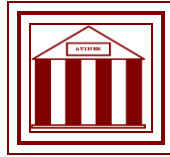# Athens Institute for Education and Research
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Comparative Study of the Impact of Social Networking Sites in Two Recent Mass Movements in Egypt and India

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Dr. Gregory T. Papanikos
President
Athens Institute for Education and Research

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Abstract

Recently we have seen a sudden upsurge of mass protests against establishment in different countries of various parts of world. These movements were generally ignited by the corrupt practices of ruling class. Individual reaction of people against corruption takes collective form sooner or later depending on quality and intensity of communication among people. Thus type of communication is an important factor for the conversion of general dissatisfaction into mass movement. To assess the nature and outcome of mass movements in contemporary world, it is must to assess the role of means of mass communication in general. In recent times particularly internet and social networking sites has emerged as a vital tool of collective communication. In various recent anti establishment movements in different parts of world decisive impact of this new tool of communication has been observed. Therefore, it needs to be critically evaluated. This paper is a small effort in this direction. In the present paper recent movements of India and Egypt are considered. These two countries represent developing countries of two important continents. Both the countries had played decisive role in non aligned movement during the era of cold war and both are assumed to play important role in their regions in the emerging power balance in the new world order of post cold war era. The attempt here is to bring forth the role played by social networking sites in both Egyptian and Indian movement. In this paper an attempt has been made to compare the nature and tendencies of social networking sites and to co-relate this with the outcome of the anti corruption and anti establishment movements in these countries.

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Introduction

In present time internet has emerged as a powerful means of communication. It's importance goes manifold due to the fact that it is the most unregulated means of mass communication. Social networking sites on internet have emerged as a very effective platform of discussion and communication. Recent movements of masses against establishment in Egypt and India have provided us an appropriate opportunity to assess the role of these social networking sites in the mass movements.

After the fall of Egyptian economy the need for change was deeply felt by the people. The Internet had played crucial role as a tool that led to the successful movement in Egypt. The uprising was manifested as a campaign of non-violent **civil resistance**, which featured a series of **demonstrations**, marches, acts of **civil disobedience**, and labor strikes. Millions of protesters from different socio-economic and religious backgrounds demanded the overthrow of the regime of **Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak** (who ruled over Egypt almost for a period of 30 years). Despite being predominantly peaceful in nature, the movement was not without violent clashes between security forces and protesters, with at least 846 people killed and 6,000 injured. The uprising took place in **Cairo**, **Alexandria**, and in other cities in Egypt, following the **Tunisian movement** that resulted in the overthrow of the long-time Tunisian president. On 11 February, following weeks of determined popular protest and pressure, Mubarak resigned from office.

Grievances of Egyptian protesters were focused on legal and political issues including police brutality, state of emergency laws, lack of free elections and freedom of speech, uncontrollable corruption, and economic issues including high unemployment, food price inflation, and low minimum wages. The primary demands from protest organizers were the end of the Hosni Mubarak regime and the end of emergency law; freedom, justice, a responsive non-military government, and a say in the management of Egypt's resources. Strikes by labour unions added to the pressure on government officials. The movement started on 25th of January 2011. The processes of reform are still on till date.

Another movement we are going to consider in this paper is 'India against Corruption' campaign led by Anna Hazare and his team. The movement has gained momentum since April 5, 2011, when anti-corruption activist Anna Hazare began his now-famous hunger strike at the Jantar Mantar in New Delhi. The concrete goal of the movement was to alleviate corruption in the Indian government through the Jan Lokpal Bill. Another important campaign led by Swami Ramdev, aims at the repatriation of black money from Swiss and other foreign banks.

Grievances of mass protesters focus on legal and political issues including political corruption, kleptocracy, and other forms of corruption. The movement was primarily one of non-violent civil resistance, featuring demonstrations, marches, acts of civil disobedience, hunger strikes, marches and rallies, as well as the use of social media to organize, communicate, and raise awareness. The

protests were unusual as they had no political affiliation; most protesters were hostile to attempts by political parties to use them to strengthen their own personal political agendas.

In the present paper recent movements of India and Egypt are considered. These two countries represent the third world countries of two important continents. These movements have proved up to some extent the assumption of **Van Aelst and Stefaan Walgrave** that Political action is made easier, faster by the developing technologies. [1]Both the countries had played decisive role in non aligned movement during the era of cold war and both are assumed to play important role in their regions in the emerging power balance in the new world order of post cold war era. The attempt here is to bring forth the role played by social networking sites in both Egyptian and Indian movement.

Research Problem

It is clear that internet has a decisive impact on the way we perceive social and political interactions on micro or macro level as is said by **Jayne Rodgers in his book Spatializing International Politics: Analysing Activism on the Internet**[2] There is no area of life which is unaffected by the internet particularly social networking sites. The research problem here is to analyze the role played by internet platform and social networking sites in particular in spreading news, creating awareness and eventually making people a part of the process of change which is possible only when people actively become a part of it.

Objective

Following are the objectives of this paper:

- To bring forth the power of Internet as a tool of communication in consolidating the collective consciousness of protestors.
- To bring forth the phenomenon of corruption as a problem that is most potent to become the rallying point for the protestors. Issues of poverty, employment, education are there in the society but these are not as important as the issue of corruption in the mobilization of general public. Whether it be Egypt or India, the corruption by ruling elite has led to mass agitation.

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[1]Peter Van Aelst and Stefaan Walgrav,'New media, new movements?The role of the internet in shaping the'anti-   globalization' movement' chap 5th of Book **Cyberprotest: New Media, Citizens, and Social Movements**, Author: **Brian D. Loader; Paul G. Nixon et al. Routledge, New York, 2004.**

[2]**Jayne Rodgers:** Spatializing International Politics: Analysing Activism on the Internet, Page:1, Introduction ,**Routledge, New York ,2003.**

- To determine the relationship between Internet and consolidation of mass consciousness.
- To establish co- relation between people's involvement in movements and their involvement in online activities.
- To investigate the role of networking sites as the tool of communication and discussion for the people involved in movements.

Hypothesis

The main hypothesis tested in this paper is that on internet and particularly on social networking sites, there is a direct reflection of activities of masses and as they can select and modify the content at their own will**.**

Methodology

In order to analyze the research problem, the following research methodology is adopted:
The study is based on observation method called the content analysis. The content, number of users on internet social networking sites, groups related to the movement and their followers are analyzed.
Views of a few important politicians and officials are also taken into account.

Analysis

The dynamic features of internet and new technologies that were used by people in both nations are discussed in this paper. Following are the main points of discussion:

- The Internet has played a crucial role in bringing unison in people's psyche. The medium provided a larger platform for discussions and to share a range of sentiments. The Internet has been arguably the most harnessed medium among all kinds and has seen the largest audience participation. On Jan 25th, 2011, the world for the first time has witnessed a movement that brilliantly leveraged the power of social networking tools to overthrow a corrupt regime. Facebook, Twitter and blogs were all used to mobilize people all over Egypt. The 30-year dictatorial regime of Mubarak was overthrown in 18 days of peaceful demonstrations.
- Social networking platforms have also played their role. Facebook, already a massive hit in the country, has let people express their sentiments the way they want. A number of Facebook pages have been created dedicated to Anna Hazare's movement in India. India against Corruption (IAC), an NGO supporting the anti-graft campaign, owns a Facebook page

and has more than 454,000 likes. Many other groups and communities were created in the name of fight against corruption. The eMovement in Egypt was sparked by a group of young activists on Facebook calling for nationwide demonstrations to restore people's dignity and ask for reform, freedom and social justice. Through the initiation of different Facebook groups, but mainly the 'We are all Khalid Saed' Facebook group that attracted about 80,000 participants, citizens coordinated their ideas and demonstration logistics via group posts, and comments, while communicating heavily on Twitter and sometimes cell phone SMS services.

- The blogging world was also abuzz with Anna Hazare and his campaign. A range of opinions are expressed while many heated discussions are taking place. Several websites have been created dedicated to the cause. At the IAC website one could find the latest updates on the movement, details of the coming events and a missed call campaign. Wikipedia page provided a timeline on how 'India's anti-graft movement' was spreading. Google News (India) search engine showed Anna Hazare on top for the many days, showing the extensive coverage of the ongoing event. And that's not all, smartphone applications were also created to push the movement and garner more support for it.

Before the Anna Hazare movement, the government hardly had any specific policy regarding the social networking websites and its content. But soon it was realized that the social networking sites were giving a cheap and economical platform to share a common viewpoint and also that these sites were helping them in organizing their protest for pressurizing government to pass lokpal bill in the form they want. It also showed the predictive ability in understanding how a movement may respond to a specific government action or in a certain situation. The government was really in deep pressure by the strength of the masses and it passed the Lokpal Bill in LokSabha in Monsoon Session of 2011. But the Bill failed to get passed in Rajya sabha and the Prime Minister promised the Public that the government will get it passed in the Summer Session (2012) of the Parliament. The government failed to fulfill its promise and during this period the India Against Corruption and other communities and groups(supporter of Anna Hazare Movement) were in touch with each other so as to from actions and policies against the government's unwillingness to pass the Lokpal Bill. Government in this one year period (april2011 to July 2012) did many things to break down the mental and moral aptitude of Team Anna, this includes:

- Allegations of being a RSS man (Anna Hazare) pretending that it is not a mass movement rather it is RSS- BJP led movement against the government.
- Many corruption- related allegations and other law violation charges were levied on Team Anna's prominent members like Arvind Kejriwal, Shanti Bhushan, Kiran Bedi and Prashant Bhushan. Ram

Dev who was at the same time fighting against government's policy of not disclosing the names of black moneyholders outside India was also got harassed by the government (Ram Lila Maidan incident and arrest of Acharya Bal Krishan). After all these actions government also tried to violate the fundamental right to speech and expression by imposing severe hard guidelines on social networking sites.

When the Egyptian government curtailed the internet activities using third party proxies, the young organizers didn't take long to figure out ways to bypass the Egyptian Internet filters and to be able to once again access Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and other Internet sites which led to the full ban on internet by the regime. Google in the meantime launched a new service called 'speak2tweet', which allowed Egyptians to call a regular landline number in Cairo and speak their tweet to an IVR/Voice recognition system. The speak2tweet system would then convert the caller voice message into a text tweet.

- On its launch more than 270,000 people have already pledged their names with the online petition in support of Anna Hazare's 'Fast unto Death' movement to fight corruption in India. The online petition was powered by Avaaz.org, which described itself as 'a global web movement to bring people-powered politics to decision-making everywhere.' The petition was delivered to India's Prime Minister Singh and the media to show India's determination to battle corruption.

Satellite channels like Al-Jazeera, BBC, CNN and others played a major role in the movement in Egypt by broadcasting live images from Tahrir square, sending live updates and clear messages to protestors on the critical gathering points. That drove the regime into a more desperate situation.

- The signatures came in quickly as indicated on the page's real-time 'recent signers' updates. The site stated that 100,000 signatures were gathered in 15 hours. That is about 2 signatures per second. Despite the Internet blackout, landline communication was never blocked; Egyptians found another way to access the Internet through old school landline dialup internet services and fax services. Egyptians living outside Egypt would receive faxes through regular landline phones, use Optical Character Recognition (OCR) technologies to convert the fax image into text contents, and post the contents, news and updates into Facebook, Twitter and different blogs.

On Feb 11th, 2011, US President Barak Obama said:

'There are very few moments in our lives where we have the privilege to witness history taking place. This is one of those moments. This is one of those times. The people of Egypt have spoken, their voices have been heard, and Egypt will never be the same'. [1]

Recently we have seen a sudden upsurge of mass protests against establishment in different countries of various parts of the world. These movements were generally ignited by the corrupt practices of ruling class. Individual reaction of people against corruption takes collective form sooner or later depending on quality and intensity of communication among people. Thus, type of communication is an important factor for the conversion of general dissatisfaction into mass movement. To assess the nature and outcome of mass movements in contemporary world, it is must to assess the role of means of mass communication in general. In recent times particularly internet and social networking sites has emerged as a vital tool of collective communication. In various recent anti establishment movements in different parts of world decisive impact of this new tool of communication has been observed.

Approximately 26% of total population in Egypt is using Internet, where as in India approximately 11% of total population is using Internet. So number of Internet users in ratio to the population is far less in India as compared to Egypt. Out of these internet users 11.4% users are registered on Facebook in Egypt and 3.8% of users are using Facebook in India(Table.1). This shows that Egyptians are more tech savvy as compared to Indians. Percentage of female Facebook users is almost 37% in Egypt and in India the percentage of female Facebook users is almost 27%. Whereas the male users of Facebook are 64% in Egypt and in India the male Facebook users are 73% (approx)(Figure.3). Youth played major role in both Egyptian and Indian movements. Among total Facebook users in India 50% belonged to age group of 15-25 years old and they played crucial role as they were more tech savvy and enthusiastic(Table.2& Fig 2). Internet played a crucial role in overthrowing the dictatorial regime and led to the restoration of democracy in Egypt. This was not done in a single day, people were already agitated and internet disillusioned millions of young people who lost faith in the political leaders and showed their resentment through social media like Facebook. Many of the people think that Internet played a prima facta in the movement but it is exaggerated. Internet played a certain significant role in the movement in both Egypt and India but its nature was complementary rather than core. Technology facilitated and encouraged connections that would have happened anywhere.

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[1]www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/.../remarks-president-egypt

Result and Conclusion

Considering the consequential accumulation of above mentioned movements of India and Egypt, an interesting inference may be drawn here. Egyptian movement accumulated in the exit of Mubarak but Indian movement failed to force political parties to bring an effective Lok Pal Bill into force. On 3rd of August 2012 at Jantar Mantar this movement ended with the declaration of forming a political party and disintegration of leadership. We may find some correlation between the outcome of movements and the nature of the use of internet and social networking sites. Most important difference between Egyptian and Indian net users may be seen in the age wise distribution. In Egypt 58% users were from the age group of 19 to 34 years while in India only 51.9 % users were from age group of 18 to 34 (Table.2 & Fig2). As we know well that such anti establishment movements get strength and edge from the younger participants, we may at least suggest a factor responsible for the different outcomes of movements. Percentage of users in total population in Egypt was also more than that of India. Similar trend we find in the women users. Due to its financial constrains and dependency it is easier to regulate and control traditional media. Internet in comparison provides a freer and more communicative and more instant platform for people who participate or sympathize such mass movements. That is why governments are now seeking to control this form of mass communication. These inferences may not be very conclusive but we cannot ignore them. Probably more studies will enable us to find clear cut correlation between outcome of contemporary movements and nature of use of internet and networking sites.
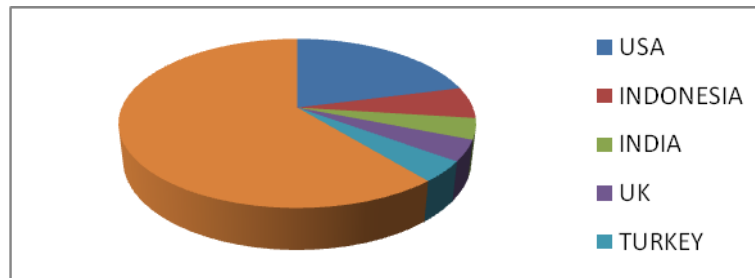
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Table 1. *Number of Internet users till December 2011*

IN EGYPT (total population,82,537000)	IN INDIA (total population:1,210,193,422)
21,691,776 Internet users	1,21,000,000 Internet users
24,72862 Facebook users	41,799,32 Facebook users
Out of total Internet users 11.4% are Facebook users.	Out of total Internet users 3.8% are Facebook users

Source: Internetworldstat.com

According to a report on Internet, Egypt ranks on the 19th position on global Facebook countries list. India ranks 2nd among global Facebook countries list. US leads the global Facebook users with a number of 155 million users.

Figure 1. *Global Leaders*

Source: Online Competitive Intelligence Department eMarketing Egypt info@marketing-egypt.com, www.e-marketing-egypt.com

Table 2. *Users profile as in 2011 in Egypt and India*

Egypt	
Age Group	Percentage
Under 19	29
19-24	29
25-29	18
30-34	11
35-39	5
Over 40	8

Source: Online Competitive Intelligence Department e-Marketing Egypt info@marketing-egypt.com,

India	
Age Group	Percentage
Under 18	20.6
18-25	25.8
26-34	26.1
35-44	14.9
45-54	8
Over 55	4.6

www.e-marketing-egypt.com
Source:http://trak.in/tags/business/2011/05/07/facebook-india-statistics-april-2011/

Figure 2. *Users profile as in 2011 in Egypt and India*
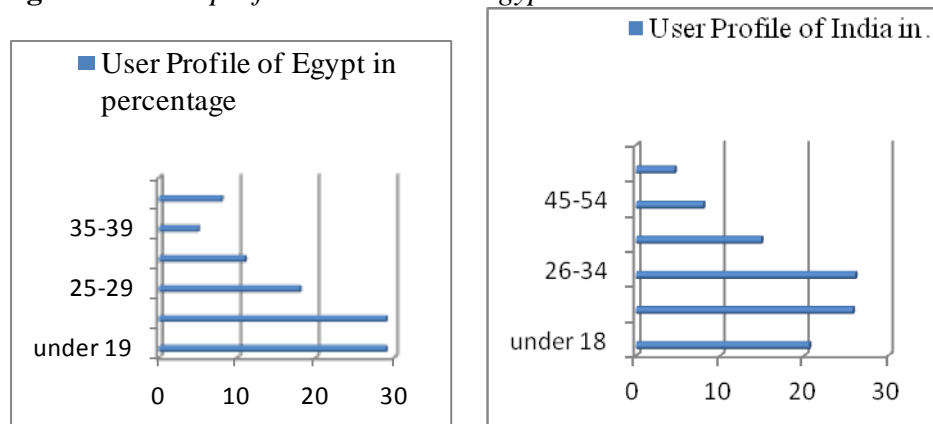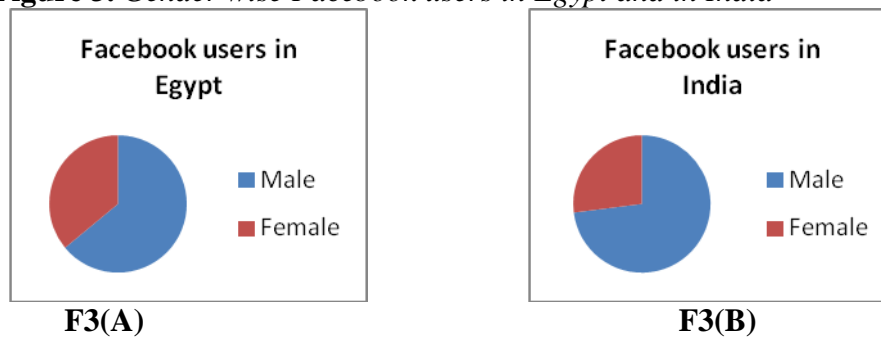
Figure 3. *Gender wise Facebook users in Egypt and in India*

F3(A)

F3(B)

F3(A).Source: Online Competitive Intelligence, www.e-marketingegypt.com
F3 (B) http://fidelus.in/facebook-demographics-for-india[1]

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[1]http://fidelus.in/facebook-demographics-for-india