The Media and the Making of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution

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Abstract: While views may differ on the factors that made the 2011 Egyptian revolution possible, the role of mass media will remain undisputable. The Internet-based social networks caught the Mubarak regime by surprise, and the popular disillusionment with the 'national' media led the public to turn to private newspapers and satellite channels for keeping pace with the events. This paper examines the role of specific media during the 18 days of the 2011 Egyptian revolution – from 25 January to 11 February, 2011 – which we have divided into four parts. It discusses how these media contributed to the unfolding of events, conceptualized the protests and the demands of the public, and presented the actors that participated in or opposed the revolution. These points are addressed by discussing the content of the *Facebook* pages of the *Sixth of April Movement* and *We Are All Khalid Said*, as well as that of a private Egyptian newspaper, *al-Shuruq*, and the state-run newspaper *al-Ahram*.[1]

Introduction: The Media and State-Citizen Relationship

Egyptian mass media have contributed significantly to the 2011 Egyptian revolution. 'National' media, including government-controlled TV channels and newspapers, were used by the Mubarak regime to manipulate public opinion. Other media, such as the Internet, private newspapers and satellite channels, played an important role in mobilizing people and updating them on developments. The role of these new media can be understood within the larger context of how developments in mass media have influenced the relationship of

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states and their citizens, particularly in Egypt and similar countries.

As Price Monroe (1996:8) rightly notes, "[c]ontrol of . . . tools of mass information and persuasion [is] central to the idea of a commanding state." Mass media in most Arab countries used to be under the tight control of Arab governments, which used them to control and manipulate news they chose to make public. In Egypt, state-run mass media are called the 'national media,' suggesting that they were run by and meant to serve the people. However, with the revolution in information and communication technology of the 1990s, the state's monopoly of mass media was challenged, and new media provided alternative sources of news to the public, diminishing thereby the power of commanding states to manipulate public opinion.

At this point, Arab states were faced with a dilemma. Stifling new information and communication technologies would deprive them of benefiting from these lucrative inventions. Permitting them, however, could threaten their authority (Kedzie and Aragon, 2002:5). Some Arab governments succeeded in exercising some control over these media, for which reason some analysts questioned their effectiveness in democratizing Arab countries (Sakr, 2001:207).

Mubarak's Egypt was among the first states in the region to launch its own national satellite in 1998 (Nilesat 101) and did not impose restrictions on the Internet, thinking that raising the ceiling of freedom of expression may limit the threatening effect of new media. However, new media were changing the relationship between the state and its citizens. Rather than "manufacturing consent" (Herman and Chomsky, 1988), they contributed to the creation of a new Arab political culture based on a "more liberal, pluralist politics rooted in a vocal, critical public sphere" (Lynch, 2006:2). They created a "public sphere" that eluded the control of the state and provided its members with relative security and freedom.[2] The Internet in particular has had great potentials for mobilizing people and coordinating political activities, an environment that can contribute to democratization (Allison, 2002; Cairncross, 2001; Rheingold, 2002). As Hofheinz (2005:96) has argued, the Internet has created

> "a dynamic of change that is helping to erode the legitimacy of traditional authority structures in family, society, culture/religion, and also the state, and thus creating pressure for reform. Slowly and not without setbacks, but in the end inexorably, young people are claiming 'private' spaces of freedom that are influencing their social attitudes. In the face of this process, ideas on the relations between state, society, and the individual that may have been generally accepted for generations are changing, and the Internet is the medium where such change is often most vigorously expressed."

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[2] Habermas's concept of public sphere refers to a combination of institutions and practices that mediate between private interests and the realm of state power. It is a space where individuals meet, discuss common public affairs, and organize themselves against abuse of social and public power (Kellner, 1992:4-5). The media, more specifically the printed media, has facilitated the functioning of public spheres and established its democratic influences.

In addition to the Internet, this paper sheds light on the role of 'traditional' mass media – the press in this case – during the Egyptian revolution. The discussion of how these media covered the 18 days of the Egyptian revolution benefits from framing analysis, which assumes that the news is not made up of random coverage of events, but is rather a specific process of selection and construction (Gitlin, 1980; Gamson, 1975; Gamson and Modigliani, 1989). Frames define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies. In short, they emphasize salient aspects of issues, reflecting thereby the perspective of the media source. Thus, it is useful in examining the underlying motives of choosing, reporting and framing events in a certain way and how this seeks to affect public opinion. In addition to observing differences in the way issues were framed across media outlets, change and continuity in media frames during the 18 days of the revolution will also be noted.

The Media

The sample of this paper comprises two *Facebook* pages and two Egyptian newspapers (both are in Arabic).

The Sixth of April Movement and We Are All Khalid Said

Calling itself the Egyptian resistance movement, *Harakat Sitta April*, or the *Sixth of April Movement* (hereafter, *the April Movement*), branched off from *Kifaya* (lit., enough), an opposition movement that appeared in 2005 primarily to campaign against the election of Mubarak for a fifth term and grooming his son to succeed him. A group of *Kifaya's* young members decided to start their own movement, which was named after its successful support of a strike by textile workers on the 6th of April, 2008. Its membership included activist groups in various parts of Egypt, and it was among the main organizers of protests in the three years preceding the revolution.[3]

Kulluna Khalid Sa'id, or *We Are All Khalid Said* (hereafter, *Khalid Said*), is a *Facebook* page that was established by Wael Ghonim–Google's marketing representative in the Middle East, whose identity as the administrator of the page was revealed only during the revolution. The page was established after the death of Khalid Said, an Egyptian youth who was apparently brutally killed in Alexandria in June 2010. Said's family and eyewitnesses claimed that he died while being beaten by two security agents trying to arrest him, allegedly because he videotaped a police officer exchanging drugs with a drug dealer. The Ministry of the Interior insisted that Said chocked on a piece of marihuana when the agents were arresting him. These agents were put on trial, but it was evident that the regime was trying to avoid their conviction. Said's family was harassed and state-run newspapers

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[3] Materials used in this paper were accessed on the *Facebook* page of the Movement (https://www.facebook.com/#!/shabab6april) in the period from the 3rd to the 25th of August, 2011.

published reports about his moral corruption. The trial sessions became occasions for Said's family, friends, and sympathizers to condemn the corruption and cruelty of the Egyptian police, as symbolized by Said's disfigured face. *We Are All Khalid Said* soon attracted many followers, and it may have been the first to call for the 25th of January protests.[4]

Al-Ahram and Al-Shuruq

Established in 1875, *al-Ahram* (hereafter, *Ahram*) is one of the oldest daily newspapers in Egypt. It is published by the gigantic *al-Ahram* Establishment. In the early 1960s, it came under the control of the Egyptian government and became part of the 'national press.' Since that time its editors-in-chief were chosen carefully by the state. For years it was seen as the mouthpiece of the Egyptian government, but perhaps because it provided more diverse views than other newspapers, it maintained relative popularity in Egypt.

Established in 2009 and published by the prominent publication house *Dar al-Shuruq*, *al-Shuruq*[5] (hereafter, *Shuruq*) is an Egyptian private newspaper that was able to bring on board a number of famous writers representing a wide range of views in the Egyptian political arena. Some of these writers were expelled from *Ahram* after long years of service, such as the liberal Salama Ahmad Salama, who became *Shuruq*'s editor-in-chief, and the famous Islamist writer Fahmi Huwaydi. After the revolution, some younger columnists in the newspaper were appointed to senior positions in the Egyptian government and became founders of new political parties.

The Media and the 2011 Egyptian Revolution

In what follows, the content and coverage of the selected media are examined in the context of four stages that we have distinguished in the course of the Egyptian revolution.[6] Before discussing the actual content of these media, we give a brief description of the major events that took place during each stage.

First stage: Before Tuesday, January 25, 2011

The period before January 25 witnessed a huge mobilization campaign on the Internet seeking to encourage as many people as possible to participate in the planned protests. Inspired by the Tunisian revolution, on January 16 the *April Movement* posted on its wall that it text-messaged members of the Egyptian government warning them that they may soon join the Tunisian President who fled his country a couple of days earlier. Ahmad Maher, General Coordinator of the

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[4] Materials used in this paper were accessed on *Kuluna Khalid Said*'s *Facebook* page (https://www.facebook.com/#!/ElShaheeed) in the period from the 3rd to the 25th of August, 2011.
[5] Often spelled 'Shorouk' by Dar al-Shorouk.
[6] PDF copies of all issues of *Ahram* and *Shuruq* are available on http://www.ahram.org.eg/ and http://www.shorouknews.com/ respectively.

Movement, urged the Egyptians to "walk the road of the Jasmine revolution and follow the example of the Tunisians who gained their rights by unity and perseverance" (https://www.facebook.com/#!/shabab6april?sk=wall). Thus, although the Movement mentioned fixing a minimum wage rate, ending the state of emergency, firing the Minister of the Interior, and bringing to justice police officers who committed crimes against the Egyptian people as their demands, removing Mubarak from power seems to have been entertained by it. However, although it used the term revolution on the 24th of January (one day before the planed protests), *Khalid Said's page* pointed out that the aim of the protests was not to overthrow the regime overnight, but to force the government to listen to popular demands. It spoke generally about the necessity of changing the philosophy of ruling, focusing on political and economic grievances of Egyptians, such as the emergency laws, the dictatorship of the regime, the double standards in enforcing the law, as well as the deteriorating economic conditions.

Both pages used innovative strategies to prepare for the protests. To create confidence among the Egyptians that change was both possible and eminent, the *April Movement* used national songs and online posters and distributed 30000 leaflets across Egypt to encourage people to join the protests to restore their rights. It posted photos of people demonstrating since 2003, commenting, "We can, yes we can, with hope and honesty, we can" (https://www.facebook.com/#!/shabab6april?sk=wall). On January 19, another statement said, "I'll sleep and wake up on a new dream: Egypt, for sure, is returning back to me" (https://www.facebook.com/#!/shabab6april?sk=wall). It contacted fans of popular sports clubs, workers, doctors, lawyers, engineers, university professors and teachers to join the marches. On January 17, it mentioned that it contacted Egyptians abroad to organize parallel protests in front of Egyptian embassies and consulates. The positive replies it received convinced the Movement that the 25th of January, the date of the planed protests, would be unprecedented. *Khalid Said's page*, however, focused primarily on using technology to advertise the protests. On January 17, it called for a campaign of text messages and encouraged contacting mass media and celebrities to spread the call for protests. Its members were encouraged to use posters advertising the planned protests as their *Facebook* profile picture and to share videos and photos uploaded on the page with friends and family members.

A few days before the protests, both pages mentioned details about the points and times of assembly along with some instructions. They sought to organize simultaneous marches in all Egyptian cities. *The April Movement* posted phone numbers in ten governorates to provide people with information and details about the event. It urged Egyptians to be "one heart" and political powers to avoid divisive slogans and banners. *Khalid Said's page* suggested some slogans, avoiding provocative religious or political statements that the security forces can use to blame the protests on any political or religious group. It provided phone numbers of lawyers affiliated with the 'Front of Defending Demonstrators,' although it

stressed that participants must remain peaceful and resist police provocation.[7] This emphasis on the brutality and corruption of the security apparatus explains the significance of choosing the 25th of January to protest. This day is (perhaps now, 'used to be'[8]) the Egyptian Police Day, which commemorates the massacre of a police force while resisting the British occupation forces in January 1952, an event that aroused the anger of the Egyptian army and led to the 23rd of July coup against King Farouq in the same year. Realizing the symbolic significance of this day, the two pages agreed that the message that the protests would carry to the police would be, "we reject torture, repression and indignity, and will not remain silent anymore" (https:www.facebook.com/#!/ElShaheed?sk=wall).

All this planning and the choice of a national holiday made *the April Movement* confident that the 25th of January was going to be a turning point in modern Egyptian history, although *Khalid Said's page* was conservative in its expectations of the outcome of its "electronic struggle," despite the thousands of its members who vouched to participate in the protests.

Prior to the 25th of January, *Ahram* was almost silent on the planned protests. It focused instead on a terrorist attack on a church in Alexandria on New Year's Eve, which killed and injured dozens of Copts. When covering news about the Tunisian revolution, it had an obvious interest in stressing that Egypt was targeted by external actors seeking to destabilize it. When Mubarak was attending the celebration of the Police Day in the Police Academy on the 24th of January,[9] the Minister of the Interior announced that the perpetrators of the Alexandria attacks were connected with the 'Palestinian Islamic Army.'[10] In his speech, Mubarak reiterated that Egypt was targeted and urged the Egyptians to show solidarity against these threats. When reporting this on January 25, *Ahram* only highlighted a statement by the Minister of the Interior that the planned protests were organized by "immature youths" who had no real influence (*Ahram*, 25/01/2011).
On the other hand, *Shuruq* took an obvious interest in the potential repercussions of the Tunisian revolution on the rest of the Arab world and on Egypt in particular. Reporting the fleeing of the Tunisian President on the 14th of January, it quoted various Egyptian political activists calling for civil disobedience (*Shuruq*, 15/01/2011). Under a headline that read, "Egypt speaks Tunisian," it reported "celebrations" by Egyptians everywhere for the success of the Tunisian revolution (*Shuruq*, 16/01/2011). It spoke about a "Tunisian tsunami" that was sweeping the

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[7] On the eve of the protests, *Khalid Said's page* reminded its members that the Ministry of the Interior had warned that the police would use force against unauthorized protests. It warned that the police might send thugs to start clashes between the protesters and attack public and private properties to provide police with a pretext to crack down on the demonstrators.
[8] A controversy did take place in the weeks prior to the 25th of January in 2012 over whether this date should still be celebrated as the Police Day in addition to being the anniversary of the Egyptian revolution. To avoid any provocation to the "revolutionary forces," the Ministry of the Interior decided to keep its celebrations to a minimum.
[9] The Police Academy was officially known as Mubarak Academy for Security. Remarkably, the trial of Mubarak, his sons, and top officials of the Ministry of the Interior are held there.
[10] The media campaign against Hamas during 2010 had prepared the stage well for this accusation.

Arab world, where most leaders were taking measures to avert the contagious nature of the Tunisian revolution (*Shuruq*, 17/01/2011). It reported incidents of Egyptians setting themselves on fire, following the example of Mohamed Bouazizi who set the first spark of the Tunisian revolution in December 2010 (*Shuruq*, 18 and 19/01/2011).

On the 21st of January, *Shuruq* began to report news about the protests of the Police Day. It mentioned that some 60000 internet activists vouched to participate in a "revolution against torture, poverty, corruption, and unemployment," as some participants pointed out. Kifaya, the 'Popular Parliament,'[11] and some political movements announced their commitment to participate, whereas other groups were still undecided. The Muslim Brotherhood did not announce that they would participate as a political movement, but its members were given the choice to participate according to their wish. The leader of the opposition socialist Tagammu Party announced that it was "inappropriate" to protest during the Police Day, whereas a leader in the Nasserist Party questioned the seriousness of the protests, *Shuruq* reported (*Shuruq*, 21/01/2011).

The following day, *Shuruq* continued its coverage of the regional impact of the Tunisian revolution and the increasing number of 'Bouazizis' in Egypt. In an obvious insinuation about his popularity, it reported a pro-Mubarak protest in which some 200 people participated. A complete page in this issue was devoted to the planned protests on January 25, including information about *We Are All Khalid Said* and the *Sixth of April Movement*. It mentioned the suggested points of assembly in Cairo and the insistence of the organizers on the peacefulness of the protests. It also presented what it described as the demands of the organizers of the protests, which included fixing a minimum wage rate, supporting the unemployed, dismissing the Minister of the Interior, releasing political prisoners, as well as dissolving the parliament and amending the constitution to limit the presidency to two terms (*Shuruq*, 22/01/2011).

On January 23, *Shuruq* reported that several political forces were preparing for the 'Day of Rage' on January 25 (*Shuruq*, 23/01/2011). On the 24th, it reported that the protests were going to take place in several Egyptian cities simultaneously and would include workers, university students, as well as fans of popular Egyptian football teams. Furthermore, while the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) was amassing thousands of persons to respond to the protests, protesters were preparing shields to protect themselves from the security forces. The Muslim Brotherhood claimed that they received threats from the police (*Shuruq*, 24/01/2011). On January 25, *Shuruq*'s headline read, "The Day of Rage." In addition to a description of "plans for attacks and defense" suggested by the protesters, it reported the participation of the Muslim Brotherhood and the rejection by the Salafists to take part in the protests (*Shuruq*, 25/01/2011).

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[11] The 'Popular Parliament' was established by some Egyptian opposition leaders after the rigged parliamentary elections of 2010. Remarkably, it was mocked by Mubarak in his first and last speech before the new parliament in November 2010, when he said, "Let them have fun."

Second stage: From Tuesday, January 25, to Friday, January 28, 2011

On Tuesday, January 25, thousands of Egyptians took to the streets in various parts of Egypt. Clashes with the police, at times violent and deadly, occurred, and seem to have ignited the spark of a massive popular uprising. The situation abated slightly on Wednesday and Thursday, when organizers of the protests were focusing their efforts on preparing for Friday, the 28th of January. This Friday was a turning point in the course of the revolution. In addition to the unprecedented number of protesters, they now had one specific demand, that is, toppling the regime. The police used violence to crush the protests, but by sunset, it lost control over the situation and withdrew completely from the streets. Mubarak requested the army to restore order, and a curfew was imposed for the first time in decades. In the evening, Mubarak gave his first televised speech, where he spoke about the saboteurs who mingled with the Egyptian youths to destabilize the country and terrorize people. And although he mentioned that he "accepted the resignation" of the unpopular government of Ahmad Nazif (appointed by Mubarak as Prime Minister in 2004), thousands of Egyptians decided to encamp in Tahrir Square in downtown Cairo until Mubarak has resigned.

When the protests began, the interest of *the April Movement's* and *Khalid Said's pages* was to report the developments on the ground. *The April Movement* focused on exposing the brutality of the police despite the peacefulness of the protestors. They reported the kidnapping of activists across the country and street fighting between the people and the police. It emphasized the unprecedented magnitude of the protests and the diversity of participants who included women and old people. On January 25, the administrator of the page wrote: "I write to you from the streets of Cairo. Tens of thousands are chanting for Egypt. This is the biggest march in the history of the country. We have surrounded the security forces twice and broken their cordons. This is the most beautiful day of my life" (https:www.facebook.com/#!/shabab6april?sk=wall).[12]

Following the spectacular success of the 25th of January, *the April Movement* released a statement calling for a public strike on January 26 and invited all activists and citizens to continue the protests until Mubarak has resigned. This was the first direct demand for Mubarak to step down, which they presented as the demand of millions of protesters. It mourned the "martyrs" who lost their lives on January 25 for the sake of their country, stressing that it was not going to back down until it realizes its goals or join them. It called people to unite against repression to gain their freedom, dignity and bread. On January 27, it added reports on more protests across the country and on the failure of security forces to deal with them. New posters now called people to join the 'Friday of Rage,' with the aim of "toppling the dictator".

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[12] Most statements posted by the two *Facebook* pages discussed here were in Arabic. *Khalid Said's page* occasional published statements in English. Nearly all of the statements quoted in this paper are translated from Arabic.

Similarly, the success of the 25th of January made *Khalid Said's page* more confident of the potentials of the protests, even after its administrator was kidnapped the following day. On January 26, it used the word 'revolution' for the first time, although it did not explicitly call for Mubarak to step down. It posted a statement hailing the '*Facebook* Youth' of Egypt who demonstrated that they represented the true pulse of the Egyptian street. It stressed the role of the Internet in mobilizing the Egyptians and how the revolution, despite all restrictions, could still be "tweeted and shared" (https:www.facebook.com/#!/ note.php?note_id=197846830229145).

Reporting on the first day of protests, *Ahram*'s main outline was, "Wide Protests and Disorder[,] *in Lebanon*."[13] A smaller report mentioned that thousands demanding job opportunities participated in peaceful protests in Cairo and other governorates. It also reported that people in Upper Egypt did not respond to the calls to demonstrate, but it added that in Ismailia there were slogans against the "state." The Muslim Brotherhood was accused of seeking to turn people against the police. Another piece of news reported that the Egyptians and the police were exchanging "chocolates and flowers" (*Ahram*, 26/01/2011). Commenting on the events of January 26, *Ahram* reported the death and injury of more than a hundred and the arrest of a similar number of "rioters" who incited violence and disorder when the peaceful protests turned violent and public and private properties were sabotaged and vandalized. It highlighted that the Egyptian stock market lost some 30 billion Egyptian pounds, and quoted an Egyptian lawyer calling for the arrest of the leaders of the *April* and *Kifaya* Movements. The Muslim Brotherhood was accused again of fuming the protests to achieve political gains. An interview was conducted with the family of "the martyr of the Egyptian central security forces," a security agent who was killed during clashes on January 25 (*Ahram*, 27/01/2011).

On Friday, January 28, *Ahram* reported that Mubarak was following news about the "events," and that he would inaugurate the Cairo International Book Fair the following day as scheduled. It added that while there were some protests on Thursday in Suez calling for improving the living conditions, Ismailia and Alexandria were calm. Other pieces of news mentioned that protesters in Cairo threw stones on the police, which was chasing young members of the Muslim Brotherhood. It highlighted that the Egyptian stock market lost 40 billion Egyptian pounds. It also reported that Muhammad al-Baradei arrived in Cairo and expressed his readiness to "lead the transitional period" (*Ahram*, 28/01/2011).[14]

Finally, reporting on the events of January 28, *Ahram* mentioned that there were massive protests in Cairo and other governorates. It highlighted news about the escape of hundreds of prisoners, the stealing of weapons from police stations, and

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[13] Emphasis added.
[14] This piece of news must be read in light of the campaign against al-Baradei in the Egyptian state media, including *Ahram*, since he announced his desire to run for the presidency in 2010.

the "widespread" looting and sabotaging of public and private properties, including the main and local headquarters of the NDP, as well as the death and injury of scores of Egyptians. It reported that the army was ordered to "help" the police impose the curfew that was announced on Friday, and that religious scholars urged the Egyptians in the Friday speeches to unite and reject "divisive calls" (*Ahram*, 29/01/2011).

On the other hand, *Shuruq* reported on January 26 that thousands of angry Egyptians took to the streets demanding "change, freedom, and justice." An opposition leader, Osama al-Ghazali Harb, called for the downfall of the regime. The first "martyr" of the Day of Rage was killed on January 25, and the Internet and cell phone services were cut in some places in Egypt. The US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, described Mubarak's regime as "stable" despite the protests (*Shuruq*, 26/01/2011). On January 27, the whole issue of *Shuruq* focused on the "second day of rage," reporting "excessive violence and cruelty," as well as the arrest of more than a 1000 persons. "Street fighting" turned Suez into a copy of Bu Zeid, the Tunisian city which witnessed the first spark of protests during the Tunisian revolution. The Association of Egyptian Writers hailed the "glorious uprising" of the Egyptian people, and the Copts were angry because their Coptic Church announced its opposition to the protests. While Europe and the US called on the Egyptian government to fulfill the demands of the Egyptians, Obama is accused by a *Shuruq* reporter of disregarding the anger of the Egyptians (*Shuruq*, 27/01/2011).

On Friday, January 28, anticipating what was going to happen the same day, *Shuruq*'s main headline read, "Friday of the Martyrs," stressing that "The Egyptian people has surpassed the threshold of fear and will not back down." Conditions in Suez were described as a "state of war." Muhammad al-Baradei arrived in Cairo and is calling for "comprehensive and immediate change" (*Shuruq*, 28/01/2011). The following day, it reported that hundreds of thousands of Egyptians took to the streets on Friday, and that the Egyptian security forces lost control. Public offices and headquarters of the NDP were burnt down, and a number of security forces refused to open fire on the protesters (*Shuruq*, 29/01/2011).

Third Stage: From Saturday, January 29, to Wednesday, February 2, 2011

On Saturday, January 29, Mubarak appointed a vice-president for the first time in thirty years with instructions to start a dialogue with the opposition. A new government was sworn in a couple of days later. However, protesters remained encamped in Tahrir Square calling for Mubarak's resignation. On the evening of Tuesday, the 1st of February, Mubarak delivered a second televised speech, where he acknowledged the legitimate demands of people and promised to fulfill them. He announced that he did not have the intention to run for the a fifth term in September 2011, and that he wished to spend the remaining few months of his term arranging for the peaceful and organized transfer of power. In an emotional

tone, he reminded the Egyptian people that he served Egypt for over 60 years during peace and war, asserting that Egypt was his country, where he was born and where he would die.

This speech created divisions among the Egyptians. A considerable segment of the Egyptians believed that what Mubarak offered sufficed to end the protests, and that the president should not be humiliated in his old age. Others, notably the protesters encamped in Tahrir Square, were outraged by the speech, which drew on the emotions of the Egyptians to give Mubarak and his regime the time to organize their forces and attack the protesters. Amid this division, Mubarak's supporters and sympathizers gathered on Wednesday, February 2, and began to march to Tahrir Square. A few hours before sunset, violent clashes broke out between them and the Tahrir Square protesters. A number of camels and horses attacking the protesters appeared on the scene. By the evening, that turned into a full-fledged warfare, where Tahrir Square protesters were attacked by stones, 'white weapons' (knives, swords, etc.), petrol bombs, and live ammunition by snipers from surrounding buildings. According to protesters, that was the bloodiest day of the revolution, where dozens of them were killed and over a thousand others injured. The 'Battle of the Camel', as it came to be known, ended around dawn, with the Tahrir Square protesters victorious. After this incident, public opinion began to sway again against Mubarak, whose downfall became a matter of life or death.

Since access to it was only partially restored on the 2nd of February (cut on January 28), the Internet did not play a significant role during most of this stage of the revolution. However, the moment it had access to its online page, the main concern of the *April Movement* was to draw off the popular sympathy from Mubarak. They posted video clips showing police trucks running over Egyptians, wondering if Mubarak's speech sufficed to erase these scenes from the Egyptian memory. They published a poster presenting Mubarak with the blood of the Egyptians covering his eyes and mouth, warning him that no matter what he did, he would eventually step down and be brought to justice. From now on, the Movement referred to the protests as "the revolution of the Egyptian youth" that was supported by the Egyptian people.

On Sunday, January 30, *Ahram* was filled with reports about widespread "chaos and looting," side by side with reports about the resumption of "normal life" in some parts of Egypt. The army demands people to respect the curfew, and Muslim religious scholars urge the Egyptian youths to protect the security of Egypt (*Ahram*, 30/01/2011). The following day, it focused again on disorder and the lack of security, for which the Ministry of the Interior is explicitly blamed. It reported that 'popular committees' (which were formed by Egyptians to protect their families and properties) were "helping the authorities" restore order (*Ahram*, 31/01/2011). When news about the new government was announced, *Ahram* reported that the Egyptians were "competing" to restore security and clean the

streets. Losses in Alexandria were reported to amount to 14 billion Egyptian pounds due to instability and insecurity (*Ahram*, 01/02/2011). Huge protests calling for change are reported on Wednesday, February 2. On Thursday, "millions of Egyptians" are reported to have taken to the streets in support for Mubarak. Covering the "Battle of the Camel", *Ahram* wrote that there were clashes between the protesters and Mubarak's supporters, adding that the Egyptian army urged all people to go to their homes. Political parties accepted dialogue with the regime, while the youths praised Mubarak's speech that met their expectations (*Ahram*, 03/02/2011).

Shuruq began its coverage of this period by announcing that "Mubarak is backing down and the Egyptian people are advancing." The slogan of all the protesters became, "The people want to bring down the regime." The Egyptian army ensured people that its goal was to secure them, and popular committees were formed to protect the "revolution" (*Shuruq*, 30/01/2011). On January 31, it reported the proposals of the Vice-President to settle the situation, as well as al-Baradei's assertion that Mubarak would be gone in a few days. Pope Shenouda, patriarch of the Coptic Church, made a phone call to Mubarak and expressed his support to him, whereas the US called for the immediate transfer of power in Egypt (*Shuruq*, 31/01/2011).

On the 1st of February, *Shuruq* emphasized the assertion of the Egyptian army that it fully understood the legitimate demands of the Egyptian people and its commitment to not use force against the protesters. It also emphasized that the new government included 15 ministers from the dismissed Nazif government (*Shuruq*, 01/02/2011). Contrary to *Ahram*, it reported "widespread rejection" of Mubarak's speech, without mentioning divisions among the Egyptians in the front page (*Shuruq*, 02/02/2011). Commenting on the "Battle of the Camel", it described Mubarak as Nero, the Roman Emperor who set fire to Rome, and highlighted attempts of the NDP to thwart the revolution (*Shuruq*, 03/02/2011).

Fourth Stage: From Thursday, February 3, to Friday, February 11

This relatively long stage begins with a stalemate after the "Battle of the Camel", with the protesters encamped in Tahrir Square requesting Mubarak's resignation. On February 10, Mubarak made one last attempt to hang on to power. In his last televised speech, he transferred his authorities as president to the Vice-president, but this speech turned more people against him. The long awaited moment came on Friday, February 11, when the Supreme Council of the Egyptian Armed Forces met without Mubarak. Although that was a clear sign that something serious was taking place, jubilation started only when the Vice-President announced Mubarak's resignation.

During this stage, the concern of the *Facebook* pages that the regime may manipulate popular feelings to foil the revolution continued to guide their online

activities. Speaking as the sons and daughters of the Egyptian families and representatives of the Tahrir Square youths, the *April Movement* pointed out that the regime was only seeking to gain time by calling for a national dialogue, while it was massacring and arresting Egyptians. It hailed those who refused to end the encamping, describing them as "Free Egyptians" who were not deceived by the regime's maneuver to keep Mubarak in power. Additionally, it took much interest in describing life in Tahrir Square, probably to encourage people to visit it. Tahrir Square was described as a "virtuous city," where Muslims and Christians took turns to protect each other during prayers, where people were not discriminated against on the basis of religion or gender, where no crimes took place, and where spirits were high and hope was infinite. Everyone was Egyptian and was willing to sacrifice their lives for the sake of their country and their compatriots, and everyone was confident that the future would be bright. When the big moment came and Mubarak resigned, the two *Facebook* pages were constantly updating their members and visitors on the reaction of people in Tahrir Square. Scenes and videos of huge crowds waving the Egyptian flag, chanting national songs, and dancing in jubilation were posted and circulated.

Ahram's coverage of this stage was a continuation of its coverage of the events of the 3rd and 4th of February. It reported that the Egyptian street was divided between those who supported and those who opposed Mubarak. It highlighted reports about protests and statements by public figures supporting Mubarak and calling for stability to stop the bleeding of the Egyptian economy (*Ahram*, 04/02/2011). Two days later, it reported that the "majority" supported the immediate end of protests, which was also emphasized by religious scholars in their speeches in mosques, highlighting the warning by the Vice-President that Mubarak's resignation would lead to chaos. Editorials discussed attempts by Iran, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the US to take over the revolution (*Ahram*, 5 and 6/02/2011). On February 7, it reported that the US stopped pushing for the immediate transfer of power, adding that the Vice-President agreed with representatives of the Egyptian youths that Mubarak should remain in office until the end of his term. The streets had now gone back to normal, and protesters in Tahrir Square were shouting "against Iran" (*Ahram*, 07/02/2011). The following day, *Ahram* spoke for the first time about the "revolution" and the "martyrs" of the "protests" (*Ahram*, 08/02/2011). The Vice-President's warning that Egypt had to choose between dialogue or face a military coup was highlighted again (*Ahram*, 09/02/2011). When Mubarak resigned, *Ahram* announced, "The people have brought down the regime. The revolution of the youths has forced Mubarak to go. The Egyptians are celebrating" (*Ahram*, 12/02/2011).

During this stage, *Shuruq* highlighted the "marches of anger" everywhere in Egypt, as well as the insistence of the Tahrir Square protesters to continue their encamping until Mubarak's resignation (*Shuruq*, 04/02/ 2011). On February 5, it reported "the beginning of the week of perseverance" (*Shuruq*, 05/02/2011). Most reports in the next couple of days were on the "revolution of rage" or the

"revolution of the 25th of January" (*Shuruq*, 6 and 7/02/2011). On February 9 and 10, it reported that millions of Egyptians joined the protesters (*Shuruq*, 9 and 10/02/2011), and on February 11, it reported that "Mubarak refuses to abdicate" and highlighted the sweeping outrage that his speech caused among the Egyptians. It also highlighted the assertion of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces that it supported the legitimate demands of the people (*Shuruq*, 11/02/2011). On Saturday, February 12, *Shuruq* announced, "The people have won. The revolution has toppled Mubarak" (*Shuruq*, 12/02/2011).

Conclusion

Some conclusions can be drawn from this presentation of selected Egyptian media outlets during the 18 days of the 2011 Egyptian revolution. The Internet-based social networks with their huge membership succeeded in setting off the first spark of the revolution.[15] However, despite many similarities between the two *Facebook* pages discussed here, each had its own character. *The April Movement* was more 'political' in tone than *Khalid Said's page*. As has been pointed, the former was already engaged with the Egyptian street in various parts of Egypt for three years before the revolution. *Khalid Said's page* focused its mobilizing effort primarily on the Internet, calling it "electronic struggle." It also stressed the peacefulness of the protests even if violence was used by the police, whereas *the April Movement* warned the police that if violence was used, the consequences would be tragic.[16] Finally, whereas *Khalid Said's page* sought to raise *hope* of the possibility of change, *the April Movement* sought to create and enhance *confidence* in the possibility and imminence of change.

The success of the online networks resulted out of several reasons. The Internet is used in Egypt primarily by young people belonging to middle- and upper-class groups in urban centers. However, the presence of large numbers of Internet cafés has made it possible for those without private access to nevertheless use the Internet. Furthermore, although some Egyptian youths were politically active before the revolution (but not necessarily members of official political institutions such as political parties), thousands of members of these online networks were typically not actively involved in political life, as became evident when the identity of some of them was revealed after Mubarak's abdication. This factor, together with the fact that these youths were able to communicate without knowing much about each other, made it possible for them to work together without religious or ideological barriers. Furthermore, because of the difficulty of monitoring them and the anonymity of their members, these online networks provided youths with a

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[15] The political use of the Internet in Egypt has a relatively long history. For years Egyptian bloggers have presented and discussed various political, social and economic grievances, covered demonstrations and elections, and exposed the brutality of the security forces.

[16] Violence did take place during the Egyptian revolution. However, it is not yet known who was responsible for setting fire to the headquarters of the NDP, police stations and government offices in various parts of Egypt.

sphere where they could express and discuss ideas, share information and formulate demands with unprecedented freedom. Modern technology, particularly cell phones, has made it possible to access these networks anywhere and anytime (unless the Internet service is cut off by the government, which did take place for a few days during the revolution). Live coverage of events was provided, and eyewitness reports, pictures, and videos were exchanged, depriving the state of the opportunity to manipulate facts before they are published and empowering citizens both as actors and as sources of news.

All these factors reflect the potentials of the Internet as a "pull" and consumer-controlled media, where receivers of the message act on the information they receive. Some scholars (for example, Toulouse, 1998: 4; Kedzie and Aragon, 2002: 108; Abramson, Arterton and Orren, 1988: 32-65) have noted that these advantages of the Internet as a means of communication enhance freedom, participation and the exchange of ideas.[17] These potentials of the Internet were realized by online activists. The administrator of *Khalid Said's page* spoke about how the Egyptian government used to mislead people by its media and how modern technology has made it possible for people "to see the reality of their situation." However, although he believed that *Facebook* was not going to change Egypt, political, social and economic awareness, strong nationalist feelings, enthusiasm for change, and knowledge of modern technology provided Egyptian youths with what they needed to create and boost hope in a country where the majority of the population seems to have been despaired of the possibility of any positive change.

As for the press, the coverage of the two newspapers selected can be analyzed in light of how they relate to the online networks. *Ahram* chose to ignore these networks altogether, focusing instead on employing various strategies to obstruct the revolution. One strategy was abstaining from reporting news about the protests, most likely to avoid providing them with free publicity. Simultaneously, it sought to deflect the attention of people from entertaining the possibility of a popular uprising in Egypt similar to the Tunisian revolution. To do this, it focused on a terrorist attack that shocked Egypt on New Year's Eve and on how that indicated that Egypt was targeted by foreign actors seeking to destabilize it. After the first few days of the revolution, it began to focus on the losses of the Egyptian stock market, and sought to intensify the feeling of insecurity and fear by emphasizing news about runaway prisoners and widespread looting and violence. Its allegations that the Muslim Brotherhood was encouraging people to defy the authorities obviously sought to lead the Egyptians to believe that the protests were in fact an Islamist coup.

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[17] It is worth investigating how public opinion is shaped in these social networks. Unlike in other media, such as newspapers which can shape public opinion over a relatively long period of time, it seems that public opinion is shaped *in* rather than *by* online networks over a relatively short period of time and by significantly larger number and greater diversity of participants.

Moreover, following Mubarak's dismissal of the unpopular Egyptian government on January 31, *Ahram* began to blame the Ministry of the Interior for the deteriorating situation in Egypt, most likely to indicate that the problem was not the regime itself, but rather the security forces that abused their authorities and bullied the Egyptian people. The language that *Ahram* used was also indicative of its objective; for example, it referred to the victims of the police during the revolution as martyrs, while the protesters were referred to as rioters who incited violence and instability. Additionally, it frequently employed outright fabrication of news and manipulation of facts. For example, it reported that the Egyptians were exchanging "chocolates and flowers" with the police officers on January 25 when violent clashes occurred. It spoke of the restoration of normal life in Egypt when millions were encamped and protesting almost everywhere in Egypt. It alleged that there was a consensus among the Egyptians that the protests should end after Mubarak's second televised speech on the 1st of February, while there was a division in public opinion that soon turned against Mubarak after the "Battle of the Camel". It is no surprise, then, that the coverage of *Ahram* and other state-run media reminded people of the Six Day War in 1967, when the Egyptian media reported that the Egyptian forces were destroying the Israeli army, while the exact opposite was taking place.

Shuruq, however, provided an alternative coverage. Evidently seeking to encourage and boost the popular uprising, it provided extensive coverage of the online networks and reported news about the protests even before they actually started. They reflected and stressed the optimism of the organizers in the possibility of a popular uprising in Egypt similar to the Tunisian revolution. During the revolution, it referred to the victims of the protesters as martyrs and hailed the protesters as heroes. It emphasized the international condemnation of the crackdown on the protesters and the calls of some world leaders for Mubarak to step down. It highlighted the growing popular dissatisfaction with the regime and the frustration and rage that each of Mubarak's televised speeches caused. Throughout the 18 days of the revolution, its reports sought to increase the popular feeling that change was already underway, and that all was needed was perseverance. Contrary to *Ahram*, *Shuruq* presented to its readers a picture of an evil, cunning regime that was on the verge of collapse by the heroism and bravery of a defenseless people.

The frames most useful for the present discussion are the mobilization and demobilization frames. According to Charlotte Ryan (1991:70-74), mobilization frames are characterized by a number of features, the first of which is the collective definition of issues, which requires emphasizing their social character and stressing collective responsibility as well as suggesting solutions on a structural level. This social definition of the events was emphasized by the *Facebook* pages and *Shuruq* newspaper which presented the events as a popular uprising aiming at collective benefit. They also emphasized that the change must be structural, i.e. changing the nature of the regime itself (which required its actual downfall) and its

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relationship with people. *Ahram* sought to present the events on a significantly narrower scale. The protests were organized and led by special groups and did not reflect public opinion. In the middle of the revolution, it put the blame on certain institutions or individuals (such as the Ministry of the Interior) and sought to market solutions that did not touch the core of the regime itself (such as changing a government or appointing a vice-president).

A second feature of mobilization frames is conflict. That is, a sharp distinction must be made between one side, 'us,' and a clearly identified challenger, 'them.' In our case, independent media distinguished clearly between 'us' – the people – and 'them' – the regime with all its institutions and symbols. *Ahram*, however, obfuscated, probably deliberately, the identity and nature of the two sides of the events. At times these two sides were the state and the people against rebels, or the state and people against certain officials or institutions, or the state against internal and external forces that sought to lead it to collapse, etc.

A third feature of mobilization frames is the "moral appeal," which can play a significant role in mobilization by portraying acts against the challenger as, according to Ryan, "unjust, unfair, plain wrong, and violates basic social standards in some regards … [as well as] shared moral principles." Indeed, the independent media discussed here highlighted the peacefulness and virtuousness of the protestors,[18] and contrasted this with the brutality and wickedness of the regime. *Ahram*, in contrast, emphasized violence and disorder, for which protesters were directly or indirectly blamed.

In the end, it must be noted that the role of the Internet was not limited to online networks. Bloggers and electronic journalism played a significant role before and during the revolution by their extensive coverage of the protests and their exposure of police brutality. Satellite channels also played an important role. In fact, they may have played the most important role when the Internet and phone services were cut in Egypt. A huge screen was provided to the protesters encamped in Tahrir Square. A radio channel was created to broadcast news and mobilizing songs linked with glorious moments in the modern Egyptian history. All these media contributed in various ways to the downfall of what appeared to be one of the most stable dictatorships in the Middle East, and to the success of a revolution that may change the Middle East for decades to come.[19]

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[18] See how Tahrir Square was described by *the April Movement* in page 16 above.
[19] According to Gamson and Wolfsfeld (1993:116), all movements need validation from some media outlets. In their view, "[r]eceiving standing in the media is often a necessary condition before targets of influence will grant a movement recognition and deal with its claims and demands. Conversely, a demonstration with no media coverage at all is a nonevent, unlikely to have any positive influence either on mobilizing followers or influencing the target."

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