

# International leveraging and civil society: The case of the 2011 Egyptian uprising

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## List of abbreviations and acronyms

DSG	Dubai School of Government
EU	European Union
ICT	Internet and communication technologies
ITU	International Telecommunications Union
NDP	National Democratic Party
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
SCAF	Supreme Council of Armed Forces
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
URL	Uniform Resource Identifier
US	United States
USA	United States of America

## Abstract

In the constantly evolving realm of international relations, where new actors and issues emerge and old ones reinvent themselves, civil society has grown in significance as an international actor. Civil society, itself a constantly developing concept, cannot simply be equated to an aggregate of certain characteristics. Thus the concept needs to be re-understood as an arena of participation. One of the strategies that civil society can use in the international arena is international leveraging, the process whereby international support is sought with the aim of effecting a change at the local level. However, whereas before international leveraging was considered more to be the domain of the ‘structured’ and more organised segments of civil society, like non-governmental organisations (and much research on the subject reflects this perception), the rise of the Internet and communication technologies has made the strategy a more accessible option to the rest of the civil society participants. The Internet has provided a transnational space and tools for communication which people can use and effectively become netizens – citizens exercising their rights online. This research, using the example of the Egyptian uprising in 2011, finds that the Internet did empower the ‘unstructured’ part of civil society. Egyptians actively engaged internationally using the Internet and social media to try to shape global opinion and leverage support. Citizen journalism was an important mechanism whereby Egyptians could bring their stories to a global audience and this content was then amplified by mainstream media. Through their efforts, Egyptian netizens managed to raise solidarity, counter negative narratives and present themselves as legitimate participants. They managed to initiate the boomerang effect as they influenced international public opinion to turn in their favour, after some initial hesitations, and subsequently certain governments started applying pressure on the Mubarak regime to yield to the protesters’ demands, which it did to a certain extent.

# CHAPTER I

## 1.1. Introduction

In an increasingly connected and globalised world, we are faced with issues that are transnational in nature. Environmental problems are not confined to state borders and affect people from across the spectrum. Terrorism and civil conflicts easily become international, as the case of Al Qaeda and more recently the Islamic State demonstrate. Financial crises ripple across oceans and continents. Many phenomena that happen locally or nationally may be integrated within or have an influence on processes that unfold globally, and social movements and civil society groups are evolving to adapt to this mutable reality. Human rights campaigns in a country often connect to global trends in order to make their voices heard. The fight against apartheid is a good example of a national struggle that became transnational through the interaction between local groups and international public opinion, thus affecting the world's stance on racism while pushing for change at the national level, specifically in South Africa.

This connection between local/national campaigns and the international arena is captured by the term 'international leveraging', which describes the process whereby pressure groups in a country (e.g. social movements) seek the support of external actors (e.g. civil society networks in other countries) to pursue their objectives domestically. This process has been described by Keck and Sikkink (1998) as the 'boomerang effect'. Traditionally international leveraging has been part of the strategy of organised civil society, such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which have often run global campaigns to exert pressure at the domestic level. Leading works on civil society's use of international leveraging (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Florini 2000) focus exclusively on social movements and NGOs (that is, organised and structured actors within civil society). They do not reflect on so much the possibility that less structured forms of civil society actors, including individual citizens, may use international leveraging as a strategy to gain support in domestic struggles. Yet, with the spread of the Internet and communication technologies (ICTs), the capacity to communicate globally is no longer confined to better organised and more affluent actors. Mobile phones and social media allow individuals and small groups to send messages to the world's public opinion from virtually all corners of the planet. People in South Africa or Argentina may



have been following the protests in Hong Kong in 2014 via new media, commenting on the situation and even interacting with the protesters through those mediums. In addition to providing alternative communication tools, the Internet provides an alternative space, cyberspace, for participation which is not subject to the same regulation and observation by government authorities as is physical space. As such people from repressive countries have the greater possibility to exercise their citizen rights in cyberspace. These people are known as netizens – the fusion between the Internet and citizen activity (Poster 2002: 101). So the question is: Are new technologies affording channels of communication and space to individual activists and unorganised civil society that would support international leveraging?

But what exactly is civil society? Civil society is a fundamental concept in political and social research. Since classical political thought, the concept of civil society has been defined in multiple ways and continuously re-interpreted as an underlying element of most political theories (Cohen and Arato 1994). Whether to indicate the participatory ‘soul’ of the Greek *polis*, the ‘*vita activa*’ underlying Rome’s republican order or as the driving force behind Liberalism’s individual rights, civil society has always been part of scholarly reflections on the political order (Gellner 1996). With the growth of studies focusing on democratisation and cross border influence, the idea (and phenomenon) of civil society has been further conceptualised with a view to assessing its capacity to bring about and sustain democracy.

In more recent years, civil society has been increasingly defined as a set of voluntary and autonomous organisations and associations, separate from the state and the market, which promote common and shared values (Carothers 1999; Diamond 1994). On the one hand, this approach has largely neglected the importance of ‘unorganised’ participation, that is, that type of activism that arises spontaneously or in an unstructured fashion from individual participation without a particular pre-established organisation. On the other hand, the stress on ‘voluntary’, ‘autonomous’, ‘shared values’ and the assumption of separation from the state and the market have resulted in a simple equation: the multifaceted phenomenon of civil society has been reduced to the non-profit sector (mainly the so-called NGOs). As both the non-profit and the NGOs are largely a Western phenomenon, some have come to conclude that the concept of civil society is hardly useful in the rest of the world (Gellner 1996; Allen 1997; Lewis 2001). Moreover, there is a fundamental (both conceptual and substantive) reason why such an approach has proven inadequate in political research: “the focus on organizations misses the crucial role played by people, by ordinary citizens, who form the

heart and soul of civil society. In other words, an NGO can set up a fax machine and a website, but without members, without a constituency, it has very little to do with civil society” (Howard 2005: 231).

By rejecting such an ‘organisational’ approach, this research endorses a spatial definition of civil society. The German philosopher Jürgen Habermas (1984) has been credited as one of the first contemporary thinkers to emphasize the importance of civil society as the public sphere, where communicative interaction takes place. Building on this notion, some have argued that civil society should be seen as an ‘arena’, as it involves conflicting ideas and goals (Heinrich and Fioramonti 2007). This spatial definition is fundamentally non-prescriptive as it understands civil society as a ‘locus’ where individuals and groups interact in the pursuance of specific (not necessarily universal) objectives.

Does this unstructured/self-organised segment of civil society use international leveraging to elicit the support of global public opinion? If so, have new technologies helped lower the transaction costs conventionally associated with global communication campaigns? This research will use the 2011 uprising in Egypt as its case study to analyse the extent to which international leveraging has been used as a tool by civil society and what role the Internet has played.

Following the demonstrations against Ben Ali in Tunisia, and his subsequent flight from the country, Egyptians were inspired to follow suit. On 25 January 2011 Egyptians came out in the thousands into Tahrir square and other locations around Egypt to demand the end of the regime of Hosni Mubarak. They relayed messages to the world via Internet-based social media platforms (Iskander 2011: 1232). The protestors were composed mainly of the youth, from a wide range of religious and socio-economic backgrounds. They were initially going to protest against police brutality on the National Police Day, 25 January, but this soon evolved into protests calling for bread, freedom and social justice and for the fall of the regime. Activists used social media, in addition to on-the-ground efforts, to mobilise the public and raise awareness. The *Kullena Khaled Said* page created an event on Facebook. Asmaa Mahfouz, a member of the April 6<sup>th</sup> Youth Movement, called Egyptians to protest by an online video (Eaton 2012: 7). The number of protestors grew over a few days and they did not leave the streets until Hosni Mubarak stepped down on 11 February 2011.

The 2011 Egyptian uprising came as a surprise to many. Egypt had a weak civil society and was run by an autocratic regime, with a strong grip on the repressive systems of the state. The government was a close ally to the United States of America (USA) and enjoyed general support from the international community, which strengthened the status quo. This raises the question of how did the civil society arena develop, manage to challenge the regime and become so visible internationally.

The popular uprisings that took place in Egypt in early 2011 (one of the first mobilizations in the so-called Arab Spring) present an ideal case study to analyse the use of international leveraging by civil society. Firstly, the Egyptian uprising (with its geographical and symbolic epicentre in Tahrir Square) was led by a semi-spontaneous gathering of citizens (mostly youth) rather than pre-organised groups and movements. This provides a unique opportunity to study the role of civil society as an ‘arena’ of participation (as opposed to the more conventional focus on civil society as a set of voluntary organisations and non-profits) and the role of the Internet has a form of ‘low cost’ transnational communication. Secondly, the role of civil society in the democratisation of the Middle East is under-researched, as compared to other regions of the world. For many years, the general conviction among scholars and analysts in the West was that the Middle Eastern regimes were rather stable, while civil society was weak and dispersed. Thirdly, Egypt is of great geo-political importance, and understanding the interaction between civic upheaval, communication technologies and their effect (or lack thereof) on international perceptions and attitudes on that country may help shed light on similar dynamics in the Middle East and in the world at large.

The importance of the research theme can be found in the theoretical and practical applications. Theoretically, the field of international relations and the actors that manoeuvre within it are constantly transforming. Civil society is gaining greater importance within international relations. Thus it should be monitored how civil society manifests itself and which tools it uses to engage internationally so to be able to predict and envision innovative ways for greater inclusion and participation of broader civil society internationally.

With regards to practical relevance, the research aims to create understanding of how international public opinion can be influenced through international leveraging and provide recommendations on how to maintain focus and relevance in the international agenda by civil

society – especially with regards to places or issues which are not emphasised internationally or are regarded to run contrary to some engrained and prevalent, but not necessarily just, norms/prejudices/interests. This can be important so to allow civil society to challenge status quos and ideas, keep generating new forms of participation and responses to various power structures and challenges.

## **1.2. Formulation and demarcation of research problem**

This research's main question is: What was the role that the ICTs played in allowing the civil society arena in Egypt to leverage international support during the Egyptian uprising in 2011? This research question is supported by a number of sub-questions, namely: What is the relation between the Internet and international leveraging? What was the role of the Internet-based transnational communication in the 'awakening' of the civil society arena in Egypt? How and to what end did civil society engage internationally? Was there a boomerang effect?

A first hypothesis is that Internet-based channels of communication provided the opportunity for greater participation by the unstructured part of civil society in the international arena with the aim of strengthening its local activity during the Egyptian uprising in 2011. This hypothesis is supported by the following sub-hypotheses: The Internet gave more opportunity to Egyptians to learn about changes effected from below in democratic and non-democratic countries in other parts of the world, thus giving them hope that change from below is also possible at home. Thus, the Internet provided a lens through which they could keep up to date with world developments and learn the practical means of activating civil society and activism. The second (corollary) sub-hypothesis is that Egyptians used this channel to strengthen and develop themselves (thus coordinating their actions on the ground) while making themselves and their goals known to the world without the usual resources available to organised forms of civil society. Thus, through the Internet-based communication tools, Egyptian civil society attempted to place their concerns onto the global agenda and influence international public opinion in their favour.

The second hypothesis is that the leveraging attempts by the Egyptian civil society resulted in a boomerang effect. The research presumed that Egyptian civil society, through the communicative opportunities provided by the Internet, managed to raise international

solidarity with the Egyptian protesters, expose certain hypocrisies and inconsistencies in international attitudes towards the Egyptian regime – the prioritisation of strategic interests over human rights and democracy concerns – and play information and accountability politics with both the international community and the Egyptian regime. This resulted in the application of pressure on the Egyptian regime to bend to the demands by the protesters and these pressures had an impact on the regime and the Egyptian deep state.

Against this backdrop, the research aims to shed light on how public participation, international solidarity, international public opinion and accountability politics can be affected and possibly enhanced by the use of Internet-based communication technologies.

### **1.3. Methodology**

Due to its exploratory nature, this research was carried out mainly through qualitative tools, starting with a comprehensive review of the literature and existing studies, corroborating some conceptualisations with secondary data and selected interviews.

A desktop analysis provided the necessary information for the literature review and the development of the overall theoretical framework, which is based on three important themes: the concept of international leveraging; the role played by new communication technologies, mainly the Internet and its tools, in redefining civic participation and facilitating communication across borders; the evolution of the civil society arena in Egypt and its usage of the Internet to engage internationally.

Whenever possible, additional qualitative data was used to provide contextual information and support the analysis. Moreover, qualitative interviews were conducted with twelve informants, including leading activists, journalists, civil society professionals and young Egyptians who participated in the uprising – inside and outside of Egypt. The purpose of the interviews was to gain more insight into the personal experiences of the interviewees during the uprising, to understand how and for what purposes they used the Internet during the uprising, to learn about their motivations and challenges in doing so, and to understand their opinion on the importance of engagement with the international community. These main points guided the interviews. A semi-structured format was used for most of the interviews

and the interviews were conducted in person, via-Skype conversations and via e-mail exchanges. Most of the interviewees preferred to keep their identities anonymous, due to the current insecurities facing activists, human rights defenders and critics of the regime in Egypt: arrests; harassment; disappearances. The researcher used her discretion to keep all interviewees anonymous for the same reasons and has used letters to differentiate the interviewees throughout the dissertation. The researcher's fieldwork in Egypt, which was conducted in December 2013, was not easy to carry out. The overall political situation in Egypt is still in flux and some informants were either not available or impossible to reach, thus explaining the relatively small sample. Besides interviews, the research also drew on a focus group with Egyptian activists, where the researcher presented her hypotheses and prompted a discussion within the civil society group. The focus group consisted of 19 activists, Egyptians and two Sudanese, of a mixed age group and the discussion took place in Cairo on 28 December 2013. After presenting the hypothesis, the researcher asked the group to share their experiences and thoughts on the uprising, with a focus on the use of social media and other Internet-based tools during that period. The discussion also extended to topics such as challenges and events taking place in Egypt at the time of the discussion, such as the referendum that was to be held on the new draft-constitution in January 2014, and their feelings on the future of the country. Thus the focus group provided valuable information directly related to the research theme, but also information and opinions which were used to more richly contextualise the uprising and form retrospective opinions on its successes and failures.

Certain content from social media sites was also consulted to find primary examples of what purposes Egyptian civil society used Internet-based communications, and more specifically social media, for. Some of the key Facebook pages which were influential and involved in the uprisings (such as We are all Khaled Said) were monitored to assess the flow of messages and posts during the days of the protests. Popular YouTube videos were viewed to gauge what their purpose and online popularity/reach was. Twitter threads (e.g. the so-called 'retweets' and tweets with hash tags such as #Tahrir and #Jan25) were also analysed to provide a macro-assessment of the popularity, reach and nature of specific messages published by protesters. The most popular Twitter messages in English from the period 25 January to 11 February 2011 were analysed. This time frame was chosen as it is the period from when the uprising commenced until the resignation by Hosni Mubarak, and thus provides insight into efforts at international leveraging during mass mobilisation periods. The messages were

accessed through Twitter history searches for tweets containing the hashtags #jan25, #egypt, #Tahrir or written by well-known Egyptian ‘twitter pashas’. Additionally, the book *Tweets from Tahrir* (2011), a compilation of the most important tweets emanating from Tahrir Square during the 18 days of protest, was used to supplement the tweets found through the Twitter search. The tweets explicitly targeted towards an international audience were extracted and then re-analysed to try and find reoccurring themes which indicated or suggested the motivations which drove Egyptian netizens to actively engage internationally. The way in which it was determined whether the tweets were directed at an international audience was by searching for references to foreign countries, references to non-Egyptians and words such as ‘solidarity’, ‘outsiders’, ‘international’ or ‘foreign’. As Twitter was the platform most used to engage internationally (Howard et al 2011: 16), a greater focus was given to it for the purpose of this research.

Finally, the research gathered supplementary quantitative information. This includes data from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the United Nations (UN) agency focusing on ICTs, the Dubai School of Government (DSG) Arab Social Media Reports and the Egyptian Ministry of Communications and Information Technology. These data sources provided supportive information such as the diffusion and usage of Internet connections, usage of social media platforms prior to and during the uprising in 2011, as well as trends on content. Such quantitative data helped paint a more comprehensive picture of the actual reach of the Internet and social media within Egypt and the representative value it has for Egyptians internationally.

#### **1.4. Limitations (and delimitations) of the research**

The time frame used for the main research question, which is whether Egyptians used the Internet-based communication technologies to leverage international support, is from 25 January 2011 to 11 February 2011 – the 18 days of protests which led to the ouster of Hosni Mubarak. The rationale behind this choice is that those 18 days presented a significant change in Egypt’s course whereby unexpected mass mobilisation took place. Moreover, it allowed for the analysis of Internet usage in unique circumstances presented by mass protests where their development and reactions to them were fast-paced and fluid. However, in order to answer some of the research sub-questions and provide a clearer outline of the case study,

the research ventured further back and looked at the development of Egyptian civil society and its usage of the Internet from the early 2000s.

The main participants who were analysed are the Egyptian netizens who initiated and were involved in the uprising. This stays in line with the examination of how the ‘new’ Egyptian civil society used the Internet to leverage international support and from whom. A secondary focus was placed on the external governmental actors that were sought to place pressure on the Mubarak regime. The foreign actors that were focused on are USA, the European Union (EU), Israel and the Arab region for sake of focus, relevance and also accessibility of information. The USA and EU were chosen as they are perceived to have strong, strategic relationships with Egypt and rhetorically profess respect for human rights and democracy. Israel was considered as it has large vested interests in keeping the peace agreement with Egypt and thus is sensitive to political changes in the country. The Arab countries were chosen because of their proximity, their regimes’ fears of possibility of spill over, as well as some of their wishes to become leaders in the Middle East instead of Egypt. Lastly, the research looked at the Egyptian regime itself and its reactions to the international pressures so as to assess whether there was indeed a boomerang effect or not.

With reference to geography, concepts of international leveraging, the potentials of the Internet-based communication technologies and civil society are applicable globally. Due to the initially successful uprising in Egypt in 2011, which was at the centre of international attention, where mass mobilisation resulted in the ouster of an autocratic leader who was in power for 30 years and was an ally of the West, Egypt was chosen as the case study for its international significance and potential of extracting ideas and methods which may then be applied to other case studies.

With regards to limitations of the research, given the extremely large body of online material – social media posts, videos, blogs, etc. - the content analysed was mainly the most popular from blogs, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. Popularity was estimated by the number of views, shares, comments and similar indicators. This research is thus unable to take into account less popular attempts at gaining international attention which also possibly tried to promote alternative discourses regarding the uprising.



Additionally, due to language constraints, content in Arabic could not be taken into account. This has provided limited insight into content aimed at the regional audience. Therefore, the reader should consider the findings as biased towards international leveraging towards a Western audience. Also, Arabic content makes up a large part of the posts on Facebook (DSG 2011: 7) and thus the exclusion of this content perhaps detracts from the importance of this platform for international leveraging in general.

Lastly, in 2013 the number of individual Internet users in Egypt equated to 49.56% of the population (ITU 2014c). The social media penetration rates are also quite low (DSG 2011). This immediately indicates that the online activity emanating from Egypt was not necessarily representative of the majority of the people, or even of the protesters who participated in the uprisings. However, the aim of this dissertation is to consider how Internet-based communication technologies are empowering the civil society arena, so this in fact presents a suitable case study as it is considering the use of the Internet-based communication tools, which are growing in accessibility and quality in Egypt, in conjunction with a developing civil society arena.

## 1.5. Structure

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. After this first chapter, which has provided an introduction to the research theme, discussed the research problem and offered a description of the methodology used for the research, the next chapter provides an overview of existing literature on the key concepts used in the research: international leveraging, Internet-based communication technologies and their role in international leveraging and civil society. The key works which were consulted were *Activists Beyond Borders* by Keck and Sikkink (1998) and *The Third Force* edited by Ann Florini (2000). They form the pillar of the understanding of international leveraging and the processes surrounding the concept. Their conceptualisations are supplemented by findings and works of other authors. Literature on the Internet and its relation to international leveraging and civil society is analysed next. Lastly, various works reflecting the development of the concept of civil society are reviewed and provide the rationale for adopting the interpretation of civil society as an arena for this research.

The case study, the Egyptian uprising in 2011, which was used to apply the theoretical framework, is reviewed in chapter three. The chapter provides background on civil society in Egypt, its development alongside increasing Internet usage and its use of international leveraging. It then provides insight into the build-up to the uprising, starting with the Tunisian protests which provided the spark and the correlating mobilisation of the Egyptian public. It then briefly describes the uprising and usage of the Internet during the 18 days of protest starting on 25 January. The purpose of this chapter is to provide context to the protests and a deeper understanding of the protests as being a part of a larger trajectory towards greater civic participation – both in Egypt and globally.

Chapter four analyses how Egyptian civil society used Internet-based communication technologies during the 18 days of protest for the purpose of engaging internationally. It begins by offering statistical data, explained by interpretative analysis, so as to establish the prevalence of Internet usage for international communication during the protests. It then explores the main themes prevailing through the online content which protesters aimed directly or indirectly towards an international audience. This exploration is based on analysis of various Internet content and interviews. The international government reactions to the protests are looked at afterwards, followed by a brief analysis of the actions and reactions by the Egyptian regime so to determine whether there was a possible ‘boomerang’ effect. Lastly, the chapter identifies some achievements of the Internet-based international leveraging.

The concluding chapter provides a recapitulation of the research, assesses the strengths and weaknesses of international leveraging by Egyptian activists and places it in context with the current situation in Egypt. Based on the findings, it provides suggestions for future research.

## **1.6. Conclusion**

New actors are entering the realms of international relations and are using Internet-based communication technologies to facilitate their entry. This research is pertinent as it studies one of those evolving actors, civil society, and the use of the Internet by its less structured components with the purpose of influencing global agendas and effecting change on a domestic level through the application of international pressure. In Egypt, a popular protest led to the ouster of Hosni Mubarak in 2011 and the Internet was one of the main vehicles for

communication between Egyptians and the outside world during the protests. The study considers how and to what end Egyptians tried to leverage international support at that time, as well as the international reactions and possible effects on the Egyptian regime. It is an interesting and complex example as the country is still experiencing the aftermath and changes since the uprising in 2011 and civil society is again facing great difficulties in terms of repression and lack of real communication channels to the government. The findings from this study would aim to enrich knowledge on public participation by civil society internationally – especially when the civil society is confronting or confronted by materially more powerful actors – and how the ICTs may be facilitating this participation.

## CHAPTER II

### 2.1. Introduction

In repressive regimes, the voice of the civil society arena may be stifled. Even in non-autocratic/-dictatorial regimes, governments can turn a blind eye or deaf ear to civil society's demands. At the same time, the growing internationalization of public opinion, in which states are unable to control information flows and global pressures, affords new options to civil society groups. In particular, increasing global interconnectedness may help to connect civil society groups to likeminded actors elsewhere in the world. Indeed, constant international media coverage, endless meetings and gatherings at international organisations and the mobility of people from country to country have decreased the chances of a government openly disregarding the demands of its people without some form of international condemnation or scrutiny. If the government is committing human rights abuses or is deeply entangled with organised crime, it will be difficult to hide away from global communication channels. Reputational consideration and fears of international sanctioning play an important role. These concerns, in turn, may affect how governments react to internal demonstrations (Carmin, Hicks and Beckmann 2003: 705). Consider the student protests in Hong Kong which have taken place in 2014. The protests were covered by international media, followed by the online community and expressions of support materialised in international solidarity protests. The Chinese government could not simply hide away the protesters, as the international outcry would be too heavy, and so it had to enter into some type of negotiations or to try to coax the public through allegations that the protests were instigated by the United States of America (USA) (Lim and Blanchard 2014). As activists are aware of the potential international effects on domestic political dynamics, international 'leveraging' has become a strategic tool used by civil society to bolster foreign support for certain causes/issues.

This chapter discusses the main concepts that form the theoretical framework for the study. The first concept is international leveraging. The chapter reviews literature defining the term, under which circumstances the tool is usually used, by whom and for what reason. The second concept that is considered is the Internet and communication technologies (ICTs). Vast literature has been published about the Internet, exploring what it is and what its

possible uses for participatory purposes are. Lastly, the chapter provides an overview of literature on civil society, exploring how the concept has evolved with time and which interpretation serves best to understand current events.

## 2.2. International leveraging

As non-state actors are becoming increasingly active in international relations, there has been a growth in the body of work focusing on these actors and the means they use to influence states, as well as other non-state actors, and their behaviour. When considering civil society and international leveraging, some leading works are *Activists Beyond Borders* by Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink (1998) and *The Third Force*, with various contributions, edited by Ann Florini (2000). Keck and Sikkink (1998) analyse transnational networks which are playing an increasing role in international relations and are primarily motivated neither by material nor professional interests, but rather by values or principles. The relation between the networks is further characterised by the exchange of information, ideas, experiences and services (Keck and Sikkink 1999: 89; Florini 2000: 7). Information is a crucial weapon at their disposal as it allows them to bring issues to the fore, frame perceptions and pressurise target governments/institutions (Keck and Sikkink 1999: 89). There is indeed increasing awareness that social change is more likely to take place when there is a direct transmission/transfusion of information, human, material and financial resources across borders (Salmon, Fernandez and Post 2010: 159). International leveraging is the process whereby activists seek support from external actors with a view to affecting change at the domestic level. This type of leveraging is what Keck and Sikkink (1998: 12) have termed as the ‘boomerang effect’.

But when is this tool used? International leveraging is more likely to occur when access or communication between the activists and the state (or other power structures that the activists want to convey a message to or influence) is blocked. This may be in countries with authoritarian regimes in power that do not tolerate dissidence and so limit freedom of expression. Thus, the activists reach out to a third party (eg. The United Nations (UN), foreign media or foreign governments) to gather enough international support to achieve their goals. Other circumstances which may lead to forming networks and turning to international leveraging may be where civil society believes that international networking will assist in the

attainment of its goals or where there is an international platform that provides an opportunity for a network to be formed and an issue debated (Keck and Sikkink 1998: 12). Carmin, Hicks and Beckmann (2003: 705) further add that the decision by civil society to employ international leveraging as part of its strategy is influenced by the configuration of political institutions and processes, strength of state institutions, legislative capacity and independence, access and options for participations, stability of political alignments and the level of repression. These factors determine whether there are other avenues available for civil society action – such as protest and legal channels – and whether civil society has the ability to engage with external actors. Leveraging has been identified as one of the three main strategies used by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), along with communication and community development to support political and social change (Carmin, Hicks and Beckmann 2003: 704). Mobilisation can be added to their list of strategies. It should be noted that leveraging is a tool that should be complementary to other efforts and should not be solely relied upon.

The goals that activists and transnational networks pursue through international leveraging can be for the external actor to directly influence a domestic situation, whereby activists use leverage to influence officials, institutions and organisations to apply pressure on their behalf on a certain government/group (Carmin, Hicks and Beckmann 2003: 705) or to build-up the local public will - the social mobilisation aimed at effecting social change through changing structural conditions or public policy (Salmon, Fernandez and Post 2010: 160). International leveraging heavily focuses on communication and the ability to target external actors who can assist in the mobilisation or building of a social consciousness locally (Salmon, Fernandez and Post 2010: 162). This focus on communication emphasises the importance of information and developments in communication technologies in international leveraging.

Transnational networks employ a number of strategies to elicit international support. They can play information politics whereby they become a source or multiplier of information and gain standing as an alternative source of information to states (Keck and Sikkink 1999: 95). The media can become an important partner through which information is amplified and reaches large audiences (Keck and Sikkink 1999: 96). As a current example, Wikileaks has gained status as an alternative information source. Certain mainstream media, such as the Guardian, the New York Times and Der Spiegel, have helped to make the Wikileaks information accessible to a wider audience by publishing its materials (Keaten and

Blackledge 2010). Transnational networks can also use symbolic politics, which is to create a symbol out of an event, a person, a thing or a space and use it to appeal to broader public (Keck and Sikkink 1999: 96). The widespread use of Guy Fawkes masks at protests in Chile, Tunisia, Spain, Greece, Germany and others has acquired the symbol of fighters for people against oppressive power structures and creates a sense of shared struggle across borders (Kelley 2013; Lush and Dobnik 2011). When networks employ accountability politics, they highlight discrepancies between statements and actions of a target government/institution to try to embarrass and hold the target to account (Keck and Sikkink 1999: 97). Lastly, leverage politics is a strategy whereby networks seek to influence stronger actors through leverage, which can be sought on material or moral grounds. The material grounds can include the provision of financial resources to the networks or the request to impose sanctions on the target government. The moral grounds can be when transnational networks try to expose and shame a certain government into a desired reaction. Using leveraging can induce defamation, erosion of legitimacy and the resultant pressure on a government to bend to civil society's demands (Keck and Sikkink 1999: 97).

After considering when, why and how civil society leverages international support, there are certain factors to be considered which are crucial to evaluate the successes and failures of transnational networks. Networks may need to make governments view issues as being in line with their national interests in order for them to take them seriously (Keck and Sikkink 1998: 203), otherwise the governments may view the issues as superfluous or even in opposition to their interests. Furthermore, for an issue to gain international appeal, it should be framed in such a way so as to transcend specific cultural or national contexts and to fit into existing belief systems (Price 2003: 598; Keck and Sikkink 1998: 204; Kumar 2000: 126). Kumar (2000:119) uses the example of the Mexican Zapatistas and the framing of their fight for indigenous rights to fit into a wider context of empowerment of communities which can resonate across many more borders and peoples. An issue needs to become a causal story where the cause is identifiable and responsibility attributable to someone (Keck and Sikkink 1999: 99) so that people have a clearer idea of what action can be taken and the results of the actions are visible. This suggests that issues that have a multitude of causes and actors involved and where the complexities are difficult to grasp, run the risk of being partially presented internationally and partially or inadequately dealt with.

Regarding actor characteristics, networks are more likely to be successful when they are dense and its members are in regular communication with each other (Keck and Sikkink 1998: 206). When comparing human rights campaigns in Chile and Guatemala, Keck and Sikkink (1998: 206) note that the Chilean campaign was more successful as it had more established and organised human rights organisations. Considering the ability of some of the protest movements nowadays to attract international sympathy, where they did not have well-established longstanding organisations, it is worth looking at how those managed to engage internationally.

Other authors have added to the debate of where civil society or the transnational networks derive their legitimacy and moral authority from. Richard Price (2003: 587) mentions that transnational activists derive authority from expertise, moral influence and claim to political legitimacy. Brown and Timmer (2006: 6) explain that moral authority is based on groups calling on principled ideas and norms which are globally accepted such as human rights; based on the representation of a certain group or issue; or based on their expertise on a matter which then lends legitimacy to the network. Thomas Risse (2000: 186) further elaborates that moral authority is derived from the perception that the activists in question represent public interest/good. In more practical terms, leading transnational civil society organisations have gained moral authority and claim to knowledge through years of work and meticulous information gathering (Risse 2000: 187). These works leave some questions however, such as how do individuals taking part in the civil society arena gain legitimacy and moral authority without having years of organisation and establishment? Additionally, are groups that represent more cultural or nuanced issues more likely to be left outside of the 'global' community as they do not conform to some 'globally' accepted norms and values? This question further problematizes and questions what those globally accepted norms are and who determines them. The characteristics of the targets are also worth mentioning. International leveraging is more likely to be successful when the target is more susceptible to international opinions and reputation, or dependent on some form of external assistance, such as aid (Keck and Sikkink 1998: 208). Issues may then be linked to those sensitivities to exert pressure on the target. As such, it seems that international leveraging is not viable in cases where targets are impermeable to international pressures.

Risse (2000: 190) builds on the boomerang effect model and explains that one should not consider a single boomerang but a spiral of various boomerangs. This spiral, if kept moving



by civil society, then places degrees of pressure on norm-violating states. He divides the spiral into five phases: 1) repression and activation of transnational civil society; 2) norms denial; 3) tactical concessions; 4) prescriptive status; 5) rule-consistent behaviour. The first phase begins with a repressive situation in country which may last for a short or prolonged period of time. A factor which is suggested to have an effect on whether the activation of civil society begins is accessibility and availability of information on the situation in the country (Risse 2000: 191). The Central African Republic is an example of a humanitarian crisis that is exacerbated by the lack of information and consequent inability to respond accordingly or raise interest on the crisis (Malsin 2014; International Media Support 2014).

The second phase is when the issue is placed on the international agenda (Risse 2000: 193). Once the norm-violating state is exposed on the international arena, Risse (2000: 194) argues that it very often denies allegations of human rights abuses. It can also appeal to some nationalistic or security sentiment and try garner local and international support. In face of accusations of disproportionality and illegality of the bombardment of Gaza in 2014, Israel retorted that it was targeting terrorists and acting in self-defence (Chiacu 2014). Israel's seeming nonchalance to the growing international criticism has meant that the spiral has not progressed to the third phase, highlighting Risse's (2000: 194) observation that the attitude of the norm-violating state towards international opinion is important for the progression to the third phase of the spiral.

After mounting international pressure, the norm-violating state makes certain tactical concessions so to appease the international community and lessen the pressure (Risse 2000: 196). These concessions do not necessarily mean that human rights violations stop or that their cessation is long-term. The caution with the concessions stage is that the international pressure might wane and give freedom back to the norm-violating state to revert to its previous practices or become even more severe. In most cases, the norm-violating state provides the concessions while continuing repression. However, if through the concessions space is created for the local civil society to mobilise, the state or government may lose control over the domestic situation and thus be forced to either cede to the demands of the civil society or be forced to abdicate power (Risse 2000: 198).

The fourth phase begins when the national government accepts the legitimacy of human rights norms and institutionalises them within the domestic legal framework (Risse 2000:

199). However, institutionalising the norms does not necessarily mean that they will be respected or enforced, and so the final phase is when the state abides by those norms and this results in rule-consistent behaviour (Risse 2000: 202).

Some of the challenges presented by international leveraging are that it may be perceived as foreign interference by target states or segments of the local population. Another challenge is that the relation between activists and their external partners may turn to reflect some unequal relationships, such as between Northern, which are usually more resource endowed, and Southern, which are usually less resource endowed, NGOs (Keck and Sikkink 1999: 93). Information which local activists or the transnational networks provide to media or other actors can be manipulated for other purposes or cause for an issue simply to be hidden away or re-located. For this reason the tool can be viewed as a double edged sword (Taylor 2005: 108). In such cases, activists run the risk of being perceived as acting as agents for external actors and consequently losing local or even international legitimacy. A relevant example is that of the FEMEN affiliated controversial activist in Tunisia, Amina Sboui. Ms. Sboui quit FEMEN after its members shouted Islamophobic slogans in front of the Tunisian embassy in Paris. Ms. Sboui's pro-women's rights stance did not automatically mean that she was against Islam and religious freedoms, as FEMEN interpreted it, but FEMEN's actions further tarnished her message at home (France24 2013).

Conventional focus on leveraging has generally required significant resources. Activists needed to travel abroad to elicit the support of sympathetic social forces. Freedom fighters often used exiled activists to canvass support in other countries. Financial resources needed to be used to promote solidarity campaigns and attract the media attention. The global campaign against apartheid was a case in point of international leveraging generated by strong social movements, with critical political and financial resources at their disposal. As communication, especially through Internet-based technologies, has become cheaper and more accessible, it has become easier to communicate across countries. Groups of activists no longer need to be structured and well-resourced to leverage international support for their causes. So, how has international leveraging changed in the digital age?

### **2.3. International leveraging in the digital age**

The advent of broad access to the ICTs has changed the way in which people communicate globally, thus impacts on the way in which support is leveraged at the international level. In 2005, there were 1024 million individual Internet users in the world. This number increased to 2273 million in 2011 and to an estimated 2923 million in 2014, which is the latest year for which data is available at the time of writing (International Telecommunication Union (ITU) 2014a). The rise in individual Internet users has been enhanced by the ability to access the Internet via various mediums: desk-tops, laptops and mobile phones. This can be seen through the steady increase in mobile phone and active mobile broadband subscriptions (ITU 2014a) and high increases are expected to continue, especially in the developing world (ITU 2014b). Along with greater mobile phone usage and Internet access, there has been an extremely high growth in social media usage making social media the number one activity on the Internet (Adler 2014). The popular site Facebook has over 890 million daily active users worldwide (Facebook 2015), Twitter has 288 million active monthly users (Twitter 2015a), Instagram has over 300 million active monthly users (Instagram 2015), and there are over 1 billion unique YouTube users that visit the site monthly (YouTube 2015). These numbers suggest that the Internet, and particularly social media, has become a consuming and influential part in many people's lives.

But what is it that the Internet offers? It provides a virtual space, cyberspace, which is characterised by its ability to transcend some of the constraints of space and time. There are no physical borders and most things happen instantaneously (Fuchs 2007: 50). This virtual space allows for participants to exercise their individualism, form or enhance communities and users can create 'virtual personalities' on the various social networking platforms (Fuchs 2007: 67). It is also a portal to information of various kinds, a place where business transactions, social and professional interactions, learning, entertainment and other activities find a platform or locus of expression. Although it is true that the transnational space provided by the Internet has no physical borders, there are other borders that it does still encompass. Many of the social divisions and power that are evident in the physical world are translated into the virtual world – although to a lesser degree. Linguistic predominance of the English language over other languages or the over-representation of the developed world over the developing world online are some examples of the inequalities circumstantially

transposed into cyberspace. There is also a mix of ‘open’ and ‘controlled’ space in cyberspace. However there is a trend towards more open and horizontal interaction on the Internet. This can be seen through the more collaborative and lateral programs/platforms being set up such as Wikipedia or Kick Starter (Tapscott and Williams 2008: 65).

The Internet however only emerges as a social space through the actions of its users (Saunders 2006: 51). Therefore it is a tool with potential and it is the responsibility of people to use it in a productive way in order for it to have social meaning. It is subject to the socio-spatial dialectic as explained by Edward Soja – society creates space, space creates society, society recreates the space, is recreated by space and so forth (Fuchs 2007: 54). This dialectic can be applied to the interplay between the transnational online world and the local, physical world. This is particularly interesting when considering civil society and how it influences and is influenced by the Internet. An apolitical person can begin viewing political content posted by a friend on Facebook, slowly start paying more attention and become involved online and possibly offline. That person may then begin posting their own political content and in turn influence other people in their network and possibly the nature of the debate online.

With regard to the development of civil society, the Internet is very important as it provides access to various sources of information, it has proven to be a logistical tool, it can become ‘an incubator’ for social movements, a forum where political ideas and opinions can be discussed (Howard 2010: 132) and a networking platform. Civil society is now using the Internet for collaboration, publishing, mobilisation and observation (Surman and Reilly 2003: 4). Kumar (2000: 126) mentions that one of the critical factors in mobilising support for the Zapatistas in Mexico was the Internet. When looking at civil society and its usage of the Internet, two broad strains can be observed that differ in their usage: the structured, organised strain, such as NGOs, and the un-structured, more fluid strain of civil society. NGOs tend to use more formal and centralised outlets on the Internet: organisational websites, e-newsletters, etc. (Surman and Reilly 2003: 5). Groups such as Amnesty International and Oxfam maintain websites, publish their reports online, have an online presence on the social media platforms where they keep audiences up to date and encourage them to engage and use these tools to organise events. The unstructured part of civil society on the other hand uses less formal and distributed outlets: social media platforms, open publishing, etc. (Surman and Reilly 2003: 5). An example of such a platform is Global Voices Online

([www.globalvoicesonline.org](http://www.globalvoicesonline.org)) – a network of bloggers, citizen journalists and others who report on, translate or summarise stories from around the world.

Referring back to the Internet as a space, the Internet has provided a critical opportunity for the unstructured part of civil society. It has provided an alternative space for the public sphere - the space between state and society (Habermas 1996: 360) – and helped increase political participation globally (Castells 2008: 90), especially important for users who cannot freely participate in the physical world. Many users, from countries with authoritarian or democratic regimes, cannot exercise their citizen rights in the physical public arenas. This control of the physical public space by states has greatly curtailed the ability of civil society to develop, mobilise and exercise their freedoms. With the emergence of the Internet as a social space, more and more people have turned to the virtual world as new spaces offered by new technologies like the Internet have limited the ability of governments to control social relations and mobilisations (Arrighi, Hopkins and Wallerstein 1989: 114). However, although government-control is limited in some ways in the virtual world when compared to some of the control tactics in the physical world, governments can still block, limit, control or monitor access to and activities on the Internet, thus taking away from its ‘freeness’. Governments can track people through their Internet activity and punish them through arrests, fines or other measures (Salmon, Fernandez and Post 2010: 166). Some cases have suggested that sometimes the blocking and attempts at controlling the Internet have actually taught people how to become dissidents as some would then learn how to bypass firewalls, as is the case in China, how to hide their identities or how to hack (Zuckerman 2008). Thus the Internet has become a battleground of sorts between attempts at controlling and attempts at bypassing and exposing the control. A prominent example of this tug-of-war is of Edward Snowden who leaked information to the journalists Laura Poitras, Glenn Greenwald and Ewan MacAskill on the USA National Security Agency’s programme of spying on its citizens with the assistance of some telecommunication companies. Snowden is now living in asylum in Russia while the USA has laid espionage charges against him for his actions (BBC 2014). This is a reminder that although the Internet is a more free space, it is not a haven where activists and civil society members can remain untouchable from governments.

Nevertheless, people are turning to the virtual world and this has led to the growing influence of the civic phenomenon known as ‘netizens’, which describes the fusion between the Internet and citizen activism (net-izen). The term was first introduced in 1992 by Michael

Hauben in an article titled *The Net and Netizens: The Effect the Net Has on Peoples Lives*. The Internet emerged as a new social and political arena, which netizens can use to channel their grievances and build critical mass under the radar screen of governments (Hauben 2003: 23). Some would argue that netizens hold an almost dual citizenship/allegiance: to national/territorial entities and to the virtual and transnational world of the Internet. They are also exposed to new ideas and practices which may influence their own activities and ideas in the pursuit of certain values and goals (Poster 2002: 101). Through interaction in the transnational virtual world, netizens have the opportunity to exercise some of the citizen rights that perhaps they are not able to in the physical world, again reiterating the importance of the Internet as a potential alternative space.

The Internet, and more specifically social media, also has allowed for the greater creation of networks and network nodes (Castells 2008: 81). Networks are “forms of organisation characterized by voluntary, reciprocal and horizontal patterns of communication and exchange” (Keck and Sikkink 1999: 91). Through the Internet, people have more access to each other and the possibilities of interaction and reaching out to persons/institutions previously unreachable have increased. It is much easier to locate the contact details of a certain activist or journalist and interact with them through their blogs, Twitter, Facebook or other online platforms rather than to try to reach out to them at their office or via the telephone – even more so if they are located in a different city or country, as the researcher found out while reaching out to some activists and journalists for interview purposes. The platforms also enable netizens to promote themselves and expose their interests/causes (Cook 2013: 3). They are able to interact with people who are seeking to have greater political consciousness or more developed ideas that can potentially be translated to participation in their countries. Through building individual ties to other activists, it is argued that one’s ideas conform more closely to those of the activists (Alterman 2011: 112). This process can be described as the levelling of certain norms/ideas transnationally through greater transnational communication and interaction. Thus greater netizen participation could be trickling transnational/global ideas to local levels. Such an interaction can help to inspire the local activists and enrich their knowledge and ideas, but could also possibly lead to the dilution of locally held values and norms to be replaced by more ‘global’ ones. This presents an interesting dynamic or problem – while some global or transnational ideas may encourage progress or diversification of ideas on the local level and vice versa, could this interaction also lead to increasing conformity on global and local levels and thus promote less critical

and less diverse debates and actions at the same time? These connections made online can facilitate the building up of activist networks and alliances on locally and transnationally, which may then facilitate in leveraging international support, but could also lead to the marginalisation of some less technologically adept activist groups.

In addition to providing a space and a chance to network, the Internet has increased availability, circulation and proliferation of information. This has made information a key currency for netizens and civil society in many respects, including for international leveraging. Netizens, many of whom may lack other resources, can now produce, exchange, challenge, promote information and build campaigns. People can access news sites from around the world, follow prominent figures and organisations on the social networking sites and blogs and can partake in debates. The options of sharing via e-mail, the share button or through re-publishing have made the circulation of content much more convenient. The options of liking, commenting or responding via posts or e-mails to content have made it easier to engage and debate. Through the various news outlets, social media platforms, websites and options of sharing, material can go viral and reach unprecedented numbers of people, thus increasing the chances of finding sympathetic witnesses (Koukal 2010: 120). This ease of communication has led to the rise of online activist networks such as Avaaz ([www.avaaz.org](http://www.avaaz.org)) which use Internet based communication and petitions to promote various issues and encourage activism. This ability to circulate and promote information is an especially effective tool against repressive regimes which control and suppress information and communication flows (Keck and Sikkink 1999: 95).

Also, it does not matter what the initial support for an idea is, anything can be spread. This can be both beneficial and damaging as false or disproportionate information can be circulated and accepted as facts if believed by an audience big enough. The social networking platforms such as Facebook and YouTube provide a forum where civil society with no voice locally, but with Internet access, could express its opinions, publicise issues or tarnish reputations of governments through sharing incriminating material (Castells 2008: 86). This is done in hope of building international awareness and support (Salmon, Fernandez and Post 2010: 165). These platforms are particularly relevant in today's culture of images and instantaneity, as they provide a platform to instantly share audio and visual material (Cook 2013: 3) and thus deepen the impact or appeal of some messages. There is also a general awareness that online content, in order to go viral, needs to be entertaining as well as political

and heart-wrenching. This approach has been coined by Ethan Zuckerman (2008) as the ‘cute cat theory’. People, civil society and netizens, have thus used these platforms to share short and effective material to capture the most attention possible (Gerbaudo 2012: 147). An example can be found in the video by Ivan Marovic, a retired revolutionary formerly with the Serbian Otpor movement, where he explains the basic steps to creating a revolution in a slightly comic fashion. The video, which was republished in early 2011 on YouTube, has over 52 000 views (Narco News TV 2011). Actions such as this provide the opportunity for netizens to influence local and international discourse – for both benign and malignant purposes. While some netizens may use this opportunity to try to raise awareness on issues such as climate change or inequality, the relatively easy access to global audiences is also being used by groups wishing to propagate hate, discrimination and conflict. The Islamic State is using social media to publish videos of beheadings and post hateful messages. Such materials may then lead to recruitment of people or even ‘inspire’ others to undertake similar activities. What some would call the ‘unsavoury’ segments of civil society, or rather of society without the ‘civil’, thus have also gained a platform on the Internet. The actions of such users may work to undermine efforts of ‘civil’ society or justify new restrictions and surveillance of cyberspace which may be used against the ‘civil’ society too.

This access and influence on information through the Internet has allowed civil society to play information politics. User generated content, especially through the usage of social media and blogs, has become an important means whereby netizens can directly contribute to the online debates and information. This has been done through the rise of citizen and participatory journalism. Citizen journalism is multi-media content gathered, created and published by non-professional journalists, whereas participatory journalism is multi-media content created by non-professionals but published by professionals (Nip 2006: 218). Such actions have made information more accessible as accounts are made by any citizen, facilitated by his/her access to a mobile phone or Internet, to either provide an alternative view on a situation or to provide reports on events that are not covered by the professional media. This has also allowed for unmediated information to gain an audience or even influence traditional media and in turn have an effect on the public debate on certain topics. A protester can him-/herself take photographs of protests, upload them to a social media platform and provide commentary on the material. Such content then can remain unnoticed in the barrage of online information or gain viewers. This ability to partake in citizen/participatory journalism has been especially important in combatting the narrative of



more powerful actors such as states, military institutions and corporations. This ‘voice’ that is found through citizen journalism has the potential to empower people (Nip 2006: 212) and to enable broader participation. This practice also assumes that people have the rational and intellectual capabilities to exercise their will and assume self-governance (Rosen 1994: 18).

Leveraging using the Internet-based communication technologies can have direct and indirect effects. As the Internet is more or less an open virtual space, when a person targets a specific audience, it is probable that many others will be on the receiving end of the information/message. The receivers are in turn influenced and motivated to some form of action. Cook (2013: 5) notes how seeing images on social media affected the way that people reacted to information and inspired them to action of their own. This could have unintended consequences on behalf of the person who initially published the content.

Some of the other challenges that are highlighted by the Internet-sceptics are that the Internet is still not universally accessible. There are large segments of populations that do not have Internet access. This is particularly so in the developing world. In 2013, 76.8% of people living in the developed world had access to the Internet as opposed to 30.7% of people living in the developing world (ITU 2014a). This means that the activities and opinions expressed on the Internet are not necessarily representative of opinions and situations on the ground. This divide also potentially contributes to the perpetuation of Western or Northern biases and interests versus non-Western viewpoints as they are represented in greater numbers virtually. Such bias can be seen in the larger amount of coverage and debate on stories such as the Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris versus the relatively inadequate coverage and debate on the massacre of more than 2000 people by Boko Haram in Nigeria, both incidents occurring in January 2015 (Sullivan 2015).

Critics such as Malcom Gladwell (2010), bestselling author of books like *Tipping Point*, observe that activism through social media can be useful in some instances, but does not necessarily translate into on-the-ground activism. Online activism relies on weak ties which allows for adaptability and resilience, but does not build focus and discipline (Gladwell 2010). As such, online activism can perhaps be better suited to *ad hoc* and time-critical actions, especially if quick publicity needs to be made, whilst actions pursuing longer-term goals need added commitment and a smaller, core group of activists. Online activism also makes people feel as if they have taken a consequential action and can in fact act as a

detractor from real action. This type of online activism is also known as clicktivism or slacktivism (Morozov 2009). This suggests that online activism cannot always replace activity in the physical world and should act in complementarity to it.

Taking these challenges into account, what the Internet has done is make international leveraging more accessible as a tool and provided more creative ways for it to be approached. An interesting dynamic that this easier access to international leveraging has indirectly highlighted is the weight of material versus moral power. Whereas previously more material resources were needed to utilise international leveraging, and thus NGOs and other more institutionalised segments of civil society were at an advantage as they could use their financial resources and connections/relationships to leverage international support for certain causes, the weight of material resources has diminished. The easier access and adaptability of international leveraging, facilitated by the Internet, has allowed persons with little material resources to use their moral and communicative resources to inspire reaction and support. This has an effect on international relations as less materially rich actors are becoming more relevant in the field. In this context, civil society, especially in its horizontal, un-structured fashion, has become an important player in global affairs.

## 2.4. Civil society

Back in 2001, the weekly magazine *The Economist* asked mischievously: civil society “is universally talked about in tones that suggest it is a Great Good, but for some people it presents a problem: what on earth is it?” (Grimond 2001: 18). Those were the heydays of the civil society ‘talk’, when international donors, policy makers and academics rediscovered the power of civil society to bring about democratic change and development. The end of the Cold War with the mass protests of the late 1980s and early 1990s, as well as the many coloured revolutions in Eastern Europe, gave the impression that civil society could succeed where governments had failed. In the history of political thought, several complementary (and, at times, opposing) ways in which civil society has been conceptualised can be distinguished (Edwards 2004). In classical Greek political thought, the term civil society described the ‘good’ society, that is, the set of manners, rules and forms of participation that characterised the *polis* vis-à-vis other forms of government. For Aristotle, civil society was society organised through self-government as opposed to the savage world of the

‘barbarians’. It was civil because of ‘civility’. In Rome’s republican tradition, civil society was the ensemble of active citizens, who regularly contributed to the various social, cultural, economic and political splendour of the republic. It was civil because of the *civis*, the Latin word for citizen. The concept of ‘*vita activa*’, which fundamentally identified the roles and responsibilities of citizens in the Roman tradition, was later popularised by Machiavelli in the 1500s and then by the German philosopher Hannah Arendt in the 1900s. In modern political philosophy, the idea of civil society resurfaced with the development of liberalism. For John Locke and Adam Ferguson, two forefathers of modern liberalism, civil society was the expression of the modern proprietary class, which created spaces of autonomy and self-determination within a state characterised by inherent oppressive tendencies. For these thinkers civil society was a fundamentally political concept, a bastion against the tendency of monarchies to override individual rights (Seligman 1992; Calhoun 2001).

Similarly, Alexis de Tocqueville treated civil society as the locus of self-organisation as opposed to government, which was by contrast viewed as the source of coercion. This self-organised world is characterised by associations and networks that cut across and transcend traditional social relationships founded on patron-client ties. In this conception, civil society provides a breeding ground for democratic values and a formidable curb against oppression. Moreover, as Robert Putnam (2001) more recently demonstrated, such horizontal interaction deeply contributes to the diffusion and production of social capital. Another tradition of thought, tracing its origins to Hegel, sees civil society as the ensemble of all those groups and entities that exist between the state and the family. In this understanding, which deeply influenced Marx’s views of civil society as the core of the capitalist system (the bourgeoisie), organisations and groups function as a vehicle of cultural permeation throughout society, according to the order imposed by the state itself (Hunt 1990; Wood 1990). Re-elaborating on Marx, the Italian intellectual Antonio Gramsci understood civil society as the realm of hegemony, constructed around the notion of consent, as opposed to the realm of force that pertains to the domination exerted by the state (Bobbio 1988). He saw greater potential in civil society than Marx, noting that civil society could also provide the space needed for people to rebel against capitalist dominant structures (Edwards 2004). For philosopher Ernest Gellner (1996), civil society has been the defining character of Western liberalism vis-à-vis other forms of political ideologies.

According to the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas (1984), civil society should be seen as the locus of communicative action, the so-called ‘public sphere’, in which ideas and values are discussed, processed and ultimately sustain a form of dialogic society. This sphere lies between the state and private realm: it is the space where public debate takes place, information is exchanged and where groups and individuals can express their interests (Kellner 2000). Habermas valued civil society as a sphere where public discourse and interaction would develop democratic values in the society and thus be crucial for the development and strengthening of democracy. The public sphere is subject to transformation as participants change, while also the state changes in its response to it (Edwards 2004). The main characteristics of the civil society as a public sphere are that it inherently involves conflicting ideas and goals and contains power structures within it (Flyvbjerg 1998).

In contemporary political research, the notion of civil society has been largely confined to the so-called non-profit sector. NGOs have also contributed to this shift mainly by projecting an image of civil society as being limited to organisations, thereby excluding all other forms of social activism (from social movements to informal groups and social networks) that do not enjoy the same degree of formalisation and ‘civility’. In some countries, especially in North Africa and the Middle East, the term civil society has been used to identify a rather narrow set of organisations – mostly Western funded – and distinguish them from the more ‘political’ groups, which are often religiously inspired. These organisations usually embody hierarchical structures and are manned by the intellectual elite or foreigners, thus run the risk of perpetuating certain inequalities and attitudes (Abdelrahman 2007: 24) and losing the confidence of the local population.

Two leading scholars of the non-profit sector, Lester Salamon and Helmut Anheier (1998), maintain that civil society groups are institutions/structured organisations that are separate from the state, autonomous and the membership is voluntary. According to Thomas Carothers (1999: 19), civil society encompasses “all the organizations and associations that exist outside of the state (including the political parties) and the market”. These organisations and associations are not necessarily benign as they can be composed of good and bad intentioned members (Carothers 1999: 20). However, as civil society emerges out of the need for greater liberation, it creates the space for greater political participation and promulgation of democratic values (Carothers 1999: 21). Despite its balanced view of civil society (which it neither glorifies nor vilifies), this approach excludes an important segment of civil society:

spontaneous and unstructured participation. Another leading scholar, Larry Diamond (1994: 6), puts forward a similar although narrower definition by focusing only on organisations between the state and the private sphere that are effectively concerned with public or specific group interests vis-à-vis the state. It is evident that the democratic functions Diamond (1994) attributes to civil society, such as dissemination of information, monitoring of the state and providing a breeding ground for the development of democratic values, further restrict the capacity of this understanding of civil society to travel across the globe, away from Western societies where the concept of democracy is contested and/or interpreted according to different value systems.

Some have noted that civil society should not only be seen as the aggregation of organisations, but also as the “environment where these organisations develop and interact” (Abdelrahman 2002: 32). Building on the concept of civil society as a ‘sphere’, Heinrich and Fioramonti (2007) have re-introduced the notion of the ‘arena’. This spatial definition is fundamentally non-prescriptive as it understands civil society as a ‘locus’ where individuals and groups interact in the pursuance of their (not necessarily universal) objectives. Furthering this spatial connotation, civil society becomes a participatory space populated by groups, individuals and organisations sharing similar (not necessarily common) values and advancing their interests (Fioramonti and Fiori 2010: 24).

In the civil society arena, the leadership and organisation also differs from the traditional, hierarchical structure. During seemingly ‘spontaneous’ protests, it is not always clear who the leader or main representative/figure-head is. This is because of the emergence of the anti-leader. These are leaders who do not want to be seen as leaders, as they believe more in horizontal action instead of hierarchical, but are instrumental in organisation and in energising movements/protests (Gerbaudo 2012: 13).

Such a definition allows for fluidity of participants and change in civil society. Instead of prescribing characteristics to the participants in order for them to be considered part of civil society, the spatial approach considers the function of the participant when determining whether they form part of civil society or not (Fioramonti and Fiori 2010: 25). This means that whether a registered organisation or simply an *ad hoc* gathering of citizens, what matters is the function performed by the actor, rather than its legal, political or economic status. Such an approach appears to perform better for political analyses focusing on non-Western

societies and aiming to identify the unstructured component of civil society as it moves away from the formal and organisational criteria.

Considering civil society from a spatial approach, one is also enabled to analyse the transformation of the arena influenced by globalisation and transnational communication. As people gain more access to Internet-based communication technologies, they are able to interact transnationally, bypassing the state as the main international communicator (Mau, Mewes and Zimmerman 2008: 2). This interaction has an impact on the attitudes, practices and linkages between civil society on an international and local level.

For the purposes of this research, the definition of civil society as an ‘arena’ will be used due to its inclusivity, flexibility and transnational potential.

## **2.5. Conclusion**

As the world is becoming ‘smaller’, in part due to the spread in ICTs and access to them worldwide, the ease of participation in the international arena is increasing for a growing number of people. If we understand civil society as an ‘arena’ populated by different groups characterised by different values and levels of organisation, then it is fair to argue that the Internet-based communication technologies have strengthened the capacity of individual citizens to mobilise, coordinate and influence global agendas. International leveraging has proven to be one of those strategies which have been made more accessible to this broader range of civil society actors. Participants in the civil society arena, who may find that their communication channel to the government is limited or blocked, can attempt to follow the boomerang model – that is to try leveraging international support with the hope that it will result in a change locally. The Internet has facilitated this process by offering an alternative transnational space and set of communication tools which people can use to become netizens and exercise their citizen rights. Via the Internet, civil society can more easily gather or disseminate information, mobilise and network. It also has access to a greater audience and can thus embark on campaigns through citizen journalism or other methods to engage in information and accountability politics and influence the international public opinion to varying degrees with the aim of eliciting support. This framework will be used to examine the

usage of the Internet by Egyptian civil society to engage with the international community during the 18 days of protest that led to the downfall of Hosni Mubarak on 11 February 2011.

## CHAPTER III

### 3.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, it was suggested that the Internet has made it easier for civil society to engage internationally. More specifically, it was suggested that the unstructured or less organised segments within the civil society arena benefit the most from this advance in communication tools as they often lack other resources (financial, political, etc.) to undertake communication with external parties. This chapter will outline the Egyptian case study used to analyse how, why and to what effect civil society engages internationally using the Internet. When considering the Egyptian case, there was a perception that there wasn't a lively or effective civil society. This was one of the factors that made the mass and scale of the uprising surprising to the international community. The medium-level Internet penetration rate also made it questionable as to how effective and representative those using the Internet were. This chapter thus first explores the nature and development of civil society in Egypt and aims to highlight some of the challenges that it faces when trying to pursue political demands. This is used to establish whether there was a genuine communication channel to the government. After considering the 'old' civil society, it looks at the 'new' civil society and its usage of the Internet for activist purposes and of international leveraging prior to the uprising, which began on 25 January 2011. Afterwards, the major events and movements during the 2000s, which have contributed to the build-up of civil action, are briefly considered, followed by an overview of the 18 days of protest which form the time period of the main research question, which is used to assess whether and how Egyptian civil society utilised the Internet to engage internationally.

### 3.2. 'Old' civil society in Egypt

The Egyptian civil society has an almost 200 year old history of development, as well as stagnation. The first formal organisations and groups in Egypt emerged between 1821 and 1881, when professionals and members of the elite were allowed the freedom of association. The main associations were those of lawyers and businessmen (Al-Sayyid 1995: 230) and these associations functioned in complementarity with the state. During the colonial era, more activist, voluntary movements emerged (feminist, religious, trade unions) which sought to



promote and protect the rights of Egyptian citizens. In the period after liberation from colonisation, the number of civil society groups grew and people organised themselves to promote workers' rights and to demand greater transparency and accountability from government. These freedoms were curtailed after the monarchy was overthrown in 1952 by the free officers who established authoritarian rule and Gamal Abdel Nasser subsequently came to power, officially becoming president in 1956. Nasser enacted restrictive legislation, constitutional amendments and suppressed any form of opposition (Hassan 2010: 320). This downward trend changed again during Anwar Sadat's tenure, which lasted from 1970 until his assassination in 1981. Sadat pursued a policy of economic and political liberalisation and this attitude reflected on the treatment of civil society to a certain extent as some of the restrictions were lifted (Hassan 2010: 321). Civil society participation, however, still remained under a form of state regulation – a problem that continued under the Hosni Mubarak regime (1981-2011) (Hassan 2011). During Mubarak's rule, the regime grew more authoritarian, corrupt, ineffective in developing the country and there was systematic suppression. This contributed to the rising grievances against the regime (Hassan 2010). However, civil society and opposition were stifled – whether through harassment, detention, laws or other means. The state kept check on organised civil society as all organisations were expected, by law, to register with the Egyptian Ministry of Social Affairs (Al-Sayyid 1995: 236). Such registration measures meant that organisations which were deemed as being too critical or oppositional in nature to the regime could be denied permits and were thus forced to operate 'illegally' or discouraged from operating at all. However, the number of civil society organisations in Egypt reached 30,000 in 2008, with more than half of them being religious associations and social service non-governmental organisations (NGO's) (Hassan 2010: 326). By far, the majority were concentrated in urban areas (Al-Sayyid 1995: 231).

Due to the socio-economic difficulties in Egypt (high unemployment, poor service delivery, etc.) and government pressures and restrictions, many people used places of worship for social and political activities (Al-Sayyid 1995: 233). Thus, many religiously inspired groups used this space to become active mainly in the provision of services, such as education and healthcare, which increased their influence and support base (Ibrahim 1998: 381). At the same time, the growth of service-delivery groups played into the government's hands, as it alleviated the government of some of its responsibilities towards the population and gave a semblance of freedom of association. However, although the government tolerated groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood to provide social services, it did not tolerate their political

ambitions and potential. The Muslim Brotherhood, which had a growing support base and was considered to be the largest organised opposition to the government, was banned from political activity (Hassan 2010: 326). The group was accused by the government of fomenting unrest and posing security threats in the form of Islamist extremism. Thus they, along with other radical Islamist groups, became the excuse used to justify security measures such as the state of emergency, which was in place since 1981 and allowed for detention without charge, for military trials for civilians, the suppression of protests, the censoring of the media and systematic abuse of human rights in the name of security (Eltantawy and Wiest 2011: 1211; Hassan 2011). In the international arena, the regime posited itself as the guardian of stability and against religious extremism. This image was given a further boost after the 11 September 2001 attacks and the subsequent war on terror, especially as Islamists were largely equated to terrorists in the West (Abdelrahman 2007: 26). This had a possible effect of discrediting the religiously inspired opposition groups and the associations linked to them in the eyes of the West. Moreover, this dualism between the state and religious based civil society groups ended up damaging the image and activities of other manifestations of civil society, which focused on advocacy and participation, but were neither Islamists nor regime supporters.

Apart from the focus on socio-economic issues, many organisations were unable or unwilling to pursue democratisation (Sika 2012). Most Egyptian NGOs refrained from cooperating with one another and were usually governed through highly hierarchical structures, thus stifling genuine participation within their ranks (Abdalla 2008: 27). In some cases, they were believed to be in tacit compliance with the state, as an instrument of ‘controlled liberalisation’ by the government (Sika 2012; Abdalla 2008: 26). Other organisations, especially human rights advocacy NGOs which were mostly funded by the United States of America (USA) and the European Union (EU), were often accused of not representing the interests of Egyptians, as many of these groups were staffed by the educated intellectual elite and by foreigners (Pratt 2005). Consequently, most advocacy NGOs did not enjoy popular trust and support (Hassan 2011; Sika 2012).

### 3.3. The Internet and emergence of a ‘new’ civil society in Egypt

A new (and less structured) form of participation emerged in Egypt in the early 2000s (Halaseh 2012: 258). A number of factors contributed to the development of a youth that was more politically and socially conscious and wanted to participate in the public arena: the Internet, foreign education and the various youth empowerment programmes.

The Internet had an important role to play in the nascent stage of the ‘new’ civil society as it provided the much needed space (or arena) where people could access information and interact spontaneously and anonymously. The number of Egyptians using the Internet has been steadily rising since the Internet was first introduced in Egypt in 1993 (Radsch 2008: 1) to reach to 49.56% of the population in 2014 (International Telecommunication Union (ITU) 2014c). Of those Internet users, in 2013, males represented 60% and females 40% (Ministry of Communication and Information Technology 2013: 6). In terms of age groups, about 20% of users were under 15 years old, 35% were between the ages of 15-24, while 45% were between the ages of 24 – 74 (Ministry of Communication and Information Technology 2013: 6). The youth thus accounts for more than half of the Internet users.

Young Egyptians who had access to the Internet began to use forums available to express their views on Egypt and other issues and to find like-minded Egyptians to interact with. It was mainly young and relatively well educated Egyptians who used social media for political discussions (Howard et al 2011: 2). When debating online, the stigmas of class, gender, race and others are diminished and people are more focused on what the person is saying rather than what their socio-economic characteristics are (Bortot 2011). This allowed for the youth to engage online on a more equal footing which was important because, as interviewee I (2013, interview, 18 December) commented, “Egypt is a highly unequal and class-orientated society. The elite and the poorer majority look at each other with fear and distrust”. The sprouting of various blogs, sites and increasing usage of social media brought the realisation that there was a diffused civil society in Egypt, which was neither exclusively pro-regime, nor Islamist, nor as hierarchical as most NGOs were. The interactions on the Internet allowed for the process of conscientisation where Egyptians realised that no situation is cast in stone, people learnt to analyse their situations more critically and realised that they can be active civil society members in ways other than by participating in NGOs (Halaseh 2011: 265).

Young Egyptians began reading more and more – translated books online, blogs, news-sites – and were being influenced by outside ideas (Osman 2013: 225). An example is how the Onion ([www.theonion.com](http://www.theonion.com)) inspired El Koshary Today ([www.elkoshary.com](http://www.elkoshary.com)), a satirical fake-news site. Art, such as music and films, was also transcending borders and Egyptians reached out further than the traditional markets (North Africa and Levant) creating more international dialogue on a range of topics (Osman 2013: 225).

The youth was turning to the Internet for alternative sources of news (Interviewee B 2013, interview, 28 September; Interviewee J 2014, interview, 28 December). The national media was government-controlled and largely lacked credibility with regards to its content and commentary. Egyptians were hungry to find stories that were not covered or to find perspectives from a different angle (Interviewee J 2014, interview, 28 December). And so they found international and foreign news sites online, but also looked for commentary and information through blogs and social media platforms. Young Egyptians were following stories of free elections in Turkey and Lebanon, the shaming of corrupt politicians in the United Kingdom (UK) and Greece and street manifestations in Chile and elsewhere (Osman 2013: 209; Ghonim 2012: 114). Activists watched films, such as *V for Vendetta*, and documentaries online to learn protest tactics and strategies (Abdalla 2012). Through these online endeavours, some Egyptians also established contact with non-Egyptian counterparts, thus opening up possibilities for cross-fertilisation and exchange of ideas and activism tactics. These evolutions led to the growing influence of the civic phenomenon known as ‘netizens’, which describes the fusion between the Internet and citizen activism (as described in chapter II).

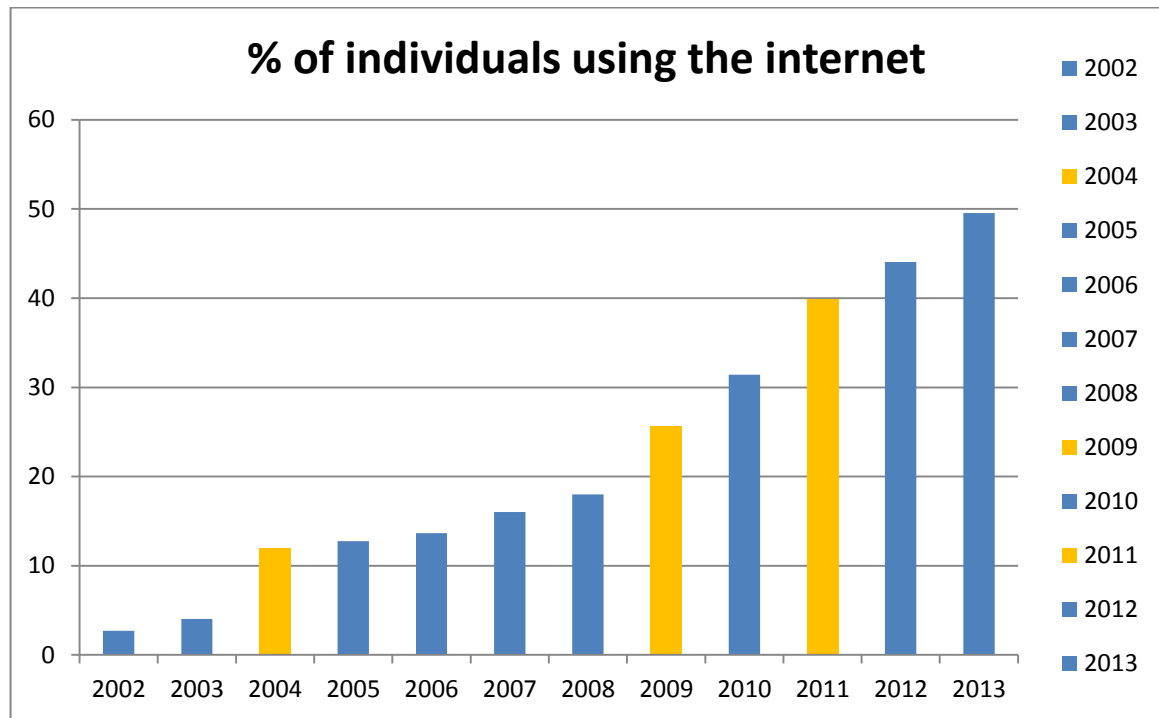
Bloggers were some of the earliest and most active netizens in Egypt. Blog aggregators, such as Omraneya created by activists Alaa Abdel Fattah and Manal Hassan, were important platforms which incubated new bloggers (Radsch 2008: 3). During the 2000s, the blogging community grew - it was estimated that there were 160 000 bloggers in Egypt in 2008 (Faris 2012: 103) - and became more critical of the authorities. Blogs such as those of Wael Abbas ([misrdigital.blogspot.com](http://misrdigital.blogspot.com)) and Noha Atef ([tortureinegypt.net](http://tortureinegypt.net)) were important in documenting and exposing police brutality. They provided a platform where people could share their stories of family members or friends being abused or tortured by the police. The blogging activity also forced some local media to publish stories that they would not have published otherwise and in that way ‘aired the dirty laundry’ of a regime which was conscious of its

reputation (Faris 2012: 102). In addition to acting as an incubator and forum for political ideas, “blogging is the best example of a set of software, hardware, and discursive practices that challenges linguistic and cultural authority” (Howard 2010: 148). This challenge to linguistic and cultural authority is especially important and helps explain the successful use of the Internet and social networking tools for engaging more and more young Egyptians and supporting their interest in politics and activism. Before the spread of the use of the Internet, mainly written/classical Arabic was used for intellectual, cultural or scientific works and in media in the Arab world, including in Egypt. This alienated the majority of the population which speaks in Egyptian dialect (Safouan 2007). By contrast, the Internet offers information and discussions in the ‘spoken Arabic’, making it more accessible to the wider Egyptian population and lending the interaction on the Internet more perceived legitimacy in the eyes of the citizens. Examples of the ‘spoken Arabic’ being used can be found on the many blogs written by Egyptian activists, such as the *Rantings of a Sandmonkey* ([www.sandmonkey.org](http://www.sandmonkey.org)) or *3arabawy* ([www.arabawy.org](http://www.arabawy.org)) or in the posts of Facebook pages such as *Kullena Khaled Said* (Ghonim 2012: 61). This ability of making political discourse and activism more attractive through more appealing language use, coupled with the dominance of the youth online, allowed netizens to forge a new identity apart from the legacy of the older generation of opposition activists (Abdalla 2012).

It is interesting to note that the years when major events occurred where civil society mobilised against the regime coincide with the biggest spikes in growth of Internet penetration in Egypt. From 2003 to 2004, the number of individual Internet users increased by 7.88% of the population – coinciding with the creation of the first broad opposition coalition, Kefaya, which included members of the youth and bloggers; from 2008 to 2009 by 7.68% - the usage of the Internet to mobilise civil society in solidarity with labour strikes; and from 2010 to 2011 by 8.41% - the uprising which led to the ouster of Mubarak (see figure 3.1.).

Figure 3.1. Percentage of individuals using the Internet in Egypt

(Yellow bars mark the years with biggest spikes)



\*Based on statistics from the International Telecommunications Union

Another indicator that there was a relation between the Internet usage and the civil society events in Egypt is the shift in content of the Egyptian blogs. From 2004 to 2011, the topics discussed in Arabic language Egyptian blogs gradually refocused from individualistic and particular topics towards more universal and societally orientated topics (Al Ani et al 2012: 4). The shift in the English language blogs is even more pronounced in the move away from personal topics towards revolution related topics from November 2010 to December 2010 and January 2011 (Al Ani et al 2012: 5). This is suggested by the authors to show that the English language blogs were tailored for an outward audience and attempted to engage the international audience in the growing activism in Egypt.

This new 'space', cyberspace, was a concern for the Mubarak regime as the regime could not exercise control over the content and over the participants. Tensions rose when various Egyptian bloggers and cyber activists attended conferences and/or training courses on online activism in Europe and the USA. The government was aware of these activities and took measures to intimidate and harass the activists. Numerous cyber activists, such as Mikael

Nabil, Esraa Abdel Fattah and Abdel Karim Nabil Suleiman were imprisoned and some of them tortured due to their ‘online dissent’ (Faris 2008; Pullicino 2012: 191).

### **3.4. The international connection**

In the case of Egypt, international leveraging is not a new phenomenon. Business organisations, for instance, have traditionally ‘leveraged’ international financial institutions and foreign powers to exert influence on the Egyptian regime to implement further economic liberalisation policies (Al-Sayyid 1995: 238). It could be considered that this leveraging was more successful than other forms as it fell in line with the Western economic narrative. This leverage was used to make the Egyptian context more comfortable for interests of the business organisations and not to call for change in the political system (Sika 2012). This way the organisations would still be tolerated by the regime and granted favours (Al-Sayyid 1995: 238) and the powerful business leaders could develop an increasingly intertwined relationship with the government (Osman 2013: 205). The relation between business and government was strengthened from the time of Sadat’s opening up of the economy in the mid-1970s (Osman 2013: 128).

From the early 2000s, civil society developed and young Egyptians increasingly began to take part in more politically orientated discussions and activism both on- and offline. They were in part influenced by the information and space provided on the Internet, as discussed earlier in the chapter, and also by Egyptians who travelled and gained fresh ideas and connections. Some of the Egyptians who returned after receiving foreign education or from working abroad brought with them new ideas in the realms of business and socio-political issues (Osman 2013: 233). Many of them were exposed to more critical forms of thinking in reference to power structures whereas the general Egyptian education standards deteriorated during the Mubarak rule and is considered to nurture a more submissive and compliant attitude (Osman 2013: 223). Those Egyptians started applying the new ideas and ways of thinking when looking at Egypt. They also formed alliances with non-Egyptian students and remained in contact mainly through Internet based social platforms (Interviewee F 2014, personal communication, April – June). These alliances were maintained and contributed to ideas and debates revolving around politics, democracy and civic participation in addition to a plethora of other topics. Activists began to make use of those connections when they began

to call for political changes. They were driven to this as their contributions and demands were generally unable to reach or directly influence local public policy or decision making circles (Osman 2013: 223). They, along with the transnational connections made via the Internet, facilitated international leveraging both organisationally and politically.

Organisationally, activists attended conferences and training sessions organised by other activist movements and institutions which had close relations to Western governments. Their aim was to create awareness on various issues, including the need for political change (Ramadan 2012: 6). Youth movements like the 6<sup>th</sup> of April Youth Movement liaised with non-Egyptian groups and activists to exchange experiences and learn. They received technical assistance from an Italian anarchist party on how to use ghost servers so as to avoid detection by the authorities (Ishani 2011). They met with members of the Otpor movement and took courses at the Center for Applied Non Violent Action (CANVAS) in Serbia to learn about organisation, mobilisation and non-violent protest (Kirkpatrick and Sanger 2011; Rosenberg 2011). Activists also worked together with the Kenyan NGO Ushahidi to develop capacities and knowledge on how to record on the ground events with mobile phones and then build online content around the material (Ishani 2011). One such project was the Harassmap site which allows people to report and map incidents of sexual harassment around Egypt.

Politically, activists reached out to foreign governments to lobby for their demands (Interviewee C 2014, interview, 19 June). Some activists travelled to the USA to meet with members of the United States' (US) congress, senate and think tanks to try persuade them to limit their support for the Mubarak regime and pressurise the regime to democratise. The USA was considered as particularly influential as they were providing aid of USD1.3 billion annually to Egypt and had a close working relationship with the Egyptian military and regime (Department of State 2011). However, many of these attempts were met by deaf ears. Interviewee C (2014, interview, 19 June), an activist who did meet with members from the US administration, expressed his frustration: "The US was more concerned about its interests and keeping a strong relation with Mubarak than the rights and freedom of Egyptian people".



### 3.5. Major movements/events during the 2000s

This new civil society which included activists and the blogger community grew bolder and used more innovative ways to collaborate and seek change. The growing activism manifested in a number of significant events during the 2000s. The first large event for young activists at the beginning of the 2000s was the demonstrations against the war in Iraq which took place in 2003. Around 50 000 protesters occupied Tahrir Square, a space symbolising Egyptian activism, for 2 days (El Chazly and Cooper 2012: 90).

The first big event in direct opposition to the regime was the creation of the Kefaya movement in 2004 (Oweidat et al 2008: 10). Kefaya ('enough' in Arabic) was a coalition of intellectuals, workers and activists from various backgrounds. The main success of the movement was that it managed to unite people from across the religious and political spectrum and in 2005 staged protests with a direct message against the regime: it called for an end to the Mubarak regime and said no to an 'accompanied' succession by his son, Gamal Mubarak. Although the movement did not directly result in any change in the regime, it did give some hope to Egyptians that there was room for dissent and action. This was encouraged and complemented by the development and growth of online platforms.

The 6<sup>th</sup> of April Youth Movement was the next significant coalition to emerge. The movement was started by young Egyptian activists who called for citizens to stand in solidarity with the workers at the Mahalla textile factories on 6 April 2008 by wearing black and staying at home on that day. The Internet was utilised extensively for mobilisation and dissemination of information by the youth movement. Esraa Rashid, together with activist Ahmed Maher, created a Facebook group called *6<sup>th</sup> of April Youth Movement* which invited people to participate. The news of the movement and the protest spread quickly and the followers of the Facebook page amassed by the thousands each day and reached approximately 70,000 followers (Shapiro 2009). Although the movement was successful in mobilising large numbers of people, it suffered setbacks resulting from internal disputes, lack of clear goals and a government crackdown. As a consequence, successive calls to protests received lukewarm responses. Some commentators believe that the 6<sup>th</sup> of April Youth Movement's call to action following the initial protest did not resonate with enough

Egyptians to make it a success and that many people did not want to take the risk of imprisonment or torture for protesting (Faris 2009) – they were living behind a barrier of fear.

This barrier of fear was created as a result of the years of living under a state of emergency (Eltantawy and Wiest 2011: 1211). The security forces clamped down critics and opponents of the regime. The police was known for its brutality and there was little faith in the justice system. This created widespread resentment towards the police and security forces. This resentment found a focus in the killing Khaled Said on 6 June 2010. He became a symbol with which young Egyptians could identify with. Khaled Said was a young man from Alexandria who was beaten to death in the street by the police for allegedly possessing a video that showed police officers selling illegal drugs. Following his death, the images of his disfigured face were circulated via the Internet (Ghonim 2012: 65). Although Egyptians were aware of police brutality and violence, the sight of those images had a strong effect. The fact that Khaled Said was a young, ordinary Egyptian made people realise that anyone could become a victim of police brutality. The prosecutor's preliminary report on the death of Khaled Said added further fuel to the fire. The report stated that Khaled Said died as a result of a drug overdose (Ghonim 2012: 62). The falsehood and impunity angered Egyptians even more. In order to capitalise on the outrage and try mobilise support and action, Wael Ghonim created a page called *Kullena Khaled Said* (We are all Khaled Said) and administered it together with AbdelRahman Mansour (Ghonim 2012: 61). This was not the first page created online in that vein. Another page was created earlier called *My name is Khaled Mohamed Said*. However, Mr Ghonim felt that the language used on the page was too inflammatory and aggressive and that those characteristics would alienate many people. For this reason he created the *Kullena Khaled Said* page to try make the page more appealing to the majority of Egyptians online, not just the ones who are already activists or hardened regime opponents (Ghonim 2012: 59). To enhance appeal, Mr Ghonim also used the colloquial Egyptian instead of formal Arabic. The page was an immediate hit and soon after an English version was created and administered by another young Egyptian living abroad so to engage with an international audience (Ghonim 2012: 92).

Shortly before the uprising, two more events contributed to the simmering discontent and feeling of inability to directly influence the government. Parliamentary elections were held in November 2010. The announced results from that election indicated that the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) won overwhelmingly. This result was widely regarded as being

fraudulent and small protests took place (Fahmy 2010). The second event occurred on New Year's Eve. A bomb exploded at a church in Alexandria killing 23 people. The government blamed Islamists, but there was speculation amongst the public on whether the government was involved in the bombing so as to sow sectarian tensions and distract the Egyptian people from the real issues (Afifi 2011). This discontent with the government and with the socio-economic issues in Egypt, coupled with the capacity of small groups to use the Internet to galvanise support, made the Egyptian civil society particularly adaptable. These activities were all preparations and drivers for the uprising that was to come. As Seneca said, luck is when preparation meets opportunity. It seems that the years of preparation by Egyptian activists met with the opportunity presented by the ouster of Ben Ali in Tunis to result in a successful mobilisation against Mubarak.

### **3.6. The uprising**

#### ***3.6.1. The build-up to 25 January 2011***

Egyptian activists were planning to stage a protest on National Police Day, 25 January 2011, to pose a challenge to and to highlight the abuse by the police and security forces in Egypt (Faris 2012: 101). The group 6<sup>th</sup> of April Youth Movement had already held a similar protest the year before in 2010. However the context in 2011 (the death of Khaled Said; the Tunisian protests) created different opportunities for such an event. The activists did not foresee that the protest would quickly become much larger than expected and would extend to demand for bread, freedom and social justice, an end to the emergency law and for the fall of the regime. This evolution happened quickly taking both Egyptians and the international community by surprise.

As described, the situation in Egypt was brewing for many years and the events in Tunisia served as the spark which ignited mass protests. From December 2010, Egyptians were following the news on traditional media and on the Internet on the developments in Tunisia. The events there began on 17 December when Mohamed Bouazizi, a fruit seller, set himself on fire, and subsequently died, in front of the governor's building in Sidi Bouzid in protest against the confiscation of his produce and police harassment. The self-immolation was followed by protests in his home town of Sidi Bouzid which then spread to all over the country. The Tunisian protests quickly evolved into general protests expressing

dissatisfaction with the rule by then president Zine el Abdine Ben Ali, frustration with corruption, the lack of service delivery and the low living standards. The protesters demanded that Ben Ali step down. Egyptians were watching the events unfold in Tunisia very closely. There was a feeling of camaraderie with the Tunisians as both countries were ruled by authoritarian governments, suffered from high youth unemployment, low wages, lack of freedoms and from police brutality (Ramadan 2012: 26). This process triggered spirited online and offline debates in Egypt and was received with mixed feelings. There were some who believed that the Tunisians set an example that Egyptians should follow – to go to the streets and voice their demands (Ghonim 2012: 131). Some, driven by desperation, tried to replicate the situation literally and self-immolated themselves in public places (Reuters 2011). Others, who were more sceptical, believed that Egypt was different to Tunisia, that it was stable and that the military was protecting the people as well as the peace agreement with Israel which promoted regional stability (Interviewee F 2014, personal communication, April – June). There was also the feeling that Egyptians become too passive and that such actions would not succeed (Interviewee F 2014, personal communication, April – June).

The Egyptians arguing for protest action were given an important boost when news emerged that Ben Ali and his family fled from Tunisia to Saudi Arabia on 14 January 2011, after 28 days of protests. The fall of Ben Ali arguably sparked hope in other countries that longstanding rulers could fall under the pressure of popular mobilization. Egyptian netizens intensified their discussions about their future and possible actions. Many bloggers and activists used the Internet to encourage Egyptians to take to the streets on 25 January and emphasised that Tunisians, Jordanians and others are supporting the Egyptian people in their quest for bread, freedom and social justice in an effort to increase the feeling of solidarity and encouragement (Eltantawy and Wiest 2011: 1248). Facebook was used to amass content and make links with like-minded people. The Kullena Khaled Said page created the Facebook event for 25 January protest titled ‘January 25: Revolution against torture, poverty, corruption and unemployment’. By 21 January, the event had 100,000 people that clicked ‘would attend’ (Gerbaudo 2012: 61). Activists and non-activists posted statuses and videos online encouraging people to protest and shared information on protest tactics. Asmaa Mahfouz, an activist and member of the 6<sup>th</sup> of April Youth Movement, posted a video to You Tube where she appealed to Egyptians to come to the streets on 25 January and said that they would be just as culpable as the regime for the state of Egypt were they to opt to stay at home (El-Baghdadi 2011). Omar Afifi, a former Egyptian police officer who resides in the US after

falling out of favour with the regime, posted a video on 14 January 2011 where he congratulated the people of Tunisia on ousting Ben Ali and encouraged Egyptians to participate in the protest on 25 January (Afifi 2011a). On 21 January, Mr Afifi posted more videos in which he gave guidance on protest tactics such as advising people not to carry weapons, to be peaceful and similar information (Afifi 2011b; Afifi 2011c). Videos such as these were shared via Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Twitter was used to attract international attention to the events in Egypt (Howard et al 2011: 16).

To be effective, however, cyber activism needs to be complemented by on-the-ground activity (Faris 2008). And so Egyptians coupled the cyber activism with on-the-ground mobilisation through word-of-mouth, handing out of flyers, sending mass text messages and activists going to areas with low Internet penetration and telling people about the protests (Interviewee C 2014, interview, 19 June; Interviewee A 2013, interview and personal communication, September). One interviewee and activist explained that he reached out to the leaders of the Ultras, the hard-core fans of football clubs Zamalek and Al Ahli, to ask them to mobilise their members and invigorate the protests with their seasoned songs and energy. The participation of the Ultras was also valuable as they were experienced in being confronted by the police and could thus help guide others in case of confrontation (Interviewee C 2014, interview, 19 June).

The activists and the rest of the newly inspired citizens were not the only ones debating the possible ripple effect of the Tunisian protests. The Egyptian government actively tried to shape the debate regarding the implications, or lack thereof, of the Tunisian events on Egypt. They repeatedly emphasised through state media that Egypt differed from Tunisia, as it was a more developed and better off country and that the leader was progressive and wise – making reforms step by step whilst maintaining stability and peace. Stability and security – the oft repeated phrases used to justify repression and control. The government also tried to delegitimise Egyptian activists who advocated change and mobilisation by labelling them as foreign ‘agents’ and trouble-makers (Ghonim 2012: 138).

The international community, too, was wary of the developments. Egypt was an important country in the international arena. It formed a strategic part of the US Middle-Eastern foreign policy, was a close ally on the war on terror, controls the Suez Canal, is close to the oil rich Gulf monarchies and holds a peace-agreement with Israel. Hosni Mubarak, president of

Egypt since 1981, was perceived by the West as a benevolent dictator – a stable partner in an unstable region (Osman 2013: 194). Even though there was knowledge that human rights, freedoms and development were not upheld, these issues were overshadowed by the necessity of maintaining stability in the region and a degree of control. Thus an uncontrolled disruption in the Egyptian system, which had the risk of spilling over into the region, was not desirable in the West. The West also considered Egypt to be more of a follower of US strategic interests in the Middle East and the so called Pax Americana. The Mubarak regime did not proactively develop its own national and regional projects that had a specific Egyptian identity. Egyptians themselves felt that Egypt was defined by its relation to the USA, Saudi Arabia and Israel and had lost its own sense of identity and dignity (Osman 2013: 201). This reinforced the perception that resulted from such a foreign policy, which was that Egyptians themselves were not proactive but reactive and followers (Interviewee A 2013, interview and personal communication, September). These perceptions and attitudes made it more difficult to believe that civil society could act as a catalyst for a large change in Egypt.

### ***3.6.2. The protests***

When 25 January came, many people were unsure of how large or small the turn-out would be. Previous protests did not manage to conjure the critical mass needed to begin popular protests and usually numbered in the hundreds (Kandil 2011: 20). Also, although there was a flurry of online activity and discussions regarding 25 January and many people confirmed attendance on the Facebook event, online confirmations did not translate to actual attendance as activists learnt from previous experiences (Interviewee C 2014, interview, 19 June; Interviewee A 2013, interview and personal communication, September). However the thousands of people who took to the streets, not only in Cairo but in many cities across Egypt, surprised everyone.

On 25 January, people started to gather at the various starting points. As they gradually marched from their neighbourhoods and side streets towards the central gathering points, they chanted for the people in their houses to come down and join them. This was critical to swelling the numbers of people in the streets (Interviewee C 2014, interview, 19 June). As the morning progressed, some protesters were interested to know whether the international media was reporting on the protests and what were they saying. Interviewee H (2014, interview, 27 December) said of his brother-in-law, a protestor who was neither an activist nor interested in politics before the uprising but became involved in promoting 25 January a few weeks before

the event: "He keep on calling me and asking if Al Jazeera show the protest. It was very important for him for protest not to be invisible". The interviewee was assigned by his brother-in-law to stay at home in front of the computer, to follow the news coverage by the international media as well as on social media and provide constant updates to the brother-in-law (Interviewee H 2014, interview, 27 December).

As protesters marched through the side streets and alleys and came closer to the central points in Cairo, with Tahrir Square being the goal destination, they were confronted by the police, wielding tear-gas and water hoses, and clashes ensued (Kandil 2011: 20). However the protesters broke through the police lines to reach Tahrir Square. This was perceived as a victory by the protesters (Interviewee I, 18 December 2013, Cairo; Interviewee H 2014, interview, 27 December). After reaching and chanting in Tahrir Square, activists and protesters were unsure of what actions to take next. Activists were fearful of losing control over the crowd due to its unexpected size and the evolution of the chants to demanding the fall of the regime (El Chazly and Cooper 2012: 89). It was debated whether the protesters should stay and occupy the square. The government tried to blame the Muslim Brotherhood for the unrest, a claim which the protesters denied. The days that followed were tense, included further clashes between police and protesters, the detention of activists and members of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Following the success of the first day of protests and the brutal response by the police, both factors which fuelled growth in public mobilisation, protesters announced that Friday, 28 January, would be the Day of Rage. Egyptians who initially did not believe that the protests would amount to anything more than a few hundred people chanting, being confronted by police and then going home, began to think otherwise and decided to participate (El Chazly and Cooper 2012: 93). Political figures and groups, such as Mohammed El Baradei and the Muslim Brotherhood, also decided to lend their support to the protests and participate on the Day of Rage (El Chazly and Cooper 2012: 83). The mobilisation of the Muslim Brotherhood members was critical as it helped inflate the number of protesters significantly (Osman 2013: 252). People began protests after Friday prayers and were again met by police brutality. After fierce battles, especially on strategic access areas towards Tahrir Square, where the protesters managed to overwhelm the police, overturn their vehicles and advance, the security forces were withdrawn, leaving the protesters feeling victorious (El Chazly and Cooper 2012: 84). However, a curfew was then implemented and the army deployed in various areas (Kandil

2011: 21). The army seemed to watch the activities from the side-lines, not taking any obvious actions against the protesters. Hosni Mubarak responded to the protests for the first time in a speech in which he dismissed his cabinet and appointed a vice-president, Omar Suleiman, for the first time in his career. These concessions did not satisfy the protesters however as Mubarak did not address their demands directly. Thus they carried on with the protest action and by occupying Tahrir Square. In retaliation against the police, some protesters broke into police stations to search for detainees and then burnt the police stations. There were also large break-outs from prisons – believed by many of the interviewees to have been ordered by the then-Minister of Interior, Habib al Adly, so to create chaos, the impression that popular actions are dangerous and to demonstrate that Egypt is not ready for a popular uprising and needs a regime like Mubarak’s for stability (Interviewee B 2013, interview, 28 September; Interviewee C 2014, interview, 19 June; Interviewee G 2014, personal communication, 22 September; Interviewee K 2014, interview, 20 December).

The March of the Millions took place on 1 February where an estimated 2 million people protested in Tahrir Square alone. The day before the army announced its recognition of the demands of the people. Such an announcement boosted the protesters’ morale. In reaction to the continuing and escalating protests, Mubarak made a speech where he announced that he would not run in the upcoming elections, which were scheduled for September 2011, and that he would respect the protesters’ demands. This speech created some divisions within the protesters as some were leaning to abandoning further protest action and to give then-president Mubarak a chance to fulfil his promises. Interviewee L (2013, interview, 17 December) was in disagreement with his friends and work colleagues who were also protesting. He said:

I told them [the other protesters] we must stop now. We should give chance to Mubarak to make [fulfil] his promise and wait for the elections. Like this we can have slow and secure change and no more violence.

Others however were sceptical and pushed for further protests and for Mubarak’s resignation as they feared that Mubarak would use the time until the next election to further repress the protesters and solidify the regime:



If we gave this chance for Mubarak, he would have used this time to kill the protesters and make the regime stronger. He was making that speech to divide and trick the Egyptian people, but we were not so stupid to believe him after he lied to us so many times before (Interviewee I 2013, interview, 18 December).

The regime's actions the next day, on 2 February, hardened the views of the second group of protesters. That day came to be known as the Battle of the Camel. Pro-regime protesters and alleged government sponsored thugs, some riding on camels and horses, entered into Tahrir Square and began attacking the anti-regime protesters. The fight that ensued included live-ammunition being fired at the anti-government protesters and the casualty figures from that battle range from 8 to more than 20, depending on the source (Amnesty International 2011: 19). Some activists noted that the army did not prevent the pro-regime protestors or thugs from entering Tahrir on that day and did not take any measures to prevent the violence. In the days that followed rumours were spread of foreign agents infiltrating Egypt and trying to destabilise the country. The rumours were followed by a rise in xenophobic attacks. The anti-regime protesters' resolution not to leave Tahrir until Mubarak resigned hardened in the face of such antics and they called for the Friday of Departure on 4 February. On this day, many people expected Mubarak to announce his resignation. However, after hours of waiting for his speech, he again made some promises but did not resign. The NDP leadership, including Gamal Mubarak, did resign however the next day (Amnesty International 2011: 19).

On 9 February, a general strike, taking on some political tones, occurred across the country (Amnesty International 2011: 19). The workers demanded for higher wages and some for the resignation of Mubarak. This strike caused great pressure on the economy and business interests in the country (Al Jazeera 2011a). On 10 February, it was again widely expected that Mubarak would render his resignation and this expectation was enforced by statements by the army and President Obama insinuating as much (Shadid and Kirkpatrick 2011). The protesters were left disappointed when Mubarak denied that he was resigning, reiterated that he would serve until the end of his term and announced that he had delegated some of his powers to the vice-president in a speech that he delivered later in the evening. However, the next day on 11 February, Omar Suleiman, vice-president, announced that Hosni Mubarak had resigned and transferred power to the leader of the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF), Field Marshall Mohamed Hussein Tanawi (Al Jazeera 2011b). The announcement was met with wild jubilation in Tahrir and other locations around Egypt. The protesters could

not believe that they managed to oust a ruler of 30 years, the only president many of them had lived under. Shortly after the resignation, the SCAF issued a statement whereby it stated that the Emergency Law would be repealed once the special circumstances ended, that the SCAF would undertake to implement the demands of the people and they encouraged for life to return to normal in Egypt (Al Jazeera 2011c).

The scale and persistence of the protesters despite facing dangers from police and security forces caught the international media's attention. It was this element of surprise which enhanced the opportunity for Egyptians to engage internationally. As Ethan Zuckerman (2013: 83) mentions in his book, *Rewire*, it is more likely that media will cover news which is unexpected than that which is drawn out. Although activism and protests were increasing steadily in Egypt since the early 2000s, the actions formed part of a steady trajectory. However the 2011 protests broke predictions and thus captivated international attention. Curiosity and questions were raised on who these protesters were, what they represented and what were their demands.

The protestors who filled the streets across Egypt on 25 January and throughout the 18 days until Mubarak resigned were neither exclusively religious fundamentalists nor admirers of the West wishing to emulate the European or US systems. Traditional organised groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood were conspicuous in their official absence at the beginning of the protests, officially joining later on; however some of their members did attend in their individual capacities from the beginning, especially from the Youth of the Muslim Brotherhood (Kandil 2011: 21). Political opposition was also officially absent from the organisation and at the beginning of the uprising. Figures such as Mohammed el Baradei came back to Egypt on 26 January to announce that he would act as the political leader of the anti-regime protests if needed (Fahim and Stack 2011). Tahrir Square, the symbolic epicentre of the uprising, encompassed the variety of Egyptians who took part in the protest. There were men and women, people from across the economic spectrum, liberals, Islamists, revolutionary socialists and more. The protestors were common Egyptian citizens (mainly youth) who wanted justice, a better life and end to the regime and its corruption and repression. The protesters' demands, the main ones being 'bread, freedom and social justice', as well as 'the people want to bring down the regime', transcended societal divisions and democratisation had popular support as it was pushed for from within Egypt and not imposed from the outside (Roy 2012: 9). This lent legitimacy to the protests locally and

internationally. The protestors largely adopted the principles of non-violent resistance and made massive use of new technologies to build momentum and critical mass (Zunes 2011).

The Internet-based communication technologies played an important role to mobilise and coordinate the protesters, especially during the initial days of the uprising. Activists constantly updated statuses, information and videos to motivate people to go to the streets and stay there, to give information on tactics and strategies to be used when protesting and to encourage protesters to remain united and peaceful. This information then filtered through to people with no Internet access through word-of-mouth, pamphlets and similar means (Interviewee A 2013, interview and personal communication, September; Interviewee C 2014, interview, 19 June). The protesters used Twitter for organisational purposes and to quickly disseminate information using the #jan25 hashtag. They provided updates on locations that were being blocked off by police, passed on tips on how to handle tear gas and reminded protesters to stay calm and not to turn to violence. They also took photos and videos of the events as they were unfolding and posted them online (Khamis and Vaughn 2011).

The government saw the power of the Internet and the social media for mobilisation and exposure. In an effort to suppress the protests, they blocked access to Twitter and Facebook on 26 January. This was followed by a full Internet shut down on the evening of 27 January and the disabling of mobile phone communications on 28 January (Dunn 2011). However the Internet as a tool proved to be adaptable and Egyptians could change the way that they used it depending on the needs of the moment (Al Ani et al 2012: 9). When the social networking sites were blocked, Egyptians still managed to access them, although in smaller numbers, via proxy-servers. Google, SayNow and Twitter collaborated to provide the Speak2Tweet service where Egyptians (or anyone) could call a specific number and leave a message which would then be tweeted with the hashtag #egypt, making it easily findable on Twitter. Also by calling the designated numbers, Egyptians could listen to Tweets and so there was a two-way line of communication. When the Internet was blocked the government left one Internet service provider running, Noor, probably as that was the one that the Egyptian Stock Exchange was running on. Some businesses and people who had access to the Internet via Noor disabled their protective security codes so that anyone within reach could connect (Khamis and Vaughn 2011: 14). The Internet was restored only on 2 February and SMS services on 6

February (Dunn 2011). The restoration of the Internet was marked by a surge in Internet traffic to pre-shut-down levels (Dubai School of Government (DSG) 2011: 3).

When asked whether they thought that the Internet blockade hampered the efforts of the protesters, many interviewees replied that the government made the move too late and that the momentum was already gaining. Many people also considered the act to have actually helped the protests as firstly people were forced to go to the streets to look for their friends/family, secondly people were angered by the blockade and thirdly they were made aware that the protests were serious as they provoked such a reaction from the regime (Gerbaudo 2012: 68; Interviewee A 2013, interview and personal communication, September; Interviewee G 2014, personal communication, 22 September). The inability to communicate online also encouraged people to get together and discuss ideas and strategies in person, enforcing the building of personal ties and networks (Dunn 2011).

The Mubarak regime fought brutally against the protesters, both physically and through information. It is estimated that over 840 people were killed during the 18 days of protest and over 6 467 persons were injured (Amnesty International 2011: 8). At the beginning of the uprising, from 25 – 28 January, the Egyptian state media barely covered the protests. Once they did cover the protests, the local media tried to convey to the world that the protesters were thugs and misguided youths who were threatening public order and safety (Hamdy and Gomaa 2012: 199). The international, rather mainly Western, media portrayed the protests as a division between Egyptians into the Islamist and secular camps (Ramadan 2012: 11) – again simplifying a complex situation into a superficial dichotomy. In order to preserve their legitimacy and convey an accurate picture of the events of the ground, Egyptian protesters used the Internet and social media to engage in citizen and participatory journalism. But did they also use the Internet and its transnational communication abilities to elicit international support? And what did they try to convey to the international audience?

### **3.7. Conclusion**

In Egypt, people saw that even after years of increasing activism and protests, the government still did not open up channels to listen to the demands of people and engage with them constructively. People felt that the communication channel between themselves and the

government for meaningful change was closed and that the regime had too many vested interests in the status quo. Instead of dialogue, the government resorted to the systematic use of force and violence to intimidate and discourage public action. Since the public space was restricted and dangerous to operate in, some Egyptians turned to cyberspace where they started exercising their citizen rights, becoming netizens, and becoming more politically active. Through their online interactions, they made ties with various non-Egyptians and were exposed to a transnational space where they learnt from and contributed to the experiences and ideas shared. Egyptian activists also realised, after various attempts at protest action, that they needed to build critical mass on the ground to have any chance at holding successful protests which would challenge the government. They were aware that this effort could be complemented by eliciting international support which would serve both to encourage morale in Egypt and to pressurise the regime to change its approach. The Internet played an important role in allowing Egyptians, activists and non-seasoned activists, to reach out to external actors for this purpose. The next chapter will explore how and why Egyptians tried to reach out to the international community and what some of the visible reactions were.

## CHAPTER IV

### 4.1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on the relationship between civil protest and the use of Internet-based communication technologies, looking specifically at the Egyptian uprising described in the previous chapter. It deals in particular with how the Egyptian protesters used the Internet to gain international support and will attempt to assess the extent to which their actions influenced the international discourse and attitude towards the Egyptian situation. The chapter begins by looking at the Internet usage by Egyptians during the 18 days of protest for the purposes of engaging with an international audience. Then, the chapter concentrates on the usage of social media by civil society to send messages to the international audiences. The most dominant themes running through the analysed content are identified and examples thereof included. The international reactions to the events in Egypt are considered next. More specifically, the United States of America (USA), European, Israeli and regional governments' reactions are looked at for the sake of focus and relevance. The reactions of the Hosni Mubarak regime towards the international stances and pressures are also reflected upon so to gauge whether there was indeed a boomerang effect. And before concluding, the achievements of the attempts at international leveraging using the Internet are considered.

### 4.2. Internet and the uprising: The year of the protester

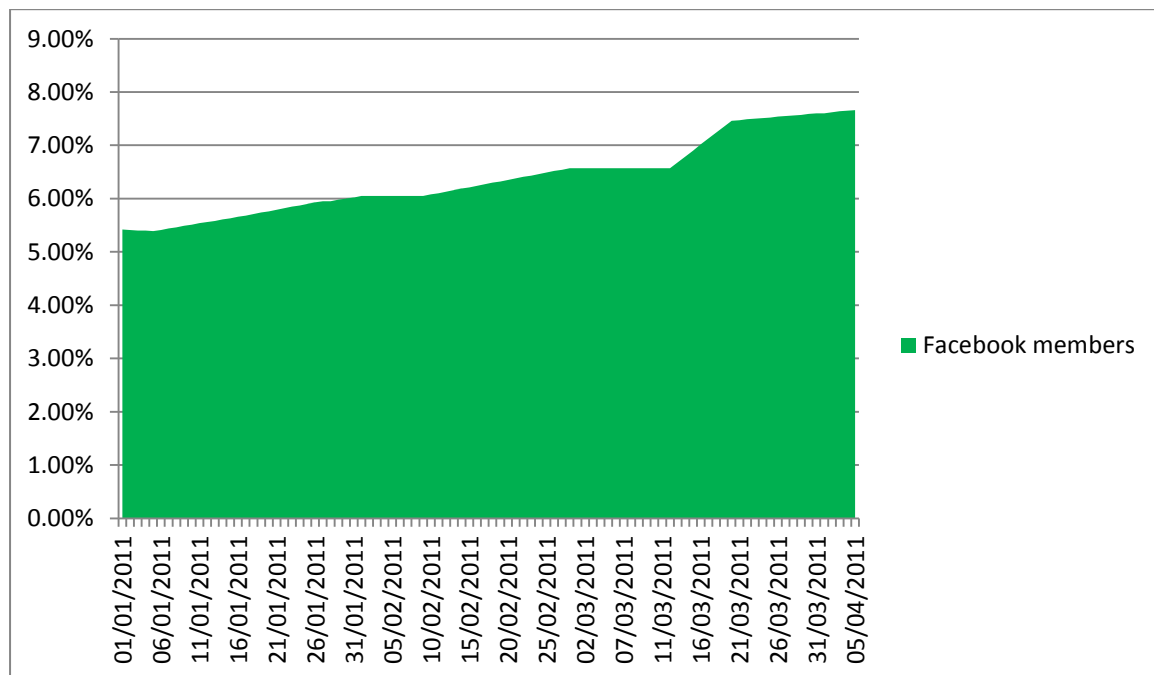
Time magazine proclaimed 2011 as the year of the protester – something that the events in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Chile, Greece and other countries contributed to (Anderson 2011). However Egypt had a particular place in that year. Egyptian protesters managed to mobilise in an atmosphere of scepticism and intimidation by the government, and force then-president Hosni Mubarak, who was in power for 30 years, to step down after 18 days of protest. As was considered in the previous chapter, the protesters who instigated and took part in the uprising were mostly young Egyptians, not necessarily belonging to specific organisations or political groups and not defining themselves within the dichotomy of pro-Mubarak/pro-Muslim Brotherhood. At the first phase of the uprising, from 25 January to 28 January, before people realised how large the protests would grow to become, most Egyptians were concerned with what was happening locally on the ground and were intent on spreading the revolution

domestically. They wanted to create a critical mass on the ground which would be able to withstand government repression and hopefully result in some change. Thus the international audience was not the main target of the growing number of social media messages and content sent in the early days (Interviewee E 2014, interview and personal communication, July – September; Interviewee D 2014, interview, 18 June). However, as the uprising progressed and it became apparent that a critical mass was mobilised and that the popular uprising would continue, a broader international focus ensued.

#### 4.2.1. A look through numbers

The Internet provided an arena through which Egyptian protesters could interact domestically and internationally. Activists and protesters used Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and other online platforms to post videos, pictures and provide a live feed of events. Facebook was viewed as being influential by Egyptians, especially as a platform to share content, and it gained two million new users in Egypt between 5 January and 5 April 2011 (Dubai School of Government (DSG) 2011: 9) to reach 7.66% of Egyptians using Facebook by 5 April 2011 (see figure 4.1.). Some people even named their café *Facebook* in downtown Cairo, as witnessed during a visit in 2013.

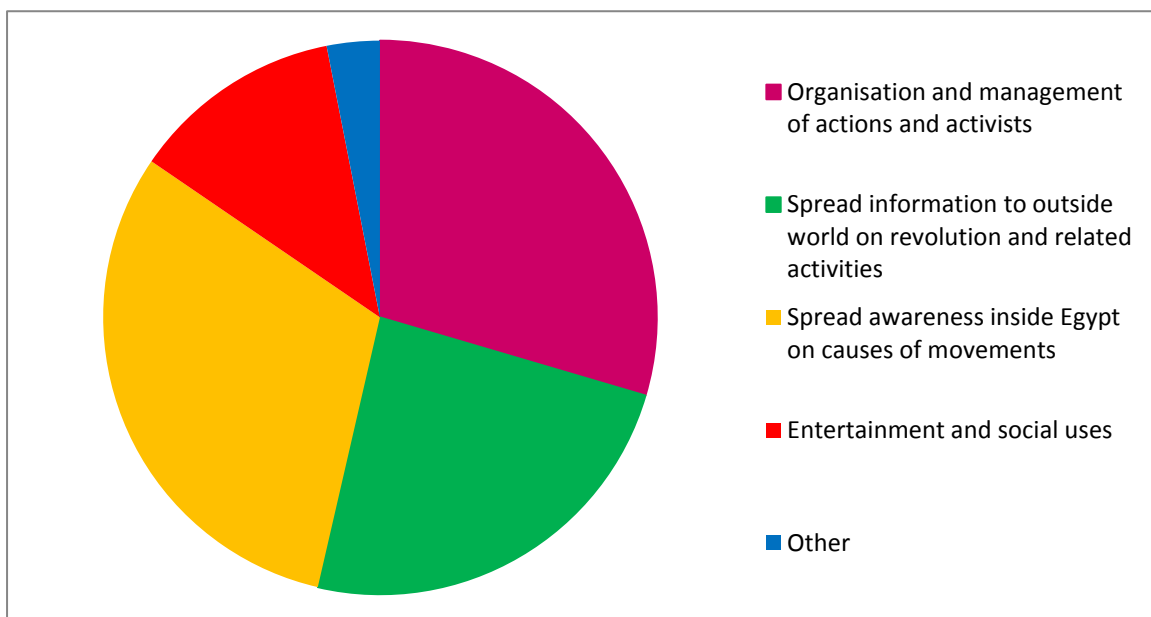
Figure 4.1. Percentage of Egyptians who are Facebook members



\*Statistics retrieved from Dubai School of Government Arab Social Media Report

In a survey conducted by the DSG, it was found that 29.55% of Egyptian Facebook users used the platform for organisation and management of actions and activists; 24.05% used it to spread information to the outside world on the movement and related events; 30.93% used it to spread awareness in the country on the causes of the movements; 12.37% used it for entertainment and social uses; and 3.09% used it for other purposes (DSG 2011: 6) (see figure 4.2.). Furthermore, about 75% of Facebook users used Arabic to communicate and 25% used English (DSG 2011: 7). This supports the views that, while the domestic focus was dominant, the international dimension was noteworthy.

Figure 4.2. Purposes of Facebook usage by Egyptians



\*Statistics retrieved from Dubai School of Governance Arab Social Media Report

While Facebook was used by a larger amount of Egyptians and had a more domestic focus, Twitter as a tool was used to communicate to a largely international audience (Howard et al 2011: 16). The Twitter penetration rate in Egypt was quite low, with the DSG (2011: 28) calculating just over 131 000 active Twitter users between 1 January 2011 and 30 March 2011. Around 51% of those users were located in the Cairo area, meaning that there was a certain bias in the coverage. Those few Twitter users were quite active during the uprising and in its immediate aftermath with producing over 2 160 000 tweets from 1 January 2011 to 30 March 2011 (DSG 2011: 18). Such online activity reverberated amongst Twitter users worldwide and resulted in that the most trending hashtag on Twitter in 2011 was #egypt while #Jan25 came in 8<sup>th</sup> place (Twitter 2011). Twitter (2011) also published the most



popular news that was circulated in 2011 and it was ‘Mubarak’s resignation’. Under most popular cities and countries, Cairo and Egypt came first and second respectively (Twitter 2011). Regionally, the top two trends within the MENA region were #egypt and #jan25, indicating that majority of the tweets in the region were focused on the Egyptian uprising and created a regional dialogue (DSG 2011: 16). These statistics indicate that the Egyptian uprising had formed a significant and a ‘loud’ part of online discourse not only within Egypt, but even more so outside of Egypt.

YouTube was also an important platform for Egyptian netizens. The number of YouTube uploads in Egypt increased by 150% and views by 220% in 2011 (DSG 2012: 23). Egyptians both from within Egypt and abroad created videos to document the events or raise awareness, amongst other reasons, and uploaded them to YouTube and other sites. One such video was shot by Omar Rashed (2011) with his mobile phone camera and shows an allegedly diplomatic car running over, killing and injuring between 20-30 protesters. In the description section, Omar Rashed provides some context and personal comments on the incident. The video received around 2 million views during February 2011. Another video, created by Los Angeles based Egyptian Tamer Shabaan and posted on YouTube, also went viral and had 2 million views by early February. It was shared on Facebook almost 150 000 times (Fauor 2011). The video is an amalgam of various pieces of footage and shows the protesters, their demands and the struggles that they were going through during the uprising. Tamer Shabaan said that his intention in making the video was to allow the world to feel the emotions that he felt when watching such footage and to hopefully inspire people, both Egyptians and non-Egyptians, to support the protesters and their cause (Shaaban 2012). The video was picked up by mainstream media networks like Al Jazeera and CNN which also broadcast it, causing political analysts to notice and comment on it too (Lee 2011).

The increasing use of social media and the interactions through them enforced the feelings of shared identities and experiences by Egyptian netizens: 79% of Egyptian respondents to a questionnaire felt that social media contributed to their feeling of being a global citizen; 78% felt that their regional identity was enhanced; and 74% created stronger links with people from the same religious communities (DSG 2011: 5 and 6). These ties helped to boost morale amongst the netizens and raised the perceived value of the social media networks (Interviewee K 2014, interview, 20 December).

While the numbers are impressive, it should be remembered that relatively few Egyptians had access to the Internet due to low penetration rate, blocked access to the Internet and social media, language barriers, and illiteracy. In order to enable Egyptians to circumvent such challenges to a certain extent, activists, protesters and their supporters came up with creative ideas. During the demonstrations in Tahrir Square, activists organised themselves and created a media tent. It was a central point where footage and pictures were collected from the events and the activists would then post them to social media networks and send them to media outlets (Interviewee D 2014, interview, 18 June). This allowed for Egyptians with no Internet access to still upload their content or testimonies online. In places where there was no media tent available, Egyptians who did not have Internet access or knowledge of English approached those who did and asked them to tell the world what was happening (Soueif 2012: 121). In an effort to reach international audiences about the events in Egypt, protesters and their sympathisers reproduced relevant Tweets in various languages. Noha Atef, an Egyptian who was abroad at the time of the uprising, followed tweets coming from Egypt, translated the Arabic ones into English and retweeted them (Aouragh and Alexander 2011: 1350). Blogs and sites like the *translate speak2tweet* (<https://speak2tweettranslate.wordpress.com/>) and *Alive in Egypt* ([alive.in/Egypt](http://alive.in/Egypt)) assisted in making the Arabic content more accessible by hosting, transcribing and translating tweets. With reference to the blockade of Facebook and Twitter and the Internet shut-down, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Egyptians managed to connect via proxy-servers and land lines, or could tweet via the Speak2Tweet service provided by Twitter and Google.

But how was this content produced and uploaded by Egyptians being received and used? A number of studies have provided some insights into the consumption and usage of the online content related to the uprising. A study conducted by Aday et al (2013: 10) found that the number of clicks on tweets containing the hashtag #jan25 and a link to a Uniform Resource Identifier (URL), also known as a web address, experienced spikes on days of significant events. The Friday of Departure attracted the highest number of clicks in the period between 1 January and 1 April 2011 (Aday et al 2013: 10). Additionally, they find that the percentages of clicks distributed between people in Egypt, in the region and outside of the regions were 14%; 11%; and 76% respectively (Aday et al 2013: 11). This suggests that most of the viewers came from outside of Egypt and the region. The percentage could be slightly skewed given that some Egyptians and users from countries in the region use proxy servers or sites such as Hot Spot Shield or Tor that would hide their real location. The percentages could also

be explained by the low Internet and even lower Twitter penetration rates in Egypt and the region when compared to other parts of the world.

#### ***4.2.2. Citizen journalism and mainstream media***

Through this increasing usage of social media, citizen journalism became an important mechanism for Egyptian protesters to make sure that their views and experiences were recorded and transmitted and it allowed them to detect and expose falsehoods and misinformation (Khamis, Gold and Vaughn 2012). This was important as the protesters were challenging certain geostrategic interests and the local status quo. External governments, especially in the West, seemed not particularly concerned with supporting the protesters' demands as much as recalibrating their own policies and strategies so to have control over the outcomes of the uprising (Ramadan 2012: 5). They had powerful interests in Egypt and needed to maintain a good relation with the government to sustain those agreements – no matter who was in power. The unexpected nature of the protests, in terms of size and speed of development, unsettled the governments of the USA, most European Union (EU) members, Israel, Saudi Arabia and others. From the uncertain stances by the USA and EU, it seems that their governments were caught in between whether to continue supporting Mubarak or tentatively supporting the protesters so as not to lose influence should the protesters be successful in their demands, whilst Saudi Arabia, Israel and some other countries did not wish to see an uncontrolled change or to lose an ally (CNN 2011b). Egyptians were aware of these dynamics (Soueif 2012: 44). A tweet from Mona Eltahawy reflected this: “Who’s scared of #Egypt revolution? #Israel, #Saudi Arabia, #Jordan, #UAE pressed #US not 2 cut loose Mubarak <http://nyti.ms/hdqtX1> #Jan25” (@monaeltahawy, 8 February 2011).

These interests dictated to a certain extent the narrative of events that was being presented in international media in the days leading up to 25 January and first few days of protests. News networks with strong allegiances to the more conservative sections of society or governments, such as Fox News, championed Mubarak and his regime, creating a sense of fear should the protesters prevail in their demands as then radical Islamists would come to power and destabilise the region or similar scenarios. Others insinuated that the protests lacked in strength and were bound to fail (Youssef 2012: 79). In many cases, the Mubarak regime and local media also gave a similar narrative: that a popular choice would allow for radical Islamists to take over; that peace with Israel would be compromised; that the protesters were thugs and that chaos will ensue not only in Egypt but the region (Hamdy and

Gomaa 2012: 199). Mubarak reiterated these points during the uprising in an interview with then-ABC News correspondent Christiane Amanpour (Amanpour, 2011).

In this presence of powerful detractors, Egyptians used citizen journalism to counter those narratives and try to influence the global debate by spreading awareness on the nature of the protesters, their demands and the reality of the Mubarak regime. Citizen journalism entered into a dynamic relationship with mainstream media where the two acted both in parallel and in complementarity to one another. A study by Nanabhay and Farmanfarmaian (2011) analysed the content uploaded on YouTube and the usage of citizen footage by mainstream media. On the first day of the uprising, 25 January 2011, citizen footage amounted to 76% of the videos uploaded on YouTube, with journalist-produced content accounting for the remaining 24% (Nanabhay and Farmanfarmaian 2011: 585). The mainstream media attention then began to increase and give fuller coverage to the developments in Egypt. The mainstream media also started using content provided by the citizen journalists in Egypt to keep up to date with the events and gain insight from the protesters themselves. Many news networks such as Al Jazeera (2011d) and The Guardian (2011) added Live Blogs to their websites which would provide real-time updates on events and include relevant tweets and videos from Egyptians and other commentators. Al Jazeera even created a page called Sharek (<http://sharek.aljazeera.net/>) where people could post their video footage. The footage would be accessible to visitors to the site and some of the footage was selected and aired by Al Jazeera. Twitter was the most important non-traditional media source for news and updates for international main-stream media. In a study conducted by Douai, Auter and Domangue (2013: 479), it was found that CNN, BBC, the Guardian and the New York Times turned primarily to Twitter, then to blogs and then to Facebook for sources that are not part of traditional media. The relationship between the mainstream media and citizen produced content had an interesting dynamic where at the beginning of the uprising, more citizen produced and disseminated content was consumed, while the mainstream media took over when the Internet shutdown was effected (Nanabhay and Farmanfarmaian 2011: 574).

Interviewees revealed that many activists and protesters actively wanted the international media to provide coverage of the events in Egypt and hoped that their, the protesters', materials would be used in the coverage.

We wanted Al Jazeera to cover the protests. We wanted them to show our videos, our stories so that the regime could not hide our side of the story.... We wanted this so that international public opinion would be mobilised and pressurise Mubarak to go (Interviewee K 2014, interview, 20 December).

They also wanted credible international media, with a special focus on Al Jazeera which could reach both domestic and international audiences, to cover the events so to provide a less biased coverage than the national media that both Egyptians and non-Egyptians could follow (Interviewee K 2014, interview, 20 December; Interviewee J 2014, interview, 28 December). Therefore this outreach to international mainstream media had a dual, international and domestic, purpose.

Through this interaction between citizen journalism and mainstream media, where the former was amplified by and could influence the latter, Egyptian netizens managed to influence the narrative constructed around the uprising. This had an effect internationally and domestically as Egyptians themselves would follow the satellite news networks to keep themselves updated when they did not have access to Internet or to supplement the information they already had. The Internet was crucial here as it helped the protesters break the monopoly that the Egyptian regime had on information and news and bring their own views to be heard.

### **4.3. Messages to the world**

Many Egyptian activists and protesters used the Internet to organise themselves and to disseminate information. As it was felt by some of those activists and protesters that the regime and wary international actors could easily provide a distorted depiction of what was happening on the streets, Tweets, blog posts, Facebook posts and YouTube videos became crucial outlets to let the world know about the reality of the protests. After looking through content directed at international audiences from the various mediums, a number of reoccurring topics can be identified.

#### ***4.3.1 This is a popular uprising***

From the analysis of the tweets, blog posts and Facebook posts, it was noted that most messages aimed at an international audience tried to convey that what was taking place in Egypt was a popular uprising. It was not a foreign-orchestrated event and nor was it an

Islamist one. Ashraf Khalil tweeted on 27 January: “#Jan25 couple thoughts to start day: outsiders need to know that all this is happening independent of the Muslim Brotherhood! That’s amazing” (@ashrafkhalil; 27 January 2011). Hossam el Hamalawy tweeted: “It is not true what some MSM outlets r broadcasting about the Muslim Brotherhood and the 6<sup>th</sup> of April leading the protests. It’s complete BS” (@3arabawy; 30 January 2011). Many Egyptians were aware that the USA and Europe feared that any popular uprising in the Middle East and Egypt would equate to an Islamist take-over and radicalisation of the country or the loss of influence over the leadership. This view was drawn from the dichotomous image that the West had of Egypt: an Egypt divided between the Mubarak regime and the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groupings. The protesters however did not fit neatly into either group. The evidence suggests that they were Egyptians who had had enough of Mubarak and his regime, who did not wish for Hosni Mubarak’s son, Gamal, to succeed him, who wanted an end to state violence against its citizens, who wanted better economic conditions and to live with dignity. The main slogans from the protests (‘bread, freedom and social justice’ and ‘Mubarak, leave’) are testament to these general sentiments of the protesters. They generally did not claim any religious or sectarian allegiance or other party political goals. Many of the protesters were not politically active before the 2011 uprising and only began to participate in the build-up to and during the first few days of the uprising.

In addition to the protesters not belonging to Islamist groups, online content analysed and interviewees indicate that Egyptian protesters wanted to show their unity. Many Egyptians made an effort to show their unity and loyalty to being Egyptian first, regardless of their religious differences. Christian protesters formed chains around the Muslim protesters during prayers and Muslim protesters protected churches. Protesters carried both crosses and the Qur’an to show that Christians and Muslims were united under the Egyptian flag (Alexander 2011). Photographs and videos of such scenes were spread online through social media such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube for Egyptians and non-Egyptians to see. One of the slogans that was repeated during the 18 days was ‘We are all one hand’, signifying unity. Ramy Essam, a singer and activist who came to prominence during the uprising, made a song called *Irhal* in which the lyrics contained the line *kullena yad wa7da* (we are all one hand) and the song became one of the symbolic ones for the uprising. The song was shared via YouTube by various users, with the referenced version receiving over 80 000 views by early 2015 (Anghel 2011). Egyptian netizens also changed their profile pictures on Facebook to

pictures reflecting the crescent and cross together. One photograph of Christians protecting Muslims during prayers was voted as the 12<sup>th</sup> most powerful photograph of 2011 by BuzzFeed<sup>1</sup> (Stopera 2011). This showing of unity to Egyptians, to the regime and the outside world was particularly important in light of the 2010 New Year's Eve bombing of a church in Alexandria in which the Mubarak regime was accused of being complicit and is said to have done so to sow divisions amongst Egyptians (Afify 2011).

In more direct approaches, some activists and protesters sent messages via Twitter and other social media to the international community in efforts to explain who the protesters were and what their demands were. Hossam el Hamalawy explained in a tweet: "Since I'm getting asked this a lot from non-Arabic speakers: Shabab means youth. ☺ #Jan25" (@3arabawy; 3 February 2011). Another twitter user, Nadine Moawad, explained in a tweet that "...women from diff clases and backgrounds r in #tahrir #jan25 #tahrir" (@nmoawad; 4 February 2011). The activist and blogger Mikael Nabil Sanad made a video and posted it to YouTube with the title *Message to Israel calling for solidarity with the Egyptian revolution*. Mr. Sanad specifically designed the message for Israel and attempted to convince Israelis that the revolution in Egypt was not an Islamists one and would not bring in a hostile government. He also mentioned that the Mubarak regime was not a true friend to Israel as they were also fomenting hatred towards Israel. This effort was done so to try discourage Israel from showing support for the Mubarak regime and to try make them understand that Egyptians and Arabs want the same things as do Israelis arguably: democracy, respect for human rights and justice. The video received around 5,000 views by February 2011 (Sanad 2011). From some conversations with the interviewees, they did not appreciate the video's attempts to appeal to Israel as for them it was controversial in light of their attitudes towards the Palestinian issue.

Messages like these helped to increase legitimacy of the protesters and activists. The online content suggests that the protesters largely did not represent foreign or politically divisive interests (with the possible exception of Mr. Sanad's from the before-mentioned examples), but popular Egyptian desires. This protected the protesters from being marginalised or labelled as thugs or agents and allowed the regional and international actors to view them as a serious force. Another aim of this message that can be deduced is that some of the protesters

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<sup>1</sup> BuzzFeed is an Internet news and entertainment website and is one of the fastest growing websites. The site has an audience of almost 150 million people. It has 1.32 million followers on Twitter and over 3 million likes on Facebook, providing an indication of its influence within the Internet community.

wanted to show that Egyptians are capable of taking control of their own affairs – much to the surprise of many who believed civil society to be ineffective and people to be apathetic to politics – many of whom were until this point. Some interviewees explained that this was in a way meant to deter foreign actors from interference and to give confidence that Egyptians could also lead the country to democracy. Lastly, an impression received from the interviewees was that this message served to show that Egyptians were united under their flag, not divided between class, religion or race. Whether this message was accurate or not, requires further investigation. The interviewees and online content reveal a desire to present this view, however social divisions do exist but seem to have been generally overlooked during the euphoria of the collective action.

#### ***4.3.2 The Mubarak regime is dictatorship and dictatorships fall***

One of the other messages that the Egyptian protesters also wanted to relay was that the Mubarak regime was a dictatorship. The protesters wanted to break the international perception that Egypt was a stable and progressive country and to expose the regime for its human right abuses, corruption and authoritarianism. Activists and other Egyptians uploaded and spread videos and photographs of police brutality and violence. One video shot by an Egyptian woman from her balcony shows an unarmed man walking with his hands up towards the police and then being shot dead by the police in Alexandria (Welcome to 2011). These documenting activities began years before the uprising with blogs being set up to document torture of Egyptians at the hands of the security forces, such as the tortureinegypt.net managed by Noha Atef. However, the intensity and volume of material being shared increased, especially since the images emerged and circulated online of Khaled Said's bloodied face. More specifically, protesters posted own and mainstream media videos, images and updates reporting violence committed by the police and regime hired thugs during the protests. These videos were meant to show the world the brutality of the regime (Interviewee A 2013, interview and personal communication, September).

Tweets and other online content seems to suggest that it was frustrating for Egyptians that even after information, pictures and videos about the police violence against protesters was shared and spread via the Internet and media outlets, Mubarak was not fully condemned by the international community. This frustration grew after the Battle of the Camel, on 2 February, when after giving a speech announcing that he would form a new government, Mubarak's regime sent thugs and plain-clothed police to attack the protesters the next day. A



Twitter user, Cin, tweeted: "SOS from Cairo. It's serious situation in Tahrir Sq. The world, please realize what Mubarak's regime is doing to its people #Jan25" (@Organica\_; 2 February 2011). The protesters felt that the international community was not putting enough pressure on him and was not giving full support to the protesters. Mona Seif, an activist, expressed her distress and frustration during an interview with Al Jazeera at how Mubarak still stayed in power while fellow protesters were getting killed at the hands of the regime's thugs (Tufts 2011).

In addition to showing the brutality of the regime, some of the Tweets and interviewees indicate that some of the protesters also wanted to convey that there will be no stability in Egypt until the people's demands are met. USA and the EU previously supported Mubarak as he maintained 'stability' in the region. It seemed to the Egyptian public that they preferred stability over human rights, freedoms and social justice. Netizens responded to such stances online: "'Stability' for your country must not come at the expense of the freedom and dignity of the people of my or any country. #Jan25" (@monaeltahawy; 27 January 2011). The protesters continued to reaffirm their determination not to leave Tahrir Square and not to abate protests until Mubarak leaves and the message was echoed by media online: "'People Are Determined to Stay Until Mubarak Leaves' @sharifkouddous Reports on Day 15 of #Egypt Protests. <http://ow.ly/3SyGA> #jan25" (@democracynow; 8 February 2011). This stance was sending a message that stability was no longer tenable under the Mubarak led-regime.

#### ***4.3.3 Stop supporting Mubarak regime***

In relation to the previous message labelling the Mubarak regime as oppressive and violent, some of the messages analysed reveal a desire for influential international actors to cease their support for the Mubarak regime. The United States (US) government was providing aid of USD1.3 billion to the Egyptian military every year. According to the US State Department's Executive Budget Summary for the fiscal year 2011, that aid falls under Foreign Military Financing and is meant to upgrade the Egyptian army (Department of State 2011: 128). The US government fully embraced the Mubarak regime as a beacon of stability and of democratisation in the Middle East, as a valuable partner in the fight against terror and as it was upholding the peace agreement with Israel (BBC 2009) – despite the Egyptian public opinion on these issues. The Egyptian regime also had strong ties to the EU due to security and anti-terrorism cooperation, significant levels of trade and immigration regulation

(Seeberg 2012: 4). A number of the regional countries also had close ties to the Mubarak regime; however they themselves were not epitomes of free societies or democracy (i.e. Saudi Arabia, Israel) and were not willing to listen to Egyptian protesters as they themselves were trying to keep their populations in ignorant bliss or oppressed.

Cognisant of the fact that Egypt was a geostrategic partner to many powerful or rich countries, some Egyptian activists and protesters did not want their efforts to effect change at home to be hampered by the interests of external actors. For this reason, some protesters and activists tried to delegitimise the Egyptian regime to those actors and appeal to their ‘support for human rights and democracy’ rhetoric so that they would cease support for the Mubarak regime. In other words, they decided to play accountability politics. Shaikh and Hamid (2012: 3) noted that Egyptians and other Arabs do not wish the US to interfere in their countries’ internal affairs, but then those same Egyptians and Arabs people contradict themselves by saying that the US does not do enough to promote democracy. From the interviews and online content analysed, it could be more accurate to say that many Egyptians do not wish for US interference in internal affairs but when they say that the US is not doing enough to support democracy, they actually mean that the US should be less of an obstacle for popular democracy to grow (Interviewee A 2013, interview and personal communication, September; Interviewee B 2013, interview, 28 September).

Some Egyptians who did not have the power or means to appeal to governments directly, appealed instead to other groups of people. Those Egyptian protesters wanted to show that they had similar demands and dreams as other people of the world to bring themselves closer to them and further encourage them to lay pressure on their governments. As Interviewee G (2014, personal communication, 22 September) stated:

We're all part of the same struggle, we deserve a better life too. Just because our governments are autocratic doesn't mean we don't deserve to be treated with humanity. That was the message to the international community because communities empower one another and apply pressure on their governments not to support dictatorships and autocrats.

One aspect that the Egyptians encountered on the streets that was related to the US directly was US made tear gas used against them by riot police and security forces. Activists posted photographs on Facebook and Twitter of the teargas canisters with the ‘Made in USA’ words

visible. This act served to embarrass the US government and accused manufacturer in hope that they would stop supplies to Egypt and rethink their relationship with the Egyptian regime. Sarah Othman tweeted: "Suez : CSF [Central Security Forces] still shooting protesters with rubber bullets and tear gas made in #usa #jan25 Congratulation Obama for the Nobel prize \_!\_" (@Sarah\_Othmann; 26 January 2011).

Nazli Hussein (2011), an Egyptian activist, called in on alternative online media Democracy Now to call on the international community to end support for the Mubarak regime. She appealed to US taxpayers to take responsibility for how their money is being used and stop contributing to the violence being committed against the protesters – violence that they have seen through videos and pictures online. She made reference to the bullets and tear gas used against protesters that were made in the USA and bought with the US aid to Egypt. Such attempts also aimed to mobilise civil society in the US to pressurise their government to end support for oppressive regimes – at least the one in Egypt.

Appeals on blogs and other social media were also made to the European leaders who paid much lip-service to the ideas of democracy and human rights, but then supported the Mubarak regime. One netizen set up a blog called *#Jan25 #Egypt* and wrote a letter to the international community to explain the situation in Egypt and call on the USA, EU and other countries to support the protesters. The letter asked Europeans (and others) to protest in front of Egyptian embassies and make it known to their own governments that support for the Mubarak regime is untenable (An Egyptian Youth 2011).

#### ***4.3.4 Spread the word and show solidarity***

"URGENT: REQUEST to ALL EUROPE & US tweeps on #Jan25 PLEASE ASK YOUR MEDIA TO COVER #EGYPT NOW" (@weddady; 25 January 2011). Many protesters invited the world to show solidarity through protests and spreading news on Egypt. When the government blocked Facebook and Twitter on 26 January, and then shut down the Internet on 28 January, Egyptians appealed to the international community and diaspora to be more active in maintaining an information flow and attention on the uprising. Mohamed Gaber tweeted: "dear followers from all around the world the regime is blocking our internet please show solidarity with spreading out words #jan25" (@gue3bara; 26 January 2011). This was important so as to counter false stories and perceptions, to raise awareness and to ensure the safety of protesters. Many Egyptians were being detained, tortured and harassed by the

Egyptian authorities. The level of violence and brutality was high and in some cases resulted in death. Families and friends of victims were not sure where the activists/protesters were taken to, under what charge and what would happen to them as the persons arrested could not communicate with them or even with lawyers (Amnesty International 2011: 70). Many Egyptians were aware of the regime's concern with its international image and the power of the Internet used to keep a constant, critical eye on the regime. One protester summed up this sentiment in his tweet, and simultaneously commented on the fickle nature of international attention to world issues: "Cynical/worrywart question of the day: will the #egypt government try something while all of America is watching the super bowl tonight" (@ashrafkhalil; 6 February 2011). For this reason many Egyptians, both in and out of Egypt, sent messages and photos of detainees to international media outlets, human rights organisations and through social media so to increase the cost of brutality by the regime – at least on that specified detainee who now had a name and face for the world to see (Soueif 2012: 119).

Regarding solidarity and a call to action, the online content reveals that Egyptians encouraged the international community to organise protests in support of the uprising and share their actions online. Activists promoted events on Facebook and Twitter and encouraged the Egyptian diaspora and non-Egyptians to attend. An example is the *March with the people of Egypt* event that was created on Facebook for a protest in New York. In an effort to boost and coordinate to a certain extent global solidarity demonstrations, an *International Day Of Mobilization In Solidarity With The Egyptian And Tunisian Revolutions* was announced for 5 February 2011. The event was announced on Facebook pages. In the appeal for international solidarity, activists appealed to a common future shared by all the peoples of the world: "Although we are separated geographically, our future is one. Our message is unified that we stand together; our pain is one and our freedom is one". The purpose of the solidarity protests was to let Egyptians know that they are not alone and not forgotten – to help mobilise public will; to let the Mubarak regime know that this is not a phase that will pass and that the world is watching his actions; to increase global awareness of the situation in Egypt; to ensure that the issue should be on the world agenda and that pressure be put on the Mubarak regime to yield to the protesters demands (Interviewee B 2013, interview, 28 September). The Internet allowed any Egyptian with Internet access, whether politically active or not, to reach other Egyptians and non-Egyptians, to call for solidarity and arrange protests. In addition to calling on the Egyptian diaspora to mobilise internationally, there were also calls for the diaspora to

return to Egypt and support the uprising. Some young Egyptians did in fact return to Egypt, some temporarily and some permanently (Interviewee A 2013, interview and personal communication, September; Interviewee F 2014, personal communication, April – June).

#### ***4.3.5. Regional waves of support***

The interviewees, and indeed the tweets and Facebook posts, reveal that many of the Egyptian protesters saw their protest not as an isolated event, but as part of a regional awakening. The spark for the Egyptian uprising, which was years in the making, was the ouster of Ben Ali in Tunisia. His ouster made some Egyptians realise that the Arab world is not condemned to dictators and oppressive regimes, but that it can be changed and that the agents of change can be the people. This realisation was reflected in the online frenzy. Netizens thanked the Tunisians for their ‘initiative’ and inspiration to rise up in Egypt. Gigi Ibrahim expressed her gratitude after Mubarak was ousted: ”Thank you Tunisians 4m the bottom of my heart. Algeria, Yemen, Jordan, Palestine, Saudi, Syria & Libya: keep fighting, nothing is impossible” (@Gsquare86; 11 February 2011). Throughout the 18 days of protest, Egyptian netizens kept alluding to the fact that the happenings in Egypt are part of a broader Arab awakening and that the consequences of the Egyptian uprising will have a direct impact on the regional events. Amr El Beledy tweeted: “The hope of the whole region is now in one public square!” (@beledy; 2 February 2011).

Some Egyptians also supported civil mobilisation in the regional countries. They interacted online to exchange ideas and protest tactics. One interviewee befriended some Tunisians he met on a Facebook group calling for revolt in Tunisia and Egypt and discussed their protest experiences with them to gain ideas (Interviewee A 2013, interview and personal communication, September). Some Egyptian activists also met with and gave presentations to activists from countries such as Libya, Algeria and Yemen (Kirkpatrick and Sanger 2011). The sense of a shared struggle was enhanced by the activists who tapped into regionally shared issues and sentiments that related to their uprising/awakening. The first was that of Arab states being mainly run by corrupt and oppressive regimes. The second one was the realisation that democracy does not have to be imposed by the West but that Arabs can plant and nourish their own democracies. The third was related to the Israel-Palestine issue and that now that Arabs can rise up to their own governments, they will be able to assist the Palestinians in their struggle for freedom. Facebook groups and Twitter further helped to

sustain a sense of common struggle in the region through the ‘electronic word of mouth’ interactions (Jansen et al 2009: 2169).

#### **4.4. A boomerang effect?**

The content being sent out by Egyptians reverberated in cyberspace and was picked up by international NGOs, individuals, commentators and governments. Certain media channels, most notably Al Jazeera, amplified the events and protesters’ views through the usage and references to the citizen-produced online content and their own productions. But did this amplification of the protesters’ voice resonate with the major international governments? And did the international eye, actions and statements from the international governments have an influence on the Egyptian regime?

##### ***4.4.1. International reactions***

The reactions from the Western governments to the Egyptian uprising were measured. Prior to 25 January, there was heated debate in the international media on whether Egypt would or would not follow in Tunisia’s footsteps. The US did not provide a clear position at the beginning of the uprising and expressed vague support for the protesters but also for the Mubarak regime. On 25 January, Hilary Clinton stated that the regime is stable and urged all sides to refrain from violence (Reuters 2011b). Further, during interviews conducted on 30 January, when asked whether the US is supporting the Mubarak regime or the protesters, Mrs Clinton stated that the US government supports the Egyptian people (CNN 2011a). Such a remark insinuated that neither the regime nor the protesters represent the Egyptian people and carefully avoided explicitly stating an allegiance. The US administration continued to state that they believed that reforms and a controlled transition should occur – without expressly saying that Mubarak should heed the protesters demands and step down. The administration used the reason that there would be a power vacuum should Mubarak step down and that instability would ensue. Additionally, and much to the Egyptian protesters discontent, the US stated that it would not cut off military aid to Egypt, despite the fact that the regime was visibly brutalising the protesters (Landler 2011). But the protests did start to create internal divisions within the administration. Some figures in the US government began to grow sympathetic with the protesters, while the more hawkish members and the Department of State remained ambivalent while they were recalculating their strategy, as an interviewee

witnessed during his communication with US officials (Interviewee C 2014, interview, 19 June). The US then began to change its stance once they saw the magnitude and significance of the protests. The statements began to call for Mubarak to yield to the demands of the protesters. US officials also held meetings with officials from the Egyptian army to discuss the transitions process (Ramadan 2012: 28). At those meetings the Obama administration was drawing up proposals on how Mubarak should leave the Presidency and various possibilities for transition, including one where Omar Suleiman would head the transition government as he has been selected as Vice President by Mubarak (Cooper and Landler 2011). When Barack Obama, the US president, started taking a tougher stance towards Mubarak, Mubarak refused to meet with Obama's special envoy, Frank Wisner. The Obama administration also made insinuations that if the regime did not bow to protesters demands and exercise restraint, the US could freeze its military aid to Egypt.

It should be noted that the US, even after changing its official position and applying pressure on Mubarak to step down, reassured its other Arab allies, who were also facing brewing local discontent, of its support. US leadership was in communication with King Abdullah II of Jordan and then President Ali Saleh of Yemen, welcomed their 'reforms' and tacitly expressed support for their regimes (Cooper and Landler 2011). The US was also aware of the repression under the Mubarak regime long before the uprising began, as documented in the embassy cables leaked by Wikileaks (Harding 2011). Considering the two facts above, the US's sincerity towards democratisation and the Arab people is questionable and placed secondary to its own strategic interests. But the ability of mass mobilisation and exposure using the Internet and social media platforms had the power to bend the US stance for a while, to the advantage of the protesters, at least in the short term.

The European countries also showed ambivalent stances towards the Egyptian protesters. They did not call for Mubarak to step down, but expressed condemnation against the violence committed against the protesters and encouraged the Mubarak regime to take the necessary steps towards reform (Isaac 2012: 8). This almost laid back attitude could have been in part due to the EU's relative low level of influence in Egypt, when compared to that of the US (Dworkin, Korski and Witney 2011: 8). The EU was less adept than its US counterpart at engaging with the Egyptian leadership during the crisis. The High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Baroness Catherine Ashton, failed to engage adequately with the Egyptian leadership and only managed a telephone call to Omar

Suleiman six days after he was announced as Vice President (Pertusot 2011). Prior to that, she issued her first statement on 27 January 2011 expressing her condemnation of the violence against protesters and calling on the Egyptian leadership to respect its citizens (Ashton 2011). The president of the European Council, Herman van Rompuy, issued a similar statement on 29 January 2011 (van Rompuy 2011). Other European leaders were also slow and careful in issuing statements on the uprising. Angela Merkel, Nicholas Sarkozy and David Cameron issued a joint statement on 29 January 2011 which called for restraint and for the Mubarak regime to allow for greater democracy and free and fair elections which were due to occur later in 2011 (Cameron, Sarkozy and Merkel 2011). Nicholas Sarkozy learnt to be wary of expressing support for the Mubarak regime after France's gaffe during the Tunisian uprising where the French Foreign Minister offered police support to Ben Ali against the protesters (Chrisafis 2011). During a meeting of EU foreign ministers on 31 January 2011, many officials were still highlighting the differences between Egypt and Tunisia and underestimated the extent of the mobilisation in Egypt (Euractiv 2011) and the European leaders did not call for Mubarak to step down. Once again, much of the EU members were aware of the regimes crimes and corruption before the uprising, but only spoke out against them once it was impossible not to do so.

The lack of a clear stance by the US and EU on the situation in Egypt left Egyptians feeling disappointed. One tweep expressed: "Who The Hell are Egyptians (Who are being massacred) supposed to ask for help when the USA and EUROPE are silent? CHINA? #Jan25 Jan25" (@Elazul; 27 January 2011). International organisations, such as Human Rights Watch, also took notice and condemned the lack of commitment to the values of human rights from the US and EU and urged them to rethink their strategies of supporting repressive regimes, with special focus on the Egyptian case (Human Rights Watch 2011).

Israel viewed the uprising with apprehension. Mubarak was a reliable ally who shared their strategic interests and maintained the 1979 Camp David peace agreement (Hellyer 2011: 1320). Israel feared that a democratically elected leader in Egypt might renegotiate or even abandon the peace agreement and once again make Egypt a regional enemy (Byman 2011: 124). The possibility of spill over of popular action from Egypt to the region was worrisome, especially as Israel maintained security arrangements with the regional autocrats to minimise threats to Israel from their countries (Hellyer 2011: 1321), as was the possibility of the spill over inspiring a renewed Palestinian intifada, backed by the possible populist leaders in



regional Arab countries. Israel tried to keep a low profile and not make too many statements during the uprising, but it did organise diplomatically to urge US and EU governments to refrain from criticising the Mubarak regime and to prioritise their national interests above public opinion (Ravid 2011). Benjamin Netanyahu told Angela Merkel during a meeting in Jerusalem on 31 January 2011 that Egypt ran the risk of becoming like post-revolutionary (1979) Iran (Reuters and Ravid 2011). Such actions further angered the Egyptian protesters who already resented the relationship between the Mubarak regime and Israel (Interviewee A 2013, interview and personal communication, September; Interviewee B 2013, interview, 28 September).

The other regional countries had mixed reactions. The Saudi Arabian ruling monarchy did not have it in its interest for a popular uprising to succeed as it needed to keep its own power intact and so it kept its support for the Mubarak regime. The Saudi government labelled the protesters as infiltrators and called on the conspiracy theorists to step in to muddy the image of the protesters. The Palestinian Authority expressed solidarity with the regime for the sake of stability and security (CNN 2011b). Jordan and Morocco decided to pass some quick reforms in their own countries to try to quell possibilities of unrest and demonstrate their commitment to their people. However the statements by the governments exposed their disconnectedness from their populace as many citizens of those countries expressed support for the Egyptian protesters and in Morocco there was a movement of its own, February 20 Movement, which mobilised and demanded a constitutional monarchy (Sater 2011).

In this variation in attitudes and responses, it is suggested that there is a link between the type of governance, or at least nominal type of governance, and the possibility for success for leveraging support in the specific country. In the previous paragraphs, it was noted that the response to the Egyptian uprising varied from the US to the EU to Israel. Israel, which does not support indiscriminate human rights or freedoms, was more prepared to voice directly its interest-based views, whereas the US had to lace its opinions with respect for human rights and democracy rhetoric as it has a lively civil society within it and proclaims its belief in freedoms and equality. This discussion of the international reactions to activists' appeals could suggest that the international state responses vary depending on the degree of democracy or freedom within the receiving country. It could also suggest that the more active a civil society within a receiving nation, the more likely that the international leveraging efforts will resonate in the receiving nation.

#### *4.4.2. Egypt's response*

With the international opinion turning away from Mubarak, even by his previous allies, the regime became more defensive. The Mubarak regime saw the value of the Internet as a communication and mobilisation tool both domestically and internationally. Thus the regime took measures to block access to the Internet and intimidate foreign correspondents. Access to Facebook and Twitter was blocked, followed by an Internet shut-down and blocking of SMS services on 27 and 28 February (Dunn 2011: 19). The government hoped that by blocking those communication channels Egyptians would lose their organisational and communication abilities and thus the protests would dwindle and be crushed by the security forces. However, a large amount of Egyptians were already mobilised and the Internet shut-down pushed others who were undecided on whether to protest or not into the streets, as discussed in the previous chapter. The Internet shut-down was the first of its kind in Internet history and this action drew strong criticism from the international community. US government officials, social media companies and rights organisations all called for the immediate restoration of the Internet (Grub and Moses 2011). Egyptians sent out appeals for help too to the international community. The regime, whose actions with regards to the Internet had further diminished its international credibility, had to bend under the pressure and Internet access was restored on 2 February and SMS services on 6 February (Dunn 2011: 19).

However content showing and describing continued violence against the protesters flowed out of Egypt during the shut-down (although to a much lesser extent) and in much larger quantities once the Internet was restored. Scenes shown internationally of the Battle of the Camel (2 February) where pro-government protesters and allegedly regime-hired thugs attacked protesters embarrassed the Mubarak regime and drew international condemnation. There was increasing international pressure for the regime to investigate the allegations of excessive brutality and its own complicity in attacks such as during the Battle of the Camel. The regime responded and promised to conduct investigations into police violence, the incident and into the claim that the National Democratic Party (NDP) incited the violence (Amnesty International 2011: 36).

As the international reactions grew more sympathetic with the protesters, the Egyptian regime took more desperate measures to control the outpour of information coming from

Egypt. In retaliation to this exposure, the regime tried to limit the production and proliferation of information and audio-visual content of the protests from circulating through media through intimidation and defamation. Egyptians who took part in citizen journalism or filmed the violence were directly targeted. Amira Samir el Sayed was shot inside her friend's house straight after she filmed the police using live ammunition against protesters (Amnesty International 2011: 49). The military and police also arrested and tortured human rights activists, journalists, ordinary people, and tried to force confessions from them stating that they were foreign agents (Human Rights Watch 2012: 546). This was done with the aim of delegitimising the protesters' actions (Amnesty International 2011: 78). The regime attempted to sow distrust of the protesters through propaganda disseminated through state media and encouraged attacks by government supporters on local reporters by accusing them of being foreign spies. The government also encouraged attacks on activists and protesters who were accused of also being 'foreign agents'.

The international mainstream media which was critical of the regime or seemed to be too sympathetic to the protesters was also targeted. Journalists were arrested and harassed (Reporters Without Borders 2011). Al Jazeera had its broadcasting license revoked on 30 January and its Egypt offices were closed, ransacked and equipment destroyed. They could again resume transmission on 9 February. Foreign journalists were intimidated and beaten, their equipment confiscated and rumours were spread that they too were foreign agents (BBC 2011b). However, this is where the persistence of citizen journalism prevailed. Citizen produced content still reached the mainstream media outlets and provided a source of news. The international news networks relied on the content provided by Egyptians more after journalists were harassed or kicked out by the regime (Nanabhay and Farmanfarmaian 2011). These measures can all be viewed as forming part of the third phase of Risse's (2000: 197) spiral model – where the norm-violating government gives some concessions but continues repression at the same time in hope to buy time and halt unrest. Egypt gave in to making an investigation into the government's role in the Battle of the Camel, but continued to repress the protesters and foreign media.

In desperate attempts to assert its importance as the guarantor of stability and defender against extremism, the regime, through the Minister of Interior's orders, allegedly ordered the release of prisoners, through staged break-outs, in hope that the prisoners would cause disarray. Additionally, the escape from prison of members of the Muslim Brotherhood was

also portrayed as part of a plan for an Islamist takeover in Egypt (Abouzeid 2011). These break-outs coincided with the withdrawal of the police. International media initially took the bait and posed questions on the desirability of a popular uprising in Egypt (Tisdall 2011). However, information began emerging implicating the regime in the break-outs and the pressure increased again on the regime to end its violence against the protesters.

There is a possibility that the international eye that was kept on the regime's treatment of protesters had an impact on the degree of violence perpetrated by the security forces. The security forces seem to have been slightly more reserved with respect to the protesters in Tahrir from where most of the local and international cameras were relaying footage to the outside world. However in areas where there was a lesser amount of attention, which were also the less affluent areas, the security forces were more brutal in their treatment which resulted in more deaths and injuries (Amnesty International 2011: 30). This exposure of the treatment of protesters at the hands of the security forces also made it difficult for the countries which were supportive of Mubarak to express explicit support for him as their own public opinion could have turned to be more critical against them.

Another effect that the uprising and to some extent international reactions had on the Egyptian leadership was a split between the army and the business elites represented by Gamal Mubarak (Osman 2012: 243). With increasing international pressure on the Mubarak regime, coupled with the non-yielding protesters, the army rethought their position. The army was concerned by the possible freezing of military aid, wanted to remain in a position of power in Egypt, during and after the transition period, and wanted to ensure its control over its considerable business interests in the country. The uprising also presented them with the opportunity to weaken the business elite, which was lucratively entangled with the NDP, and reassert its dominance over it (Kandil 2011: 18 and 30). During the reshuffling of the government by Mubarak, many military men took government positions making some speculate that the military was consolidating its grip on power instead of the reshuffle being a legitimate concession to the protesters. The military also took care to appear to be on the protesters' side by not visibly attacking them and later by the Supreme Council of Army Forces (SCAF) issuing a communique whereby they recognised the protesters' demands (Shane and Kirkpatrick 2011). This made them negotiate with the US and jointly formulate for a transition without Mubarak (Shane and Kirkpatrick 2011). Thus this specific boomerang, especially with the advantage of hindsight, did create some changes in the

government, but not necessarily make the deep structural changes which would allow for real democratisation and realisation of demands of the protesters.

The efforts and actual on-the ground action by Egyptian protesters managed to shape to some extent the international attitudes towards the uprising. With the assistance of mainstream media which picked up on citizen journalism, pressure was also placed on certain foreign governments to cease their support for the Mubarak regime and pressurise it to yield to the protesters' demands. This pressure, in addition to the domestic pressures, made the situation in Egypt untenable and thus the deep state actors, specifically the army, had to change something and make concessions to the protesters – the resignation of Mubarak; the statement by the SCAF that the Emergency Law would be repealed once protests cease and stability returns to the streets; and that democratic elections would take place (Al Jazeera 2011c). This occurrence fits into the description of the boomerang effect.

#### **4.5. The achievements of Internet-based international leveraging**

Although it is difficult to assess whether the attempts to leverage international support by the activists in the long-term were successful or not, especially since political turmoil in Egypt is still unfolding and the uprising's demands entail a systemic overhaul, there are some achievements that should not be overlooked.

##### ***4.5.1. Bringing Egyptian protesters onto the global agenda***

The Internet allowed protesters to keep a constant flow of information coming out of Egypt and engage in information politics. Even when the Internet was shut down, protesters managed to either connect to the Internet through landlines or send messages via Speak2Tweet to maintain the information flow – albeit in lesser quantities. Prior to 25 January, there was a lot of scepticism on whether Egypt would be able to follow in Tunisia's footsteps and many journalists and pundits, especially from the West, opined that Egypt would not be able to do the same as Tunisia and emphasised the differences between the two countries: Egypt had a higher illiteracy rate, no vision, a very inert population and the army stands behind Mubarak (Leyne 2011; Hauslohner 2011). However they were proven wrong. The constant updates and footage of amassing protesters on 25 January and subsequently quietened the voices that cast aside the Egyptian people. The media and many Internet users

around the world saw content that showed that Egyptians were continuing with their protests, maintained high numbers in the streets and proved to be resilient in their demands.

The immediate and audio-visual appeal of most social media platforms allowed Egyptians to post content on events within minutes of their occurrence. The speed and potential for mass dissemination challenged the Egyptian government which was not well equipped to handle the tidal wave of support for the protesters both domestically and internationally. The way that Egyptians used the social media helped to break the ‘political hegemony’ – where the Mubarak regime and his allies had the power to shape public opinion and discourse. The political hegemony was broken in Egypt and internationally as it became more difficult to control the media and information flows and thus the shape of public opinion. Egyptian activists and netizens managed to establish themselves as reliable sources of news through their strategic use of social media and other Internet based tools (Douai, Auter and Domangue 213: 482).

By engaging with the international community, Egyptians could ensure that the protests entered onto the international agenda and that they would not be relegated into the shadows of history and disregarded as antagonistic to the government. Especially in areas where popular sentiment may not be in line with strategic interests of the local or external governments, there is always the risk of the expression of legitimate popular sentiment being relabelled as extremism or destabilising factionalism, thus delegitimising the local protesters. Online engagement with the media and international community can shape the narrative and coverage of certain situations through providing different perspectives (Hamdy 2010: 9). Thus Egyptians played information and symbolic politics aided by the Internet-based communication technologies.

In the quest for legitimacy and building of emotional connection, the power of symbols is also important. The Egyptians had two prominent symbols: Khaled Said and Tahrir Square. Khaled Said became the face with which ordinary people could identify with and who personified the uprising. Tahrir Square became more than just a gathering spot for the protesters and internationally. It became a symbol of varying levels. For Egyptian protesters, it was known as the State of Tahrir, a space where they were free from the repressive Mubarak regime and where they had a voice and could establish an order that they wanted (Interviewee G 2014, personal communication, 22 September). Internationally, Tahrir Square

became the spatialised symbol of resistance. Activists, people and governments could relate Tahrir Square to physical spaces with similar symbolism in their own countries (eg. Syntagma Square in Athens; Puerta del Sol, Madrid; Bourghiba Avenue in Tunis) (Gerbaudo 2012: 155) and that connection aroused more sympathy and/or disdain (depending on the actor). That is why the localisation of the protests and subsequent publication of images and video clips on the Internet played a big part in capturing emotions and provoking a reaction from external actors. Some people mistakenly attribute the power to capture the attention and emotion to the Internet. The Internet carried the message to the international audience showing what Egyptians were doing on the ground and it was their physical occupation and actions which captured attention (Gerbaudo 2012: 11). Tahrir became a symbol of the Egypt that Egyptians were fighting for. It was an inclusive place, where people worked together, there were no strict hierarchies and people exercised their civic rights and duties (Soueif 2012: 46). This space allowed outsiders to see that Egyptians are capable of organising themselves and that the country would not necessarily descend into chaos – as insinuated by some – once Mubarak and his regime leave (Code Pink 2011).

Through the employment of these strategies and active use of Internet and its platforms, Egyptian protesters and their sympathisers managed to achieve high visibility internationally, resulting in headlines such as ‘The year of the protester’, the most popular topics on Twitter being #egypt and #Jan25 and the Egyptian uprising becoming the biggest international story since 2007 according the Pew Research Center (Jurkowitz 2011).

#### ***4.5.2. Re-humanising the protester***

Another achievement of Internet-based international leveraging is the re-humanisation of the protester. Through citizen journalism and the availability of audio-visual content circulating online, international audiences did not simply see a mass of people protesting against a regime. They saw faces, heard stories and watched videos which helped to show the human face of the protests (Cottle 2011: 648) and this helped provide a bridge between Egyptians and people outside of Egypt – an emotional connection between the outside world and the protesters (Gerbaudo 2012: 151). They kept audiences who were not on the ground feel constantly involved in the events. The image of Khaled Said’s beaten face became one of the symbols of the uprising, as did Neda Agha-Soltan for the Iranian Green Movement in 2009 (Fathi 2009). The re-humanisation allowed for a sense of empathy to grow with the protesters. The slogans of the uprising also appealed across borders and allowed for non-

Egyptians to identify with the shared struggles or goals of the protesters such as democracy, freedom, social justice and the desire for a better life. As one non-Egyptian tweeted: "Hearing the actual voice of someone in #Egypt profoundly humanizes the stories of protests thousands of miles away: [is.gd/DaxDYX](https://is.gd/DaxDYX)" (@jess; 31 January 2011). The acceptability of the protesters in the West was also aided to a certain extent by the mainstream media in that those organisations gave most coverage to the modern, young, educated Egyptians who seem to be most acceptable and familiar to Western audiences (Douai, Auter and Domangue 2013: 482).

#### ***4.5.3. Strengthening accountability***

The Internet platforms and international attention allowed Egyptians to expose the crimes and hypocrisies of the Mubarak regime and force them to confront the issues and defend themselves internationally. During the actual protests, mediums such as Twitter were important to keep the information flow from the ground to Egyptians and the international audience constant. The Egyptian netizens wanted to expose the problems in Egypt so to make their cause and arguments more compelling and the context understood. In addition to wishing to arouse sympathies from the international audiences, the protesters also wanted to protect themselves from state violence and expose the state's crimes. The international exposure aimed to embarrass the Egyptian regime also had the possible effect of making the regime more wary of perpetrating violence against its own people. Egyptians of all backgrounds posted videos of state security violence, police brutality during protests and other examples of systematic violence. Some activists/journalists, like Wael Abbas through his blog *Misr Digital*, documented such crimes online. Wael Ghonim also documented such crimes through the *El Shaheed* blog. These videos which then spread online not only evidenced what was tacitly known, but also sparked more stark outrage by Egyptians and non-Egyptians alike and intensified debate around issues such as police brutality. Other issues were also tackled. Corruption was spoken about and articles published on the financial crimes and dealings by the regime.

In addition to playing accountability politics with the Egyptian regime, they were also played with other governments. Many Egyptian people considered that international governments – especially Western ones – were complicit with the Mubarak regime. This sentiment was strengthened when protesters found that many of the crowd control devices used against them by the security forces (tear gas, grenades, etc.) were made in the USA and United Kingdom (UK). The activists then published photos of the items on Facebook, Twitter, blogs and other



websites to expose the connections and embarrass the US and UK governments (Smith 2011) – much like the Tunisian protesters did when they exposed via the Internet that the French government was still supplying Ben Ali's security forces with anti-riot materials so to help quell the protests (Love 2011). In the words of interviewee E (2014, interview and personal communication, July – September),

Ultimately the role of social media, coupled with international media, especially the nudifying effect of Al Jazeera, which at the time quickly became the Arabic CNN, was what put pressure on Western Governments to pressure the Egyptian deep state. As the uprising wore on the American position started to adjust to political reality and the message was delivered, in no uncertain terms to Egyptian counterparts that Mubarak must go.

This was the element that encouraged Western governments to put pressure on the Egyptian deep state. The US saw that support for the Mubarak regime was no longer viable and placed pressure on the Egyptian deep state (Interviewee E 2014, interview and personal communication, July – September).

In this breakthrough, the protesters managed to shame the Mubarak regime internationally through their continuous publication of various multi-media exposing violence perpetrated by the police under the Mubarak regime, expressing opinions against Mubarak and his corruption. They successfully managed to present him as a tyrant (Interviewee F 2014, personal communication, April – June). Such efforts made it very difficult for international actors to support Mubarak and forced them to re-strategise their policies. The US and European countries had to throw their support, at least in their rhetoric, behind the Egyptian protesters and express support for the demands eventually.

#### ***4.5.4. Growing people-to-people solidarity***

Members of the Egyptian diaspora and non-Egyptians arranged protests in various cities around the world in front of Egyptian embassies/consulates. Protests occurred in London, New York, Pretoria, Beirut, San Francisco, Milano, Ramallah, Amman, Sydney and more. Activists and ordinary citizens arranged the protests and used social media to organise and publicise the events. Groups such as the *Egyptians in South Africa* were launched on Facebook to act as a virtual meeting and organising room. Twitter was used to inform about demonstrations and act as reminders about events. Imad Bazzi from Beirut tweeted:

“REMINDER: Lebanon protests tomorrow in solidarity with #Egypt details → <http://bit.ly/hzPg7g> plz RT” (@TrellaLB; 28 January 2011). These events were then seen by Egyptians or other people interested in supporting the protesters and some of them gathered at the said time and venue. Many of those people did not know each other before, but the communication online and the physical meetings at the protests gave them an opportunity to network and form communities (Interviewee B 2013, interview, 28 September). Interviewee B (2013, interview, 28 September), who organised a protest overseas, said:

I needed to act finally, to participate in the struggle and not just follow the protests on Facebook. I wanted to show solidarity and show the suffering and power of Egyptian people in other countries to see... This protest made me meet other Egyptians in [country] and we became friends and made other actions to support the revolution.

Even though some of the protests were small in size, there was a feeling of camaraderie and solidarity between the people around the world. Known freedom and democracy activists, academics and organisations, such as John Rees and Tariq Ali in London, Gavin Mooney in Perth and Amnesty International in Berlin, attended some of these protests and lent their thoughts and support. Footage from these protests and messages from protesters were then posted online and increased global visibility of the uprising and the international solidarity with the protesters. Some websites, like Global Voices, aggregated these videos to provide an easier overview of the solidarity events (Almiraat 2011).

At some of the protests that took place outside of Egypt, protesters carried Tunisian, Palestinian, Yemen and other flags to signify support for a broader regional awakening. They carried the message that the same struggle can be or was being carried in those other countries and that the people are together, regardless of their nationality/religion. This sentiment was especially evident at the celebrations held in the streets in various regional countries. Videos of these celebrations, such as the one showing Palestinians celebrating in the streets (Marouf 2011), were circulated online. Egyptians themselves were aware of these dynamics. A caption on one of the graffiti works in Mohamed Mahmoud Street in Cairo encapsulated this feeling: “The struggle is one... The borders are dust” (Amnesty International 2012).

In addition to protests and solidarity marches, a number of international activists took on the cause of the Egyptian protesters and supported them in other ways. For example Carlos Latuff, the Brazilian cartoonist, produced critical cartoons, such as the one with Khaled Said dangling a minute General Tantawi from his fingers, which were then spread online. Facebook pages such as *Kullena Khaled Said* and the English version *We are all Khaled Said* republished the cartoon.

These solidarity efforts, which were viewed by Egyptians through traditional and new media, contributed to the local morale. As Interviewee G (2014, personal communication, 22 September) mentioned “It made us feel we were not so completely isolated.”

#### **4.6. Conclusion**

The Internet has helped protesters and activists gain access to wider domestic and international audiences. They have managed to use the platforms successfully to create dialogue on issues that perhaps otherwise would have been swept aside and to expose the regime and its brutality. Although not discussed in the chapter, it may be noted that these efforts need to be wary of becoming the next ‘media-hype’ that will be followed by campaigns of people taking photos of themselves with signs showing support, and then fading away while another urgent and compelling issue takes over the world’s attention. In shaming the local governments, activists should keep the supporters of their governments shamed too so to limit their ability to manoeuvre and manipulate the situation to suit their own geo-political strategies and interests. The Internet and its role in the uprising were pivotal. Without the medium, few Egyptians would have had access to international audiences. What further assisted was that most Egyptians from the higher income groups have English knowledge and this allowed them to better communicate with non-Egyptians. The Internet and social media did not make the uprising, but they helped accelerate it and create the domestic and international awareness necessary to create the crowds in the streets and sustain the protests. The Egyptian engagement on the Internet helped to spread their views and influence the international opinion. The international opinion, mainly Western, turned favourably towards the Egyptian protesters, especially after it was obvious that the mobilisation is too large, and started to pressurise the Egyptian regime. This in turn had an effect on the Egyptian deep state which then, after attempts at suppression of the protests, had

to provide some concessions. There were a number of boomerangs which can be extracted from the above: one being the Egyptians influencing foreign governments which then pressurised the Egyptian regime; the second boomerang being the building up of international solidarity which then helped boost morale for the Egyptian protesters.

## CHAPTER V

### 5.1. Introduction

Civil society is becoming an increasingly relevant actor in international affairs and the Internet is facilitating its access and participation therein. The global connection is relevant as civil society is faced with concerns which are either shared, sympathised with or influenced across borders. Additionally, power structures, be they governments, corporations or other, are influenced by a combination of local and external elements meaning that civil society cannot always rely on local, direct action with reference to the power structures. Therefore, they turn to the international space to try to influence public opinion and gather relevant support. The Internet and communication technologies (ICTs) have played a significant role in facilitating this internationalisation of civil society. In the Egyptian case, civil society needed to mobilise both local and international support in order to pressurise the Mubarak regime into listening to some of the demands of the protesters. This study set out to find whether and how Egyptian protesters utilised the Internet to leverage international support. It was found that indeed, Egyptian civil society proactively used the Internet to engage internationally.

This final chapter provides an overview of the research. It then summarizes its findings, while mentioning the challenges encountered during the research process. Finally, the chapter proposes some recommendations for future research.

### 5.2. Overview of research

This study explored key concepts such as international leveraging, the Internet and its relevance to international leveraging, and civil society. International leveraging, using the boomerang effect model developed by Keck and Sikkink (1998), has been mostly researched with reference to structured and institutionalised forms of civil society, such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and organised transnational networks, leaving a gap in research of how the other forms of civil society can use it. The Internet was identified as providing an alternative transnational space and tools for communication which facilitate public participation locally and internationally, away from some of the restrictions found in

physical space, thus enabling users to act as netizens. The diminishing constraints of space and time provided by the Internet have allowed for quicker and greater proliferation and exchange of information, making information an important weapon for netizens to use. The rise of social media and networking platforms have also facilitated the engagement in citizen journalism, allowing for members of civil society to contribute to news- and agenda-making internationally. However, civil society still remained an unclear concept. In order to take into account the manifestations of civil society, other than the ‘traditional’ and formally organised ones, especially if wanting to study civil society in non-Western contexts, the development of the concept needed to be revisited. From a sum of its characteristics to the near equation to NGOs, it was decided to use the conceptualisation of civil society as an ‘arena’ so to be able to take into account all manifestations of citizen activism. The spatial approach to civil society means that the arena is defined by the function and not specific characteristics thus encompassing all segments of civil society and not giving undue preference to the organisational forms, such as NGOs. The less-organised and unstructured actors in the civil society arena usually do not have financial and other resources which are available to the institutionalised segments and so it was more difficult for them to internationalise. However, the Internet has provided a freer space and communication tools which offer the opportunity to elevate the power of civil society members with few material resources to engage internationally.

The third chapter outlined the case study, which was the Egyptian uprising in 2011. The development of civil society in Egypt was analysed and it was found that the growth in access to the ICTs coincided with the growth in activism and participation by the youth in the civil society arena. The Internet became a useful tool as it provided a space where netizens could debate, learn and mobilise with the options of relative anonymity. This allowed for a freer debate to take place and away from the supervision and censorship of the Egyptian authorities. Bloggers and activists using Internet tools became more prominent from the early/mid-2000s and became increasingly critical of the Egyptian regime and socio-political environment. Growing social discontent and activism resulted in eruptions of protest during the decade. The regime actively curtailed the right of expression and dissent through laws and systematic suppression. Many netizens were harassed, jailed or even tortured. This treatment by the authorities extended to other, less or even non-politically active Egyptians too and became symbolised by the death of Khaled Said at the hands of the police. Instigated by the mass protests in Tunisia, and subsequent ouster of Ben Ali, the built-up discontent

transformed into popular action. Seeing that the channels of communication to the government were closed, activists and netizens in Egypt began mobilising the public to take part in protests against the government, starting on 25 January 2011, with the aim of achieving a critical mass which would force the regime to enact some change. The protests were met with force by the regime and actions aimed at maiming the protesters' capacity to communicate – such as the shutting down of the Internet. However, the protesters endured and after 18 days of their action, the result was the resignation of Hosni Mubarak.

However, as the Egyptian regime remained impervious to the protesters' demands and instead reacted with violence, Egyptian activists opted to strengthen their efforts through international leveraging. Chapter four found that netizens began to use the Internet with the intent of engaging or influencing sympathetic external actors who would be able to show solidarity and exert pressure on the Mubarak regime to yield to some of the public demands. The number of subscribers and the usage of Facebook, YouTube and Twitter increased pointedly during and immediately after the uprising. The Egyptian government tried to curb the momentum gained by the protesters and the exposure of the crackdown by blocking access to the Internet. However, alternative methods were found to connect and local mobilisation was already underway. The spirited online activity by Egyptian netizens resulted in the Egyptian uprising becoming one of the most popular topics on social media and grabbing the world's attention. The Egyptian netizens utilised the Internet to spread audio-visual content and disseminate information on the developments on the ground – thus engaging in citizen journalism - and counter the misinformation which was being spread by their detractors, most notably the Egyptian regime. The online content was noticed and used by international mainstream media, human rights organisations and global civil society which either reproduced it or acted upon it. The Egyptian protesters also built up their moral authority through the Internet. As simple citizens with reasonable demands, they came to be perceived sympathetically by Western publics and their governments. The global attention made it impossible for the Egyptian protesters not to form part of the international agenda and governments which were allied with the Mubarak regime had to recalculate their approach to the situation. A shift in rhetoric and attitude was noted from the United States of America (USA) and European Union (EU) countries, whereby at the beginning of the uprising they were hostile or ambivalent towards the protesters, but later expressed their support for them and made calls for Mubarak to cede to their demands. A discrepancy was found in the reaction to the uprising by governments which had more free societies and those

with less free societies. The Mubarak regime was found to have reacted to some of the international pressures, but at the same time try to repress the protests. However, the regime was not able to withstand the internal and external pressures and Mubarak resigned, with the army swiftly taking control of the situation.

### **5.3. Summing up the research findings**

The main research hypothesis was that the Internet facilitated the process of international leveraging by the unstructured segment of Egyptian civil society. The findings indicate that this was indeed the case. Egyptian civil society benefited from the Internet as it provided a safer space and communication tools whereby Egyptians could engage internationally. The Egyptians who used this space and tools did not necessarily belong to civil society organisations, but were or became active members in the open civil society arena. Due to the relatively low transaction costs of using new technologies, the Internet has made transnational communication and access to a large audience easier. Thus any Egyptian with Internet access had the potential to reach an international audience.

However, although it was found that the Internet has made it easier for all members of civil society to engage internationally, there are some challenges which need to be taken into account. There isn't yet universal access to the Internet, and so the tendency is that the more affluent segments of society or the more developed areas globally are better represented in cyberspace. In the Egyptian case, the medium-upper strata of the socio economic ladder and the urban areas (especially Cairo) were the best represented online. Issues such as illiteracy and language barriers also present challenges where the illiterate are unable to partake in online activities and some people may be hampered by inability to communicate in and understand different languages. The Internet is also subject to government surveillance and the complicity of some Internet companies with governments' intrusive or repressive endeavours. The research has shown that there are efforts to overcome these challenges, although they have a long way to go. Initiatives such as speak2tweet tried to mitigate the language barrier problem. The media tent in Tahrir Square became a point where people with no Internet access could provide their stories and materials which the activists in the media tent would then publish online. Proxy servers were used to hide people's identities and locations by connecting from remote servers.



The sub-hypothesis which the research presented was that the Internet assisted the Egyptian civil society to develop and learn from other examples of mobilisation and protest action. The research found that the Internet did indeed form an integral part of the development of the 'new' civil society in Egypt through providing access to information, platforms through which like-minded Egyptians could engage with each other and with non-Egyptians, and learn about other cases where mass mobilisation led to regime change. These efforts encouraged the building up of protest action in Egypt during the 2000s and the increasing usage of Internet tools for communication, organisation and mobilisation.

The second sub-hypothesis was that the Egyptian civil society used the Internet explicitly to elicit international support. This was also found to be true. Egyptians sent content and messages directed at international audiences aiming to provide clarification on the uprising, to counter the anti-protester narratives promoted by the Egyptian regime and hostile parties, to expose the real nature of the Mubarak regime and request for support in the forms of solidarity or the cessation of support for the Mubarak regime. These messages were sent via social media forums: Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and more. Egyptians also engaged in citizen journalism which was picked up on by mainstream media and thus the protester-generated content became integrated within and enriched many mainstream media coverage such as of Al Jazeera or the Guardian.

The second hypothesis was that a boomerang effect took place. The research found evidence of this, but its impact on the structural transformation of Egypt was less strong than many had hoped. The Egyptians civil society managed to arouse international interest in the uprising and place it on the global agenda. After some initial hesitations, many media and foreign governments proclaimed their support for the protesters. The Mubarak regime reacted to these attitudes and pressures through further attempts at suppressing the protests, making some concessions and finally it ended with the resignation of Mubarak. Although on the surface it seems that the protesters won, they did not manage to make a deeper structural change in the regime and gain real support from international governments, more specifically Western ones, for the values of human rights and democratisation. From this observation, recognising that boomerang effects did take place, the case study should also be considered within the framework of Risse's (2000) spiral. Egypt was clearly in Risse's first phase of the spiral where there was a protracted phase of repression. During the 2000s, as Egyptian youth

gained more access to information and a space to interact in, cyberspace, so the activation of a new participation in the civil society arena began to emerge. The Egyptian protesters managed then to escalate the situation to the second phase of the spiral by placing their cause on the international agenda during the uprising. The situation even progressed to the third stage where the regime made concessions – Mubarak stepped down, the emergency law was repealed, elections were being organised without the participation of Mubarak, but simultaneously worked to continue repression. However, Egypt has stayed in the third stage and regressed again. Thus, boomerangs did take place, but civil society did not keep the focus or momentum to enable Egypt to progress to the fourth and fifth stages of the spiral.

In addition to the findings made with regards to the hypotheses, there are a number of other observations that have been noted. For starter, the Egyptian case has shown that any segment of civil society can utilise the tools provided by the Internet to engage with international actors to raise awareness, promote, or build solidarity with a certain cause. This is particularly pertinent for members of civil society who have been ignored by mainstream media or who are not of strategic interest to the international community. At the same time, this research shows that people can use the Internet for whichever cause they wish, but the online actions need to reflect and be supported by actions on the ground for greater effect and sustainability. People probably would not have tweeted so much about Tahrir Square and the Egyptian revolution were it not for the people who actually stood in the square to protest and occupy it. A second point is that the netizens using the Internet need to have legitimacy. Without legitimacy, they would not be able to gain the trust of international audiences. The Egyptian netizens were perceived as being representative of Egyptian demands. It is beneficial when segments of civil society are cosmopolitan or fluent in other languages as this helps with legitimacy and cross-cultural communication that is needed when engaging with the international community. Many of the Egyptian netizens used English in their posts and online content. Thirdly, in order for the international community to accept the cause, the messages or demands should be able to transcend geographical and cultural differences. This will allow for the international community to identify more closely and embrace the cause more readily. The protesters had demands that transcended local borders. The main demands of the protesters were ‘bread, freedom and social justice’ and ‘Mubarak, leave’ (democratisation). The protesters also raised issues such as women’s rights and sexual harassment. These issues are global and attracted more focused attention from various women’s groups and human rights organisation.

There are some cautionary notes which can also be extracted from the research. Activists should be wary of audience fatigue. Even though a problem has not been resolved and perhaps has degenerated into something worse, international audiences can become fatigued and the level of interest dwindles. The democratisation struggle continued in Egypt well after the ouster of Hosni Mubarak but it has lost its momentum and international appeal. Also, other urgent international issues have taken away attention. A more recent example of audience fatigue can be found with the case of the Bring Back Our Girls campaign. The Internet and mainstream media were abuzz with the story of the kidnapping of school girls by Boko Haram in Nigeria. Many netizens posted photos of themselves holding signs in support of the girls. However the attention wound down, people moved on to other causes for their slacktivism and the girls are still missing (Sam 2015). Activists need to have a strategy to keep audiences interested and to propose viable solutions/proposals so to show that through engagement, change can happen.

In this world where information has become so abundant in its availability and is much more easily accessible, the wish for control over this information has become greater. Governments, big businesses and media all have a large sway over which information is most prominent or easily found and what perceptions are formed internationally on various issues (consumer preferences; views towards a certain people; acceptability of scientific views, etc.) by using their military, economic or political power. So how do people who do not have access to those modes of power participate in this information exchange? With the growth in access to ICTs and the interactive nature of the various platforms found online, people can add their voice to the mass of information. However, a single voice or piece of information has a high chance of being missed or easily forgotten in the stampede of new information. For this reason, if a message is to be noticed and received, it has a much better chance if there is a mass of people behind it – a common message. This relates back to the importance of the framing of the message to make it more broadly appealing.

In the information age and age where rhetoric of human rights is held as a norm, information wars have become more important in cases of conflict. This is because there is more media focus and less of a chance to hide crimes or scenes that are not easily digestible. For this reason the struggle between dehumanisation and rehumanisation of the victims or aggrieved party to shape the international opinion is stronger than ever. The Internet and social media

are the platforms where the aggrieved party can more easily present its face and show that they are more than just a shadow/thorn in the orderly society. In Egypt, the regime tried to present the protesters solely as balaclava clad, stone or cocktail Molotov wielding hooligans/anarchists/thugs (Hamdy and Gomaa 2012: 199). This arouses a negative feeling towards the protestors and to some extent seems to justify the use of excessive force by police and security services. The Egyptian protesters and their sympathisers in turn would show the unmasked protesters, crying, wounded or shielding one another to arouse feelings of empathy and condemnation for the use of excessive force. A more recent example of this information and perception war online is the use of social media to cover the Israeli attack on Gaza in July 2014. The images of the dead or wounded civilians and destruction in Gaza have stood in contrast to the images and words expressed by Israeli politicians and supporters of the attack who claim that that Israel was acting in self-defence and targeting terrorists (Mason 2014).

The Internet is ultimately a tool and the space is characterised by those who use it. It is thus a double edged sword as it can be used for or against civil society. Governments can use the visibility and availability of information to track and hamper activities by civil society. Internationally, the requests by governments for data or removal of content from Twitter have increased (Twitter 2015b), again highlighting the tug-of-war taking place in cyberspace. It provides the space for greater voice and participation, but it is also the space where great details on people or organisations can be gleaned by authorities. Also, segments of society that are not 'civil' can use the medium to spread messages of hate, violence and disruption. An example can be found where the Islamic State (IS) is using Twitter and other social media to spread its messages of hate and gain an audience for its online content – including videos of beheadings. The online community has grown aware of this perverse use of social media and there have been calls not to share and help grow an audience to such messages.

With reference to Egypt, although the protesters were successful in removing Mubarak from power and eliminating the possibility of his son from inheriting the presidency, the situation has regressed. Egypt, at the moment of writing, has seen the deterioration in human rights under the rule of the new-president, ex-general Abdel Fattah Al Sisi. One interviewee's words on Egypt at the time of writing echoed the sentiments of most of the other interviewees:

The situation in Egypt is worse now than before even Mubarak! The military is more brutal with activists and is dividing people.’ He went on to say ‘I don’t know how things will change, but something will happen soon (Interviewee B 2013, interview, 28 September).

The last expression of hope was expressed by most interviewees, however their conviction on whether some change will happen soon varied. There is an increasing polarisation of the society encouraged by the government and the state sponsored local media, encouraging antipathy between military supporters and Islamists, between Egyptians and Syrian refugees and encouraging xenophobia (Interviewee J 2014, interview, 28 December). The military regime has successfully divided the Egyptian public again with the effect of isolating the pro-democracy segment. It has also passed draconian laws banning protests, it has arrested many activists, is reconsolidating its grip on the state apparatus and there is still no transparency into the workings and finances of the army. Amnesty International has recently published a report wherein it describes the continuing deterioration of human rights and increasing repression in Egypt. Since the ousting of Mohammed Morsi in July 2013 to the end of 2014, 1400 protesters have been killed by security forces (Amnesty International 2014: 137). The international main-stream media has also taken a step back from Egypt and the country is again shown as going through a period of transition and a strategic partner in the Middle East. Al Jazeera has lost some of the credibility is gained during the coverage of the uprising as it has been viewed as being biased towards the Muslim Brotherhood and promoting Qatari foreign policy. However the authoritarian nature of the regime glossed over and the international community views it generally as a seeping pot that is kept under control by the military regime.

The international community has wavered between criticising the Sisi regime over its human rights violations and returning to business as usual. The EU, after some criticism of the Raba’a massacre by the military under Sisi, where at least 817 people were killed (Human Rights Watch 2014: 6), has continued providing aid to Egypt. Some of its countries, such as Germany and United Kingdom (UK), reviewed and suspended for a while their arms exports to Egypt in light of the human rights violations (BBC 2013). However, many of them have since resumed the arms sales. The UK approved arms sales to Egypt during 2014 to the value of 2.7 million British pounds (Townsend and Boffey 2014). France has recently signed USD six billion arms deal with Egypt and this is keeping in line with the increasing arms exports to Egypt since 2011, despite the fact that some of French equipment has been used against

Egyptian protesters (Mohamed 2015). The USA will continue its military aid to Egypt, as well as weapons sales after an almost two year suspension following the ousting of ex-president Mohamed Morsi (Tejas 2015). This resumption is taking place despite the fact that there has been improvement neither in the human rights situation, nor in democratisation. These examples show that support for democracy, human rights, freedoms and self-determination is weak, subject to political manipulation and subordinate to strategic interests.

Egypt now is divided and the perception of a dualistic society has re-emerged: that Egypt is divided between the military and the re-banned Muslim Brotherhood and its supporters. The activists who sought a third way have also become more polarised and marginalised in the international arena. This has allowed the interests of the Egyptian military to regain control over the happening in Egypt and four years on, almost none of the demands apart from Mubarak's removal have been achieved. This shows that international leveraging as a tool needs to be used in conjunction to many other steps and that many boomerangs need to be made to complete the spiral phases. It is not enough to protest and to gather support. That energy needs to be directed towards a clear goal, otherwise it will wane and fade or be used by other actors with more focused goals.

With respect to the usage of Internet-based communication technologies in Egypt, Egyptians have continued using the online platforms as netizens. Groups have been formed such as Kazeboon which highlight the variations between the words and actions of the Egyptian military. Leaks have also been circulated via social media of conversations between senior officials, including President Sisi, speaking about corrupt practices and deals. The regime has also responded not by embracing the potentials of transparency, but by further protecting themselves from it. During a visit to Cairo in December 2014, military and certain police officers were seen wearing balaclavas so to protect their identities should they be filmed by civilians.

#### **5.4. Problems encountered during the research process**

As discussed, civil society is a fluid concept. Although some of its components are crucial drivers of positive social change and important voices for the citizenry at large, it must be emphasized that it is always complicated (not to say impossible) to accurately gauge the

legitimacy of some of these individuals and groups, let alone their capacity to represent shared interests. This research acknowledged such an inherent complexity and does not pretend to provide an accurate picture of the demands of all social and political groups in Egypt.

There were some difficulties in obtaining certain statistical information with reference to social media. As the research was conducted retrospectively, the number of tweets and trends could not be monitored and analysed in real time. The historical data is not freely available and the financial constraints prevented the researcher from accessing the monetized information. Thus the statistical information relied on secondary sources and their scopes. It was also difficult to establish contact with some key interviewees (activists and protesters) as the situation in Egypt is still unstable and they were unavailable.

Regarding data gathering, online content in Arabic could not be taken into account due to a language barrier. Thus the study could not extensively analyse the usage of international leveraging aimed at the region where Arabic is the common language. Although messages in Western languages were crucial to activate international support, the lack of focus on the regional dynamics activated within the Middle East results in a limited depiction of the overall phenomenon.

It should be kept in mind that the Internet-based and international dimensions were only complementary to the protests and to the physical presence, actions and interactions between the Egyptians who were in the streets during those 18 days. As such, this research should be considered as a fragment of a larger picture describing the processes, interactions and tools used during the uprising.

## **5.5. Proposals for future research**

This research managed to provide some insight on the use of international leveraging during a very limited time-frame, the 18 days of protests, but did not take into account the longer term usage and potentials of the tool. Questions remain on how protest movements can keep international attention alert and not let it succumb to viewer fatigue. It would be useful to monitor Internet-based international leveraging efforts over a longer period of time so to gain

greater insight into trends, strengths and weaknesses of the civil society actors looking for support and also at the trends in the reception of such efforts. These findings could provide clues to the reasons for endurance or dissipation of international campaigns.

Most of this research looked at the supply-side of international leveraging, but had limited capacity to carry out a thorough analysis of the demand-side, that is, how messages were received and processed by ordinary people outside of Egypt. Aday et al (2013) have analysed media consumption patterns with reference to the Arab Spring. However there is room to build upon their research which would in turn provide greater information on the reception of attempts to leverage international support by means of information. This would provide further insight into the transnational links formed by civil society which then influence politics and developments in a certain country.

Another area which could warrant further research would be a comparative analysis of the reception of international leveraging attempts from countries which have more free societies versus countries which have less free societies. From the findings of this research, there was a suggestion that there is indeed a link. However, empirical analysis of the various reactions to attempts to leverage support would be necessary to establish whether there is a link between degree of reception and degree of freedom in receiving country.

## **5.6. Conclusion**

The Internet has proved to be a useful tool in empowering all segments of civil society, although challenges such as access, literacy and governmental restrictions remain, and increasing their stature in the local and international arenas. It has also facilitated their usage of international leveraging. These interactions are allowing civil societies, especially those living in authoritarian countries, to raise their issues and find global audiences which can help to pressurise local governments into acknowledging and acting upon those issues. Egyptians have used international leveraging as a complementary strategy to their on-the ground action in part to try grow international pressure on the Mubarak regime and in part to encourage further mobilisation and protection of Egyptian protesters. Their efforts have succeeded in the short-term, but have fallen short of longer term change. This has highlighted the need for



tools such as international leveraging to be complemented by more comprehensive strategies and goals which would then maintain pressure and focus for civil society.

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## Appendix 1 – List of interviewees

- A male, 28, engineer, Cairo – interview and personal communication, September 2013
- B male, 32, veterinarian, Cairo – interview, 28 September 2013
- C male, 45, activist, San Francisco – interview, 19 June 2014
- D female, 29, activist/student, Sussex – interview, 18 June 2014
- E male, journalist, Cairo/New York – personal communication, July - September 2014
- F male, NGO worker, Cairo - interview and personal communication, April - June 2014
- G male, 34, journalist, Cairo – personal communication, 22 September 2014
- H male, 35, accountant, Cairo – interview, 27 December 2014
- I male, 43, NGO worker, Cairo – interview, 18 December 2013
- J male, 33, NGO worker, Cairo - interview, 28 December 2014
- K female, 29, student, Cairo – interview, 20 December 2014
- L male, 32, engineer, Cairo – interview, 17 December 2013