

TANDEM OF TV + TWITTER

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Social media played a very important role in the political processes that took place in Egypt and Tunisia. It is exactly thanks to these resources that people around the world received information about the unfolding events. At that, I would not even say that this or that resource was the most important, as it seems that all forms were important and continue to complement one another. Moreover, **not only the social media are important, but Al-Jazeera is also important.** Taken together, all of these social media have their niches, and they are all setting into different, yet complementary roles.

For example, the protests were heavily advertised on Facebook, so the early protests were first spread through this channel, with pictures and videos being posted on

the social networking site. Twitter was mainly used to disseminate information from Egypt and Tunisia to those outside the country. **Al-Jazeera actively used the materials of the social media about the situation in Tunis and in Egypt, as if they were suddenly equipped with hundreds of thousands of journalists on the ground.**

In this context, we can speak about the total ecology of social media, through which people can pass on information to others about events as they unfold by uploading photos and video materials onto the internet. Al-Jazeera uses information from Facebook and Twitter in their reporting, and it is virtually impossible to censor such a system. These new types of media have certainly played a major role in supporting peoples' ability to organize, to disseminate information, and to figure out what was going on in their country.

It is not surprising then that Mubaraq's regime shut off the internet, and then cut off 'Al-Jazeera,' as both tools were perceived to be a major threat.

However, I would not over idealize these new forms of social media, because they can just as easily be used by a government for censorship and surveillance. There is a new book by the researcher Evgeny Morozov from Belurussia, called 'The Network Scam: the Dark Side of Internet Freedom', which discusses how **the state can use the internet to oppress any potential protestors.** They can use it to promote propaganda, and they can use it to try to identify and punish citizens.

Social media are not utopian tools, they are open to censorship, and they are open to surveillance. But social media are also free for people to use, and they do help people coordinate and talk to each other in a way that traditional forms of media do not allow.

The advent of social media offers great potential for democratic

organization, yet it is no magic wand; it is not something you can just introduce into a country and then 'boom' everything is fine and well. **It depends on whether people even want to use them to organize in the first place, on the perceived legitimacy of the state, and so on.** There is a complicated system of relationships to consider.

In particular, many people blame Twitter for spreading rumors. Actually, rumors are spread and will always be spread. The thing is, Twitter is a part of the real world. So, it is not a question of whether or not Twitter is reliable, but a more general issue of how one can ever know when a piece of information is reliable or not. It could depend on who you heard it from, on how you heard it, what you hear, and so on. **You might hear a false rumor from a neighbor, you might hear it on Twitter.** The issue isn't Twitter but that there are generally many ways in which false rumors can be spread.

Of course, with Twitter there is the opportunity for rumors to spread a little faster, but conversely there is the opportunity for corrections and the truth to be spread — **there is the possibility for ongoing feedback. The Russian taxi drivers, for example, who were blamed for sharply increasing their prices after the terrorist attacks at Domodedovo airport have the ability to answer back and say: 'No, this is not true.'** Ultimately, Twitter, along with all social media, is like any other thing in life. It is messy, and it is not always correct, just like everything you hear on television isn't always correct, nor is everything that you hear from your neighbors. However, rather than criticize these new forms of social media, people should focus more on trying to assess the credibility of the information that gets passed through them. ■

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