, 30 June 2010). By region, 42% of the world's Internet users are based in Asia, 24% in Europe, 14% in North America, 10% in Latin America and the Caribbean taken together, 6% in Africa, 3% in the Middle East and 1% in Australia/Oceania (World Internet Usage Statistics News and Population Stats, <http://www.internetworldstats.com.stats.htm/> 30 June 2010).

In most of the countries where online Internet facility is available, public authorities and corporate groups have email boxes and websites to which all people can have an access. The people can elicit information about the government and can also send in their complaints or suggestions to the concerned departments. Apart from its public-oriented utility, the Internet can also be used to promote propaganda or disinformation. Undoubtedly, information technology is a potent revolutionary medium of transmitting information. It is noteworthy that in the immediate aftermath of the invention of the printing press, government tried to regulate it through control and curbs. Armed conflicts and political rivalries, especially during the Cold War period, have spurred the concerned countries to control the flow of information. During the Cold War period, radio programmes from West Germany were frequently beamed into East Germany and from Hong Kong into China.

Radio and television, as tools of information technology, are centralized and dependent on the allocation of frequencies. This enables the government to exercise its control over these tools by jamming the unauthorized frequencies and signals. However, the Internet is not subject to such a centralized control and is decentralized. One can build an information network independent of local and government-influenced or controlled media outlets. The manner of dissemination of information and speed of its distribution has both undergone significant change in an era of Internet. According to broad estimates, it took about 13 years for television and 75 years for telephone to acquire a clientele of 50 million users whereas for Internet it took only five years to acquire that number of users (Wilkinson, 1995: P.40). According to Paul Wilkinson, the Internet is not only a technology that affects other technologies but it is also a kind of knowledge market impervious to the attempts of states to control it (Warf and Grimes, 1997: P. 263).

The Internet has yielded many progressive uses which *inter alia* include the disbursement of documents, audio and video files, chatting, e-mail petitions, software and as a medium of organizing more traditional forms of protest. Various groups make use of the Internet for projecting their respective political interests and agendas—from civil and human rights activists to special internet groups, political parties, religious movements and even terrorist groups (For details see Green, 2000: Pp. 13-15). The rapid proliferation of the Internet and easy accessibility to it has raised possibility of its being used as a Trojan horse by activists and campaigners in authoritarian regimes to effect political change and reform. The Internet provides the potential of cheap access for almost instantaneous transmission of news, reports and TV footage. During the Tiananmen Square events of June 1989, the Communist leadership of China were particularly stung by the Chinese students' use of emails and faxes and by the China Net Newsgroup based at Stanford University in the United States. It was feared that the Internet represented a technology that was a potent weapon of American domination (For the details about the Arab Uprising's Cascading Effects, see, International Telecommunication Union –ITU–, <http://nii.nst.gov/gii/whatgii.html>).

Rapid pace of emergence of the Internet as a potent tool of politics has further enhanced its significance. Many political groups use the Internet to achieve a new method of organizing in order to carry out their mission, having given rise to Internet activism, most notably practiced by rebels in the recent Arab Spring.¹⁸ *New York Times* suggested that social media websites, such as Facebook and Twitter, helped people organize the political revolutions in Egypt where it helped certain classes of protesters organize protests, communicate grievances, and disseminate information (Kirkpatrick, 2011).

Simon R. B. Berdal in 2004 thoroughly explored the potential of the Internet as a civic tool of communicative power as thus:

As the globally evolving Internet provides ever new access points to virtual discourse forums, it also promotes new civic relations and associations within which communicative power may flow and accumulate. Thus, traditionally ... national-embedded peripheries get entangled into

greater, international peripheries, with stronger combined powers... The Internet, as a consequence, changes the topology of the "centre-periphery" model, by stimulating conventional peripheries to interlink into "super-periphery" structures, which enclose and "besiege" several centres at once. (Berdal, 2004)

While extending the Habermasian notion of the public sphere to the Internet, Berdal underlines the inherent global and civic nature that intertwined Internet technologies provide. To limit the growing civic potential of the Internet, Berdal also notes how "self-protective measures" are put in place by those threatened by it:

If we consider China's attempts to filter "unsuitable material" from the Internet, most of us would agree that this resembles a self-protective measure by the system against the growing civic potentials of the Internet. Nevertheless, both types represent limitations to "peripheral capacities". Thus, the Chinese government tries to prevent communicative power to build up and unleash (as the 1989 Tiananmen Square uprising suggests, the government may find it wise to install "upstream measures"). Even though limited, the Internet is proving to be an empowering tool also to the Chinese periphery: Analysts believe that Internet petitions have influenced policy implementation in favour of the public's online-articulated will... ". (*Ibid*)

The developments obtaining in the wake of the Arab Spring prove the political and social potentials of the Internet in transforming the existing system.

The social media, of which the Internet is an integral part, is a crucial factor in the socio-political transformation of the state and society. Hence a brief overview of social media and its main components is called for here.

7. ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Viewed in a broad spectrum, social media refers to the tools of interactions among people in which they create, share, and exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks. According to Kaplan and Haenlein, social media is "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of World Wide Web, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (Kaplan, Andreas and Haenlein, 2010: P.61). Some experts have opined that social media is dependent on mobile and web-based technologies to facilitate creation of highly interactive platforms through which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content. It is further held that such a mechanism envisages substantial and pervasive changes to communication between organizations, communities and individuals (For details see, Kietzmann and Hermkens, 2011: Pp. 241-251).

There are many aspects such as quality, reach, frequency, usability, immediacy and permanence, which differentiates social media from traditional/industrial media (See: Morgan, Graham, and Hodges, 2013). Social media comes in many different shapes and forms. The basic concept upon which all instances of social media rely is that users can create and share content with other users, easily and instantly. Broadly speaking, social media allows content accessibility to all. Social media is highly dependent on Internet usage. According to Nielsen estimates, internet users continue to spend more time with social media sites than any other type of site. At the same time, the total time spent on social media in the U.S. across PC and mobile devices increased by 37 percent to 121 billion minutes in July 2012 compared to 88 billion minutes in July 2011 (Nielsen, 2012). According to one opinion, the benefits of participating in social media for content contributors have gone beyond simply social sharing to building reputation and bringing in career opportunities and monetary income, (Tang, Gu, and Whinston, 2012: Pp. 41-75).

Social media has both its supporters and critics. Social media is criticised for exclusiveness as many sites disallow the transfer of information from one to another site, disparity of information available, issues with trustworthiness and reliability of information presented, concentration, ownership of media content, and the meaning of interactions created by social media. However, Kaplan and Haenlein have argued that social media has positive effects such as allowing the democratization of the internet, (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010: P. 67.), while also allowing individuals to advertise themselves and form friendships. (For details see, Rainie and Wellman, 2012)

Associating social media with positive outcomes every time may not be observed as a matter of rule, because, as pointed by one expert, due to the increase in social media websites, there seems to be a positive correlation between the usage of such media with cyber bullying, online sexual predators and the decrease in face-to-face interactions. Social media may expose children to images of alcohol, tobacco, and sexual behaviors. (Munni and Ray, 2013).

8. TOOLS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is an integral part of as well as a subset of Information Communication Technology (ICT) and the ICT is defined by Manuel Castells as "the converging set of technologies in microelectronics, computing (machines and software), telecommunications/broadcasting, and optoelectronics" (Castells, 1996: P.30). The

social media networks (SMNs), as subset of ICT, can be defined as “online tools and utilities that allow communication of information online and participation and collaboration” (Newson, Houghton and Justin, 2008: P.3). Additionally, social media tools are websites that “interact with the users, while giving them information.” It is this two-way nature of SMNs that is central to this argument, and the role they have played in the Arab Spring.

As a subset of ICT, social media technologies assume various different forms including magazines, Internet forums, weblogs, social blogs, micro blogging, wikis, social networks, podcasts, photographs and videos and social bookmarking etc. Kaplan and Haenlein have created a classification scheme with six different types of social media: collaborative projects (for example, Wikipedia), blogs and micro blogs (for example, Twitter), content communities (for example, You Tube and Daily Motion), social networking sites (for example, Facebook), virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft), and virtual social worlds (e.g. Second Life), (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010:P.61). However, the boundaries between the different types have been increasingly blurred. For example, Shi, Rui and Whinston have argued that Twitter, as a combination of broadcasting service and social network, is better to be classified as a "social broadcasting technology (Shi, Rui, and Whinston, 2013).

The usage of social media in tandem with mobile devices makes it mobile social media, which is defined by Kaplan as a group of mobile marketing applications that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan, 2012). The mobile social media can be differentiated from traditional social media as it incorporates new factors such as the current location of the user (location-sensitivity) or the time delay between sending and receiving messages (time-sensitivity).

The Facebook, Twitter, YouTube blogging and mobile phones are the most widely and effectively used tools of social media networks, which are briefly analyzed in the following section:

1) **facebook**

Facebook was launched in 2004 as a social networking website exclusively for Harvard students and as of September 2012 it has over one billion active users, (*The Wall Street Journal*, 4 October 2012). Facebook users interact with other users by updating their “status”, writing on other members “walls” or sending direct personal messages. Users are able to “create and join interest groups, ‘like’ pages, import and search for contacts, and upload photos and videos. The average user is connected to 80 community pages, groups and events. Over 75% of users are located outside the United States, despite its origins in the United States.

Users of the Facebook must register before using the site, after which they may create a personal profile, add other users as friends, and exchange messages, including automatic notifications when they update their profile. Additionally, users may join common-interest user groups, organized by workplace, school or college, or other characteristics, and categorize their friends into lists such as "People From Work" or "Close Friends". Facebook is the most popular social networking site in various English-speaking countries, including Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. In regional Internet markets, Facebook penetration is highest in North America (69 percent), followed by Middle East-Africa (67 percent), Latin America (58 percent), Europe (57 percent), and Asia-Pacific (17 percent).

Over the years, the Facebook has come to play important role in national and international politics. In January 2008, facebook teamed up with ABC and Saint Anselm college to allow users to give live feedback about the "back to back" January 5 Republican and Democratic debates shortly before the New Hampshire primary in the US. Facebook users took part in debate groups organized around specific topics, register to vote, and message questions (Callahan, 2008).

Some users of the formed in February 2008, a Facebook group called "One Million Voices Against FARC" and organized an event in which hundreds of thousands of Colombians marched in protest against the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, also known as the FARC (from the group's Spanish name) (Brodzinsky, 2008). In January 2011, Facebook played a major role in generating the first spark for the 2011 Egyptian revolution. On 11 January 2011, the Facebook page of "We are all Khaled Said" was started by Wael Ghoniem to invite the Egyptian people to "peaceful demonstrations" on 25 January 2011, (Hauslohner, 2011). As happened in Tunisia, Facebook become the primary tool for connecting all protesters, which prompted the Egyptian government to ban Facebook, Twitter and another websites the next day and thereafter the ban all mobile and Internet connections for all of Egypt was imposed at midnight of 28 January 2011. After 18 days, the uprising forced President Mubarak to resign.

Facebook filed paperwork with the US Federal Election Commission In 2011 to form a political action committee under the name *FB PAC*. In an email to *The Hill*, a spokesman for Facebook said "FB PAC will give our employees a way to make their voice heard in the political process by supporting candidates who share our goals of promoting the value of innovation to our economy while giving people the power to share and make the world more open and connected" (Cited in Gautham, 2011).

2) **Twitter**

Twitter is an online social networking and micro blogging service that facilitates its users to send and read text-based messages of up to 140 characters, known as "tweets". Launched in 2006, Twitter is a “real-time

information network that connects you to the latest information about what you find interesting” (Chebib, and Sohail, 2011: P.141). Users communicate via “Tweets” which are short posts limited to 140 characters, also allowing for embedded media links. Twitter users can “follow” or essentially subscribe to the updates of other users, some of which include conventional media sources, such as *Newsweek* or *Al-Jazeera*, celebrities, and friends. Additionally, tweets can be categorized using “hashtags” which “group post together by topic or type”, (*Ibid*).

Within a short span of its existence, Twitter has been able to gain worldwide popularity, with over 500 million registered users as of 2012, generating over 340 million tweets daily and handling over 1.6 billion search queries per day, (Crunch, 2012). It has emerged as one of the ten most visited websites on the Internet, and is usually described as “the SMS of the Internet.”

Twitter has been used for multiple purposes in many industries and scenarios. It has been used to organize protests, sometimes referred to as “Twitter Revolutions”, which include the 2011 Egyptian revolution, 2010-2011 Tunisian protests, 2009-2010 Iranian election protests and 2009 Moldova civil unrest. The Twitter and other social media have been described as a “strategic weapon ... which has the apparent ability to re-align the social order in real time, with little or no advanced warning, (“Social media as a strategic weapon” by Paul and Peters, 2011). The developments obtaining in the wake of the Arab Spring in early 2011 witnessed increase in the number of hashtags mentioning the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt. A study by the Dubai School of Government revealed that only 0.26% of the Egyptian population, 0.1% of the Tunisian population and 0.04% of the Syrian population are active on Twitter (*The Globe and Mail*, 19 August 2011).

3) Youtube

Created in 2005, YouTube was the first website dedicated solely to uploading and sharing personal video. Over 3 billion videos are viewed each day on YouTube, reaching 700 billion playbacks in 2010. According to YouTube website, more than 1 billion unique users visit YouTube each month and more than over 6 billion hours of video are watched each month on YouTube—that’s almost an hour for every person on Earth. YouTube is localized in 56 countries and across 61 languages (YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/yt/statistics.html>, 26 June 2013). As well as uploading and viewing media, users can also leave comments on videos. YouTube is the third most frequented website online, (“Top Sites”, at <http://www.alexa.com/topsites>, 22 June 2013). It displays a wide variety of user-generated video content, including movie clips, TV clips, and music, as well as amateur content such as video blogging, short original videos, and educational videos.

Bulk of the content on YouTube has been uploaded by individuals, although some media corporations and other organizations offer some of their material via the site, as part of the YouTube partnership program. Unregistered users can watch videos, while registered users can upload an unlimited number of videos. Videos considered to contain potentially offensive content are available only to registered users at least 18 years old. In November 2006, YouTube, LLC was bought by Google and since then it operates as a subsidiary of Google. A media report published in early September 2008 commented that YouTube was “notorious” for “some of the most confrontational and ill-formed comment exchanges on the internet”, and reported on YouTube Comment Snob, “a new piece of software that blocks rude and illiterate posts”, (*Daily Telegraph*, 2 September (2008). Another media report published in early April 2012 noted that finding comments on YouTube that appear “offensive, stupid and crass” to the “vast majority” of the people is hardly difficult, (Rundle, 2012).

4) Blogs

Weblogs, more commonly referred to as blogs, are “an easy-to-use content management tool. When you ‘blog’, you are instantly adding new content to your site via a web interface, where no technical or programming skills are necessary”, (Wyld, 2007: P.49). Blogging requires merely Internet access and typing skills, and these low-cost barriers have led to personal blogs proliferating worldwide. There were 35,000 active blogs in the Arab region in 2009, growing to 40,000 by 2010, (The Initiative for an Open Arab Internet, “Arabic Blogs: An Embodiment of Freedom of Expression”, at <http://www.openarab.net/en/node/335>. Accessed on 15 May 2013). This number had increased dramatically since the 2011 uprisings, speculated at 600,000 blogs, according to the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, (Arabic Network or Human Rights Information Online at <http://www.anhri.net/en/>, 10 June 2013). A blog is a discussion or informational site published on the World Wide Web and comprising discrete entries or posts.

An early milestone in the rise in importance of blogs came in 2002 in the United States. Though often seen as partisan gossips, bloggers sometimes lead the way in bringing key information to public light, with mainstream media having to follow their lead. More often, however, news blogs tend to react to material already published by the mainstream media. Meanwhile, an increasing number of experts blogged, making blogs a source of in-depth analysis. In Russia, some political bloggers have started to challenge the dominance of official, overwhelmingly pro-government media.

9. Social media in Arab world

The significant role played by social media tools in the Arab Spring cannot be appreciated without being placed

within the context of media culture in the Arab world. Over the last decade, the Arab region has experienced the highest rates of technology adoption amongst all developing nations (Howard, 2011: Pp. 19-20). According to Bernard Lewis, “Perhaps the single most important development is the adoption of modern communications. The printing press and the newspaper, the telegraph, the radio, and the television have all transformed the Middle East”, (For details see Lewis, 2011). Though Internet penetration has increased dramatically over the last several years, with 40-45 million Internet users identified in 16 Arab countries surveyed in 2009, the technological capabilities of modern life that are taken for granted in highly developed societies, have progressed in a relatively short span of time and have not been embraced by the authoritarian governments that dominate the Middle East, (Abbassi, 2010).

“Print and visual media developed within decades of each other in the Arab world, as opposed to developing through centuries in Western Europe,” so it is of little surprise that “ruling elites fear the Internet as a conduit for political and moral subversion, and this fear has dominated the discourse on the use of the technology” (Hammond, 2007: P.118). Before 1990, media ownership fell mostly in the hands of the government, subject to strict censorship and supervision. This was largely a result of the 1952 revolution which “claimed a monopoly on truth and hence had to have a monopoly over the means of propagating it as well” (Ayalon, 1995: P.271).

The 1996 launching of Al-Jazeera, the scion of independent media broadcasting in the Middle East represents a pivotal moment in the history of Arab media, a “revolution in Arabic-language television” and establishing itself as “a forum for debate on human rights, fundamentalism, religion and corruption, offending just about every Arab state in the process” (Hammond, 2007: P.15). As Internet access has proliferated across the Arab region, a “highly ambivalent and complex relationship between media and governments” has developed, in which Arab autocracies have encouraged Internet penetration in the name of economic development, while simultaneously attempting to maintain control over the spread of information and media sources (Khamis and Vaughn, 2011: P.3).

This complex relationship between increasing Internet accessibility and a complementary increase in suppression of online freedom has led to a culture of subversion, an “emerging cyberworld that knows no physical boundaries” (Samon and Post, 2010: P.159), based on online social networking. With a lack of truly independent and representative media, disenfranchised youths have searched for an alternative method of participation in the public and political spheres.

According to a recent report released by International Telecommunication Union (ITU), Arab countries continue to rapidly gain access to mobile cellular and to a smaller extent, mobile and wireless Internet, but lag behind in access to fixed broadband Internet access at home. It is revealed that more people in Arab countries are online largely because of the increasing spread of mobile 3G networks that give people access to the Internet on their mobile phones, and the increasing number of computers accessing the Internet via wireless networks. As of the end of 2011, 30 percent of the population in the region was using the Internet. This is comparable to the Asia/Pacific region (27 percent) and higher than sub-Saharan Africa at 13 percent. Europe has the highest level of internet use (74 percent) followed by the Americas (56 percent), (International Telecommunication Union (ITU), *ICT Adoption and Prospects in the Arab Region 2012*, http://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-d//opb/ind/D-IND-AR-2012-PDF-E.pdf, 21 June 2013).

Of all the Facebook users in the Arab world, the UAE has some 41 per cent — almost double the amount of the country next in line, According to the latest fifth edition of the Arab Social Media Report series, published by the Dubai School of Government (DSG), the UAE continues to score the highest amongst all Arab countries in terms of Facebook penetration at 41 per cent, while Egypt claims around 25 per cent of Arab Facebook users and Saudi Arabia has more than half 50 per cent of the Arab active Twitter users. However, for the first time, most GCC countries saw a drop in social media adoption for the first time in 2013.

Fadi Salem, Director of the Governance and Innovation Programme at the Dubai School of Government and co-author of the report, said: “With more than 55 million active Arab users of Facebook and 3.7 million of Twitter, social media is already playing a growing role in formal and informal education. The emergence of new concepts like ‘social learning’, ‘intelligent decision making networks’ and ‘massive open online courses’, is enabling educators, students and educational institutions to rely on social media tools” (*Khaleej Times*, 23 June 2013).

The percentage of Arabic tweets generated reached 74 per cent of total tweets in the region in March 2013, up from 62 per cent a year ago. Facebook registered an increase of 10 million users between June 2012 and May 2013. The number of active Twitter users in the Arab World has also grown from just over two million to 3.7 million in the past year. In March 2013, Arab Twitter users generated 336 million tweets (*Ibid*).

10. ARAB SPRING

The spark that initiated the spree of anti-government protest movements in the Middle East came in the form of fire: Mohamed Bouazizi, a dissatisfied Tunisian street vendor, publicly burned himself to death in December 2010 after government authorities seized his unlicensed vegetable stall (Reuters, 2012). Thereafter, rioting and

large protests followed, spreading in a matter of days to other cities and shortly thereafter to the capital city of Tunis. By mid-January, in the midst of increasingly energetic protests, Tunisian president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali called for new elections, fired the existing government, and ultimately fled the country (Al Jazeera, 12 May 2013).

The swift success of Tunisia's "Jasmine Revolution" unleashed a torrent of anti-government sentiment across the Arab world and it gained the nomenclature of Arab Spring. Everywhere that protests broke out, the grievances expressed by newly mobilized populations followed a similar theme: while the state thrives, society suffers. By the end of January 2011, antigovernment protests were held in Algeria, Egypt, Yemen, Lebanon, and Jordan (Pulham and Torpey, 2013), and within another month unrest from the Arab Spring touched at least a dozen Arab nations (Al Jazeera, 22 February 2011).

In Egypt, highly organized protests against three-decades old regime of Hosni Mubarak gained critical mass in early-February 2011 with hundreds of thousands of peaceful protesters gathering in Cairo's Tahrir square (Shenker and Knalili, 2013). The Mubarak regime's strong resistance to protesters culminated in 846 deaths linked to police violence against protesters (Human Rights Watch, *World report 2012*). Nevertheless, by mid-February 2011, Mubarak tendered his resignation, delegating power to the military and stepping down.

In the days following Mubarak's ouster, protests were organized in Bahrain and Libya. The Bahraini protests, surging at one point to an estimated 150,000 protesters, were put down with the introduction of troops from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (Al Jazeera, 15 March 2011). On the other hand, in Libya the situation rapidly devolved toward violent rebellion, the result of which included NATO support for the insurgency and President Gaddafi's eventual death in a dramatic shoot-out (Al Jazeera, 21 October 2011). In Yemen, where protests originally broke out in January, the level of instability gradually increased through 2011. Protesters numbered over 100,000 at their peak and violence between armed factions and government forces was common in a situation that threatened collapse. More than a year after protests began, President Saleh stepped down in February 2012 (Al Jazeera, 27 February 2012).

Elsewhere in the Arab world, protests varied in size from hundreds to tens of thousands, and a wide variety of policy changes were proposed and implemented to appease restive communities. More than a year since protests began in Syria, a major internal conflict still rages in which the UN estimates at least 9,000 have been killed (Al Jazeera, 24 April 2012), while other estimates suggest more than 11,000 have died in the conflict (Al Arabiya, 2013).

The seeds of the Arab Spring, fertile as they proved so far, have not fully run their course. Events continue to unfold, and for many countries in the Arab World, a long process of political reform has only just begun. While information from the movements in various countries remains murky, one thing is clear that the social media has played a crucial role in the mobilization of anti-government protests during the 'Arab Spring.'

11. Conclusion

Mass communication is a potent means of accelerating the pace of globalization. Global communication especially through Internet has concomitantly envisaged the dual process of globalizing the local and localizing the global. Benefits accruing from globalization can be rationally disbursed through mass communication, especially through social media. The developments obtaining in the wake of Arab Spring demonstrate that these developments of social unrest have been interlaced with a technological and digital revolution, in which the Arab world has increasingly been opened to various forms of social media. In the last few years, Internet penetration rates, social media activity, and mobile phone usage have increased enormously in Arab urban areas. This validates the surmise that the proliferation of social media facilitated or otherwise played an important role in enabling the Arab Spring.

The social media may have facilitated the dialogue amongst a network of activists who were then able to instigate calls for reform; social media may also have directly helped in protesters' ability to organize and coordinate their activities. In quickly disseminating not only information but sensational pictures and video clips, social media played an important role in attracting both national and international attention to protesters' plights and subsequently swaying international opinion and policy. Concurrently, social media also allowed for greater government efforts to monitor organizers' online activities, coordinate the suppression of these endeavors, and thwart protesters' goals.

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