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Social Media and Democracy: Facebook as a Tool for the Establishment of Democracy in Egypt

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Abstract

Title: Social Media and Democracy: Facebook as a Tool for the Establishment of Democracy in Egypt
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This study examines the role of social media in democracy establishment and promotion. As social media gets more and more popular and well-developed it gives ordinary people an opportunity to share information quickly. Facebook and Egypt's revolution were chosen as a case study to illustrate the issue.

The aim of the thesis is to analyse the role of Facebook in the political development, namely in the promotion and establishment of democracy. The following questions were posed: Whether Facebook can be more liberal and control free than traditional media? Whether Facebook can be constructive and uniting media? Whether Facebook can be regarded as a public sphere?

The theoretical framework assumes that social media being more mobile, easily accessible and less controllable than traditional media may be regarded as a public sphere and consequently facilitate democratic development in a country.

The study is conducted with a case study method and quantitative research method. The results show that Facebook during 2011 revolution in Egypt proved to be mobile, easily accessible, uniting and non controllable media enabling the citizens to share their opinion free and facilitating overthrowing the President and consequently the authoritarian regime led by him. This confirms the theory.

Keywords: Public Sphere, Democracy, Social Media, Facebook, Egyptian Revolution.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Recent years have seen increasing attention being paid to the issue of new media technologies and development. Wireless communication and the gradual diffusion of greater broadband capacity, highly developed mobile technologies and the communications and information-processing power of the Internet is being distributed to all realms of social life, just as the electric grid and electric engine distributed energy in industrial society. There has certainly been recognition that social media is playing a more and more important and significant role in social, economic and political development. The direct or indirect consequences of this increasing importance are now deliberated at high-level political meetings and between heads of state. In other words, the issue of social media and its role in social development overall is no longer merely a question that refers to one territory or related to a particular sphere, but it has become present in different spheres as a powerful factor of change transforming into new mass self-communication (Castells 2009:58-71). Viewed on a global level, the issue of, and application of new media has increasing importance due to latest revolutions in Arab world. As social and political unrest continues in some countries, new media may become a powerful tool for reaching particular goals. In the given paper the role of Facebook in the recent revolution in Egypt is examined.

1.1 Background

At the time when press and media emerged and gained its strength as powerful tool for highlighting public opinion that in its turn enabled people to influence the state power somehow, people gradually realized the power of information. And the stronger the traditional media got, as a way to express public opinion, the more controllable it got. However, as almost always, the craftier one think he is, the more sophisticated an opposite side gets. Media is no exception. Trying to get a way to raise their voice, people start seeking alternative channels for transmitting information. That's what happened in Egypt in 2011. The Egyptian revolution was one of the drastic changes that happened during the Arab Spring – a sequence of revolutions in Arab states in 2010 – 2011. Today the notion of Arab spring is familiar to many and while some start to forget those events, their consequences are still developing. The Arab spring started with Tunisian unrest that began on December 17, 2010 after Mohammed Bouazizi, a 26-year-old fruit and vegetable seller, set himself on

fire after police confiscated his cart because he did not have a permit. After he died from his injuries, protests quickly spread nationwide making people more and more decisive in demanding the current government to resign, elect a new one and solve long lasting problems of high unemployment, corruption and food crisis as well as lack of freedom of speech (Spencer 2011).

In Egypt, 82-year old President Hosni Mubarak had done enough, during his 30 years term, to lose public support (Habeeb 2012: 3) and caused a massive wave of unrest that quickly spread all over the country and resulted in turning the main square in the capital into the battlefield (Hardy 2011). For almost 60 years, Egyptians have celebrated Revolution Day on July 23, to commemorate the day in 1952 when Gamal Abdel Nasser and the Free Officers overthrew the monarchy to establish a republic (Shehata 2011: 137). Starting from 2012, the country celebrates Revolution Day on January 25 – the first day of the mass protests that forced Hosni Mubarak, the country's president for 30 years, from power. 30 years of one man rule, wide spread corruption, patronage, nepotism, economic reforms that did not benefit most Egyptians, but that nonetheless contrasted sharply with the almost complete absence of political change (Haas 2011: 115). Thus, for decades Egypt has been hiding major problems that caused poverty, high prices, social exclusion, elite enrichment, unemployment and corruption in the country. The underlying reasons were always there until a catalyst, the Tunisian revolution, triggered the Egyptians (Chebib, Sohail 2011: 142). Beginning in the mid-1970s, in an attempt to bolster his legitimacy both at home and abroad, then Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat began to liberalize the political system. He allowed opposition parties to gain some representation in the country's elected assemblies. As long as the ruling political party maintained its two-thirds majority and its control over the real levers of power, the Egyptian opposition could contest elections and maintain a limited presence in parliament. When Mubarak came to power, he continued to follow the same formula with few adjustments. However, over the last five years, the Mubarak regime began to violate this implicit agreement, by imposing renewed constraints on the ability of political parties to organize and contest elections. Moreover, the state heavily manipulated the 2010 parliamentary elections in favour of the NDP, effectively denying all opposition groups any representation in the parliament (Shehata 2011: 141). Needless to say that papers and TV channels were under strict control of the government. All these events gradually but surely led the country to the revolution.

After the state's harsh prosecution of Islamists in the 1990s, youth activists began to express their grievances through a new generation of protests open to members of all ideological backgrounds. One such movement was Kefaya, which has attracted legions of previously apolitical youth (Shehata 2011: 142). In 2008, youth activists from Kefaya formed the April 6 Movement in solidarity with textile workers who were planning a strike for that date. The movement attracted 70,000 members on Facebook, making it the largest movement in Egypt of all time. (Ibid.). Members of both the April 6 Movement and Kefaya were behind the creation another popular Facebook group, one supporting Mohamed El Baradei, the former head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). But perhaps the most important Facebook group arose in June 2010, when the activists associated with El Baradei campaign created a Facebook page called "We are all Khaled Said" in memory of a young man who was beaten to death by police officers in Alexandria (Ghayesh 2012: 84). It is quite clear that before the revolution, Facebook was quite popular and powerful channel for information in Egypt¹. Obviously, for unknown reasons it was underestimated by Mubarak's government, since there was no attempt to ban or hack any Facebook group. By the end of 2010, Egypt's youth activists had succeeded in bypassing many of the long standing constraints on political life in the country. All they needed to see their mission to the end was a final, triggering event – and that was gathering momentum some 1300 miles away in Tunisia (Shehata 2011: 142).

Thus, following the Tunisian revolution, a revolution in Egypt began. According to Habeeb, Egypt's underlying social, demographic and economic problems, combined with a political system which allowed little room for legitimate opposition, created conditions that proved ripe for unrest. Rumours that elderly President Mubarak was laying the ground for his son, Gamal, to succeed him became a further source of frustration and resentment. With the rapid overthrow of Tunisia's president Ben Ali in January 2011 serving as an incredible inspiration, Egyptian activists — mostly young, urban, and college educated — launched a nonviolent protest movement that grew rapidly (Habeeb 2012: 3). From the very beginning of the revolution there was nothing related to unrest shown on TV and in newspapers. Quite logically people turned to social media, to Facebook in particular, exchanging with the information of protest organisation. Quickly the anti-Mubarak protestors numbered in their millions and the Egyptian military, the back bone of the regime's political power since the

¹ Between 2008 and 2010, Facebook memberships increased in the broader Middle East 360 percent to 3.5 million (Gelvin 2012: 50-51).

1952 revolution and an institution whose principal concern is security and order, refused to act against the protesters. Faced with this opposition from his erstwhile colleagues, Mubarak begrudgingly resigned (Habeeb 2012: 3). With the presidential elections held on 23-24 May, with a runoff in June, one may assume that revolution in 2011 leads to overthrowing of the authoritarian regime at minimum and heading towards more democratic (Blomfield 2012). Whether Egypt can get democracy established is a highly debatable question, but it is definitely the time when it is much more possible than before.

1.2 Problem formulation

As during the recent Egyptian revolution, traditional media (press and TV mainly) were under close control by the authorities, social media and Facebook, in particular, has become a vital spot for exchanging information related to protests organisation. Before, all the revolutions (unrests) were organised and highlighted via traditional media, but the Egyptian one was different in this sense. The social media component present in the revolution's organisation may have consequences, different from those that may happen after revolutions involving mostly traditional media.

1.3 Purpose

Thus, in the given paper the role of social media, namely Facebook network in Egyptian revolution in 2011 is scrutinised, focusing on possible consequences for political development that may emerge as a result of such a revolution. The main question of the paper is: "Shall Facebook be regarded as a kind of media that may facilitate democratic development?"

To answer this question it is necessary to analyse recent Egyptian revolution and in particular protesters' first-hand experience as well as media discourse at the time the revolution went on. I am also going to answer three additional questions:

- Whether Facebook can be more liberal and control free than traditional media?
- Whether Facebook can be a constructive and uniting media?
- Whether Facebook can be regarded as a public sphere?

The questions are formulated as yes/no questions to let the reader easily grasp the essence of the paper. However, while the final answer maybe yes or no, it requires analytical explanation/justification, why it is so or not.

1.4 Scope and Limitations

The sphere of application of new media is a huge one and includes lots of different aspects. Given the scope of the paper it was necessary to set a few limitations to narrow down the research and make it feasible.

First of all, one should bear in mind that the paper is primarily a case study and the results of this examination may not be applicable in other cases, in other regions of the world, not even in the Northern Africa region. However, the scope of this essay is that the results may serve as a foundation for further research of what role social media may play in democratic development on different phases of the transition towards democracy (for elaborations on case studies see Loader and Mercea 2012). This essay might also be seen as a contribution to the examination of development of social media.

Since social media implies various different social networks and similar sites including but not limited to Facebook, Youtube, Twitter, LiveJournal, Blogpost, etc, it is necessary to focus on one of those. The given paper is a case study of the role of Facebook in democratic development, though in a theoretical framework social media is debated as a whole. Narrowing down the research to Facebook only, apart for a reason of feasibility, may also be explained with the difference between these sites. All the above mentioned social media websites provide different information sharing services. The possible impact upon democratic development caused by the usage of these websites may also be different. For that reason each of them may require separate analysis (or even separate theoretical discussion) that obviously is not feasible within the scope of this paper.

Finally, Facebook is a global network which grows fast with people joining it from more and more territories.¹ In each country Facebook usage may entail different consequences and each country requires a separate research to avoid false generalisation. In the given paper Egypt is taken as a case study, namely, the Egyptian revolution that happened in 2011, where Facebook is believed to have played one of the key roles.

The reader may also refer to the theoretical framework section for some more limitations (subsection 3.2 Democracy and Public Sphere).

¹ On 30 April there were 839,073,380 Facebook users in total. Data retrieved from: <http://www.checkfacebook.com/> on 30 April 2012.

As one of the chosen methods is a quantitative one, focused on the results of a survey conducted among people whose native language is Arabic the language barrier is another limitation of the paper. The point is that I don't speak/read/write Arabic. So it would be a challenge for me to make a survey with open questions or at least with questions more complicated than yes/no questions. The choice to use quantitative methods inevitably led to a simple survey and consequently narrowed the analysis and the scope of the paper. It would be possible to get more data knowing Arabic.

1.5 Disposition

In order to be clear in the mind of the reader and to have quick indication, I have decided to show the disposition of the study with a short summary of each chapter.

Chapter Two: METHODOLOGY

The methodology chapter explains the choice of literature and briefly describes the main sources. It also tells the reader about the methods used in the paper, their merits and demerits as well as sheds some light on validity and reliability of the paper.

Chapter Three: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter provides notions and explanation of main concepts and theories, namely public sphere, democracy, social movements and social media. To make it easy for the reader to see the logic, theoretical framework is build on a 'pyramid principle' when the previous section is a basis for the following one.

Chapter Four: RESULTS

This is the part where the analysis and the results of the study are presented. The chapter is split into several sections depending upon the method used for the analysis.

Chapter Five: CONCLUSION

This chapter wraps up in explaining the findings of the study. That is also where the theory is mentioned again.

Chapter Six: SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

It indicates potential areas for further research emanating from this thesis.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Literature

In order to answer the posed questions I have collected and analysed a large amount of material. To create a theoretical framework section I have used a number of articles and books written by prominent scholars in the field of social media and communication studies. One of the main theoretical sources is Jurgen Habermas' work, namely *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1991). The book is perfect for understanding the origins of public sphere as well as current tendencies of its development. More sources were used in explaining democracy among which one may single out Robert Dahl's *Polyarchy* (1971) and Lipset's "Some social requisites of Democracy: economic development and political legitimacy" (1959). Both papers provided a good description and explanation of democracy. Finally, one of the most crucial works for the paper both in terms of theory and analysis is *Social media and democracy: innovations in participatory politics* by Brian D. Loader and Dan Mercea (eds.) (2012). The book is really a fresh piece of analysis of social media impact on democratic development. For method section the basis of the literature consists of two books, namely *Models, Numbers & Cases: Methods for Studying International Relations* by Detlef Sprinz - Yael Wolinsky-Nahmias, (eds.) and *Adventures in social research : data analysis using IBM SPSS statistics* by Earl Babbie - Fred Halley – William E. Wagner III - Jeanne Zaino (2011). The first one provides very good perspectives upon case study method and the second one serves as a statistical method explanation and a manual for using SPSS software.

The materials that will serve as the empirical evidence of this essay are existing literature on the revolution in Egypt in 2011, news of those events, first-hand experience and questionnaire for those that participated in the Facebook group *دي عيس دل اخ ان لك* (We are all Khaled Said, further in the text the group will be referred as We are all Khaled Said) that allegedly lead to the unrest. Precisely this data makes the paper different from the literature on the issue we have now. Since the events are still developing, there is little data on those that directly or indirectly participated in the revolution via the Facebook group We are all Khaled Said. The majority of current works focuses either on news (facts) on the events of the revolution or on first-hand experience of those who participated in the revolution. In the given paper, all the mentioned literature is also used, however, in addition I will use

quantitative data too. More details on the latter one may found in the subsection 2.3 Quantitative Research Method.

2.2 Case Study Method

Analysis in the paper is done on the basis of the case study method mainly. Bennett defines a case study method as the investigation of a well-defined aspect of a historical happening that the investigator selects for analysis, rather than a historical happening itself (Bennett 2004: 20). Applying this to the given topic – it is not the revolution that is analysed but the role of social media in the revolution.

The method is ideal for testing theories, as one can see from the research questions and theoretical framework subsection, there is a hypothesis or theoretical assumption made in the paper and then tested in the analysis section. Case study method, as pointed out by Bennett, may focus on theory-testing at the expense of theory development (Bennett 2004: 21). It is important to keep in mind, however, that there are several kinds of contributions to theory, including the generation of new hypotheses (the “logic of discovery”) as well as the testing of existing ones (the “logic of confirmation”). In addition, Bennett has identified several kinds of research objectives, including not only the development of generalised theories but the historical explanation of particular cases, that is explanation of a sequence of events that produce a particular historical outcome in which key steps in the sequence are in turn explained with reference to theories or causal mechanisms (Bennett 2004: 21).

Since the government banned the traditional media during the revolution one may assume that social media was crucial for the success. This means that Egypt’s revolution 2011 may serve as a most likely-case, if Facebook played an important role in the revolution in Egypt one may assume that it was also equally significant in other countries that constituted Arab spring. However, one should bear in mind though; that this is primary a case study and the results of this examination may not be applicable in other cases (for details see subsection 1.4 Scope and Limitations). This makes the chances of confirmation of the theoretical hypothesis higher, however, in case the theory fails to explain the most likely case, it will greatly undermine confidence in the theory (Bennett 2004: 29).

Nevertheless, case study method has its disadvantages. It gives few possibilities for generalisation. Case study method cannot measure those variables as precisely or permit as precise a calculation of the magnitude of an effect or the relative importance of multiple

causes. This is one of the most obvious advantages of statistics. This disadvantage is described a bit more detailed in the following subsection 2.4 Validity and Reliability.

2.3 Quantitative method

Another part of analysis is made on the basis of the quantitative research method. It implied the request to fans of the Facebook group We are all Khaled Said to complete the questionnaire about the role of Facebook in Egypt revolution 2011. This would show the expectations of those who participated in the group activity at the time of the revolution. The link to online questionnaire was sent to the fans (survey can be found here: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/5BLJWW3>). That made people who answered the questions and the author of the questionnaire completely unrelated. All those that took part in the questionnaire did that voluntary and completely confidentially. The survey contained no questions about age, sex, professional occupation, city of living, etc. This, unfortunately greatly reduced the scope of conclusion, since knowing what people think of Facebook in Cairo and Alexandria would be good for the paper. However, since the country is still in the process of getting a new government, clashes and protests occur from time to time, people being afraid of prosecuting, might consider the survey as an attempt to gather data on those who participated in the revolution and refrain from filling the questionnaire.

It was not possible to give multiple responses from one computer (option available at www.surveymonkey.com) and the link was sent directly to fans of the Facebook page. Questions were posed in two languages – English and Arabic. I know a few words in Arabic and I cannot read and write the language. In order to translate the questions I used google translate and also checked the questions with a friend of mine that studied Arabic language. Since all the questions are of yes or no type it was not difficult to get them. However, the language did limit the survey and the paper as a whole (see more in section 1.4 Scope and Limitations).

Quantitative data is not an ideal mean to find out answers for all the questions. Actually its critique in many cases was a ground for qualitative method's development (Flick 2006: 34). But despite that some scholars argue that quantitative method has several disadvantages and cannot explain much, still statistics will show much more than qualitative analysis (Flick 2006: 35). Usage of that method can give us a good view on general picture of the role of Facebook in the revolution. But by using statistical method, it's almost impossible to find

out anything else than just “general picture”. Unfortunately, this kind of research methods does not allow posing and consequently answering questions like why or how. It is difficult to use this method to find out why Facebook can be regarded as a public sphere or why Facebook can be more liberal and control free than traditional media and finally why it can be constructive and uniting media. Moreover the people who constitute the statistical data might not be educated enough to answer such questions. Statistical method allows us only to make a conclusion from ‘raw’ data on people’s views on the role, Facebook played in the revolution. It has nothing to do with processes or any kind of underlying motives. It gives only superficial data.

But at the same time one can afford another thing to do which one can hardly do using other than quantitative methods (Silverman 2006: 303). Statistics gives an opportunity to generalize. This is definitely an advantage of the method. The degree of generalizing (depending on a sample) (Silverman 2006: 304) can increase validity of the study and consequently veracity of the relevant conclusion. The latter will not ground on a single case study (Flick 2006: 34, Silverman 2006: 35). Using quantitative method it will be easy to make the work structured (fixed) and objective. But at the same time, the quantitative method, being fixed, limits flexibility of the work (Silverman 2006: 35).

The social researches use two types of statistics. They are descriptive and inferential types of statistics. The former type allows us to describe or summarize the main features of our data or the relationships between variables in the data set. Available tools in the SPSS software include frequencies, calculating mean and standard deviation as well as calculating lambda and Cramer’s V values (for nominal variables) in order to measure the strength of association between two variables. The association between variables imply how the knowledge of one variable influences our knowledge about another. However, it still does not prove a causal link between variable. It simply shows that there may be a causal link (Babbie et al. 2011: 168).

All descriptive statistics tools except frequencies, lambda and Cramer’s V values can be calculated for continuous variables only. Because of the survey questions, the variables in the given paper are nominal and that allows running frequencies, lambda and Cramer’s V functions only.

Inferential statistics in contrast to descriptive one, allows us to go a step further by making it possible to draw conclusions or make inferences that extend beyond the items in our

particular data set to the larger population. In short, one can use inferential statistics to help us learn what our sample tells us about the population from which it was drawn. SPSS allows calculating Chi-square value that shows the statistical significance of the data gathered in the sample (Babbie et al. 2011: 260).

2.4 Validity and reliability

One of the greatest strengths of case studies is the opportunity to achieve high levels of construct validity, or the ability to measure in a case the indicators that best represent the theoretical concept we intend to measure. Many of the variables of interest to researchers, such as democracy, power and political culture, are notoriously difficult to operationalize and measure. What constitutes a "democratic" procedure in one cultural context might be profoundly undemocratic in another. Thus, it is important to carry out "contextualized comparison," that is, comparison that "self-consciously seeks to address the issue of equivalence by searching for analytically equivalent phenomena - even if expressed in substantively different terms – across different contexts" (Bennett 2004: 34). This requires detailed consideration of contextual variables, which is extremely difficult to carry out in statistical studies but common in case studies. Whereas statistical studies run the risk of "conceptual stretching" if they lump together dissimilar cases to get a higher sample size, case studies move in the opposite direction, refining concepts with a higher level of validity but doing so at the cost of producing generalisations applicable only over a smaller number of cases. Put in other terms, there is a trade-off between achieving a high level of construct validity, which is easier to do in case studies, and establishing a high level of external validity, or the ability to apply findings across a wide population of cases, which statistical studies are better suited to doing (Ibid, Odell 2004: 69).

As for reliability, which according to Uwe Flick means a possibility of having the same results while using a particular method (Flick 2006: 369), the sufficient amount of information available on the issue and relative high degree of its trustworthiness make it possible to argue that the same results can be easily obtained with the same method (case study) by another researcher. However, one should bear in mind that revolutionary events in Egypt are not over yet and particular development of the political situation in the country

may change people's attitude towards the revolution and the role of social media. That's why the whole process of government overthrowing in Egypt may be pictured differently.

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the given section I will provide theories and concepts explaining terms of democracy, public sphere and new media as well as elaborating on the interrelations between them. That will further be used in the section of analysis.

3.1 The evolution of the Public Sphere

There is hardly any analysis of media and its role for development that can be done without at least mentioning Jurgen Habermas theory of public sphere. In the given paper, Habermas' theory will be used as one of the main theories to describe the development of media and explain the new media and its role for democratic development.

Jurgen Habermas in his important early work *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* explored the origins, radical potentials and ultimate degeneration of the bourgeois public sphere of the eighteenth century (Habermas 1991). It was this public sphere of rational debate on matter of political importance that helped to make parliamentary democracy possible and which promoted enlightened ideals of equality, human rights, and justice (Habermas 1991: 69). Habermas described this sphere in terms of both the actual infrastructure that supported it and the norms and practices that helped critical political discourse flourish. The European public sphere formed in the urban culture of the seventeenth century with its coffee houses, intellectual and literary salons, and print media. In this nascent public sphere communication was guided by a norm of rational argumentation and critical discussion in which the strength of argument was more important than the identity of the speaker (Ibid: 54). Citizens criticized the state and checked government power via rational debate in the public sphere. In a way it was rather the principle of integrating people into the state (Ibid: 120). Referring to 18 century, Habermas notes that the press was for the first time established as a genuinely critical organ of a public engaged in critical political debate: as the fourth estate. While quite a great deal of things have changed since that time the press gave an opportunity for people to have an opinion (Ibid: 60).

Public opinion had the form of common sense. It was dispersed through people in the form of prejudices, but even in this turbidity it reflected "the genuine needs and correct tendencies of common life (Ibid: 120). It was formed in public discussion after the public, through education and information, had been put in a position to arrive at a considered opinion.

Due to the parliamentary democracy which emerged to some extent due to the public sphere, the public opinion reigned but did not govern. With the help of parliamentary discussion, public opinion makes its desires known to the government, and the government makes its policies known to public opinion (Ibid: 239).

However, eventually, Habermas tracked the decay of the public sphere as an institution with industrialization and the rise of the mass popular media. As he puts it:

“...the mass media have on the one hand attained an incomparably greater range and effectiveness — the sphere of the public realm itself has expanded correspondingly. On the other hand people have been moved ever further out of this sphere. The more people’s effectiveness in terms of publicity increased, the more they became accessible to the pressure of certain private interests, whether individual or collective. Whereas formerly the press was able to limit itself to the transmission and amplification of the rational/critical debate of private people assembled into a public, now conversely this debate gets shaped by the mass media to begin with.” (Habermas 1991: 188).

To Habermas’ mind all the ‘problems’ have started when the press got commercial and profitable oriented, making people simple consumers of the information (Ibid: 184-190). The advertising business put financial calculation on a whole new basis. In a situation of greatly lowered price per copy and a multiplied number of buyers, the publisher could count on selling a correspondingly growing portion of space in his paper for advertisements. These initial attempts at a modern commercial press gave back to the journal the unequivocal character of a private commercial enterprise. If at first, within a daily press that was primarily politically motivated, the reorganization of individual enterprises on an exclusively commercial basis still represented nothing more than a possibility for profitable investment, it would soon become a necessity for all editors. For the upgrading and perfection of the technical and organizational apparatus demanded an expansion of the capital basis, an increase of the commercial risks, and, necessarily, the subordination of entrepreneurial policy to the demands of business efficiency. The relationship between publisher and editor changed correspondingly. Editorial activity had, under the pressure of the technically,

advanced transmission of news, in any event already become specialized; once a literary activity, it had become a journalistic one. The selection of material became more important than the lead article; the processing and evaluation of news and its screening and organization more urgent than the advocacy of a "line" through an effective literary presentation. Governments brought the agencies into indirect dependence and bestowed on them a semi-official status not, of course, by eliminating their commercial character but by exploiting it (Ibid: 184-190).

According to Habermas, commercialized mass media have turned the public sphere into a space where the rhetoric and objectives of public relations and advertising are prioritised. Commercial interests, a capitalists economy and mainstream media content have colonized the public sphere and compromised so important for a proper public sphere, rational and democratic public discourse, with television frequently playing a vanguard role (Habermas 2004, cited in Papacharissi 2010: 116).

However, as everything else, Habermas' public sphere could be easily criticized and has been under attack from different scholars. The essence of the critique is exclusion and limitation of the public sphere. As Outhwaite notes, Marxists point out limitations of the sphere in terms of class, feminists in terms of gender and liberal-conservative critics stress the importance of the private interests as against the general will (Outhwaite 2009: 11). And to some extent the critique is sound. The public sphere does provide the opportunity to participate in the process of governance for some people, excluding other. Whether it is uneducated people or women, it doesn't matter, the fact that relatively big part of society may stay out of the public sphere is sad. However, Habermas claimed that this fact eventually resulted in pluralisation of the public sphere (Outhwaite 2009: 12).

3.2 Democracy and Public Sphere

During the twentieth century many scholars have tried to explain democracy in broad and narrow meanings. The concept of democracy has been constantly evolving making previous research obsolete and outdated consequently creating the need and space for further research and explanation.

As Diamond argues, there is a powerful association between democracy and liberty which means that countries that hold free elections are overwhelmingly more liberal than those that do not (Diamond 2003: 30). Assuming this as a main feature of the modern democracies one

can separate out several key features typical for democracy. Starting with minimalist definition which is often called electoral democracy, it implies a system for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote (Diamond 2003: 31). Competitive elections were also defined as an essence of democracy earlier by Robert Dahl: according to whom democracy implies holding elections in which the opposition has some chance of winning and taking office (Dahl 1971: 7-8). Beside opposition and participation as necessary conditions for democracy, Dahl also added civil liberty which implied freedom to speak and publish dissenting views, freedom to form and join organisations and alternative sources of information (Dahl 1971: 2-3). However, Dahl's definition encompasses nonelectoral dimensions of democracy in order for competition and participation to be meaningful, it still does not devote much attention to them nor it incorporates it into actual measures of democracy. However, modern democracies are quite often referred to the definition of liberal democracy that includes besides of the elements of electoral democracy few others, among which the special attention deserves the one that implies extensive provisions of political and civic pluralism as well as for individual and group freedoms, so that contending interests and values may be expressed and compete through ongoing process of articulation and representation, beyond periodic elections (Diamond 2003: 35). This feature is often considered as a result of the social and political change and development which gradually moved it almost to the forefront of the definition of democracy. However, main features of modern liberal democracy were actually defined by Lipset earlier:

1. The dependence of policymaking institutions in government.
2. The right of political leaders to compete for support and for votes.
3. Freedom to form and join organisations.
4. Freedom of expression (Lipset 1959: 69-105).

The only thing that Lipset did not include in the list at that time, was Diamond's 'ongoing process of articulation and representation, beyond periodic elections' mentioned above. It is crucial for understanding and following the given paper, since it along with Lipset's features resulted in well-working public sphere that appeared so vital for democracy, according to Habermas (see subsection 3.1).

The scholars also identify several types of democracy, depending upon the way the public participates in the governance process. It is necessary to make clear for the reader which type of democracy will be referred in the given paper.

Initially, long ago in ancient Greece democracy meant that each and every citizen had an equal and meaningful chance to participate in lawmaking (Urbinati 2008: 2). This is an ideal type of democracy where each person plays his or her part in every decision about the policies in the country. They attend regular meeting where issues are debated and then they vote according to their opinions. This kind of democracy is usually called direct democracy (Woolf 2006: 4-5). Obviously it is extremely difficult for modern huge societies to organise system of governance in such a way. Therefore, modern democracies have adopted a simplified version of direct democracy often called representative democracy, which enabled citizens to elect representatives to participate directly in decision making thus making citizens free from everyday burden related to state governance (Ibid).

As it is clear from Diamond' and Lipset's definitions, deliberation was one of the key elements of democracy of any kind. Deliberation was the consequence of citizens' participation in the process of the governance. It implied decision making through discussions among citizens (or their representatives) when the issues were considered on their merits (Fishkin 2009: 11). This is what unites all the types of democracy - the ability to express own opinion in such a way participating in the process of decision making. This is the essence of democracy. That is when we come to the public sphere, as Habermas put it, the one that helped to make parliamentary democracy (participatory democracy) possible and which promoted enlightened ideals of equality, human rights, and justice (Habermas 1991: 69). The thing is that Habermas has described and explained public sphere for the representative (parliamentary) democracy mainly. The public sphere in the society with representative democracy is quite logically occupied by the political parties. So in practice the role of a citizen in the process of decision making implies his or her vote during the parliamentary elections and then more or less passive observation how the important issues are being discussed in the parliament. Since media got commercial and provided little opportunity for citizens to express opinions and ideas, the regular people exercised their power upon the government at the day of the elections only. Donatella Della Porta argues that this is the most direct expression of the democratic principle. But the power to vote periodically and thus bestow legitimacy to an elected government is almost always

accompanied by a wish to exercise a more permanent form of control over the government thus elected (Della Porta 2011: 802). Again going back to Habermas' decay of the pure public sphere due to the commercialization of the mass media and few opportunities for regular citizens to express their opinion in a traditional media, one comes to the conclusion that the public discusses what the media suggest to discuss. And since the media remains the main stage where public discourse is formed we get to the Castells's conclusion of "what does not exist in the media does not exist in the public mind" (Castells 2007: 241). As political actors are those who exercise considerable influence over the media and who the media uses to feed content relentlessly, it makes collective the main ingredient of the traditional mass media (Ibid). An overwhelming majority of the public feel they have 'not very much influence' or 'no influence at all' over decision-making in both their local area and the country as a whole (Pearce 2010: 28). However, the ongoing disaffection with representative democracy does not necessarily confirm an unwillingness to get involved (Ibid). Therefore an increasingly vital necessity for a new information channel for ordinary people arises. That leads us to another type of democracy called participatory democracy.

If we go back to the Habermas' public sphere where citizen are able to discuss their ideas and convince each other by the force of the better argument in such a way influencing the decision making and if we also bear in mind the decay of the traditional media as a space where public debate used to take place we can get to the need, stressed by the concepts of participatory democracy, with growing success, to develop public spheres, characterized by free and equal participation (Della Porta 2011: 803). Within participatory conceptions of democracy, to use Barber's (1984: 173) words, 'at the heart of strong democracy is talk', and democratic talk requires listening as well as uttering. With various emphases, also theorists of deliberative democracy stress the importance of communication, as in deliberative democracy people are convinced by the force of the better argument (Habermas 1998).

Therefore, participatory democracy implies the access for citizens to policy decision and the ability to influence those decisions (Zittel 2007: 17). Here one has to be careful, because participation may easily lead to the empirical model of direct democracy which as it was stated above is difficult to organise in modern huge societies. Some scholars even use both concepts as synonyms. However, in the given paper it is assumed that there are other institutional means to implement the notion of participatory democracy rather than paying

attention to direct democracy (Ibid). As one may see participatory democracy is characterised by features very similar to liberal democracy.

The result of citizen participation is empowerment which as Nylén argues, is the construction of active social subjects defining for themselves what they consider to be their rights and fighting for recognition of those rights (Nylén 2003: 27). As he further argues, empowerment refers to the transformation of an individual's prior mentality of fatalism and dependency on "higher ups" and /or an active disgust regarding all things political, to a new sense of personal responsibility to struggle against systemic exclusion and domination, and belief in one's efficacy to be successful in doing so (Nylén 2003: 28). This requires the formation of a free and independent public opinion, one that is not subjected to the large means of communications, and that, as such, may form a solid foundation capable of constructing of permanent opposition to the process of domination; a process that flows through large media and huge monopolies of information (Ibid). Thus, under the participatory democracy citizen can form an independent opinion, exercise the power over the government and participate in the politics via an independent communication channel which social media can be. However, Habermas described also the importance of the public sphere for more 'classic' types of democracy ranging from Greek democracy to the forms of bourgeois democracy and more modern democracy in welfare state capitalism (Kellner 2000: 261). For these kinds of democracy public sphere provided a place for rational debate for all the citizens. But as the public sphere decayed and democracy evolved quite logically both transformed into different types. As Kellner argues, public sphere began facilitating public participation and debate over the key issues of the current conjuncture and which consequently promotes the cause of participatory democracy (Kellner 2000: 260-1).

3.3 Social Media, Public Sphere and Democracy

Before drawing lines between the above mentioned three notions, perhaps, it is necessary to give a general notion of social media or new media (two terms are used in the paper interchangeably). The key lies in the two words. As Safko points out social refers to the instinctual needs we humans have to connect with other humans. The second part of the term refers to media we use with which make those connections with other humans (Safko 2010: 4). However, in the given paper social media implies Facebook (see scope limitations subsection).

Speaking about social media which implies social mobilisation one should also mention social movement concept. Scholars interpret the concept of social movements differently – in a broad and in a narrow way.

One of the main definitions of a social movement was made by Herbert Blumer. He defined a social movement as a collective enterprise seeking to establish a new order of life (cited in Crossley 2002: 3). One may argue that the enterprise may try to establish another order rather than a new order, since a new one usually means the one that was never the case before, while social movements may be directed at establishing an order that existed earlier. So, we take a collective enterprise and a new order out of this definition.

Another definition, being worth our attention, was made by Ron Eyrman and Andrew Jamison. It implies that social movement is a temporary public space, as a moment of collective creation that provides societies with ideas, identities and even ideals (cited in Crossley 2002: 4). Here the important feature is temporality of a movement and new ideas.

Sidney Tarrow states another important feature here, claiming that a social movement may consist “...of ordinary people often in league with more influential citizens...” (cited in Crossley 2002: 4).

Thus, making sense out of all these definitions, one may define a social movement as a temporarily collective enterprise consisting of ordinary and more influential citizens seeking to establish a new order of life or/and provide society with new ideas.

Social media is a perfect example of a social movement. People are mobilised with new ideas, desires to establish new orders or to improve the current. However, mobilisation of people from different society groups is different. As Zibechi rightly points out, elites and masses mobilize in completely different ways. The former do it vertically, closely linked to the institutions; social action takes place in a ‘cautious and controlled’ manner and its high points comes in electoral contests. However, the mobilisation of the poor is, on the contrary, horizontal, more spontaneous and based ‘on the traditional kinship and territoriality or associations of class’ that appear linked to the insurgency (Zibechi 2010: 11). Therefore the social media in Egypt is quite likely to function according to the above mentioned principles.

With the emergence of Web 2.0 technologies and new media citizens became able to be journalists themselves avoiding unnecessary mediation of traditional media. As Castells put it:

“The powerful have been spying on their subjects since the beginning of history, but the subjects can now watch the powerful, at least to a greater extent than in the past. We have all become potential citizen journalists who, if equipped with a mobile phone, can record and instantly upload to the global networks any wrongdoing by anyone, anywhere” (Castells 2009: 413).

Multiplying the spaces for exchange of ideas, the Internet also improves mutual understanding by allowing for the development of multiple, critical public spheres. As Networked media has the potential to re-configure communicative power relations, by facilitating social networking and ‘user-centred innovation’, citizens are said to be able to challenge the monopoly control of media production and dissemination by state and commercial institutions (Loader, Mercea 2011: 759). Freed from the necessities of professional media and journalist skills or the centralized control and distribution of industrial mass media organizations, social media is instead seen to be technologically, financially and (generally) legally accessible to most citizens living in advanced societies (Ibid). Equipped with social media, the citizens no longer have to be passive consumers of political party propaganda, government spin or mass media news, but are instead actually enabled to challenge discourses, share alternative perspectives and publish their own opinions. Diamond rightly notes, in an age of widespread communication and political consciousness, people expect political participation and accountability much more than they did in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Diamond 2003: 30). However, whether this new ways of expressing opinion may be regarded and should be regarded as rational, political and public – that is the question.

Democratic potential of social media may be easily questioned. One of the main features of Habermas’ public sphere was rationalism of the debate that took place in the sphere (Habermas 1991: 54). In this regard social media is usually somewhat simple and may not be characterised as rational. However, as Loader and Mercea put it if we move beyond the traditional engagement with mainstream politics, such as voting, party membership, petitioning representatives and the like, and adopt a more open conception of democratic citizenship, a different focus and set of questions emerge (Loader and Mercea 2011: 761). Those which are more attuned to the potential changing perceptions of citizens less inclined to be dutiful and open instead to a more personalized and self-actualizing notion of citizenship. An approach that does not valorize the more rigid one-dimensional political identities of previous times but instead recognizes the multiplicity of identity positions that

citizens are required to grapple with in contemporary societies, where the spheres for democratic engagement reach into the private spaces to enable the personal to become political (Hawthorn and Lund 1998: 37, 41-2). In this framework, it may be possible to interpret the democratic potential of social media in a new light (Loader and Mercea 2011: 761).

The distinctiveness of current social media is the displacement of the public sphere model with that of a networked citizen-centred perspective providing opportunities to connect the private sphere of autonomous political identity to a multitude of chosen political spaces (Papacharissi 2010: 166). It thus represents a significant departure from the earlier restricted and constrained formulations of rational deliberation with its concomitant requirement for dutiful citizens. In its place is a focus upon the role of the citizen-user as the driver of democratic innovation through the self-actualized networking of citizens engaged in lifestyle and identity politics (Papacharissi 2010: 151-152).

Most sites of public discourse do not remain public in their entirety and for eternity, and therefore issues that are debated in the public sphere simultaneously are discussed outside of it (Papacharissi 2010: 118). That makes democratic discussions robust, transnational and diverse. Thus, one could look for the kinds of political public self-expression more widely experienced and performed through a variety of text, visual, audio and graphic communication forms. The playful repertoires of innovative YouTube videos, mobile texting language, Facebook posts, protest music and the celebration of trivia may all be regarded as aspects of the political as well as public and rational.

Finally, the main argument which allows discarding large amount of the critique of the democratic influence of the new media is that the latter evolves extremely quickly providing the public with qualitatively new opportunities for sharing views and ideas. Needless to say that Facebook, one of the biggest social networks was created in 2004, the biggest video sharing website Youtube did not exist before 2005 and the most popular micro blogging site Twitter goes back to only 2006. Each year the technology and specialists of those social media giants allow us to indulge with new features. All this factors makes it difficult to be confident making conclusions of any kind. Even the given paper may be easily disregarded e.g. in 6 month because of possible ICT revolution that completely changed the way social media used to function.

Thus, theoretically, a possible hypothesis that may be assumed based on the above is that social media may contribute into development of democracy leading to development of at least two features that according to Lipset are typical for democracy. These are the freedom of expression, freedom to form and join organisations and indirectly to the dependence of policymaking institutions in government (Lipset 1959: 69-105).

4 RESULTS

In this section I will present an analysis of the development of the revolution in Egypt in January 2011 and the role of Facebook in it. The section consists of three subsections. The reason of such a division is three additional research questions posed in the beginning of the paper.

4.1 Case study

4.1.1 Facebook is a more liberal and control free media?

During the revolution, Facebook appeared to be a last resort for people when every other media did not work.

On January 25, 2011, anti-Mubarak protestors numbered in their millions. Consequently, media tension intensified and the government's battle to control the message became more desperate. The authorities, finally realizing the importance of social media for gatherings, pulled the plug on the country's internet and shut down the phone service for a while and escalated attacks on journalists. Many TV channels had their broadcasting license withdrawn and their reporters were held under arrest. As anti-Mubarak demonstrators orchestrated one of the biggest political protests in recent Arab history, Egypt's online activists and reporters from the regions and around the world resisted government crackdowns. People tried 'tweeting', 'facebooking' and 'videoing' the revolution (Web 1).

A clear disconnection between the Egyptian state and its people was that while in the Tahrir Square there were around 2 million people, main TV channels broadcasted music videos. At the same time the internet and satellite TV broadcasted the protests from the main square. That was not surprising. Many people looked at state television as a joke. Nobody took that media seriously. The contrast between state media and satellite channels was huge. Egyptian state television turned to typical propaganda broadcasting virtually giving no information about protests (Web 1). So the Egyptians were subjected to two parallel media discourses. The first showed the rally taking place in the capital and other cities, another confirmed that the government was in control of the country. Lots of journalists were arrested or at least detained for some time. And the Deputy Chief of Naal TV, Shahira Amin publicly resigned, saying she could not be a part of the propaganda effort any more. When Mubarak appeared on TV it proved that state TV experienced a complete schizophrenia as the President did not

answer any of the people's questions. The public demand was completely unmet (Web 1). But asserting control was not easy any more. The Arab media landscape was no longer exclusively controlled by the state. The last fifteen years saw a lot of change. So at first there was a television media revolution that allowed people to see what was happening from alternative TV channels. Then they had an independent media revolution which implied the birth of independent newspapers that did not affiliate to any political party and obviously not the state. And most importantly there was a social media revolution in which young people from the country have taken part to mainly Facebook, Twitter, blogs and all the new types of social media. When the revolt in the streets escalated the Mubarak government went desperate to control the communications. That was the crisis of traditional media that were under absolute control of the state. At the same time, people were setting events, sharing news and self-organising in Facebook (Idle and Nunns 2011: 28).

Facebook is the most popular social media network in the Middle East and has 10,644,600 users in Egypt as of May, 2012 (Web 2). According to Arab social media report by Dubai school of government 78% of Egypt's Facebook users are between the ages of 15-29 years and 22% users are above the age of 30 years (Web 3). Perhaps, that's why the revolution is sometimes called Egypt's youth revolution. In the second edition of a series of reports produced by the Governance and Innovation Program at the Dubai School of Government, it has been observed that among Arab countries, Egypt has seen the highest increase in the number of Facebook users in the first quarter of 2011. The report surveyed Facebook users in Tunisia and Egypt and also found that six out of 10 respondents in both countries said that blocking access to social media provided a boost to the revolutions (Web 4).

Moreover, as it was mentioned in theoretical framework section, social media, being faster, got a potential to influence traditional media. There is no need to announce a planning of the event on TV channel if everyone has already heard via social media of that event had happened. 95% journalists working in Middle East use Facebook, Twitter and other social media websites mostly for staying in contact with family and friends, 60% using it as part of their daily working lives and 35% journalists use social media as a source of news (Web 5). In his blog, Riyaad Minty, responsible for social media services in Al Jazira, affirms that the social networks helped Al-Jazira in staying "Updated". "Facebook and Twitter helped us foresee in advance, when and where future manifestations might happen", said Minty. "They

also made it easy for us to find contacts to respond live and discuss the latest developments with journalists (Chebib, Sohail 2011: 140).

The call for one of the main protests on 25 January went on Facebook and then on other social networks (Idle and Nunns 2011: 31). Facebook being easily accessed by everyone was everywhere. During protests in Egypt, Tahrir Square was teemed with mobile phones, graffiti, journalists, camera crews, etc. When some forms of media were blocked, others were still available to help the protestors. Mobile phones' cameras were used to record footage of manifestations. Later, pictures and movies were broadcasted and/or displayed online (Alexander 2011). Quite predictably national TV channels were broadcasting completely different things from those happening in the capital.

Participants of the revolution testify also in favour of Facebook as a tool of expressing opinion and calls for protests made by anyone. Hassan El Ghayesh, one of those that came to Cairo to take part in the protests noted that they were constantly checking Facebook to find out where the protests were (Ghayesh 2012: 86). Another participant, a 26-year-old young lady Asmaa Mahfouz also wrote on facebook about her intentions to join the protest and encouraged all those who wanted to change the country to join her (Naib 2012: 100). Asmaa also posted a video that quickly went viral and encouraged everyone (women in particular) to join the protests. They took up the call to act hoping that the model of democracy established in Tahrir will be carried forward as Egyptians shape a new political and social landscape (Naib 2012: 100).

Thus, one can easily claim that Facebook represented free media during Egypt revolution 2011. It was easily accessible, almost instant and free for everyone. However, whether it was control free media? Yes and no. People could easily post at the social network not being afraid of censorship, share news, and ideas. However, when Egyptian government realized that social media and Facebook in particular is a tool for organisation of protesters, internet was quickly shut down. At midnight of the 27th the government disconnected Egypt from the World Wide Web. The Egyptian government stepped up its crack-down on media and communication services. The internet was effectively shut down in the country. In an unprecedented action the Egyptian government ordered internet services providers and mobile phone operators to shut down. Terrified of the new tools of Facebook and Twitter, and the uncensored visual media of yFrog, Flickr and Youtube, the regime chose to pay the

price of millions of lost dollars to the economy in order to deprive protesters of a key weapon – the means of communication and organisation. Four of the country's five main internet service providers were ordered to shut down all international connections to the web in Egypt. Only ISP was exempted to enable the Egyptian stock exchange to stay connected (Idle and Nunns 2011: 59). An estimated 93% of country's networks were unreachable (Web 1). It was one of the most extensive internet blackouts to date. But it came too late. What the government supposed was that by shutting down the internet it would shut down communication. All the people were in the streets and social media had performed its function.

That's the tricky thing about Facebook and social media as a whole. Internet access is crucial here. People may be easily deprived of the access by the state. That makes Facebook not completely free from control. As long as the state is able to control internet access the social media won't be completely free of control. However, the cases when the state uses its power to shutdown internet connection are quite rare. Moreover, in Egypt at that time, when TV channels showed everything but the truth, Facebook even being temporary blocked, still proved to be less controllable media than the traditional one.

4.1.2 Facebook is constructive and uniting media?

As it was discussed in the theoretical framework section, new media and Facebook in particular, leads to a multiplicity of identity positions that citizens are required to grapple with in contemporary societies (p. 25). This idea is often used by critics of new media that state that 'networked individualism' and the possibility to express opinion for everybody, (Wellman 2001: 239-241) which characterizes social media, can be regarded as an evidence of the social fragmentation which is seen as corroding collective action and social responsibility (Loader and Mercea 2011: 762).

In Egypt the opportunity to express one's own opinion, for free via social media, during the revolution, could result in a complete mess of lots of different views, ideas, and calls for action, etc. As Facebook proved to be much a more liberal and control free media than a traditional one (see the previous subsection) proponents and opponents of the Mubarak's regime could easily make Facebook contain lots of pages with calls for action more than there are nations in the world. One should not also forget the number of movements inside Mubarak's opposition groups.

However, in practise, Facebook appeared to be a uniting and constructive tool as via this network the majority of the protests and rallies were organised. It was the space where people shared the common, despite the different forms of the information. The Egyptian mass movement of 25th January unified different groups to call for one goal. Socially and politically varied groups united including workers, bloggers, democracy campaigners, senior judges, and even the followers of different religions such as The Muslim Brotherhood and Coptic Christians. Diversified communication media, including the social media, were used to get the message across (Alexander 2011, Mainwaring 2011). Coming from different sectors of society, Egyptian protestors at the forefront included young tech-savvy Egyptians, the Muslim Brotherhood, a UN former nuclear agent Mohamed El Baradei, businessmen, lawyers, academics, etc (Asser 2011).

Whether it was a text, picture, video, etc, all of those pieces of information were united with the common goal – to change the government in the country (Idle, Nunns 2011). That's where Mercea and Loader's point is confirmed – people express their political will and organise themselves through a variety of text, visual, audio and graphic communication forms (Loader and Mercea 2011: 761). An outcome of such an expression on Facebook in Egypt was an uprising that finally resulted in overthrowing the President of Egypt.

4.1.3 Facebook as a public sphere?

As one can understand from two previous subsections, during the revolution in Egypt in 2011, Facebook proved to be more liberal and control free media, than the traditional media, uniting people. Can one call this Habermas' public sphere where people could discuss political life, express their opinion with no restriction? The answer may be positive in case one more criterion is met. In Habermas' public sphere the strength of argument was more important than the identity of the speaker (Habermas 1991: 54). It was not important who is talking, but rather what was the essence of the discussed subject. The protesters in Cairo were not only young and internet-savvy Egyptians, but people of all age groups and professions – students who knew they have no real future and will probably never get a well-paid job; engineers who have to work as part-time taxi-drivers in order to earn enough money to get their families through the day; newspaper editors and reporters wanting to write and publish what they really and truly think (Witzel 2012: 9).

Social media helped in gathering real-time information, by facilitating the “weak ties”, that is, the physically distant and socially diverse relationships across the globe. The revolution in Egypt was significantly shaped by internet usage and was peaceful, since it was socially driven, as opposed to those hierarchically driven. Socially driven revolutions are subject to views from different perspectives and social classes (Greg 2011). With Facebook and Twitter and the like, barriers between the political authority and the public have been lifted, to make it easier for the regular citizens to contribute and make their worries heard. Social networks aren't controlled by a single central authority. Decisions are made through consensus, and the ties that bind people to the group are loose (Gladwell 2010).

4.2 Statistical analysis

As it was mentioned in the methodology section, a survey¹ was sent to fans of the Facebook page [دي عس دلاخ انلك](#)². The survey consisted of 5 questions listed below:

1. Do you think Facebook played an important role in Egypt's revolution 2011?
2. After the events of January 25, 2011 in Egypt, do you think Facebook was the main space where people could express their opinion about the government? If it was not Facebook, please state what it was.
3. Do you think Egyptian government could control or influence the page [دلاخ انلك](#) [دي عس](#) on Facebook to prevent people from using it during the revolution in Egypt in 2011? If yes then how?
4. Do you think Facebook page [دي عس دلاخ انلك](#) united people during the revolution in Egypt in 2011?
5. Do you think Facebook page [دي عس دلاخ انلك](#) helped people in Egypt to organise in order to achieve common goals related to political life in Egypt?

The survey was sent to 254 people (Facebook was about to ban me as a spammer. Out of this number 143 people has answered the questions that is 56.3 %. For the sake of analysis the data were entered into SPSS 17 the software that allows processing statistical data. SurveyMonkey.com also provides basic tools for processing the data, however, specific software is always better than an online service. Since the questions in the survey are all closed-ended and none of the respondent gave an answer for additional questions, each variable got two values — yes and no. All the variables were entered as nominal (those that

¹ The survey can be seen here: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/5BLJWW3>

² See the group here: <http://www.facebook.com/EIshaheed>

simply name the different attributes constituting them) (Babbie et al. 2011: 18). Figures 1-5 show the frequency tables for each variable.

Figure 1.

FB played important role

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	137	95,8	95,8	95,8
	No	6	4,2	4,2	100,0
	Total	143	100,0	100,0	

Figure 2.

FB was a main space for expressing opinion

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	121	84,6	84,6	84,6
	No	22	15,4	15,4	100,0
	Total	143	100,0	100,0	

Figure 3.

FB was controlled

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	47	32,9	32,9	32,9
	No	96	67,1	67,1	100,0
	Total	143	100,0	100,0	

Figure 4.

FB united people

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	140	97,9	97,9	97,9
	No	3	2,1	2,1	100,0

FB united people

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	140	97,9	97,9	97,9
	No	3	2,1	2,1	100,0
Total		143	100,0	100,0	

Figure 5.

FB helped to organise

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	141	98,6	98,6	98,6
	No	2	1,4	1,4	100,0
Total		143	100,0	100,0	

The figures clearly show respondents' attitude towards Facebook as an important media during revolution. More than 95 % of respondents answered positively on all the questions except of the questions about the space for sharing ideas and state control of the network. The question number 2 about the space might be explained by popularity of other social media (Twitter). The revolution is quite often also called Twitter revolution. Still 84% of respondents believe that after the events of January 25, 2011 in Egypt, Facebook was the main space where people could express their opinion about the government.

The data for the question 3 clearly show that for some reason the respondents are not happy with the possibility of state control/influence over Facebook. Only a bit more than half of respondents (67%) stated that the government did not control the Facebook page while one third was not able to define Facebook page as control/influence free.

It is possible to check whether those people that believed that Facebook page We are all Khaled Said was controlled/influenced by the government, believed that Facebook was not a main source for expressing opinions about the government. In a word, using bivariate analysis in SPSS one can check whether there is an association between the beliefs that Facebook was controlled by the state (independent variable) and whether it was the main space for expressing an opinion (dependent variable). See the Figure 6 below.

Figure 6.

FB was a main space for expressing opinion * FB was controlled Crosstabulation

			FB was controlled		Total
			Yes	No	
FB was a main space for expressing opinion	Yes	Count	26	95	121
		% within FB was controlled	55,3%	99,0%	84,6%
	No	Count	21	1	22
		% within FB was controlled	44,7%	1,0%	15,4%
Total	Count		47	96	143
	% within FB was controlled		100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Examining the crosstab to determine whether there is an association between two variables, what I am trying to determine is whether knowing the value of one variable helps to predict the value of other variable. In other words, whether the perception of Facebook, as controllable/uncontrollable network, is associated with the perception of Facebook as the best place for opinion sharing during the revolution. Knowing the independent variable (belief about the control) should help us to predict the value of the dependent variable (belief about the main sphere to share the opinion). If these two variables are not related or associated, knowing the first one will not help us predict the value of the second.

As we can see 99.0% of those that stated that Facebook page We are all Khaled Said was not controlled/influenced by the government stated that Facebook, after the events of January 25, 2011 in Egypt, was the main space where people could express their opinion about the government. At the same time only 55,3 % of those respondents that considered the page under the government’s control/influence stated that it was the space for expressing the opinions. Among those who answered negatively to the question regarding the space for opinion expression, only 1% believed that the page was control/influence free and 44.7% stated that the page was controlled.

Clearly there is an association – people thinking Facebook was free tend to think It was a main space for ideas sharing. However, how strong it is, that’s the question. There are statistical techniques that provide measures of strength for associations. For now I’ll provide a crude method of assessing the strength of associations by examining the size of the differences in the percentages. One general rule to keep in mind is that the larger the

percentage differences across the categories, the stronger the association. Conversely, the smaller the percentage differences across categories, the weaker the association between the variables (Babbie et al. 2011: 166).

Some researches use a rough 10 percentage point rule. That is, if the percentage point difference is 10 or more, the relationship between the variables is probably worth examining further (Ibid.). But this is just a rough indicator.

In the case of the given crosstab the relationship is a 44 to 46 point difference (99%-55% and 47%-1%). Based on the 10 percentage point rule, the relation would be judged as strong.

Since both variables are nominal it is impossible to find the direction of association. The direction of association or ‘greater than’, ‘less than’ relationships is possible to determine only when both variables in the table are greater than nominal (ordinal or higher) (Babbie et al. 2011: 165).

However, to determine more precisely the strength of a relationship I will calculate the values of Lambda which is a measure of association appropriate for use with two nominal variables, and it operates on the Proportionate Reduction of Error logic (PRE). Essentially, it helps to define the extent to which one variable associated with affects, or has an impact on the other. Nonetheless, as it was mentioned above, in the absence of an order between categories, there can be no direction of relationship (Babbie et al. 2011: 214).

The value of lambda can vary between 0.00 and 1.00. The closer the value of lambda is to 1.00, the stronger the relationship between the variables. Conversely, the closer the value of lambda is to 0.00, the weaker the relationship between the variables (Babbie et al. 2011: 214).

Figure 7

Directional Measures			Value	Asymp. Std. Error ^a	Approx. T ^b	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Lambda	Symmetric	,290	,040	4,564	,000
		FB was a main space for expressing opinion Dependent	,000	,000	. ^c	. ^c
		FB was controlled Dependent	,426	,076	4,564	,000
Goodman and Kruskal tau		FB was a main space for expressing opinion Dependent	,323	,072		,000 ^d
		FB was controlled Dependent	,323	,060		,000 ^d

From the Figure 7 we can see that there is no association between Facebook as controllable/not-controllable media and whether it is a main sphere for ideas expression. In a word knowing whether person thinks that Facebook is controllable/not-controllable media will not improve our knowledge about person’s belief about Facebook as a main sphere for opinion sharing. However, in the opposite order it is different, knowing what one thinks about Facebook as a space for sharing opinion allow us to predict his or her attitude to Facebook as controllable/not-controllable media by 42,6%.

However, Lambdas of 0.00 must be treated with great caution. When one of the totals for the dependent variable is much larger than the rest, lambda can take on the value zero even when an inspection of the percentages indicates a strong relationship. To be safe, a chi square-based measure of association, such as Cramer's *V*, should be used (Babbie et al. 2011: 220).

Figure 8.

		Symmetric Measures	
		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	-,568	,000
	Cramer's V	,568	,000
N of Valid Cases		143	

Cramer’s *V* value shows that the strength of the associations is somewhat strong – 0,568 (Figure 8). However, to find out this association can be applied widely and to test the ‘generalisation degree’ of the association or statistical significance I will use the chi-square measure. Tests of statistical significance allow us to estimate the likelihood that a relationship between variables in a sample actually exists in the population as opposed to being an illusion due to chance or sampling error. Whenever analyses are based on random samples selected from a population rather than on data collected from everyone in that population, there is always the possibility that what we learn from the samples may not truly reflect the whole population (Babbie et al. 2011: 259).

Unfortunately, this is the case here. Statistical significance is very low - 0,0 (Figure 8). That means that although knowledge of the independent variable improves prediction of dependent variable in the sample, the relationship cannot be generalized to the population. In a word attitude to Facebook as to controllable/not-controllable media could influence people

opinion whether it was the main space for opinion expressing during the revolution in the sample (among the respondents) (Babbie et al. 2011: 266). But as it was explained in the methodology section, it is important to remember that while there may be relationships found between some two variables that are worth investigating further, it is still not proven. For instance, while there seems to be a fairly strong association between the variables on control and main sphere for opinion expressing, this association is probably best looked at as evidence of, not proof of a causal relationship (Babbie et al. 2011: 168). Because two variables can be associated without its necessarily being a causal relationship, one need to proceed with care when interpreting these findings.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper was an attempt to examine the role of social media in establishment of democracy. The fact that social media may be an alternative sphere for sharing views and opinions and discussing political life in the country may imply that the social media can play an important role in democracy establishment. As a case study of social media presumably playing an important role I chose Egyptian revolution which is often called a Facebook revolution or a Twitter revolution as a most-likely case but nevertheless emphasized that the scope of this essay may not be applicable in other cases but serve as a ground for further research of social media and its role in democratic development. A theoretical framework was created where I explained and to some degree elaborated on essential concepts and theories, namely public sphere concept, theory of democracy, describing essential types of democracy as well as the concept of social media. After that I applied this theoretical framework as I examined the revolution in Egypt during January-February 2011. The scope of the given paper is that social media can play an important role in the political development of a country leading to democracy establishment and probably consolidation.

Results section clearly showed that Facebook can be more liberal and control free than traditional media. In Egypt while traditional media was blocked completely by the state, Facebook was almost the only place where people could share the news and ideas. The fact that the network was really a mean for transmitting information alternatively to traditional media is also reinforced by the desperate desire of the government to block it. The state was not even scared to lose lots of money due to almost complete internet shut down in the country.

Another feature of Facebook, debated in the theoretical framework, was its ability to unite. Public sphere, according to Habermas, was a constructive place, where people can together achieve common goals. While some scholars claim that Facebook can be destructive because of everyone is able to post there and the numerous opinions do not lead to a common goal, during Egyptian revolution the network united people. Coming from different social classes, different regions of the country and with different backgrounds, people sharing the individual view of the events were united and acted together. Facebook allowed people to organise.

Finally, at the Facebook page *دي عس دلاخ انلك* (we are all Khaled Said) that has been under examination, the power of the argument was more important rather than identity of the speaker. Facebook proved to be easily accessible, difficult to control, mobile, constructive and effective media that allowed people to share their opinion, organise to show different violations done by the authorities and act together to overthrow the government.

The survey conducted among 143 fans of the Facebook page *We Are All Khaled Said* confirmed people's attitude to Facebook as the more liberal and less controllable media, than traditional media, constructive, uniting media. More than 95% respondents believed that Facebook page *We are all Khaled Said* played an important role in the revolution overall. The same number of respondents characterised it as a main sphere to share opinion about the government and as organising and uniting media. A correlation confirming the importance of the absence of control was also found, proving that facebook popularity, as a media for sharing opinions and views about the government, drops if people think the network may be controlled. This underlines the importance of one of the main features of Facebook – almost complete absence of censorship and control.

Giving all that, Facebook during the revolution in Egypt may be regarded as the emerging cyber public sphere, the one that may be quite similar to the one described and explained by Jurgen Habermas (Habermas 1991) and the one that was common for modern democracies. Therefore, Facebook can facilitate at least overthrowing of the nondemocratic government and quite likely setting a democratic regime. Of course, the role of other media in Egypt was also important. Though, as analysis section shows, it was heavily controlled, it was still also a good support for the protesters. But this is a topic for another paper. Anyway, one should not overestimate Facebook role in the revolution and bear in mind that at the current age of ICT there is not a single type of media that can function with no influence of other types. Facebook effectiveness to some extent also depends upon other media. Though in Egypt other types of media was nearly blocked, still press and TV were first places where media battle started (take quitting of Deputy Chief of Naal TV, Shahira Amin p 24). To some extent people transmitted information a lot. If the media is understood as mean to transmit information then people are also a type of media. In Egypt they told each other where protests happened. However, though the revolution was quite likely to happen even without Facebook and social media as a whole, the analysis clearly shows the importance of it in

the revolution. After all, the revolution happened in the capital mainly, where internet coverage is quite wide.

One should bear in mind that while this paper is being finalised the process of change of political regime in Egypt is not over. The first round of presidential elections is over leaving two winners for the second round. Muslim brotherhood candidate Mohammed Mursi and former Prime Minister Ahmed Shafiq will compete for the main political position in the country on 16-17 June 2012 (Web 6). That makes the paper also valuable since it might be useful in further analysis of the evolving process, however, it also may get irrelevant due to some future events related to political development.

6 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The work can serve as a good foundation for further research. First of all, the paper can be used in elaborating on the development of social media and media as a whole. Increasing importance of social media for development may be another sphere for application of the given paper. It also can be used in the research of the role of social media in other countries' development, particularly those that constituted Arab Spring sequence of revolutions.

It also may be a good ground for further research on democratisation, because obviously social media may change the way the states get democratic and to existing three main approaches on democratisation there may be few new added (Potter 1997:10). Who knows maybe in half of a year we will witness some incredible Facebook revolution in North Korea.

Finally, as it was already mentioned, the paper may be used in further research on Egyptian revolution, its political regime, etc.

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