

Libya

The history of Libya is parallel to that of other once-colonized nations. Therefore, it displays economic, class, gender, religious, and ethnic inequalities. Libya gained independence from Italy in 1951. The country became The United Kingdom of Libya, a constitutional and hereditary monarchy. After the discovery of oil reserves and a large income from petroleum sales, Libya established as a wealthy nation. However, discontent arises with the concentration of the country's wealth in the power sphere.

On September of 1969, a group of military officers led by Muammar Gaddafi launch Libyan Revolution and deposing the king Idris. The constitution was abolished and policies were outlined in the "Green Book" - a proposal of Gaddafi to improve and develop the country. Keeping Libya debt-free, the government improved the income per capita and increased the ranking of the country in the Human Development Index to the higher in Africa. However, since the 1970s most of the oil profits was spent on arms and supporting terrorist groups. Without any elections or democratic nature, in 1977 Libya became "Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya" and Gaddafi got unlimited power. In 1986 there was a failed assassination attempt against Gaddafi and shortly thereafter, Libya was under UN sanctions.

The "Permanent Revolution" of Gaddafi has been characterized by its brutality and extravagance. The dictator prohibited private ownership and retail trade, banned press, controlled the military, implemented the *sharia* and pursued dissidents. Libya's decades of international isolation left the country without no political alliances or national organizations of any kind. Libyan society has been fractured, divided by the cleavages of kinship and region. In recent years, Gaddafi went from anti-Western terrorist dictator into a semi-Western ally in the global war against terrorism and fundamentalist Islamism.

The Arab Spring

At the beginning of the year 2011, revolutions in several Arab countries were highlighted in the worldwide media agenda. Social media played an important role in these political changes. The "Arab Spring" hit Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Syria, Libya, Jordan, Morocco, Algeria, Yemen, Oman and Djibouti. The Internet and social media were considered as determinant. Social media applications such as Facebook, Twitter,

YouTube or Flickr have been identified as key to the revolution in the Arab world. These platforms were the epicenter of Arab regional social media innovation and help built communities.

The labels "Twitter Revolution" and "Facebook Revolution" fulfilled many newspaper titles. However, demographic issues as well as social and political patterns between countries were very diverse. Compare substantially different economies and cultures become habitual although created fallacies. Activists and opposition of dictatorial governments used technology to share ideas and disseminate their message. Nevertheless, the main issue is that these uses resonated in different ways in the local contexts and in the global sphere. Therefore, was the social media a facilitator of the revolution? There is no consensual answer. Yet it became clear that the political developments in the Arab showed that the youth used the Internet as a political platform and a tool to mobilize people for change.

The use of platforms such as Facebook and Twitter highlighted the shift from social tools to political tools. Not only in the Arab world but mainly in the Arabian Diaspora. Through social media, the Diasporas have been instrumental to the change. However, broadcast media have not been redundant in the revolutionary processes. The role of Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya channels television were also very important.

As Libyan regime was based on a society fractured into clan's networks, armed rebels ignited the protests within the eastern provinces. The first manifestations in Libya began on February 15th 2011 and in the following days more than a dozen protesters were killed in confrontations with pro-Gaddafi tribes and secret police. The demonstrations hostile to government intransigence and brutal repression against protesters degenerated in a revolt that spread rapidly through the eastern part of the country, traditionally opposed to Gaddafi. In April 2011, the New York Times reported that two of the sons of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi attempted to articulate a transition to a constitutional democracy that would include the step-down of the father from power. The transition would be conducted by one of Gaddafi's sons, Saif al-Islam Gaddafi. The rebels, however, rejected the proposal. NATO took the command of military operations in Libya. The decision was taken unanimously by member states of the organization, after several days of tough negotiations on NATO's role and its ability to perform or not air strikes on ground targets.

Even with the declared defeat of pro-Gaddafi forces and complete occupation of the territories, Saif al-Islam remained in hiding in the south of the country until his

capture in November 2011. In addition, members of the former government escaped to Niger, despite the violence when they were detected by troops from that country.

Role of Social Media

Although digital migration is still in its early years in Libya, the use of social media for external dissemination of protests revealed the tribal and regional cleavages in the country. In Libya, the Internet penetration rate was quite low: only 5.4% of the population had access in June 2010 and in March 2011, only 1.1% had created an account on Facebook. These numbers demonstrate how it is not possible to argue that social media has been the main impulse of the uprising in Libya. From an internal perspective, the numbers demystify the idea of "Facebook Revolution" or "Twitter Revolution".

Numerous Facebook pages and hundreds of thousands of tweets supported the protest. Moreover, the role of mobile devices has been significantly important, both in messaging and for conveying information across the Internet. On 18 February, the regime has disabled the Internet hoping to smother manifestations. Nevertheless, on the contrary, they increase, culminating in bloody clashes between rebels and loyal to Gadhafi. As social media encouraged the free expression, Gaddafi's regime replied with brutal repression and arrests. As a consequence, the rise of an independent social media in the Diaspora resulted in an increasing of citizen engagement within communication technologies. Therefore, social media also were used as "watchdog" of official Libyan press and disseminated information to the Western world. Several Twitter campaigns were directed to public figures and against political actors in Libya. In the same perspective, the Libyan government also tried to resist and become active particularly on Twitter. The second son of Gaddafi, Saif al-Islam, also tried to use social media for spreading his message to the international community and present his determination to govern Libya and move the country toward democracy.

As the revolution has several social and political actors, it became clear the appropriation of the technique as a method of propaganda. "The YouTube war" exposed the uses of social media platforms for the purposes of political dissident and activist organizations. There were many suspicions as to the contents published and confirmation of information was increasingly difficult, with armed rebels on the ground to hinder the work of media professionals. The propaganda war has become evident in video content but also in fake pages created on Facebook and false

information disseminated on Twitter. The different streams in social media caused many questions about the veracity of what was actually happening in the country.

Journalists and bloggers faced serious repercussions for expressing independent opinion and publishing reliable and impartial information. Several social media campaigns demanded rights for Internet users, journalists, citizen journalists and bloggers. The Gaddafi regime severely repressed digital dissidents. The imprisonments were emblematic for a control of digital space. Hence Libyan Diaspora has often been the source of information of what was happening inside the country for the outside world and international audiences. In fact, Libyan youth movement in the Diaspora reported directly to Twitter and Facebook and tagged the messages with the hashtag #feb17.

As Tripoli collapsed into a civil war, social media were used for empower the revolution as well as to place the message into a transnational sphere. On Twitter, users from around the world tagged tweets with the hashtag #feb17 as an international demonstration of solidarity for the pro-democracy protests. The media professionals dialogued directly with users through these streams and relied to the techniques of semantic classification to remain at the forefront of publishing content and attracting audiences.

The new tools implemented different (simple and, simultaneously, complex) social objects that promoted new practices: to subscribe, to like, to retweet, to digg, to share... This means that users' online behavior can be studied as an activity. Therefore, social practices can be labeled as the lead to social action and to social interaction. The role of hashtags in Libyan revolution was relevant as it promoted adherence to social and political movements, ensured information streams, indexed messages to contents and disseminated information by communication channels that promote collective action through social interactions. Social media and social practices of semantic web advertised the revolution as a whole organized and created ties that sustained communities and mobilized civic action.

The NATO intervention in Lybia was also an issue that has been much discussed in social networks and led the rebels to impose severe punishments to critics. What seemed like a revolution for democracy began to cause questions in social networks and in the Libyan youth movement in the Diaspora.

After five months of being blocked, by August 2011, the Internet was available again to the Libyan public. The capture of Gaddafi and his death at the hands of the rebels

seemed to put an end to civil war, in October 2011. Though Libya is currently undergoing a political reconstruction, widespread corruption and scarcity of basic goods still occur. The main issue is state formation and not only democratization. The 6.4 million people in Libya are still living fearing a war and divided among the different provinces. The rebels took the power but democracy was not declared and social media continue to be a support to expose what is happening in the country. As media professionals began to redirect attention to the Syria, social platforms have become the only medium to disseminate information on the real situation in Libya. The youth in the Diaspora returned to play an important role after the disillusionment with the fall of Tripoli to the rebels.

The opposition to Gaddafi who took power understood the role of network and satellites. Internet cuts aim to end communications with the outside world. Yet the attempts were frustrated because users can get to Twitter via SMS and virtual private networks and proxy servers that allow secure remote access to external networks. Attempts to limit communications with the outside world not only failed as it highlights in social media that there is another need for change.

Social media continued to play an important role at this stage in the disclosure of the country situation and the evolution and social revolt. After the elections in July 2012, the new leaders of the country have difficulty imposing his authority over the rebel brigades who fought the Gaddafi regime in 2011. Some militias believe that their legitimacy is stronger than that of elected officials. The population responded by organizing demonstrations and managed to oust Islamist groups. Through the Internet and social media, Amnesty International reported that although most human rights violations had occurred by the forces of the deposed regime, supporters of the new regime would also be involved in torture and murder. Facebook pages and Twitter continue to have a very significant impact on the disclosure of internal information of the country, often replacing the media professionals. Moreover, social media started to be complementary to satellite TV that is assumed to be partial. Bloggers and citizen journalists continue to be harassed and Internet access is still controlled by the authorities and militias, according to Reporters Without Borders and Amnesty International.

The critical mass of Twitter, mostly Western, considers unacceptable this kind of pressure on citizens and condemned the way Gaddafi was executed. The trial of the son of the dictator, prisons and repression of digital dissident are now the most

discussed topics in social media. Despite the hashtag #feb17 refer to February 2011 and the beginning of the revolution, it continues to be used to index content on the Libyan situation.

The use of social media cannot be interpreted as a direct cause that induced changes in Libya. Cyberspace was the link between different networks and established new public spheres for debate. Digital media has individualized, localized and structured a collective consciousness. Within this new news ecosystem, political uses of social media were also exposed. Social media don't generate revolutions but may facilitate them and aided political actors to transform their public image. Nevertheless, social media can change the nature of news, just as Arab satellite channels helped to broadcast the revolution.