



Graduate School of Development Studies

## **Social Movement 2.0**

**An Analysis of Mobilization Through Facebook in the 2011 Egyptian Revolution**

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To Roy & Karin: For the great help and guidance through this inspirational journey;

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To my dear friend Amin: For the endless conversations, meditations and the endless inspiring moments;

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*“The greatest revolution of our generation is the discovery that human beings, by changing the inner attitudes of their minds, can change the outer aspects of their lives”*

William James

# Contents

<b>Chapter 1 Introduction</b>	<b>8</b>
1.1 Historical Background	8
1.2 Research Problem and Research Questions	9
1.3 Methodology	10
1.4 Reflexivity	10
1.5 Organization of the Research Paper	11
<b>Chapter 2 Theoretical Framework</b>	<b>13</b>
2.1 Theorizing Collective Action and Social Movements	13
2.2 Resource Mobilization Theory	13
2.3 New Social Movement Theory	14
2.4 Political Opportunity Theory	15
2.5 The Concept of Youth	17
<b>Chapter 3 Social Networking Sites and Social Movements</b>	<b>19</b>
3.1 Web 2.0	19
3.2 Importance of Digital Networking	19
3.3 Social Networking Sites and Collective Action	20
3.4 Conclusion	22
<b>Chapter 4 Mobilization 2.0</b>	<b>23</b>
4.1 A New Type of Group	23
4.2 We Are All Khalid Said: Group or Not?	25
4.3 Overview of the Group's Posts	26
4.4 Online Mobilization (14-24 January)	27
4.5 Revolution in the Streets (25-27 January)	38
4.6 End of the Line for Mubarak (28 January–11 February)	42
4.7 Conclusions	43
<b>Chapter 5 Conclusions</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>49</b>
Appendix 1	49
Appendix 2	50
<b>References</b>	<b>52</b>

## **List of Acronyms**

WAAKS - We Are All Khalid Said

## Abstract

This paper examines the way in which social networking media were used in the 2011 Egyptian revolution. It focuses on the *'We Are All Khalid Said'* Facebook page, which played crucial role in toppling the Egyptian regime signified by its President, Mubarak. By using various theories of social movements, the paper analyses the content of this specific Facebook page to determine whether and how this rather novel form of activism may constitute a new type of social movement. The data was submitted to a complex theoretical scrutiny to arrive at the following conclusion: *'We Are All Khalid Said'* is both a *group* and a *New Form of Social Movements*. To this end, the paper makes a significant contribution to the literature in at least two orders. Firstly, it is one of the first studies that has extensively analyzed the content of a Facebook page to determine the extent to which it could be considered a new form of social movements. Secondly, the paper is at the forefront in using the literature on '*group dynamics*' to determine whether or not a Facebook page is actually a *group*. It is for these two contributions, the paper pinpoints a gap in the literature with regard to new types of activism and social movements in the second decade of the 21st century.

## Keywords

Social Movement, Social Media, Social Networking Sites, Facebook, Egypt, Egyptian Revolution, WAAKS, We Are All Khalid Said.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

The decision to undertake this research owes much to the slogans, poetry and songs related to freedom, social justice and dignity during the 2011 Egyptian revolution, as well as to the determination and ingenuity displayed by young Egyptians in the face of intimidation, beatings and bullets. While I was following the events in Tahrir square on TV, I saw one remarkable scene of an old man holding up a sign reading “Shokran Shabab el Facebook”, which means “Thank you, Facebook youths”. I found this inspiring because of my academic background in information and communication technology and started researching how Facebook had been used in Egyptian revolution.

This paper represents the fruits of my research. It focuses on the We Are All Khalid Said Facebook page, which played a crucial role in the Egyptian revolution. The paper develops a framework of theories on social movements, which is used to analyse the content of this page before and during the revolution in order to determine if this form of activism can be said to constitute a new type of social movement.

The remainder of this first chapter briefly outlines the political history of Egypt from historical perspective and then states the research problem and research questions. I then describe the methodology and provide my personal reflections on my research journey. The chapter ends with an outline of the rest of the paper.

### 1.1 Historical Background

Several social movements have struggled for decades to advance political and social change in Egypt. However, they have not been able to operate freely and, until recently, failed to bring down the authoritarian Mubarak regime. In 2011, in one of the major mass demonstrations of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, people from all parts of the country united and succeeded in voicing their demands for a change in the political system. In spite of the government's desperate attempts to suppress them, the Egyptian masses succeeded in demonstrating continuously for 18 days, ultimately forcing the then President Hosni Mubarak to step down after 30 years of corrupt and oppressive rule.

Egypt is one of the most populous countries in the Middle East, and more than half of the population of 83 million live under the poverty line (Khatab 2012). Young people (aged 15-29) make up 29% of the population (Kavanaugh et al. 2012). During the last 60 years, Egypt has been governed under three different political systems. First came socialism under Gamal AbdelNasser, who led a military coup against the monarchy in 1952 and became president in

1956. He nationalized many industries as well as the Suez Canal. Nasser's national policies included free education, governmental jobs for university graduates, affordable housing, and highly subsidized public services.

After Nasser's death in 1970, his successor Anwar Sadat introduced neoliberalism with his open-door policy, which included privatizing the main industries that Nasser had nationalized. Sadat ended cheap social services and stopped other subsidies, which resulted in an increase in the prices of food and basic goods and services for low-income families. Sadat's peace treaty with Israel was one of the main political events of his presidency. Extremists who assassinated Sadat in 1981 cited the peace treaty as their motive. One of the main differences between the Nasser and Sadat periods was Sadat's relation with one of the social movements, the Muslim Brotherhood. Sadat freed many Muslim Brotherhood members, whom Nasser had jailed, and he used them in his fight against communism. 'He also encouraged the Muslim brotherhood to expand, particularly in universities, in order to balance the growing influence of communists and Nasserists' (Salem 2011).

Mubarak came to power in 1981, becoming the third military president. He soon faced economic problems, and to resolve them he accepted an IMF structural adjustment programme involving more privatization. Many Egyptian youths have only known Egypt under the Mubarak regime. They grew up at a time when the effects of neoliberal policies were becoming acute and corruption was growing. "They witnessed the formation of a new coalition of government officials, businessmen and politicians that emerged on the back of deregulation and privatization" (Shahine 2011; Wardany 2012).

This historical background created the conditions that ultimately led to the 2011 Egyptian revolution. The socioeconomic and political conditions that build up frustration and anger among Egyptians, especially the youth to the point were it exploded, as well as the polarization of Egyptian politics, had their roots not only in Mubarak policies but also in the policies of Nasser and Sadat.

## 1.2 Research Problem and Research Questions

The perception of Egyptian youth in the pre-uprising literature was that they could not be actors in the process of political change. "The Egyptian youth [...] were once perceived as incapable of change, achievements, and lacking accountability" (El- Sharnouby 2012). Many other authors (for example, Abdel Ghany 2004; Abdelhameed 2000; Abdel-Latif; Abdel-Hamid; Helen Rizzo and Asmaa El-Moghazy 2010; Ahmed 2011; Assaad and Barsoum 2007) have written about the perception of Egyptian youth as being incapable of change. The uprising of January 2011 proved this perception wrong, since young

Egyptians using digital social networking sites played a major role in forcing Mubarak to give up power. The aim of this paper is to provide a deeper understanding of this online form of collective action, with specific focus on whether it could be turned a social movement. The research questions of this study are:

Can we understand the online collective action in Egypt in 2011 as a new form of social movement? If so, what are the implications and limitations of this type of organization?

### 1.3 Methodology

To answer these research questions, I will study the largest Egyptian Facebook group, We Are All Khalid Said, which engaged in successful human rights and political campaigns before and during the Egyptian revolution and played a crucial role in the Egyptian revolution of 2011. The membership of this group mainly comprises Egyptian youth. This movement was very influential on Facebook as well as in the offline world of Al-Tahrir square in Cairo, which was the offline epicentre of the uprising.

I will use three information sources. First, a review of the relevant literature will be employed for the context of the study and the theoretical framework used for the analysis. My theoretical framework consists of theories on collective action, and social movements. It also defines the term “youth” as used in this paper.

The second source of information is Facebook posts of We Are All Khalid Said. I downloaded more than 1000 screenshots of the posts and comments placed on Facebook in January-February 2011. I organized these posts chronologically to identify their commonalities and help me to analyse them qualitatively. (See section 4.3 in chapter 4 for details about this.) I also used Facebook data to obtain a broad statistical breakdown of Egyptian users, by age group, gender and geography. (See section 3.3 in chapter 3 for details about this.) The final source is data from articles in academic journals and newspapers in both Arabic and English.

The collected data will be analysed with the help of the theoretical framework to determine whether We Are All Khalid Said is a social movement. The data will also be used to form conclusions as to the implications and limitations of the group in terms of collective action and social transformation.

### 1.4 Reflexivity

I have lived in the Gaza Strip for more than 16 years. During that time the historical, geographical and political attachment between the occupied

Palestinian territories and Egypt has given me a deeper understanding of the political, social, economic and cultural situation in Egypt. I particularly became passionate about events in Egypt when the 2011 uprising broke out. The uprising was a deeply personal and emotional experience for me. Even though I have not lived in Egypt, I comprehend the reasons for the uprising because the problems faced by youth are very similar throughout the region. The Arab world regards Egypt as the regional leader in some ways; we have been raised on Egyptian movies and TV series; moreover, in the Gaza Strip, the educational system was totally Egyptian until 2005, so Gazans are as conversant with Egyptian history and culture as any Egyptian.

As I come from an Information and Communication Technology background, I found this task very interesting. I read more about social media, the context of Facebook and how it emerged as a dominant Internet technology.

I then proceeded to investigate the debates on social media and the different schools of thought, especially the famous debate between Malcolm Gladwell and Clay Shirky (Wasik 2011). Gladwell 2010 argues that social networking media cannot bring about change because they are based on weak ties, without face-to-face interaction. However, Shirky 2011 disagrees, observing that what matters is commitment. He notes that committed actors are more than “slacktivists” who do not go beyond clicking on a button to show their support for a cause. Activists use social networking media for mobilization and coordination and combine it with action in the streets. He notes that this has been done in several parts of the world:

Recent protest movements including a movement against fundamentalist vigilantes in India in 2009, the beef protests in South Korea in 2008, and protests against education laws in Chile in 2006 -- have used social media not as a replacement for real-world action but as a way to coordinate it. As a result, all of those protests exposed participants to the threat of violence, and in some cases its actual use (ibid.).

This led me to read more about Web 2.0 technology, which changed the way people, perceive the web, and how it enables Internet users to interact with websites. I also read about the relation between individuals and society, and the theory of networks, and this enabled me to understand the effect of technology in this regard.

## 1.5 Organization of the Research Paper

*Chapter 2* will discuss the theoretical framework that I use to analyse We Are All Khalid Said. It will outline different theories on social movements, the

debate surrounding those theories, and my stand on each theory.

*Chapter 3* will provide an introduction to social networking sites and their use for collective action. On this foundation it will briefly introduce the reader to the Egyptian revolution and outline how We Are All Khalid Said came into being. The chapter will also analyse Egyptian Facebook users in terms of age, gender and rural/urban location. The data for this are based on the information given to Facebook by users of the social networking site, which could create a possible limitation since some users may not have submitted true age, gender and place information.

*Chapter 4:* This chapter will analyse the primary data. I will begin by investigating whether We Are All Khalid Said can be termed a group and then analyse its message and activities before and during the uprising. I will also use the components of the theoretical framework to determine whether or not the group is a social movement.

*Chapter 5* will revisit the main research questions and summarize how they have been answered. It will also explain the importance of this research and present its implications. Finally, it will suggest areas for future research.

# Chapter 2

## Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Theorizing Collective Action and Social Movements

Collective action generally refers to actions undertaken by individuals or groups for a collective goal, for instance the advancement of a specific ideology or idea or the political struggle with another group (Brunsting 2002). What is important to note is the fact that collective actions are initiated by those who do not accept the existing social order, which means that a social movement is initially about constructing a different social reality.

There are many theories on collective action; one way to understand collective action is through social movement theories. Traditionally, a social movement is seen as an extension of more basic forms of collective behaviour and containing both movement of personal change (e.g. religions and cultures) and institutional change (e.g. changes in political power and legal reformations) (Jenkins 1983). Foss and Larkin (1986:xii) indicate that throughout history, social movements were never anticipated or led by those in power, because the “leading characteristic of social movements is the rebellion against the prevailing social structure which is thought by those in control to be a fact of nature”. This suggests that collective actions anticipated by social movements are likely to be identified as political intervention.

A social movement is “simultaneously utopian and practical, it is the collective expression of highest sensibilities, the desire for freedom, liberation and self determination” (Foss and Larkin, 1986:2). It is originally “anti-structure” (op. cit.:1) and it “engages to make change” (op. cit.:xiv) in human condition which implies the alteration of social relations. This understanding suggests “the quantitative and qualitative changes in the appearances of social relations, which continue throughout periods of dissidence and quiescence alike” (op. cit.:2). Such conception does not mean, however, that social movements definitely and “permanently alter social relations,” but they are certainly be “one of the prime mechanisms for doing so” (op. cit.:7).

### 2.2 Resource Mobilization Theory

Several approaches to analysing social movements were developed during the last century to analyse new changes in the form of collective action. One, the Resource Mobilization theory, has become a dominant paradigm for studying collective action in the United States (Buechler 1995). It concentrates on the mechanisms by which movements recruit participants (Peterson 1989).

According to (Wiest 2011:1209), the Recourse Mobilization theory (RM)

“is based on the notion that resources – such as time, money, organizational skills, and certain social or political opportunities – are critical to the success of social movements”.

At first, the Resource Mobilization theory took a different approach from that of other collective action theories, as it considered social movements to be “normal, rational, institutionally rooted activities that are structured and patterned” (*ibid.*), which allows for analysis in terms of organizational dynamics (Buechler, 1993; Jenkins, 1983). Later, the main critical element was not the types of resources social movements use, since types vary from one social movement to another, but the availability of applicable resources and the effective use of those resources by the actors.

Additionally, the Resource Mobilization theory was the first to acknowledge the significance of influences external to the social movement, not only psychological variables recognized by other social movements (Johnson, 2000).

The main elements of the resource mobilization theory are rational actions oriented towards clearly defined, fixed goals with centralized organizational control over resources and clearly defined outcomes that can be evaluated in terms of tangible gain (Peterson 1989). Further, resource mobilization theorists see social movements as an extension of institutionalized actions and change that attempt to adjust elements of social structure and organize previously unorganized groups against institutional elites besides representing the interest of groups excluded from the polity (Jenkins 1983).

However, proponents of the Resource Mobilization theory are accused of basing their analysis on assumptions that do not conform to the real world. For example, Buechler observes that “rational choice theories presume a world populated by fictive independent, isolated individuals who have conflicting interests and yet voluntarily enter into profit-seeking exchanges on a presumably equal footing with each other” (Buechler 1993:227). He views the theory as neglecting “other logics of action based on politics, ideology, and culture as the root of much collective action” and “other sources of identity such as ethnicity, gender and sexuality as the definers of collective identity” (Buechler 1995:443).

### 2.3 New Social Movement Theory

These missing elements are addressed by another approach to analysing social movements, the New Social Movement theory which emphasizes the role of framing activities and cultural processes in social activism (Buechler 1995:441). The New Social Movement theory, which is rooted in the central European

traditions of social theory, emerged as a reaction to the inadequacies of classical Marxism for analysing collective action. Marx argues that all political social actions derive from the economic logic of capitalist production and all other social logics are secondary in shaping such action. He also argues that all social actors are defined by class relationships rooted in the process of production and that all other social identities are secondary in establishing collective action. The proponents of the New Social Movement theory look to other logics of action based on politics, ideology and culture as the root of much collective action, and they look to other sources of identity such as ethnicity, gender and sexuality as the definers of collective identity (ibid). It is important to note that, while there is diversity in New Social Movement theories, they all try to answer the question of why social movements emerge in specific contexts. The Resource Mobilization theory, on its part, tries to answer the question of how social movements engage their supporters in the process of collective action. Thus, they complement each other to some extent.

The New Social Movement theory has also sparked debate. There is discussion over whether a social movement should be defined in terms of being either progressive or reactive. The notion of “progressive” implies taking action towards achieving a vision of what society should be like, while a “reactive” movement emerges as a reaction to certain factors such as the economic situation or political oppression. In the case of Egypt, the posts of the Facebook group being analysed show that it is both. It is reactive since it emerged because of brutality by the police which caused the death of Khalid Said, but the members also have a broad conception of what they would like Egyptian society to be like, which is reflected in the many posts related to democracy, freedom and dignity. They criticise existing institutions such as the police, parliament and judiciary (Buechler 1995:449-451).

There is also debate over whether a social movement has to be either cultural or political. (Buchler 1995:451-453) sees a danger in making such a distinction, because it “can create and perpetuate unfortunate dichotomies that obscure more than they reveal about movements”. In the case of Egypt, the Facebook group is both: it is cultural in the sense that it advocates post-materialist values such as freedom, democracy and social justice, and political since it consistently called for the removal of Mubarak and now continues to push for the removal of all members of the former president’s regime.

## 2.4 Political Opportunity Theory

Tarrow (1998:76-77) defines political opportunity as “consistent – but not necessarily formal or permanent – dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for collective action by affecting people’s expectations for success or failure”. In other words, it focuses on the factors that promote a

social movement. It is different than the Resource Mobilization theory in two main aspects. The first difference is that Resource Mobilization theory sets out to explain why the movement began and why it continued to be strong, while the Political Opportunity theory only explains the movement's origins, mainly with a focus on political factors. The second difference is that, while the proponents of Resource Mobilization theory argue that the amount of resources crucially affects a social movement's emergence and growth, Political Opportunity theorists say that the essential factor is the existence of a political opportunity that provides the right conditions for the emergence of a social movement. Tarrow perceives a weakness in Resource Mobilization theory in this respect. He notes that a social movement can find fertile ground even among resource-poor groups when "changing opportunities create avenues for resource-poor actors to engage in contentious politics".

According to him, "movements emerge because the conditions for mobilization have expanded in the polity in general, political opportunities may not be apparent all at once to all potential challengers. In fact, an advantage of the concept is that it helps us to understand how mobilization spreads from people with deep grievances and strong resources to those with fewer ones and less resources. By challenging elites and authorities, 'early risers' reveal their opponents' vulnerability and open them to attacks by weaker players. By the same token, the latter groups more easily collapse when opportunities decline because they lack the internal resources to sustain contentions."

He also contends that "rational people do not attack well-fortified opponents when opportunities are closed; gaining partial access to participation provides them with such incentives."

Thus, "contention is more closely related to opportunities for – and limited by constraints upon – collective action than by persistent social or economic factors that people experience. Contention increases when people gain the external resources to escape their compliance and find opportunities in which to use them. It also increases when they are threatened with costs they cannot bear or which outrage their sense of justice. When institutional access opens, rifts appear within elites, allies become available, and state capacity for repression declines, challengers find opportunities to advance their claims. When combined with high levels of perceived costs for inaction, opportunities produce episodes of contentious politics" (Tarrow 1998:71).

Tarrow (1998:71) also identifies the instability of political alignment as an important factor in the emergence of a social movement. The changing fortunes of government and opposition parties create uncertainty among supporters, encourage challengers to try to exercise marginal power, and may even induce elites to compete for support from outside the polity.

What makes the political opportunity theory different from other social movement theories is the “focus on the on the interaction between the state and its challengers, which has not been a central issue for other social movement theories” (Manukyan 2011:13).

In the case of Egypt, this theory can also be used to explain not just the emergence of the selected Facebook group as a reaction to a certain political opportunity, but also the development of the group and its reaction to what happened nationally and regionally. The Tunisian revolution was not just an inspiration for the Egyptians, but also a political opportunity to challenge the existence power structures and the regime. However, it was not the only factor. Egyptians had suffered throughout the Mubarak period and that suffering had increased in the years leading up to the revolution. Not only the poor but also the middle class youth could not see any hope at the end of the tunnel. Their hopes had gone up when Mohamed El Baradei<sup>1</sup> returned to Egypt after leaving the International Atomic Energy Agency; when (rigged) elections were held in 2010; and when other social movements such as the Kifaya movement and the 6<sup>th</sup> of April youth movement emerged; but none of those developments had borne fruit.

## 2.5 The Concept of Youth

The general definition of youth is the period between childhood and adulthood; however, it is a complex concept and many authors and organizations define it in different ways.

The United Nations defines youth as those between 15 and 24 years of age (UN DESA, 2005). The Egypt Human Development Report 2010 defines youth as the 18 to 29 years age group; this comprises about 20 million individuals or close to a quarter of the population. The upper limit of 29 years is when Egyptian society expects an individual to have formed a family and acquired a home. On the other hand, the Egyptian National Youth Council has a different perspective, defining youth as being between the ages of 18 and 35 years.<sup>2</sup>

These definitions are based on age. However, factors such as class, social status, gender and ethnicity also determine who is a youth and who is not. Wyn

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<sup>1</sup> El Baradei, joint winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005, was expected to stand against Mubarak in the Egyptian presidential election. However, he refused to do so until the national Constitution was changed to ensure a fair election.

<sup>2</sup><<http://www.aucegypt.edu/research/gerhart/Documents/Youth%20Activism%20and%20Public%20Space%20in%20Egypt.pdf>>.

and White (1997) observe that “youth must be understood as a social construction and hence as a social category, meaning that the definition and experience of youth are shaped by the broader social, economic, and political conditions in a particular setting.” Thus, any attempt to conceptualize youth must consider the environment by which they are being influenced and which they influence. Youth are not passive in their societies; they participate in shaping their social position, although not all youth are in a position to exercise their agency. “They are not only social becomings but also beings that are active in their own right, as can be seen from the impact of youth cultures and activism” (Wyn and White, 1997).

This study accepts the Egyptian National Youth Council’s definition of 16 to 35 years because this population group are Internet literate and able to communicate through social network applications. They comprise around 88%<sup>3</sup> of the total members of We Are All Khalid Said (WAAKS). Moreover, for the most part they took a stand against the oppression they faced inside their country from the ruling regime, shared the same dreams, believed in change and worked hard to achieve their goals. This was done regardless of their social classes, and ethnic and religious differences. They were aware of the urgent need for change and used new communication technology to promote their perception of freedom and democracy.

One reason for the attraction of youth to social networking sites maybe that the online world is a public space free of the restrictions of the offline world. However in the case of We Are Khalid Said, it went beyond that, by presenting a different picture of the world, the Facebook page countered the control of the “old media” by the regime. As a New Social Movement theorist points out “this ideological hegemony of the state requires counter hegemonic actions by social movements to dismantle the dominant social views that reinforce the legitimacy of the capitalist system” (Pichardo 1997:421). In this way, the members of We Are Khalid Said used Facebook to empower themselves, thus strengthening their identity as a generation.

The theories and concepts discussed in this chapter will be applied in the rest of this study, as I analyse the role of youth in the Egyptian uprising. The next chapter, on Internet communication and online activism in Egypt as well as selected other countries, will further lay the groundwork for that analysis.

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<sup>3</sup> Further details are given in chapter 3.

# Chapter 3

## Social Networking Sites and Social Movements

### 3.1 Web 2.0

Social networking sites are one of the digital services that fall under the umbrella concept of Web 2.0. This concept also covers services such as blogs<sup>4</sup> and wikis<sup>5</sup>. It is an evolution from Web 1.0. One of the main characteristics of Web 2.0 is the content. On Web 1.0, the content was controlled by the owners or editors of a website. Visitors to the website were receivers of information; they could not intervene, add or change the content. It was mainly a top-down approach in terms of content publishing. In contrast, in Web 2.0, "There's an implicit 'architecture of participation', a built-in ethic of cooperation, in which the service acts primarily as an intelligent broker, connecting the edges to each other and harnessing the power of the users themselves."<sup>6</sup> This aspect of Web 2.0 was crucial to the success of WAAKS in the Egyptian revolution.

### 3.2 Importance of Digital Networking

Digital networking tools have become very important in the modern world. They have become crucial to activists trying to change societies in many countries. The literature identifies network connections between people as a "key to collective action and social movement activity" (Snow, Zurcher, and Ekland-Olson 1980; McAdam 1986; McAdam and Paulsen 1993; Kitts 2000; Passy and Giugni 2001). Some scholars even maintain that social interactions through the Internet are the main reason why the modern world is increasingly becoming a digital network-based society (e.g., Castells 1996 and 2004, cited in Schwarz 2012:3).

The literature on network theory observes that networks widen the circles of interactions between individuals. To quote Granovetter (1973), "Larger social patterns emerge through social networks and interactions between individuals." Research shows that knowledge of networks is crucial to understanding certain types of group behaviour; for example, how emotion is

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<sup>4</sup> "Blog" is a contraction of "web log". It is a regularly updated electronic journal of the blogger's thoughts on various issues.

<sup>5</sup> A "wiki" is a site that allows users to add to or modify its content. The best-known example of this is Wikipedia.

<sup>6</sup> T. O'Reilly (2005) 'What Is Web 2.0: Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software', <<http://www.oreillynet.com/lpt/a/7425>>. Accessed on 5 November 2012.

dispersed within groups (Fowler and Christakis 2008). Networks are the basis on which people are recruited into groups. Once they are in a group, networks are pivotal to maintaining and strengthening their support for the group. Various tactics are used to discourage members from leaving the group. A very important aspect of networks is that the number of people that individuals know within, and outside of, a group, influences their participation in the group. This is significant in the context of social networking sites such as Facebook because each individual member has a circle of friends with whom he or she is in regular contact. The names of people in the circle are already in a list, so all the member has to do is click on a button and a message is instantly transmitted to all those members. Thus, there is an exponential increase in the dispersion of any information sent out by the central administrator of a Facebook group. This facilitated the mobilisation of activists during the Egyptian uprising.

Researchers have noted that several features make social networking websites different than other Internet tools. The fundamental characterization of online social network sites is that they are “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). It is generally understood that Social Networking Sites support the creation and maintenance of both strong and weak ties as users may be connected to family and close friends as well as general acquaintances (Donath 2007; Ellison et. al. 2007; Ellison et. al. 2011). Benefits of Social Network Sites, for instance the inclusion of openly visible profile data combined with the ability to send messages to the users, can be used to generate offline interactions (Ellison et. al. 2011). Moreover, as with offline public spaces where face-to-face interactions happen, or virtual communities found on the Internet, social network sites can be seen as “networked publics” that encourage sociability (Boyd and Ellison 2007). These websites can “make it possible for users to identify others with whom they have similarities, which can lead to future collective action” (Schwarz 2012:8).

### **3.3 Social Networking Sites and Collective Action**

Social networking websites such as Facebook, micro-blogging networks such as Twitter, and content sharing websites such as YouTube have created opportunities for wide-scale online collective action. Social media enabled Egyptians living under the Mubarak dictatorship to connect with each other and with the wider world. They used Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to send messages, posts, videos and tweets to their contacts locally and globally. In the

case of WAAKS, at first it was a way of expressing support for the campaign to bring Khalid Said's killers to justice, but over time it became more than that.

The Internet allowed people living in an undemocratic state to criticize their conditions through a new forum that could not be controlled by the authorities. In Egypt, it spread news as it occurred, publicising the aspects that were censored by the government, and attracted international public attention to the Egyptians' strong desire to bring about changes in their country. Thus, digital social media allowed the free speech that was not allowed by the government (Bhuiya 2011).

Social networking websites created and strengthened the foundation on which collective action could be initiated on a wide scale and then helped to ensure the success of that action by mobilising support for it and disseminating a true picture of events as they unfolded. In this way, Social Networking Sites were used to mobilise resources, which is an important aspect of defining a social movement. Their use was both progressive and reactive. The users of social media in Egypt were progressive because they had a common goal, that of achieving democratic rights, even though their concepts of that democracy varied. They were reactive because the main group of users, WAAKS, came into being in reaction to the killing of a prominent Egyptian activist. Social Networking Sites created a political opportunity because they could not be controlled by the state, and the death of Khalid Said was the trigger that launched the movement that used that opportunity on a wide scale, quickly reacting to every step taken by the authorities to stem the tide of determined resistance.

The reach of WAAKS can be seen in the following statistics.<sup>7</sup> The number of WAAKS members is 2.47 million. Of these 1.64 million are inside Egypt. The majority of these (1 million) are male and the rest are female. Of the Egyptian members, 88.4% (1.45 million) are age between 16 and 35 years. In terms of geography, 906,000 of the total Egyptian members are from Cairo and 246,000 are from Alexandria. They comprised 72% of the total. Most of the rest of the members are from Egyptian cities. Thus WAAKS members are mainly youths located in urban areas. The main reason for this is the high literacy in urban sites especially and limited Internet access in rural areas.

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<sup>7</sup> These statistics were obtained from data available on Facebook. Anyone can access the data, using the Facebook advertisement tool, which enables advertisers to target a specific country/city or specific population group.

Egyptian movements such as Kefaya, the April 6th Youth also used social networking websites to expand their reach among discontented Egyptians, broker relations between activists, and globalise the resources and reach of opposition leaders (Lim 2012:231). However, their identity was not based only on their membership of such websites.

The Egyptian revolution was preceded by other revolutions where social networking websites were used effectively. The most prominent of these are probably the Ukrainian and Tunisian revolutions. In fact, as the next chapter will show, the Tunisian revolution was a source of inspiration to the youth in Egypt. Appendices 1 and 2 provide basic information about both these revolutions.

### 3.4 Conclusion

The use of digital social networking websites has proved to be crucial in bringing about social change in countries where human rights are routinely violated and the old media are subservient to the government. Social networking websites enable the bypassing of government censorship. This is vital for success. “If protest tactics are not considered significant by the media, or if newspapers and television reporters or editors decide to overlook protest tactics, protest organizations will not succeed” (Lipsky 1968). Social networking websites also make it difficult for authorities to suppress demonstrations with brutality because news and images of such actions are very transmitted very quickly, not only within countries and regions but also globally. In Egypt, activists used Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to send messages, posts, videos and tweets to their contacts locally and globally. These forms of communication became tools for criticism, resource mobilisation and rapid reporting of the changing situation.

The importance of social media is summed up by the following joke which has become popular among Egyptians since the resignation of Mubarak on 11 February 2011:

The three former presidents of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak, Anwar Sadat and Gamal Abdel Nasser are having tea in the afterlife. Mubarak asks Nasser, “How did you end up here?” “Poison,” Nasser answers. Mubarak then turns to Sadat. “What about you?” he asks. “An assassin’s bullet,” Sadat replies. Sadat and Nasser then turn to Mubarak, “And you?” To which Mubarak replies: “Facebook.”

The next chapter builds on the conclusions of this chapter to analyse the posts of the WAAKS group in order to determine to what extent it is a new form of social movement.

# Chapter 4    Mobilization 2.0

## 4.1    A New Type of Group

The “WAAKS” page on Facebook was set up in reaction to the murder of Khalid Mohamed Said, a young Egyptian who filmed policemen dividing up confiscated marijuana among themselves and placed the video on YouTube . He was arrested and beaten to death on 6 June 2010. The killing caused outrage among Egyptians, particularly among the youth, and the page was set up on 10 June as a forum on which they could vent their feelings. It also regularly exposed other police misdeeds and government corruption. Over time, it expanded its role, acting as an alternative news source and eventually mobilising young Egyptians to revolt against the government. In this process, as will be shown below, it was transformed from a Facebook discussion page into the centre of a cohesive group determined to bring about socio-political change in Egypt. It was one of the most important players in the uprising that led to the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak.

Before evaluating the posts of the WAAKS group, I will place the group in the context of the main elements of this paper’s research framework, which will be used later in this chapter to analyze to what extent the group is a social movement.

The theories on collective action assume the existence of an organised, hierarchical group, the members of which use various strategies and tactics to achieve their aims. As noted in Chapter 2, the Resource Mobilization (Resource Mobilization theory) theory regards social movements as being “normal, rational, institutionally rooted activities that are structured and patterned” (Eltantawy and Wiest 2011:1209). They engage in rational actions oriented towards clearly defined, fixed goals with centralized organizational control over resources and clearly defined outcomes that can be evaluated in terms of tangible gain (Peterson 1989). Social movements are specifically viewed as an extension of institutionalized actions and change that attempt to adjust elements of social structure and organize previously unorganized groups against institutional elites besides representing the interest of groups excluded from the polity (Jenkins 1983). Thus, resources are perceived to be the key factor in their ability to recruit members. External influences also become important in their success.

The New Social Movement theory, while criticizing Resource Mobilization theory for neglecting “other sources of identity such as ethnicity, gender and sexuality as the definers of collective identity” (Buechler1995:443) does not challenge the basic assumption that a social movement is an institutionalized activity. Its emphasis is on how collective actions are organized by social movements, either in reaction to an event or circumstances, or as part of a strategy to achieve social change. It also classifies such movements as being either cultural or political.

The Political Opportunity theory, too, implicitly accepts the conventional perception of a social movement as having an institutional form. As Manukyan (2011:13) observes, this theory focuses “on the interaction between the state and its challengers”. It is difficult to see how such interaction could take place between the state and an amorphous group of individuals with no representatives to speak on their behalf. Thus, the argument that the essential factor that provides the right conditions for the emergence of a social movement is the existence of a political opportunity seems to be based on the unspoken assumption that the movement that emerges under such conditions is an organised one capable of taking advantage of the situation by challenging/negotiating with the state.

What is particularly interesting about the Egyptian revolution is that, as this chapter will go on to show one of the key actors was not a group in the conventional sense. The WAAKS group was not an institution with a defined hierarchy and identifiable members. There were no regular physical meetings of group members. The group “met” only in cyberspace, specifically when accessing the WAAKS page. Access to the page was open to everyone.<sup>8</sup> Although they shared one basic aim, to make Egyptian society just and democratic, their perceptions of the ideal Egyptian society varied in accordance with their political and cultural leanings. Some wanted a society based on Islamic principles, others wanted democracy based on Western models. And, of course, there were some who wanted a combination of the two. However, the group’s Facebook page transcended political, class, gender, religious and other divisions because there was no face-to-face interaction. This collective identity was promoted by “the perception among individuals that they are members of a larger group by virtue of their shared grievances. Shared awareness motivates otherwise uncoordinated individuals or groups to begin cooperating more effectively” (Spier 2011:8). These grievances included the lack of democracy in Egypt, an economy that made the rich richer and the poor poorer, lack of jobs and rising inflation.

The Facebook page was managed by an anonymous admin. Although he was a key figure, initiating various actions to increase the group’s impact and effectiveness, he had no formal authority over those who visited the page. The group was a model of e-democracy in practice.<sup>9</sup> The admin put forward

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<sup>8</sup> Of course, the person has to go on the Internet first before he/she can access Facebook. This effectively restricts membership of the page to those who have either their own Internet connection or access to an Internet café. Since there is a generational divide in using digital technology, this means that most of the users, especially in Egypt, would be young people.

<sup>9</sup> In broad terms, e-democracy “most correctly can be defined as IT use in democratic processes” (Ake Gronlund, ‘Introduction to the Special Issue on E-democracy in Practice: Methods, Infrastructures and Discourse’, *e-Service Journal* 2(1), Fall 2002, p. 3). It is normally used in the context of governments and citizens, but the aspect of information technology enabling wider, speedier and more effective consultation is applicable here.

various suggestions, either his own or those of members, and invited the page participants to provide feedback on them. Everyone could participate in the ensuing dialogue. Membership of the page was easy. All a visitor had to do was click on the “like” button, which would provide access to all the posts on the page as well as enable interaction with the other visitors and the admin. On the basis of the feedback from members, the admin then issued a call to action. He also placed posts that were informative and/or emboldening.

## 4.2 We Are All Khalid Said: Group or Not?

Can we call WAAKS a group? To answer this question, we need to outline the characteristics of a group. On the basis of the literature on group dynamics, Smith (2008) lists five main features: the existence of *group interaction*, *group interdependence*, *group structure*, *group goals*, and *group cohesion*. Let us see if these characteristics apply here:

- **Interaction:** As this chapter will show, the members of WAAKS interacted vigorously, with the admin as well as with each other.
- **Interdependence:** Baron et al. (2003:139) explain this as a situation where “one member’s feelings, experiences and actions can come to be influenced in whole or in part by others”. This was true of the members of the Facebook page. As this chapter will show, the extensive interaction did influence the members’ actions, persuading them to participate in “legal” protest actions as well as illegal ones where they ran the risk of being wounded or even killed.
- **Structure:** This chapter will show that the group had a definite structure. The hub was the admin and the other members were digitally linked to that hub as well as to each other.
- **Goals:** Over time, as the admin responded to the changing situation in Egypt and Tunisia, the Facebook page began to centre around specific goals. Because of the democratic way in which the admin operated, these goals were shared by the majority of the members. Had they not been acceptable to a large proportion of the members, the page membership would have fallen drastically instead of expanding as it did.
- **Cohesion:** Smith (2008) observes that “The notion of group cohesion – the forces or bonds that bind individuals to the collectivity - is fundamental to an appreciation of groups.” What bound the members in this case was a mutual desire to change Egypt socially, politically and economically. This eventually hardened into hatred of the country’s president and his government. It is important to note that group membership did not require the members to abandon their beliefs relating to what form the new society should take. The anonymity of communication through the Facebook page helped to transcend divisive factors such as politics, gender and class.

Thus, group dynamics were evident among the members of the WAAKS page. In spite of the diverse backgrounds of the members, the group was cohesive on the whole and there was a big response to action calls. This contradicts Buechler's assertion that "independent, isolated individuals who have conflicting interests and yet voluntarily enter into profit-seeking exchanges on a presumably equal footing with each other" (1993:227) are a fiction. What was extremely difficult to achieve in the old type of institutional social movement was made reality by a social networking page.<sup>10</sup>

The above argument shows that those who visited the WAAKS page did constitute a group, albeit a new type of group made possible by advances in digital technology. To what extent the group was a social movement is something that the analysis of the posts will show.

### 4.3 Overview of the Group's Posts

The group's Facebook page has hundreds of thousands of posts and comments, so I had to limit the research to the most important ones relevant to this study. Placing historical time limits was an obvious starting point. There was little mobilization for mass action before 14 January and Mubarak resigned on 11 February, so I decided to focus on the posts between those two dates. There were three divisions within this period: 14-24 January (i.e. until the eve of the massive demonstrations in several Egyptian cities); 25-27 January (i.e. until the eve of the government's shutting down of Internet communications); and 28 January-11 February (i.e. from resumption of Internet service till the resignation of Mubarak). The admin wrote 848 posts during this period (see Table 1). In addition, there were audiovisual posts in the form of patriotic songs and videos. This analysis focuses on a representative selection from the written posts, which also serve to provide a chronicle of the events leading up to the resignation of Mubarak.

**Table 1: Number of admin posts, 14 Jan–11 Feb 2011**

Number of posts	Period	Major aspect
355	14 - 24 January	Online mobilization
201	25 - 27 January	Revolution in the streets
292	28 January - 11 February	End of line for Mubarak

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<sup>10</sup> The dynamics of such a social movement would be an interesting study but would require more extensive research and resources than are available for this paper.

## 4.4 Online Mobilization (14-24 January)

### *Tunisian influence*

The first date for the research, 14 January, was the day when Tunisian President Ben-Ali fled into exile. That event electrified young Egyptians, who had been avidly following every twist and turn of the Tunisian revolution. Since the mainstream media, which were under the tight control of the Mubarak regime, were not giving a complete picture of the Tunisian revolution, the WAAKS page and the websites of international media such as Al Jazeera had become very popular by then. The departure of Ben-Ali was a political opportunity that was quickly seized by the admin of the WAAKS page.

Until then, the page had been mostly an alternative news site and had vigorously protested police brutality. “This page organized many silent stands<sup>11</sup> throughout the period between June 2010 and January 2011. Through this period there were many awareness messages sent through this page, messages related to the corruption of the government, torturing of police.”<sup>12</sup> The admin was prolific (he placed 70 posts on 22 June 2010, alone), but was careful not to go too far. For example, on 24 June 2010, two days after the page was set up, he wrote:

From now on there is no media, we, the youth of Facebook, are the media. And we will not shut up until we achieve justice for Khalid Said and stop the torture and humiliation that are inflicted on any Egyptian who enters a police station.

The focus was on the need to bring those responsible for Khalid Said’s death to justice (the reason for setting up the Facebook page) and end policy tyranny. There was no call for mass action by young Egyptians. The following examples are representative of the supportive reactions to this post:

*Of course we will not shut up, because if we stayed shut up for sure everyday one of us would die as a result of torture and because the shit Emergency Law.*

*This group must stay alive to bring back all Egyptians' rights.*

*This is the right thing to do, I'm with you.*

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<sup>11</sup> This is a form of protest in which people stand in silence at a public place, without interacting with each other, for a period of time and then disperse. Thus, the demonstrators could not be arrested on charges of unlawful assembly under the Egyptian Emergency Law, which banned gatherings of more than four persons.

<sup>12</sup> <<http://www.elshaheeed.co.uk/>>.

*The people are the ones who create the media, media that give the truth and without restrictions and censorship. Long live Shabab el Facebook [the youth of Facebook].*

*We have to be bigger (in terms of members' numbers) and to be more effective in society. Because we can't handle more of this situation, we have to find a new way of organized opposition.*

On 14 January 2011, with the Tunisian revolution in full flood, the admin took advantage of that political opportunity with the following post:

Shabab [youths], next 25th will be a national holiday. It is the Police Day. How should we celebrate this day? We need creative ideas.

The date was highly significant because Khalid Said had died in police custody. The word “celebrate” was obviously used sarcastically. The post shows how e-democracy was used by the admin to make decisions. Among the suggestions for marking the Police Day were: blacking out Facebook profile pictures, a “silent stand” by demonstrators dressed in black in front of the courts building, and a night march through the streets with candles and Khalid Said’s picture. Others urged more drastic action. In the words of one page participant, “Let’s do what Tunisia did”, that is, let’s stage a revolution.

### Confrontation

That day Ben-Ali left Tunisia for exile in Saudi Arabia. The next day, 15 January, two posts on the Facebook page indicated a significant change in tactics. One called explicitly for a mass demonstration, in violation of the Emergency Law, which banned gatherings of more than four people:

Today is 15th January. 25th January is the Police Day, which is a national holiday. If we assemble one hundred thousand Egyptians in Cairo, no one can stop us. Can we do this?

The page was no longer urging “legal” protests in the form of “silent stands” against policy brutality and corruption in the government. The aim now was to challenge to the state itself. The post resulted in more than 2300 comments and more than 4500 “likes”.

The second post started to build up momentum by calling for a campaign to publicize the planned gathering with a personal commitment by every protester to make it a day when “I will go and take my rights”:

From now until 25th January, we need to mobilize people. I want all the youth with a positive attitude to do me a favour. We need to start a photo campaign. Everyone take a picture of him/herself and write on it, “I am Egypt, and I will go and take my rights on 25 January”. We need all Egypt.

It was no longer a question of asking for or even demanding rights; “taking rights” implied direct confrontation. From a Resource Mobilization theoretical perspective, the intention of these two posts was to mobilize young Egyptians against the institutional elites of the country. The page was not yet a social movement, but it was beginning a process of transformation. There was an immediate reaction to the post and many people photographed themselves and posted the pictures, with the slogan, on their Facebook pages, the pages of their friends and the pages of people within their own digital social networks.

### Coordination with others

The admin’s idea of calling for some sort of action on 25 January was not a spur-of-the-moment brainwave. In the second half of 2010, he had contacted Ahmed Maher, leader of the 6th of April Youth movement, via email (Wolman 2011). The admin insisted on not revealing his name, and once that was accepted, the two agreed to coordinate their protests on issues of mutual concern. In late 2010, the 6th of April Youth movement started preparing to mark the Police Day on 25 January 2011 as a “Thugs Day” that would expose the real nature of the Egyptian police force. Once again, the admin and Maher communicated by e-mail and agreed to mark the day with a larger protest.

“They conferred about what kind of demonstration to conduct, and Maher reiterated the idea that the police were especially ‘pissed off’ to have to work on Police Day. Said wrote back, ‘I can energize people to participate.’ But he needed Maher’s expertise with information dissemination, publicity, and details about how to evade the police. It was soon settled: WAAKS would endorse and advertise a January 25 event, while A6Y would coordinate the logistics” (*ibid.*).

The comments on the WAAKS page, like the early ones cited above, left no doubt that visitors to the site were eager to express their anger but did not have a unified view of how to do so. Thus, when the admin asked for “creative ideas” on 14 January 2011, the question was not should Egyptians demonstrate, but rather what form the demonstration should take. Since the admin was always careful to act on the basis of majority views as much as possible, it is logical to assume that the change in tactics shown in the posts of 15 January reflected the effect of Ben-Ali’s overthrow on the members of the WAAKS page.

### Mobilization

Mobilization of resources became a dominant element in the posts after the overthrow of Ben-Ali. That event was evidently a political opportunity which provided: “incentives for collective action by affecting people’s expectations for success or failure” (Tarrow 1998) and the admin made full use of it. In another post on 15 January, the admin appealed:

I need all the youth to wake up and participate effectively. I need poets to write about the 25th January, I need all the youth to talk to each other, motivate each other to come and join us on the 25th. I want the members

who have graphic design skills to design posters and flyers that motivate people to join us. We need to write statements and put them in our home. I really hope that we can forget the dependency on others or lose hope! Because that is exactly what the regime wants. Let us move and participate. We will not give up on our rights.

According to Edwards and McCarthy (2004), resources include: moral resources such as solidarity and support to the movement's goals; cultural resources such as specialized knowledge; and human resources such as labour, experience, skills and expertise. The above post is an outstanding example of mobilization of these resources.

### Setting of goals

Also on 15 January, for the first time, the WAAKS page proposed specific goals, which is an important characteristic of a social movement as defined by the Resource Mobilization theory:

- 1- Abrogate the Emergency Law and release all prisoners who have been arrested under this law
- 2- Sack the Interior Minister (Habib Al-Adeli)
- 3- Prevent Mubarak from being renominated in the next presidential elections and modify the Constitution
- 4- Increase government subsidies for basic goods
- 5- End the security censorship of media

The demand for Mubarak to be banned from another term as president was also new. Until this date, the focus had been on issues: police viciousness and corruption. Now the head of state was himself seen as a problem. It was a big change. The demand on subsidies was also interesting; the page was now "representing the interest of groups excluded from the polity" (Jenkins 1983). Such quick changes, in response to opportunities that open up, are a crucial advantage of the new type of group such as the one around the WAAKS page. They are a feature of the Political Opportunity theory. As we shall see, goal changes continued during the subsequent days, demonstrating that the interaction on the Facebook page enabled the admin and the group to respond more quickly to the evolving situation than would have been possible in a conventional social movement where democratic consultation would have slowed down the decision-making process.

### Overtures to the army

Also on 26 January, the admin addressed a post specifically to the army:

To all the members of the Egyptian army on Facebook: I know that there are at least a thousand members of the army following this page. We are your brothers, we are fighting injustice and corruption. You have to go into the streets. Please be with us and say no to the injustice and corruption. Do not shoot your bullets against your brothers. The bullets should be used against an enemy, not against your brother. To all members of the Egyptian army, we are all citizens of this nation.

This was a follow-up to a previous post on 15 January that had linked the Egyptian army with the Tunisian one:

All respect to the Tunisian army chief Rasheed Ammar who absolutely refused to shoot the protesters and asked the army to defend the people. Egypt has tens and hundreds of Rasheeds, those who were willing of sacrifice themselves in the 1973 war to liberate their country. Believe me, our army is a national army and most of the members of the army are with us in this cause. We need to move to make them stand by us as happened in Tunisia.

This was an important broadening of the group's mobilization targets. Civilian revolutions rarely succeed when the army stands united against the population and is prepared to shoot down demonstrators. It would be reasonable to assume that, since the admin (later identified as Wael Ghonim, Google's Head of Marketing for the Middle East and North Africa) was well versed in the use of Facebook, he would be aware that users do not always tell the truth about themselves. So he probably verified the information in some way before claiming that at least a thousand members of the Egyptian army were members of the page. The second post had a triple purpose: to embolden members of the page, to appeal to the patriotism of soldiers, and to encourage group members with army links to lobby soldiers. The link to Tunisia was an attempt to deepen the influence of an external event on young Egyptians. There are two interesting notes here. First, on 28 January the army deployed in Cairo, Suez and Alexandria. Later, the police, who had been using brutal tactics to try and break up the demonstrations, were sent home. The army declared openly that it would protect the demonstrators. Secondly, it was later revealed that an (unidentified) co-founder of the Facebook page was to report for military service just before the day of the planned protest.<sup>13</sup>

From 16 January onwards, the mobilization continued to gain momentum through posts containing text, images and videos. An important element was a stream of posts exposing how the establishment media were manipulating the public sphere, which served to increase suspicion of the old media and strengthen the image of the digital media as being more believable.

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<sup>13</sup> (<<http://aljazeeratalk.net/node/7398>>;  
<<http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/contributors/93740>>).

The Tunisian example was raised frequently. Take, for instance, the following post on 16 January, which reproduced an old picture of the Tunisian president from a Tunisian national newspaper. The picture included the slogan, “Stability and continuity for Tunisian dignity”.

The admin commented:

The Tunisians were living the same old silly movie that all Egyptians are living now. This picture reminded me of many pictures we have here in Egypt. Could someone take this picture and compare it with pictures from Egypt, and the people will understand!

The message was clear: The Egyptian president is no different than the former Tunisian one. He uses the same propaganda. Let us make sure that he suffers the same fate.

#### Guidelines and widening the circle

The admin also gave guidelines for the coming protest. On 16 January he wrote:

This is very important for all youth that will participate in the 25 January [protest]. We are not calling for chaos or destruction of any private or public property. We are going on that day to ask for our rights; we will protest but we will not allow anyone to attack property. We will not assault anyone, and we will defend ourselves only if we are attacked. This is very important and I hope that you will all share this with other pages and profiles.

He also raised the hopes of the group members:

We need to understand that the 25th will be the start, but if we are really united and go in big numbers, it will be the beginning of the end.

On 16 January, the admin appealed to the group members to make full use of Facebook and other digital social networking sites to spread the posts as widely as possible:

Guys, because I post many things on this page, I need your help to make this content reach everyone. Any content you believe in, please “like” it and “share” it. You can collaborate in making these posts reach hundreds and thousands of people. Please help me and make our voice become stronger and stronger.

Given the structure of the Facebook page, with all visitors accessing the content becoming members, this was also a recruitment strategy. In another post the same day, the admin suggested yet another way of spreading the anti-Mubarak message:

Urgent appeal: We need to share this post in all websites of ultras [supporters of football teams] and pages. Tomorrow there is a big football match at the military college. We need everyone to shout "Tunisia, Tunisia" to make our voices reach further, to wake up people so everyone will become more motivated to get down with us and move. I hope everyone prints this and distributes it in all groups' and sport websites.

As we can see, the admin tried to use every public event in Egypt to mobilize people for the protest demonstration. Moreover, once the members responded to the above post, the content of the WAAKS page started to spread to the members' friends, sports websites, political websites, YouTube, and blogs. People started to print the content and distribute it in the streets. The influence of the page mushroomed.

On 17 January, the admin again urged:

Like! Like! Like!

In three simple steps you can help the page to have half a million member within a week. I hope everyone participates in this campaign and shares this page, so our voice will reach everyone. You were the real publisher of the call of 25 January and it has already reached 615 thousand people on Facebook. Let's enable WAAKS to have more than half a million member in less than a week.

Then he pasted a link that opened the "friends" list of every member to make it easier for every member to select all the people on his/her list and recommend the page to them. This allowed the page to be shared among more members, so the page gained thousands of new members every day. Clearly, the admin had a very good understanding of how Facebook could be used. Later, after his arrest and detention on 28 January 2011, it became clear why: the admin was Wael Ghonim, a Google's Head of Marketing for the Middle East and North Africa.

A few hours later, the admin reported:

Just yesterday, there were more than 9 million views for the posts on our page, more than 2610 new members, and around 56 thousand comments by the members. I can now say from the depths of my heart that WAAKS... and we all love Egypt.

### Consultation on tactics

In another message he emphasized the need for the members to contribute ideas:

Shabab (Youth), I need to hear your suggestions and your ideas on the way we can decide the places in each city in Egypt where we should go and protest.

The members had diverse ideas. For example, one wrote: "The most important place is Cairo. I hope everyone will go to Cairo. The concentration should be on how many people not how many places, because if we have big numbers in Cairo, people in other cities will become braver about going to protest in every city." Another suggested that more than 10 spots should be identified in each city and that the spots should not be far from each other to make joint action easier. Cairo seemed to be the most widely suggested location. As one member put it:

Cairo is the most important place, because millions come to it every day. Once you have decided the gathering places, make sure that you announce the locations only a short time before the 25th to prevent any action by security agents. Also, ask all media offices and international channels to cover this day so the security forces will not react brutally because the regime will be afraid of an international scandal." Many people suggested meeting initially at Tahrir Square in Cairo because it was central and easy for everyone to reach. The protesters could then decide where to go.

On 17 January, the admin suggested a campaign to reach out to mobile phone users:

We need to reach all Egyptians. In Egypt there are more than 40 million people who have mobile phones, and we can reach them all if 100 thousand people send SMS messages to their friends. It is easy and you can make the change if you participate and send it to friends you know.

He posted examples of the sort of SMS messages that people could send. Some are reproduced below:

1- Do you want to have a job? Do you want the prices to go down? Are you fed up with corruption? Do you wish to get married? Be positive and join us on 25 January.

2- For you, for your children's future, say no to the injustice and corruption and join us on 25 January.

3- There are some people who say that the Tunisians are "braver" than the Egyptians. Let's get them to understand that we are not cowards and will go and ask for our rights on 25 January.

4- We are not inferior to the Tunisians. Join us on 25 January to ask for your and our rights and take them.

5- Hey Ahmed (Muslim name), hey Paul (Christian name), Egypt must become like Tunisia. Join us on 25 January.

6- Let us cleanse the country of torture, injustice and inflation on 25 January.

7- No salaries, no jobs, no justice, the Emergency Law made the police officer a god, a president stayed a president for 30 years and now wants to bequeath this country to his son. We have to set things right in our country on 25 January. We are not inferior to Tunisia.

In order to reach out to more people, the goals were being widened. Now they included provision of jobs and an end to inflation. A deliberate move was being made to mobilize across religion. And the Tunisian example was again being stressed, with appeals to national pride ("We are not inferior to Tunisians"). Now it was absolutely clear: the group was a social movement. It was mobilizing human resources and using them "to adjust elements of social structure and organize previously unorganized groups against institutional elites besides representing the interest of groups excluded from the polity" (Jenkins 1983). Self-respect was being used as a "definer of collective identity" (Buechler 1995:441).

Also on 17 January the admin provided more ideas on how the coming protest could be publicized:

Distribute the Facebook event page (insert the link); share the We Are All Khalid Said [WAAKS] page to enable all Egyptians to communicate with each other on the same page; participate in the million SMS campaign; change your profile picture on Facebook to a picture that says "am coming on 25th January"; print a page that calls on all Egyptians to participate on 25 January and put it in mosques, churches, universities, houses. Do "share" and "like" any videos or pictures or posts that are posted on this page to motivate people, because this could enable many people to see it, not only the members of this page. Call at least five friends and make sure that they will join you on 25 January. Communicate with all kinds of media and celebrities to increase support for the idea of 25 January.

#### Government counter-attacks

The same day, the admin informed the group members that there was a dramatic surge in the number of negative comments being placed on the page. This was probably not a coincidence. On 23 January, the admin reminded the members that the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) had "a department called the electronic committee [...] They have many fake Facebook accounts; all these names are of girls and celebrities and they enter the page and try to devalue what we are saying, so be careful of those people.

The government certainly had the capability to cause such confusion. Ahmed Saleh, who was admin after Wael Ghonim's arrest (and after the government ended its shutdown of the Internet), revealed later in an interview with *Middle East Law and Governance* that the WAAKS page membership had increased by 40,000 during a period when the government had closed down the Internet totally. "I guessed that the security apparatus must have had access

during this time, and that they installed robots to spam our page, a tactic that they were using since we started. This time it was serious. There was a massive attack on myself as the anonymous administrator of the page. Accusations of being a foreign agent, deceiving the masses into turning their country into chaos so that Israel (or sometimes Iran) would take over, were all over the page. Every post I would make, I would receive tens of thousands of comments, mostly attacks against me" (MELG 2011). It is thus impossible to distinguish between posts indicating genuine differences between the admin and some of the members, and the fake negative posts originating with the security services. For example, while the discussion on where to hold the protests was going on, one of the comments was:

*I need to know who the admin of this page is. Sorry, but I need to know if his goal is to stage a coup and create chaos in the country. I'm Egyptian like any other Egyptian and wish the best for my country always, and I have family and friends, and it is my right as any other's to care about my country and its future. Secondly, is there anyone who intends to make a revolution and announces his intention? Just think about it, guys!*

Was this a genuine post or was it one placed by the security services to sow dissension within the group? There is no way to tell.

On 18 January the admin asked the members of the page to provide their e-mail addresses so that they could be contacted in case something happened to the page. The following day, the main post asked the members to identify their biggest problems in Egypt as Egyptians. The responses included education, unemployment, poverty, lack of social justice, lack of industries, corruption, injustice, the Emergency Law, Mubarak, the police, lack of freedom, and the Constitution. Some of the comments looked deeper. As one put it, "Everything has roots. We have to get to the root of the problem in order to change it." One of the comments was particularly striking: "Hey admin, forget about this! [...] the 25th will come, and only 2000 people will turn up. These people can only [click on] like [...] No one understands the Egyptian people more than me, they are cowards!" It is difficult to believe that this post was not written by an agent provocateur of the earlier-mentioned section of the NDP specializing in digital infiltration.

In a post on 20 January, the admin used satire to highlight the desperate plight of Egyptians. Outlining the government's "achievements", he wrote:

In Egypt 12 thousand people committed suicide in the last four years, 5000 in 2009 alone, and were more than 100 thousand suicide attempts in the same year. Every day there are 14 Egyptian suicides and the main reasons are unemployment and poverty. And more than two-thirds of these numbers are youths under 25 years. The source is Al-Ahram [a national newspaper] just in case someone accuses me of promoting rumours.

He also posted messages to motivate the members. For example:

I just received wonderful news from a reliable source, that a big group of lawyers and doctors and university teachers will join us in a big demonstration on 25h January. We are all Egyptians and we all want our rights back.

He informed the members that at midnight the page would give details of where the protests in Cairo would be held. The next day was the last Friday before the 25th and he asked the members to spread the word about the protest locations at mosques after the prayers.

### Growing influence

The admin gave some statistics that are indicative of the extent of interaction within the group:

I apologize to you all for not replying to the comments. I do not have the ability to read all the comments; there are more than 40 thousand comments on this page every day and I receive more than 200 emails every day! I really cannot handle all this. But I have good news for you. I'm now coordinating with many youths from many political organizations and activists, so everything I post here will have been agreed with all these organizations.

The good news did not end there. In another message, the same day, he reported:

I feel very (good). For the first time I heard the ordinary people in the street talking about 25 January and asking each other whether they would participate or not. For the first time there are more than 60 thousand people on Facebook who say that they will come. For the first time, our call has reached more than a million accounts on Facebook. For the first time, all these things are happening in a very short time. For the first time I feel that I can go, and even if I die this [25 January protest] can restore my rights and my children's rights.

The movement appeared to be unstoppable, particularly after the next day's news on the page: "the Ghazl el Mahalla workers will join us on 25 January." These workers had become famous throughout Egypt for going on strike over low wages on 6 April 2008. The strike and its brutal suppression had led to the creation of the 6th of April youth movement, which, as mentioned earlier, was also mobilising people for the 25 January protests. The movement was now bridging class divisions within Egyptian society.

Some other groups of people preferred to organize their own protests, which the admin welcomed in a post on 21 January:

There are other pages and groups on Facebook that have announced that they will gather and protest in different places. This is not only good, this is excellent, because many people are going to participate, which means that all Egyptians will know about this call. Also, the security [services] will not

know the places, so they will not limit their reaction to only a few places and will not know what places they should protect. That will weaken their power and they will not be able to control our protest.

He also welcomed the regime's attacks on the planned protests. On 23 January he described them as "free advertisements for this day, because then the idea will reach more people, and everyone has been hurt in one way or another by this regime". He also released statistics showing the continuing development of the group:

More than 2600 members yesterday. The comments and news and photo views are more than 7 million. The members of the page made more than 50 thousand comments and "likes" in one day. We are mobilizing all the people on Facebook and our voice has become very very strong. Once we post something on our page, it is picked up by many websites and reaches many places on the Internet. This Tuesday, the 25<sup>th</sup>, we need to unite with the 60 million Egyptians who do not have Internet.

On the same day, the admin added some goals to those that had already been announced: "to combat poverty, which can be done by respecting the Egyptian law to increase the minimum wages; providing a fair increase in important sectors such as health and education; and giving 500 Egyptian pounds to any university graduate student who cannot find a good job". He also called for the resignation of Interior Minister Habib Al-Adeli "because of all the crimes he has committed".

On 23 January, the admin made arrangements for Ahmed Saleh to take over the page "if something happens to me" (Ghonim 2012). "I wanted to ensure that the page would be constantly updated if I was arrested, and I didn't want any-one to suspect that I was the admin. I also called Najeeb, one of my few Google coworkers who knew about my online activism, and provided him with access to the page's admin account, so that he could update the page if he noticed that I hadn't updated it for more than twelve hours" (*ibid.*) It was a timely move because he was arrested and detained on 28 January.

#### 4.5 Revolution in the Streets (25-27 January)

##### "The whole regime has to go"

The hectic activity of the WAAKS group bore fruit on the day of the protests. Tens of thousands marched through the streets of Cairo and demonstrated in front of the offices of the ruling National Democratic Party and other government buildings before gathering at Tahrir Square. The dominant slogan on the placards and chanted by the demonstrators in the streets was "Bread, Freedom and Social Justice", which had earlier been posted by the admin of the WAAKS group. Significantly, when the demonstrators gathered in Tahrir Square, the main slogan became "The whole regime has to go". Similar protests were also held in the cities of Alexandria, Suez, Mansura, Tanta, Aswan and Assiut.

The massive turnout in Tahrir Square on 25 January was not only because of the efforts of the WAAKS group. Other groups were also involved, among which, as already mentioned, the 6th of April youth movement was a major player. However, the WAAKS group played a crucial role. How did it manage to influence so many people?

### **Group interaction 2.0**

Every Facebook account holder has a list of friends who are allowed access to his/her page. Those friends form a network because each friend also has another list of friends, who in turn have their friends, and so on. Every user has a “wall” on which posts and comments are placed automatically. The user can then click on “like” or “share”. When the user clicks on “like”, the post or comment is automatically sent to the walls of their friends, who can then similarly send it on to members of their own network. If the user clicks on “like” for a link to a particular page (for example, the WAAKS one) he or she becomes a member of the page and automatically receives news feeds, comments and other information from that page as soon as it has been posted. The multiplier effect of the “friends” list then ensures rapid gain in the page’s membership. To make a comment on a post from the page, the user clicks on “share”, which links his comment to the post, which he then shares. This architecture also enables the comment to be discussed by all those who receive it..

The total effect of this process was summed up by the admin in an interview given (under the pseudonym of El Shaheed) to the *Newsweek*-associated online magazine *The Daily Beast* in January 2011. He told the interviewer, “The power of Facebook is that our updates reach to everyone's wall. Some of the videos we publish get shared on people's walls more than 30,000 times. That's how powerful a virus can be ... Once it's out, it goes everywhere. It's unstoppable.”<sup>14</sup>

Until 25 January, there was mobilization in cyberspace, but it had not yet been fully translated into “the real world”. The demonstrations that day and on subsequent days were the realization of all the previous preparation. This increased power was reflected in the posts that appeared over the next few days on the WAAKS page.

### **“We do not want a president who treats us like zionists”**

On 26 January, the tone of the posts was more uncompromising. It was no longer enough to prevent Mubarak from being able to stand for re-election or

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<sup>14</sup> <<http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2011/01/30/el-shaheed-the-mysterious-anonymous-behind-egypt-s-revolt.html>>.

to pass on the presidency to his son. Now the demand was that he should step down immediately:

We do not want him, we do not want a president for 30 years. We do not want a president forever. We do not want a president that has become a god who does not make mistakes and all of whose orders are wise. We do not want his son to become the president. We do not want a president who treats Egyptians as if they are zionists and gives orders for them to be shot with live bullets. We do not want a president whose name is on all streets, squares, universities and institutions. We do not want a president whose picture we have to look at 20 times a day at least.

### Revolution

The admin elatedly continued to mobilize resources for what was now obviously more than a protest:

Believe me, the revolution is not an idea any more, the revolution is now happening in all streets and we have to support it in whatever ways we can. If you are a poet, write poems. If you are a graphic designer, make a design. If you are a photographer, go down and take pictures. If you are a director, make a film. If you are a journalist, write the truth and show the reality. If you are a computer expert, raise the awareness of the people and teach them how to use the Internet. We all should go down to the streets. We all have to move!

In another post, he demanded that everyone should stop sitting on the fence:

This is a historic moment in Egypt's history, it is not possible to be Egyptian without taking a stand. You have to choose who you are with, either with the people who are asking for their legal rights, the revolutionaries in every single place of Egypt, or with the government. Make a choice, but do not make a fool of yourself by taking a neutral position, because this position means that you agree with all actions that are being taken against the protestors, such as torture, killing and injustice, and you agree with the government and its actions.

He also used patriotism to try and shame people into joining the revolution:

They can slow down our Internet or even shut it down. They can ban Facebook or block Twitter. They can burn the cables in the sea or interrupt networks in our homes. We are all going this coming Friday after the prayers. We will be protesting in all the streets of Egypt. Their batons, tear gas, and live and rubber bullets will not stop us. Enough! We are fed up and we have absolutely nothing to lose. All we now see is hope. Any Egyptian not coming down and protesting will be acting unfairly to himself/herself, to his/her children, and to the history of this great nation.

This post attracted thousands of “likes” and comments. Among them was one from a Tunisian who gave advice on how to cope with attacks by the security forces:

I hope your revolution succeeds soon. To do so, you have to do the following:

1- Try to protest at night. This has many benefits; first, that will reduce the chances of being arrested and also of being seen and identified by security forces. Second, you will make the security forces really weak, because you will protest at night and sleep during the day, while the security forces will not be able to sleep during the day because of the emergency situation. They will also not be able to sleep at night because you will be active at night. So they will become weaker everyday.

2- Try to involve the international media to make your voice stronger, because external pressure is very strong.

Such support from a citizen of a country where the revolution had succeeded must have heartened the Egyptian revolutionaries. The Tunisian also gave practical advice on matters such as how to deal with tear gas and disable the vehicles of security forces. His comment was a graphic example of how Facebook enabled mobilization and support across geographical boundaries.

By the next day, 27 January, the admin was certain that the revolution would succeed. Two of his posts summed it up:

1. Where are the millions of people who voted for the National Democratic Party? If this party was as strong as they said, they could easily have sent out 2000 people to demonstrate in support of the president. I'm sorry to say it, but these people can only go out on the streets when they are protected by the security forces. They are too petrified to go into the streets now. The truth is now known by the Egyptians in the streets. We will all meet tomorrow, Friday, the Day of Rage.

2. Safwat el Shareef [General Secretary of the National Democratic Party] is saying: the demands of the people are their rights, but we don't have a button marked change. My answer to him is, by the way there is a button for change. We have already pressed it and we will not let the button until you all change.

The posts of 26 and 27 January are clearly confrontational, aimed at achieving a revolution rather than just a transition to a different government. The brutal reaction of the regime to the protests of the 25th was a political opportunity because it made the people very angry. The admin seems to have sensed this. In terms of the theoretical framework of this study, the posts intensified mobilization of resources and made wide-ranging social change the

overall goal. Thus, they incorporated essential elements from all three theories relating to social movements.

### Internet shutdown

The size of the 25 January protests seems to have come as a shock to the government. They may have assumed until then that the subversive activities on the social networking pages could be kept under control, but the protests destroyed any such illusion. The very next day, the government tried to block Facebook and Twitter communications in stages. The WAAKS admin as well as those of other websites informed their members about the linkages that were still active and how to bypass the blocks. Frustrated by this, the government imposed a total shutdown of the Internet on 28 January. However, some activists were able to still access the World Wide Web through phone calls to international numbers, which enabled them to dial up to the Internet. In addition, Google made available a “Speak to Tweet” service for Egyptians. Any Egyptian with access to a landline could phone in a Tweet by saying “#hashtag Egypt”<sup>15</sup> and then leaving a voicemail.

The Internet shutdown did not reduce the protests, since they had already attained enough critical mass to continue on their own. , “All of the administrators of the Facebook pages and even the political activists were surprised that the demonstrators continued protesting all over Egypt on January 26 and beyond, without any Facebook page calling for it or organizing it,” Ahmed Saleh, one of the admins of WAAKS, told *Middle East Law and Governance* later (MELG 2011). If anything, the protests increased in size because young Egyptians who might have occupied themselves with communicating on social networking sites went into the streets and joined the demonstrators.

## **4.6 End of the Line for Mubarak (28 January–11 February)**

Internet service was resumed on 2 January and the posts continued. On 7 February, there was a call to the unions:

The revolution is not demonstrations and protests only. The revolution is legitimate and it is imposed by the people. And this long confrontation with the regime is in our favour because the system’s defences are collapsing. So why don’t the labour unions and student unions start to choose their own legitimate representatives rather than the current fake representatives. Why don’t all municipalities elect a new mayor by themselves and start operating? We can build a new system by ourselves and impose a popular reality and change the system on the ground with our own hands.

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<sup>15</sup> The hashtag makes it easier to search for Tweets on Twitter. It comprises the symbol # (the hash) combined with text identifying a group or topic.

This post was an attempt to mobilize new resources for the revolution. However, it was a change in tactics. From Wael Ghonim's demands for Mubarak to leave office, the focus moved to setting up an alternative government at the municipal level. It is important to emphasize that this was posted several hours before Wael Ghonim's release from custody.

Another post on the same day also had something new:

The people want to bring down the regime. The president is part of the regime. We are on our way to bringing him down, but we also need a Constitution that protects our freedom and our rights to housing and health; a Constitution that is based on a civil state, guarantees fair distribution of wealth, prevents election fraud, and annuls the Emergency Law. From now on, we will choose our president and our parliament. We are not talking about making a cosmetic change in the Constitution. We want our country back. We are the owners of our country.

Wael Ghonim was released on 7 February and resumed his work as admin of the WAAKS page. The posts on the page after that, are summarized by this one written on 11 February:

A message to the regime: Every hour the people are increasing their demands. Our main demand now, and it should be met very soon, is Mubarak has to step down and leave Egypt.

The page was now back on message again. The goal was Mubarak's departure without any further delay. Other posts continued the mobilization to put further pressure on Mubarak. There were calls for unity, like this one on 8 February:

To everyone that is busy trying to get a slice of the pie, and to everyone who is trying to get his own back on people in the regime, to everyone who is trying to get ideological or partisan gain: Egypt is above all.

With the continuing demonstrations in Tahrir Square as the background, there were also mobilization posts to increase the ranks of the anti-Mubarak forces.

On 11 February, Mubarak resigned. The main goal of the WAAKS group had been achieved.

## 4.7 Conclusions

This chapter has shown that the members of the WAAKS page display the main features that are characteristic of a group: group interaction, interdependence, structure, goals and cohesion. It has also shown that they meet most of the requirements for a social movement, as set out in the theoretical framework of this paper.

The main focus of the admin's posts analyzed in this chapter was on resource mobilization. The group members then engaged in rational actions oriented towards clearly defined, fixed goals and clearly defined outcomes that could be evaluated in terms of tangible gain (Peterson 1989). In addition, external influences to the social movement played a significant role. As the group grew larger, there were attempts to adjust elements of social structure and organize previously unorganized groups against institutional elites in addition to representing the interest of groups excluded from the polity (Jenkins 1983).

The analysis in this chapter may have created the impression that the posts could be categorized neatly into one of the three social movement theories. However, that was not so. For example, Tunisia was used mainly to mobilize resources, but it also represented use of a political opportunity and was indicating of a reactive social movement under the New Social Movement theory. It is mostly at this secondary level that the elements of the other two theories show up. Even then, their presence is limited. However, there is one exception. Some New Social Movement theorists emphasize the role of post-materialist values in collective action, and this was certainly true of the Egyptian revolution. There were consistent demands for democracy, social justice and human dignity right from the beginning.

In one important respect, that of centralized control and the resulting group dynamics, the posts fail to correspond to all three theories. Obviously, by the very act of choosing which comments to display on the site, the admin did have some control. However, every member could share his/her comments with all the other members without going through the admin, so that power to control was restricted. Centralized control is characteristic of the "old" types of social movements in which members meet and interact personally and which have a hierarchical structure. The WAAKS group was a new type made possible by the Internet. The use and analysis of posts to document how this new type of social movement operated during the most important period of the Egyptian revolution is this paper's major contribution to the literature.

## Chapter 5 Conclusions

The main research question of this paper is: What was the role of Egyptian youth in the Facebook groups that participated in the 2011 revolution, and can we understand those groups as a new form of social movement? To answer this question, I decided to focus on the largest Facebook group in Egypt, WAAKS, which is generally recognised as having played a crucial role in the events that forced the resignation of the Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak. Facebook was used by other, more “traditional” groups, but not to the same extent. In contrast to them, WAAKS is based only on a Facebook page. I did a literature search on social movements and constructed a theoretical framework that would enable me to analyse the posts and comments on the WAAKS page to determine if it was also a social movement. The components of this framework were the Resource Mobilization theory, the Political Opportunity theory and the New Social Movement theory.

The WAAKS page was set up after Khalid Said, a young Egyptian, was killed by police after he threatened to expose corrupt police officers on the Internet. Thus, the very birth of the page, in response to a specific event, conformed to one of the characteristics of a social movement. To determine whether the page and its members demonstrated other relevant characteristics, I analysed the posts between 14 January and 11 February 2011. The first date was that of Tunisian President Ben-Ali’s flight into exile. It was significant because it marked a change in the WAAKS page, from an alternative news site to an active mobilizer of young Egyptians to take increasingly confrontational actions to change the government. The Tunisian revolution provided a political opportunity for raising the hopes of Egyptians that they, too, could get rid of their autocrat, Mubarak. The second date was the day of Mubarak’s resignation.

Before analysing the posts, I had to show that WAAKS was more than a Facebook page, that it was a group even though it did not have a physical location and there were no physical meetings between members as a result of their membership. This paper has demonstrated that this is indeed so. The interaction between the members and admin of the page displays group interaction, group interdependence, group structure, group goals, and group cohesion, which are the main features of group identity (Smith 2008).

I used my theoretical framework to analyse a selection of the 848 posts placed during the period defined above. The sample was selected on the basis of relevance and of being representative of the content of the whole. The analysis proved conclusively that, over time, as it reacted to political events, the

WAAKS group did display most of the characteristics of a social movement as identified in the theoretical framework.

The analysis suggests that we need to re-think the theories about social movements and examine the potential of new paradigms in the light of the digital technological advances that characterize modern society. As shown by the paper WAAKS is a new type of group, its nominal leader, the admin, is not a leader in the conventional sense. He has no executive power over the members. The literature on leadership is based on the traditional, hierachal concept of leadership, but what we need is theories that can be applied when analyzing the new type of leader made possible by social networks such as Facebook. An interesting aspect of WAAKS that its members were both, producers as well as consumers of knowledge. Until the twenty-first century, the means of production of knowledge were concentrated in relatively few hands. Thus, autocrats and dictators, could easily control the discourse of favor themselves. In Egypt for example, the media portrait Mubarak as the “Father of the nation” whose decisions was always beneficial to the population. However WAAKS changed that. Bypassing the established media, it created a new discourse, of the government as being parasites on Egyptian society. It thus created an alternative public space to counter the public space in which the government had a monopoly.

## **Implications for governments**

The biggest implication of this research for governments, as Mubarak found out to his cost, is that digital social networks cannot be controlled for long. The Egyptian government first blocked Facebook, but young Egyptians were still able to bypass the blocks by proxy servers<sup>16</sup> or with the help of supporters in Western countries. Then the government shut down the Internet. However, the Internet is also used by businesses, so the shutdown was costly in economic terms. Moreover, such drastic action increased international pressure on the government. So the lesson is that corruption and police brutality can be publicized very quickly across the globe, as can any news that a government wants to suppress. If governments oppress their people, there will be consequences.

## **Importance of This Research**

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<sup>16</sup> <<http://kb.iu.edu/data/ahoo.html>>.

The research and analysis in this paper add important new elements to the literature. Until now, to my knowledge, studies of the 2011 Egyptian revolution have relied on media sources and interviews with key participants for information. This is the first study that has analysed the Facebook posts that played a very important role in mobilising millions of Egyptians to defy the Emergency Law which banned gatherings of more than four people, and to demonstrate against the government despite its use of lethal force as it attempted to intimidate them. This is also the first study that has proved that the WAAKS page was more than a catalyst for the revolution, that it was a new type of group. This has shown that there was no rigid structure or hierarchy, which is a necessary characteristic in most of the literature on group dynamics. The members interacted simultaneously with each other in cyberspace, through their own Facebook pages and that of WAAKS, as well as with the admin, but there was no pressure to subscribe to a “group position” on any issue.

This fluidity is related to the second research question, about the implications of this new type of social movement, because it enabled the group to react very quickly to changes in the political situation as well as to have a reach beyond the capacity of “traditional” groups. It also enabled transcending of factors such as class, gender and political views, which could have created disunity. However, there was also a weakness in such a democratic structure, because it was vulnerable to infiltration by the regime. In fact, as this paper has shown, some of the members’ comments do indicate that the ruling party probably used agents of its “Electronic Committee” to post discouraging comments on the WAAKS page in a vain attempt to forestall revolution. As the admin said later in his autobiography:

The NDP's Electronic Committee intensified its activities noticeably halfway through the day on January 24. New accounts were created and made to seem as if they belonged to opposition parties and anti-regime political movements. The false accounts all attempted to deflate people's enthusiasm and described Jan25 as a conspiracy leading the nation to its destruction" (Ghonim 2012: 173).

A major strength of the WAAKS group was that it engaged in political activities both online as well as offline. The consciousness raising and mobilization online was accompanied by protest actions in the streets. The restrictions on democracy in Egypt affected everyone, so it was possible to unite against the common enemy, Mubarak. However, once Mubarak had been forced to give up power and elections were to be held, that unity was undermined. One reason for that, of course, was that political differences became more important. So, for example, those in favour of having Islam as the guiding principle of the new government supported the Salafist or Muslim

Brotherhood candidates. On the other hand, those who wanted a secular government supported candidates who promised Western-type democracy. A second reason for the reduction in the group's influence post-Mubarak is summed up by this post placed on its page on 9 February:

We will win because we do not have agendas and we don't know how to play dirty political games.

The idealism that was characteristic of WAAKS was an important mobilizing factor in the run-up to the Egyptian revolution because its membership largely comprised the youth. This is typical of digital media generally.<sup>17</sup> In the Middle East and North African region as a whole, 45.6% of Facebook users are in their twenties.<sup>18</sup> However, the age factor became a liability in the run-up to the parliamentary and presidential elections. Knowing how to play “dirty political games” was an important resource when it came to persuading people to vote for a particular candidate. The two leading presidential candidates made extravagant promises of a wonderful future if they were elected. Lack of political experience, combined with suspicion of politics, was the major limitation of WAAKS in this respect.

Another limitation of WAAKS was that its influence was mainly in urban areas. To be a member of the page, one had to have access to the Internet. However, in the rural areas, illiteracy – both general as well as digital – is high and access to the Internet is limited. Rural areas are important in Egyptian politics, which was why the Islamists paid particular attention to establishing a strong presence there long before the elections, and the running count of votes after the elections showed that their victory was due to support from the rural areas.

However, as this paper has shown, these limitations did not play a significant role during the Egyptian revolution. The members' common hatred of Mubarak, combined with their offline mobilizing activities, to achieve widespread mobilization.

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<sup>17</sup> <<http://www.incluso.org/manual/social-media-and-their-use-young-people>>.

<sup>18</sup> <[lovop.com/en/statistics-about-the-use-of-facebook-across-countries-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa/](http://lovop.com/en/statistics-about-the-use-of-facebook-across-countries-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa/)>.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1

### Ukraine's Orange Revolution

The major trigger for Ukraine's Orange Revolution, from late November 2004 to January 2005, was accusations of massive corruption, voter intimidation and electoral fraud during the run-off round of the 2004 presidential election. As the news of this spread, thousands of protesters set up tents in the capital city Kiev and demonstrated daily.

An interesting aspect of the Ukrainian electoral crisis was that news of government corruption and the election irregularities spread throughout the population even though the mainstream media were subservient to the President. The reason for this was to be found in alternative media that used the Internet to bypass censorship.

“Maidan” means public square in Ukrainian, a place where people traditionally gather to take part in public activities. The main activity of Maidan was election monitoring and networking with other pro-democracy organizations around Eastern Europe. It trained election monitors in nearly every Ukrainian region, with support from Serbia’s Otpor movement. “The evidence collected by Maidan was central to proving the existence of massive election fraud” (Goldstein, 2007:14).

Maidan also used its websites to attract funding from Ukrainians abroad. “Maidan’s websites were crucial for donor relations with the expatriate Ukrainian community, who could follow the spirited discourse online and then contribute money via credit card” (ibid.). In addition to its Internet activities, Maidan used SMS messages to coordinate activists, share information and ideas and organise actions and demonstrations on the ground (Vila 2012).

Another organisation, Pora (a Ukrainian word meaning “It’s time”), was able to spread the pro-democracy message and disseminate information to the grassroots through mobile phones in addition to the Internet. During the elections, it coordinated mass protests centred around tent cities in towns throughout Ukraine (Goldstein, 2007:16). Like Maidan, it, too, was inspired by the Serbian Otpor movement. Interestingly, Otpor was also a source of inspiration for one of the influential youth movements in Egypt the “6<sup>th</sup> of April movement”, which even adopted the logo used by Otpor. Clearly, activists in the cyber-world have an effect far beyond their national borders and even geographical regions.

## Appendix 2

### Showing the Way in Tunisia

The revolution in Tunisia owed much to the rapid growth of Internet use in the region. “From Morocco to Bahrain, the Arab world has witnessed the rise of an independent vibrant social media and steadily increasing citizen engagement on the Internet, the social networks inform, mobilize, entertain, create communities, increase transparency, and seek to hold governments accountable” (Ghannam 2011).

In 2009, out of a total population of 10 million Tunisians, 8.5 million (85%) had mobile phones (5% of which were smart phones), and 3.4 million (34%) were estimated to be Internet users (Wagner 2011). Approximately two million Tunisians are on Facebook.<sup>19</sup>

According to Yousri Marzouki, there were over 3.6 million Tunisian Internet users and 850.000 active Facebook users during the Tunisian revolution, which he describes as “the first reported massive use of an online social networking platform as an alternative militant media” (Marzouki 2012).

The event that triggered the revolution on 17 December 2010 was the public self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi, a 26-year old fruit and vegetable vendor, after his cart and products were confiscated by a policewoman because he did not have a trading licence. His pleas that he had no other means of survival and could not afford the licence fee were ignored. Bouazizi then went to a local municipal office, poured paint thinner over his clothes and body and set fire to himself (Aljazeera 2011). The news of his death was transmitted through social networking sites, e-mail, SMS messages and mobile phone calls. It shocked the entire country and brought to the forefront the deep poverty in which the majority of the population lived. There had been other, earlier, protests, most notably in May 2010 when an opposition leader dramatised the plight of Tunisians with images on Facebook and called for demonstrations. The government reacted with heavy repressive measures. Bouazizi’s suicide was the last straw.

The resulting anti-government demonstrations started in Bouazizi’s hometown “SidiBouzid” and then rapidly spread to many other cities. The activists used social media networking websites and YouTube to promote their

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<sup>19</sup> <<http://www.epolitics.com/2011/02/10/how-social-media-accelerated-tunisia-revolution-an-inside-view>>.

cause and spread texts, images and videos documenting the protests. These tools, combined with mobile phones, helped in organizing the protests (Kirkpatrick 2011). The activists also used Twitter for logistics, from warning others about the location of snipers to calling for blood donations at hospitals. According to Van Niekerk, social media offered a platform for the activists to spread their cause to the world, to disseminate anti-government messages and to apply more pressure on the regime leaders to step down (Van Niekerk 2011:1413).

The Tunisian government reacted by blocking access to Facebook pages and Internet sites used by the activists. However, as quickly as the sites were blocked, others sprang up. The activists managed to reach not only Tunisians but also the outside world, supplying news and images of the ongoing demonstrations and government repression. That led to international pressure on the government. Eventually, the combination of unending domestic demonstrations and international criticism led to the resignation of President Ben-Ali.

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