Instrument or Structure? Investigating the Potential Uses of Twitter in Kuwait

by

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines if and how Twitter can be used to organize protests by activists. Theoretically, it addresses several debates about Internet technology in approaches to Social Movement Theory, Network Theory, and Digital Politics Theory and synthesizes them to create an analytical framework to address Internet technologies effects, or lack thereof, on civil society. Through a case study examining protests in Kuwait empirical results indicate that Twitter does not have a significant impact on collective action efforts as it is not used to connect activists or create a forum for dialogue. Instead it is used to promote slogans and provide on-the-ground-reports of events, which do not have significant effects on organizing collective action. The reason for its relative insignificance is largely due to political, social and economic obstacles that polarize and fragment online collective action efforts.
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Introduction

“In the blink of an eye, the Twitter and Facebook generation had successfully rallied hundreds of thousands to its cause, across the nation[s]” – January 30, 2011, New York Times

The emergence of numerous social movements in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) during the Arab Spring threatened the rule of despotic regimes in the region. Seemingly overnight, disenfranchised citizens took to the streets and demanded accountability, transparency and democracy from their aloof autocratic elites. These events captivated and shocked academics studying the dynamics of civil society life in the region (Lynch 2011, Gause 2011, Bunce 2011). Observers assumed that activists would not be able to overcome the obstacles prevalent in civil societies weakened by decades of repression and neglect (Anderson 2006, Hinnesbusch 2003, Lust-Okar 2009, Amaney 2007). The diffusion of collective action, simultaneously across different locations (especially in places entirely unused to such demonstrations) totally revised scholars’ assumptions about what was possible (Al Ghobashy 2011). As Egyptian author Alaa Al Aswany surmised, “The revolution took the world by surprise and forced Western interests to reconsider the superficial and flawed political analysis that had long prevailed” (2011: x).

One of the most persistent narratives explaining these protests is the notion that Internet technology, especially social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter, significantly contributed to the activities of protesters. Many activists, media sources, and academics cite the protests as evidence that Internet technology offers a crucial advantage

The possibility that social media could have been an important factor in the protests leads this paper to a serious investigation of Internet technology as a tool that may facilitate the mobilization of civil society by activists. To what extent is social media an effective organizing tool for activists? Do these tools enhance activists’ mobilization efforts?

A review of the theoretical literature reveals a significant empirical gap in the study of social media (Platter 2012). A general lack of fieldwork or methodological advances on this subject mean that there is very little known about the potential patterns of social media use. This being said, several literatures – the approaches to Social Movement Theory (SMT), Network Theory (NT), and Digital Politics Theory (DPT) – make a number of theoretical assertions about the role of social media in mobilizing protests. Yet, there are three theoretical debates in these literatures that raise more questions than answers concerning this issue. In SMT approaches the debate is between theorists who disagree whether Internet technology augments or changes the boundaries of activism for social movements (della Porta 2012, Earl and Kimport 2011). In the NT literature scholars disagree over the types of ties needed to foster activist networks online and whether these networks can augment collective-action efforts (Lim 2009, Halgin and Borgatti 2011). Last is the DPT literature, where two groups debate whether Internet

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1 In a survey conducted by Canadian newspaper The National, 9 out of 10 Egyptians and Tunisians said they used social media to organize protests.
technology has positive or negative effects on collective action efforts (Diamond 2010, Morozov 2009, Howard and Hussain 2011, Rheingold 2003, Mungiu-Pippidi and Munteanu 2009, McFaul 2007, Etling et al. 2010). Implicit in these three debates are two very different conceptions of Internet technology use—one action oriented, focusing on the instrumental abilities of individuals; and another function oriented, based on examining the political power structures, institutions, and norms that condition users' ability to utilize Internet technology for any purpose. Generally speaking, scholars in each literature analyze Internet technology for democratizing purposes with the idea that these theoretical conceptions are not compatible. This theoretical issue constrains attempts to study social media use by civil-society actors by only addressing one side of social media use and creating monolithic results that fit only one worldview.

To avoid this pitfall, I address these theoretical and empirical issues in a case study that focuses on studying both the instrumental and structural aspects of Internet technology in breadth and depth. Through the construction of a framework that analyzes the content of a particular social media device - Twitter - and interviews with the activists who use them, I investigate if and how social media use affects mobilization efforts. The country that is the focus of my examination is Kuwait, which has experienced significant Arab-Spring protests, numerous obstacles to mobilization, and high Internet use among activists.

The research I present in this study demonstrates that Twitter was used in Kuwaiti protests, but not as an effective organizing tool. Activists did not use Twitter for
organizing or recruiting protesters, connecting different activists, or as a conversational forum: in short, it did not provide a direct channel for collective action. These results go against approaches in the SMT, NT, and DPT literatures that argue that social media augments or radically changes traditional mobilization efforts. These findings strongly emphasize that there is little reason to believe that social media can ever act as a democratization tool for civil society groups. Instead, Twitter use by activists was mainly a source of rhetorical expression and a quick way of disseminating information about ground-level events, which shows a change in public discourse and collective action frames, but no tangible impact on offline coordination efforts. I strongly argue that Internet skeptics in the literatures are correct in their assertions that Internet technology degrades mobilization efforts. The social, ideological and political obstacles to mobilization in Kuwaiti civil society and the design of Twitter reinforces fragmentation and polarization among civil society groups even if they have great interest in using Internet technology to organize collective action. This being said, unlike the skeptics’ assertions, I demonstrate that both the instrumental and structural arguments are crucial to understanding why Internet technology is not an important factor in mobilization efforts. In particular, instrumental decision-making at the micro-level has a major impact on how structural factors are reinforced. As I illustrate, only when taking both perspectives into account simultaneously can we verify how important structural concerns are to the success or failure of mobilization efforts.
These findings also say something important about democratization efforts against authoritarian regimes. Like some other studies on this topic (Geddes 1999), civil society groups in Kuwait were unable to overcome state power by civil society advocacy alone. Even with inclusive and cross-ideological coalitions that organize wide ranging protests, mobilizations are unlikely to have a democratizing impact, even in the shadow of economic downturns or other exogenous shocks such as regional uprisings, as is the case of the Arab Spring. Much of this issue relates to the balance, or imbalance in this case, between civil society and a state dominated by a personalist regime. Such state actors have substantial capabilities that the weak and limited repertoire of civil-society actors cannot hope to overcome without other political opportunities being present. In this type of regime, the restructuring of the state power can only be altered in two ways: through violent overthrow as happened in Libya, or through splits in the regime itself, as occurred in Egypt (Vandewalle 2012, Geddes 1999). This also explains in many ways the failure of the Arab Spring to contribute to democratization in a substantive way in the region. Without regime splits and an orderly transition, as was the case in many South American and European countries, the likelihood that protest mobilizations the MENA will have a major restructuring effect on state power is increasingly unlikely.

This study proceeds in several steps to develop my argument. Part I demonstrates the various debates and empirical gap in the three literatures. Part II illustrates my

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2 I define personalist regimes as a non-democratic government that’s power relies on the discretion of an individual leader. Decision making power is in the hand of this leader, who has a narrow support base that relies on patronage, familial loyalties, and external support to survive (see Bratton & van de Walle 1997:61.96, Linz and Chehabi 1998:4.45, Snyder 1998, Geddes 1999:121).
analytical framework for studying activists and how they use Twitter. In Part III I describe in a case study the various ways Twitter was and was not used. In the final part, I conclude with my results and other thoughts about this subject matter. Overall, this study contributes to the existing literature by providing a case for the study of the intertwining relationship between a social medium, social mobilization and democratization. Its methodological and theoretical synthesis of instrumental and structural perspectives in the study of social media is a significant advancement in the study of the Internet technology. Understanding the interplay between activists’ tactics and mobilization obstacles refocuses perceptions towards new digital repertoires of contention – such as Twitter - which are discussed in positive or negative terms with little real knowledge in the literature of how they are used by activists. How and under what conditions activists use a particular tactical tool are manifold, and entail instrumental and structural considerations that are at times are ignored by scholars studying Internet technology due to the fact that they are enthralled with a possible elixir or poison to mobilization obstacles.
Section I - Literature Review

Before I begin my analysis examining if and how Twitter was used by activists during protests, I situate this paper in the theoretical literature. I concentrate on the SMT, NT, and DPT literatures in this section as they may help us find answers to these questions. Scholars use these literatures to explain the conditions and tactics under which a successful social mobilization can occur by examining how social media stimulates social movements, networks and individual activists’ capabilities. Therefore, I divide this section into three reviews focusing on each literature as they relate to the use of social media for mobilization. Overall, this literature review demonstrates that the three literatures may assist in finding answers to my research questions, if their empirical issues and theoretical debates are synthesized into a dedicated framework.

Social Movement Theory Approaches

The first literature I address is the various approaches to SMT, which comprise theories that explain the tactics and strategies that Social Movement Organizations (SMOs) use to foster collective action among other things. This section illustrates the gap and debate in the SMT literature concerning the use of social media as a direct channel for diffusion in the process of social movement emergence. In the debate two groups agree that social media is good for mobilization, yet disagree how Internet technology has an impact on mobilization efforts. While one group believes that the Internet enhanced mobilization
efforts, the other argues that this technology has changed activism itself. I argue that neither approach satisfactorily explains social media use for mobilization.

Social movement theorists generally conceptualize social movement emergence as occurring through the collection action of non-state actors in “civil society.” These groups of SMOs – which are civil-society groups comprised of activists – foster the solidarity, collective identity, common purpose, and sustained contention necessary for emergence (Tarrow 1996). Authors perceive SMOs as the main agents of mobilization efforts in state - civil society relations – mobilization being recruitment, dissemination of information, or public debates that lead to protests, rallies, or other efforts that contest state powers (McAdam 1996).

A vast literature made up of three main theoretical groups - resource mobilization, political opportunity, and framing – engage in debates about the necessary conditions under which a social movement can emerge (Soule 2004). As these separate theory groups have developed, and became synergetic, approaches to understanding social movement emergence – such as Tarrow’s protest cycles (1998), McAdam’s spin-off movements (1996), or the newer approach to ecological analysis (Navratil 2010) - use combinations of all the theories to explain the dynamics of social movement emergence. One of the debates between these approaches exists due to the different concepts of

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3 Civil society is defined this paper as comprising the aggregate of groups of non-state, non-governmental actors that are not beholden to state actors or business interests and manifest the interests and will of citizens, individuals, or organizations which are independent of the government (Almond and Verba 1989, Putnam 2000)

Despite these dissimilarities in analysis between the different approaches, all authors generally accept that a necessary condition for social movement emergence is direct channels for strategies, frames, or opportunities to diffuse between activists and their respective SMOs.\(^5\) As Tarrow (1998) convincingly argues, successful collective action efforts can help foster a social movement only after activists can “build on dense social networks and connective structures” (41-42) that create sustainable interactions between different opposition groups.

Research that focuses on the use of social media tools (such as Twitter, Facebook, and blogs) as direct channels for tactics, frames, or solidarity to diffuse through for

\(^4\) Diffusion refers to the “flow of social practices among actors within some larger system” (Strang and Meyer 1993: 488). The diffusing item “might be a behaviour, strategy, belief, technology, or structure and embraces the concepts of “contagion, mimicry, social learning, organized dissemination” (Soule and Zylan 1997).

collective action processes has been almost non-existent. In scholarly journals such as *Mobilization, Social Movement Studies,* and *Journal of Democracy,* where aspects of social movements and SMT are most commonly dissected, the digital dimensions of social movements are overwhelmingly absent (Plattner 2012:72, Earl and Kimport 2011, Obar et al. 2011, della Porta 2012:51, Vedres et al. 2005, della Porta and Mosca 2005, Diani, 2000; Polat, 2005, Shaery-Eisenlohr and Cavatorta 2012: 122, Etzioni and Etzioni 1999, Van de Donk and Foederer 2001). Generally, writers only reference the uses of social media as part of a list of factors; not as a potential agent of change in its own right (Snow 2004; Gamson, 2004; Plattner 2012:42, della Porta 2012: 45-46). More complex theorizing about the nature of technological devices has yet to penetrate the mainstream debates over the roles played by technology in mobilization.

However, there are two groups of SMT scholars that discuss the use of Internet technology for social movements that set a valuable benchmark for an empirical study. These works draw on two different theories about the web, which Earl and Kimport (2005) designate as “supersize” theories versus “theory 2.0” approaches.

Supersize theories argue that when digital technology like social media are used for protest purposes they “primarily increases the size, speed, and reach,” of protest movements, but have little or no impact on the fundamental “processes underlying activism” (Earl and Kimport 2005: 24). Social media facilitates and supports offline

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6 The gap in studying social media devices in SMT approaches is part of a larger gap in sociology and political science in studying the conditions and extent to which media is used by SMOs and the effect it has on the emergence and sustainability of social movements. The reasoning for this are discussed in much more depth by many scholars, but it is enough to say here that social media is simply not studied.
collective action in terms of organization mobilization. There are a few theoretical
eamples of this approach. Building on Oberschall’s (1989) conception of decentralized
movements, Eltantawy and Wiest (2011: 1210) and Albawaba (2009) assert that social
media lowers participation thresholds for individuals to get involved by enabling more
efficient means of communication, deliberation, and organization. They argue that social
media accelerates social movement formation by speeding up the diffusion of tactics and
frames.

In the framing literature, a few scholars similarly argue that the uses of social
media in a strategic and discursive sense have important effects on mobilization efforts
by allowing processes of meaning production and legitimization to take place (Noakes
and Johnston 2005: 5-7, Rogerson 2009). In a recent example, Lindgren (2012) argues
that social media activity can create sites of mobilization, allowing participants to speak a
common language, agree on the definition of the situation, and formulate a shared vision.
According to Eltantawy and Wiest (2011) it was through such online framing that
Tunisian activists experienced “cognitive liberation” as their shared sympathy for Sidi
Bouzid led to the construction of common grievances.

On the other hand, the theory 2.0 approach claims that digital technologies “may
change the actual processes of organizing and/or participating in activism, resulting in
model changes to existing theories of activism” (Earl and Kimport 2005:180). Earl and
Kimport (2005) argue that that “it is people’s usage of technology[…] that can change
social processes” (14). They suggest that social media is a new “digital repertoire of
contention” (180) which changes the rules of activism (Ibid). Unlike nineteenth-century repertoires or modern repertoires, which, they argue, rely on physical co-presence, tactical congruence, and long-term campaigns, digital repertoires differ significantly. Only a few examples of this argument exist in the literature. Chadwick (2007), Gurak and Logie (2003), and Vegh (2003) argue that social media are not simply neutral tools to be adopted at will, but come to shape what it means to be a participant in a political organization. Coordinated collective action can therefore take place without physical interaction, with asymmetric goals, and nonaligned campaigns that are disassociated from larger social movements or SMOs (Marmura 2008:250). This argument is premised on the belief that values shape repertoires of collective action, which in turn shape the adoption of organizational forms. Some scholars even make a strong case to abandon completely the sharp distinction between the online and offline worlds, since both spheres are heavily interdependent (Bimber 2000).

However, looking at this research in general, it provides little insight into how social media devices may play a role in reinforcing or destabilizing larger configurations of political power. Eltantawy and Wiest (2011: 12) note that the rational actor/resource mobilization mode of analysis of supersize theories has little or no cultural referents built into them, with the result that activists are interpreted as operating as though they were mute pieces on a social chessboard, duly anticipating or responding to each other’s structured moves. This notion of collective action is overly indebted to an a-historical focus on technology and definitions of action and coordination from economics.
It is clear that scholars need to engage in deeper investigations to fill the gap in SMT approaches to resolve whether social media devices can be used as direct channels for collective action diffusion. While supersize and theory 2.0 approaches argue that Internet technology positively impacts mobilization efforts, there are few theoretical distinctions and limited empirical field work to back up their claims. This is especially concerning considering the overemphasis on rational choice approaches to examining digital technology, which do not bring into account the values and culture components of collective action.

**Network Theory Approaches**

Like SMT approaches, NT is integral to understanding the collective action efforts of activists. While SMT generally studies the macro-level emergence of social movements through its study of SMOs, NT examines the micro-level connections between activists and theorizes how different groups of people connect with each other (Snow 2004, Zurcher and Ekland-Olson 1980, McAdam 1986, McAdam and Paulsen 1993, Kitts 2000, Passy and Giugni 2001). This section addresses the NT literature as it relates to studying the potential connections made between people who used social media devices. My main goal in this section is to show the empirical gap in NT concerning social media. I also review several small groups of scholars who debate the networking potential of Internet technology for successful collective action efforts. This demonstrates that NT needs
further theoretical and empirical contributions to advance understandings of how the use of social media tools may affect political participation.

In the broadest stroke, NT examines the development of networks linking different groups. According to most authors, formal and informal networks are vital for organizing people for collective action (Diani 2004, Diani and McAdam 2003, Schussman and Soule 2005). In NT, social movements and SMOs are seen as clusters of these networks (Halgin and Borgatti 2011: 1169, Diani 1992: 13). In general, when it comes to explaining collective action processes, two major theory groups debate the way networks function: Granovetter’s (1973) strength of weak ties (SWT); and Burt’s (1992) structural holes theory (SHT) (Halgin and Borgatti 2011: 1168). Granovetter (1973) theorizes that social, familial, or other relational “strong ties” are unlikely to be the sources of new connections between networks because only novel, unconnected “weak ties” are likely to be bridges between different network clusters. On the other hand, Burts (1992) sees tie strength as a mere correlate of the underlying principle, which is non-redundancy (27). Therefore, SH examines the proximal cause (bridging ties) over the distal cause (strength of ties). People with strong family, social, and political ties are more likely able to bridge network clusters effectively because both the social rewards for participation and the cost of non-participation are higher (Brady et al. 1999; della Porta 1988; Gould 2004; McAdam 1986; Passy and Giugni 2001, Lim 2008:965, Kitts 2000, Klandermans 1984, Lim 2009). Overall, then, SWT embraces a serendipitous world in
which people form ties that only incidentally prove useful, while SH embraces a more strategic and instrumental view of existing networks (Halgin and Borgatti, 2011: 1169).

Within NT, there is very little research or discussion about the use of social media as a medium for connecting networks of activists in mobilization efforts (Lim 2008). Like the SMT theory approaches, the sub-discipline has barely begun to study the use of Internet technology for activist purposes. Yet, there are also important benchmarks worth reviewing. Four small groups of scholars debate how online networks can foster mobilization efforts.

The first group argues that activists can organize online and that is a place with significant democratic potential. Social media assists in fostering weak ties, because they expand network clusters by augmenting novel relationships. This has a positive effect on mobilization efforts by increasing the chances of being asked to take part in collective action. Unlike strong ties, weak ties enable information to travel beyond group boundaries and transition to offline meetings (Castells 1996; Rheingold 2002; Wellman 2002; Wellman et al. 2003, Walgrave and Klandermans 2010, Donath and Boyd 2004, Haythornthwaite 2005, Zhao 2006, Wang and Wellman 2010, Hampton et al. 2011, Hampton and Wellman 2001, Rainie and Wellman 2012, Kavanaugh 2005). The second group also sees Internet technology as positive for mobilization but takes a somewhat different stance. Social media can foster network expansion between activists, but only through strong ties. Strong ties reinforce existing networks - not weak connections - by facilitating communication and interaction capacities across diverse networks clusters.
that already exist. This then extends to users’ offline participation (Zhao 2006; Wang and Wellman 2010, Wellman, et. al. 2001, Boyd and Ellison 2007: 211, Rogerson 2009, Livingstone 2009, Mascheroni 2012: 212, 222, Takhteyeva et al. 2012, Shuai et al. 2012, Huberman at al. 2008, Mok et al. 2010). The third group argues that social media supports mobilization through the creation and maintenance of both strong and weak ties in networks (Bennett et al. 2008; della Porta and Mosca 2005; Walgrave, Bennett, Van Laer, and Breunig 2008). Activists use social media to connect to family and close friends, as well as novel acquaintances, to maintain and reinforce multiple engagements and relationships across issue and organizational boundaries (Donath 2007, Ellison et. al. 2011). The more a person holds multiple engagements, the more important digital media becomes to be able to “manage” these different engagements.

The last group emphasizes that social media actual stifles collective action by degrading strong ties. They argue that it decreases the frequency of important face-to-face interaction between activists who are trying to cultivate relationship ties (McPherson et al. 2006, Honari 2012:164). Earl and Schussman (2003) contend that the rise of Internet activism has created protest “users” rather than “members,” meaning that the fast growing support and diffusion of protest enabled via the Internet is followed by an even faster decline in commitment. Low entry costs allow users to opt easily in and out of different protest issues and causes following their individual preferences and current priorities. Weak ties are found insufficient to create a network of activists, endangering the maintenance and coordination of social movement organizations (Bennett 2003, Tilly
2004, Kavanaugh, Reese, Carroll, and Rosson 2005). Della Porta (2012) argues that all theorizing about network ties is not effective because it does not properly take into account the social and political context in which networking takes place. Mobilization in consolidated democracies is generally seen as driven by large groups of activists with strong ties for networking (della Porta 2012). In nondemocratic or democratizing states, political change is more likely to be enabled by a greater number of small groups of activists with only weak ties for networking (Etling et al. 2010: 39, 45, 47). Therefore, diverging conditions must be carefully parsed in context.

As we can see the empirical gap in NT concerning to the use of social media. The way scholars study networks results in widely varying outcomes relating to different conceptions of weak and strong ties, and social and political context. This means that the debates between the four groups lack generalizable patterns that weaken their theoretical assertions. Only by resolving the debate between the four NT groups can I find some important theoretical understandings to answer my questions.

**The Digital Politics Theory Approaches**

The final part of this review is an assessment of DPT. This literature represents the major source of inquiry into social media and how it augments mobilization efforts by activists. Two main groups of scholars in the sub discipline, “cyber optimists” and “cyber pessimists,” disagree over the fundamental use of social media as a medium for mobilization efforts. I divide this review into two parts studying the arguments of both
groups. Through this review I demonstrate that a synthesis of these two groups’ conceptions of the Internet can assist in better understandings of social media devices relationship with mobilization.

*Part I - Cyber Optimism*

The first group in the DPT literature are “cyber optimists” who believe that social media has inherently democratic potential for mobilizing efforts. In this part I review the underlying dimensions of the optimist literature and the way that they study social media for mobilization efforts. The objective of this part is to show the underlying nature of arguments about Internet technologies relationship with mobilization and the views of those confident of its democratizing function. As I illustrate, optimists are overwhelmingly advocates of the instrumental view of the Internet, which they believe is the ‘next frontier’ in democratization from below.

Theories that argue that technology can empower civil society’s democratic development have been a key aspect of the social science literature since the 1950s. As it concerns DPT, the idea of technological empowerment has developed along three teleological dimensions about the Internet.

The first dimension was constructed by scholars in Modernization Theory, who contend that democracy needs certain economic, social, cultural, and technological prerequisites, as they develop through economic growth, education, industrialization, and urbanization (Lipset 1959, Dahl 1971). The development of Internet technology then, is
important for gauging the socio-economic conditions along with radio and television ownership (Von Laer 2010). Therefore, to fit into the criteria required for modernization a burgeoning civil society has abundant Internet access (Von Laer 2010, Zheng and Wu 2005). The second dimension was fostered by scholars that emphasize the advances of the Internet as a powerful stimulant for the formation of civil society and the public sphere. The formation of civil society in the democratization literature is an independent variable for democratic institutions in studies of Eastern European transitions from communism and for improving the functions of the existing democracies (Zheng and Wu 2005, Di Palma 1991, Rau 1991, Weigle and Butterfield 1992, Putnam 1993). This approach argues that the digital technology promotes the formation, development, and growth of civil society and democratic institutions. This dimension is heavily influenced by Habermas (1989), who emphasizes the importance of communication between individuals in the public sphere for fostering the most effective democratic tendencies. The third dimension is made up of scholars of participatory democracy. They argue that digital technology provides individuals with political resources and opportunities to expand their political participation. In this argument digital technology is more interactive and reciprocal than one-way communication between politicians and citizens making governments more accountable (Zheng and Wu 2005, Van Laer 2010). These implications are taken further to support the argument that the Internet creates a technological condition for the transition from Schumpeterian elitist democracy to direct mass democracy (Barber 1984).
Two distinct teleological premises have grown to underpin these dimensions and more recent literature on the democratizing effects of Internet technology. The first is what Dahlberg (2007) terms the “liberal-individualist” understanding. It envisions individuals as instrumental creatures who examine competing political positions and problems, and to make their strategic cost–benefit calculations and choices. This clearly reflects the classic liberal economic agent found in Schumpeter’s works on participatory democracy (Schumpeter 1976: 169, Dahlberg 2007: 859-60). The second position, “autonomist Marxism,” also sees social media devices as advancing democracy, but in another way. It sees social media networks as enabling democratic politics that overcome undemocratic states and capitalist systems. Therefore, social media networking is the basis for producing a democratic ‘commons’ for the lower classes (Dyer-Witheford, 2002; 2006; 2007, Negri 2008: 173, Dahlberg, 2007: 864-865, Kidd 2003, Cleaver 1999).

Overall, cyber optimists rely on a belief that the problems of ‘real life’ are not relevant in cyberspace (Bonchek 1995; Naughton 2001, Benkler 2006, Howard et al. 2011: 8). Markley (1994) states that:

Cyberspace is consensual primarily in its insistence that, through technology, experience can transcend the conditions of economic scarcity and ecological limits that have plagued and continue to plague mankind...In this respect, it gives a new form to an age-old dream: that through its ingenuity humanity can devise products and riches in excess of the resources required to manufacture and maintain them (435- 436).

These ideals have become direct inferences for the democratization literature. With the rise of the Internet, scholars argue that this technology is instrumental in the transition of

The above dimensions of technological empowerment and the subsequent teleological implications have a major effect on how scholars analyze social media devices. Overall, scholars argue that whether used in combination or as stand-alone argument, social media is positive for mobilization. For clarity, I divide their theoretical contributions into three categories to review the different ways scholars theorize about how social media can be used by activists and what their effects are on mobilization efforts.

The first cyber optimist group argues that social media is a revolutionary organizing tool for activists to communicate with one another in order to organize collective action (McFaul 2007:78). This approach emphasizes that social media can bridge SMOs in four ways by creating more efficient, decentralized and spontaneous collective action processes that cannot be blocked by the state.

First, social media devices can reach large numbers of people more quickly than face-to-face communication because it makes organizing efforts more efficient than
offline efforts (Diamond 2010). Social media speeds up the recruitment process, the emergence of opposition groups, and independent structures in civil society - making protests larger. This is why Diamond (2010) calls social media “liberation technology” (71-72); it can rapidly “expand political, social, and economic freedom” (79). Via the Internet, organizations provide detailed information on time, place and perhaps even a practical field guide for activists to “inform people on how to organize, on their rights and how to protect themselves from harm” (Van Aelst and Walgrave 2004, George 2000, Walgrave et al. 2008, Carty 2002: 135, Fisher et al. 2005, Gillian 2009, McPhail and McCarthy 2005, della Porta et al. 2006). Overall, online efforts bridge the divide between SMOs and create the collective action environment for the emergence of a social movement (Palfrey et al. 2010:40).

Second, it allows users to be journalists, commentators, videographers, entertainers, and organizers in their own right, who respond to the organizers and become activists themselves (Diamond 2010: 80). This decentralizes the mobilization process making it much easier for individual activists to use online applications and digital content systems to organize collective action, activate local protest networks, and network with other SMOs at the local, regional, or international level. Third, the decentralization of mobilization makes efforts more spontaneous, by taking away the need for a traditional structure for organizing collective action (Howard and Hussain 2011: 42-43). Because users are not passive, mobilization efforts are reflexive and constitute what Rheingold (2003) calls “smart mobs,” which consist of “people who are
able to act in concert even if they don’t know each other... [they] cooperate in ways never before possible because they carry devices that possess both communication and computing capabilities” (182). Concerns of mobilization are mainly about distribution of information, both about the reasons and goals of the action as well as more strategic information concerning the action itself. Lastly, social media dilutes the power of traditional elites and gatekeepers, who are unable to stop them from organizing (Diamond 2010: 71-72). This is because the Internet is mostly independent of the state.

The second cyber optimist group focuses on the use of social media as a digital alternative free press. These scholars argue that social media devices provide environments where a free press, freedom of expression, and alternative information can exist - all fundamental criteria for civil society mobilization efforts (Smith 2005, Dahl 1998). This approach hypothesizes that user-generated information augments three outcomes in mobilization efforts: by empowering democratic freedoms, overcoming state censorship, and increasing the intensity of mobilization (Palfrey et al. 2010:39, Diamond 2010:74).

First, the Internet plays an equalizing role with respect to relatively powerful versus traditionally powerless elements of society by serving as an alternative mass medium. An alternative press offers a space for emancipatory discourse, empowering subaltern groups, and producing journalism from marginal segments of society. As Margolis and Resnick (2000) observe, “a presence on the web could greatly increase the exposure of a narrow interest group to its own constituency and to the public at large”

Second, this virtual press cannot be closed by the state, as the spread of information thrives in this digital environment (Diamond 2010: 75). Sidelining state control of the media, social media users become “a form of independent news agencies, giving the grassroots up-to-the-minute news and other information” (El-Gody 2007: 221). Kulikova and Perlmutter (2010: 46) and McFaul (2007: 78) conclude that the provision of critical news at times of mobilization is vital for the overall outcome of collective action efforts. This function is especially pertinent during civil unrest, when threatened regimes block or distort other forms of public information. Protesters use social media as rallying points to read revolutionary propaganda and obtain critical news of events (Kulikova and Perlmutter 2007: 46, Mungiu-Pippidi and Munteau 2009:138). Lastly, as

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7 Studies repeatedly show the mainstream press marginalizes, delegitimizes, and more often than not entirely ignores protesters views (Gitlin 1980, McLeod and Hertog 1999, Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993, Lewis et al. 2004).
more citizens gain access to the Internet and information through social media devices, membership in latent social and political communities grows (Palfrey et al. 2010: 47). Mobilization efforts are then intensified. This premise resides in the instrumentality of the individuals involved, as potential revolutionaries weigh the cost-benefit of the new information and decide to join causes independently of others (Von Laer 2010: 13).

The final group of cyber optimists see social media as the potential site for a virtual public sphere. These scholars argue that social media facilitates the formation of a digital public sphere by creating democratic forums, expanding offline civil society boundaries, and intensifying civil society groups demands.

While Internet mediums do not fit notions of face-to-face, geographically bound communities required by traditional interpretations of a public sphere (Habermas 1989 Toqueville, Plattner 2012: 66-67), the members themselves feel that the connection and affinity they experienced in these groups fully justified their designation as a form of community (Everett 2002:129-130). These overcome traditional boundaries of time and space making debate more efficient, inclusive, and spontaneous (Castells 2001). Rheingold (2003) defined this “virtual community” as,

a group of people who may or may not meet one-another face-to-face, and who exchange words and ideas through the mediation of computer bulletin boards and networks... [the] social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace (83).

Second, this medium offers citizens the opportunity to encounter and engage a diversity of positions, thus extending the public sphere (Blumler and Gurevitch 2001, Gimmler
2001, Kellner 2004, Papacharissi 2002, Lynch 2006). The two-way, low-cost, user-friendly, pliable, and readily moderated form of such digital communication is understood as affording information sharing, rational debate, and public opinion formation (Janssen and Kies 2005, Dahlberg 2010: 861). This condition changes the practice of activism by creating new platforms for political discussion - social media devices diffuse not only media consumption but media production as well (Elsadda 2010: 313, Khiabany and Sreberny 2007: 12). Overall this allows people to articulate and debated conflicting views in both a private and public setting (Shirk 2012: 6-7).

Lastly, the uninhibited space for discussion of public affairs allows civil society to expand the boundaries of associative and communicative freedoms (Qiang, 2011: 58). This leads to a better informed and more engaged public that demands more from its government (Qiang 2001: 61). Often, the next step after public dialogue is civil society organization around issues of common concern, bridging SMOs and then mobilizing collective action.8

Several points can be made from this review. Cyber optimists view Internet technology as having democratizing potential because of its purely instrumental value (Palfrey at al. 2010: 1225-1226). Three different groups argue that social media can foster significant collective action efforts if used by activists. They highlight that social media devices are capable of being used to organize protests, provide a place for an independent

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8 This inference relies on Katz and Lazarsfeld’s (1951) study of mass media of the 1948 U.S. presidential election.
and effective citizen-led press, and create a public sphere. To cyber optimists this intensifies mobilization efforts and collective action.

*Part II – Cyber Pessimism*

The last group of DPT scholars I review here are “cyber pessimists” who, as the name indicates, are skeptical of the positive impact of Internet technology on mobilization. As this part illustrates, pessimists fundamentally disagree with optimists and argue that social media cannot overcome obstacles or impediments that hinder activism in real life. In fact, Internet organization works against mobilization efforts and degrades activists’ abilities to foster collective action. The structure of civil society and its relation to the state is more important to understanding how Internet technology is used by groups than instrumental implications alone. Overall, this part section demonstrates the dichotomous relationship between cyber pessimists and optimists.

While cyber optimists discuss the democratizing potential of the Internet, others scholars caution that there should not be an overemphasis on the impact of the Internet on democratic development. In large N studies of 144 countries, both Kedzie (1997) and Norris (2001) found a statistically significant correlation between network connectivity and political freedom, though these results do not determine causality. Pessimists argue that the relationship between the Internet and democracy is unclear. In many ways it is similar to the one between economic development and democracy, where there is

Instead, states exercise much more control over Internet technology then cyber optimists give them credit for. They extend control of the Internet through proactive strategies, guiding the development of the medium to promote their own interests and priorities (Chase and Mulvenon 2002). Therefore, the capability of civil society groups to use this medium to exert pressure on the political system is less likely to materialize. (Kalathil and Boas, 2003: 136). There are even more cynical views about the impact of Internet technology on democratic development in authoritarian states. Although the premises that cyber optimism lie upon - based on studies of the Internet in existing democracies – their premises have been transferred to nondemocratic environments without a real understanding of what civil society consists of in these places. Civil societies in the developing world - if one chooses to call them that - have very different horizontal and vertical power structures then Western models. Meaningful comparative work between these countries can be dubious even with the best of intentions. Scholars specializing in studying authoritarianism respond to the democratization trend in cyber optimist by offering compelling critiques of the preoccupation of scholars in comparative politics with transitions to democracy (Anderson 2006, Bellin 2002, Huntington 1991: 30, Bunce 2011: 2-3). In the broadest strokes, these scholars argue that cyber optimism is normatively skewed and teleological: studying what does not exist, instead of what does.
Digital mobilization is exacerbated by a “digital divide”, which refers to the inequality in Internet access between the rich industrialized countries and the developing countries in the South (Norris 2001). While over 75% of the people living in North America can be considered Internet users, this percentage drops to barely 5% in Africa (Von Laer 2010). Besides the clear geographical variation between North and South, certain people remain behind in the digital evolution, not only because of the absence of a computer or Internet access, but also because they lack the skills to utilize social media technology (Von Laer 2010: 15). In this respect, activists’ use of social media may fail to reach the socially weaker groups in society if they rely too much on the new media to organize their protest events (Tilly 2004:155). There is also a digital divide within cyberspace - which Norris (2001) calls the ‘democratic divide’ - between those who use the Internet for political aims and those who do not. In this sense, the Internet chiefly serves those activists and groups that are already active, thus reinforcing existing patterns of political participation in society. Di Gennaro and Dutton (2006) conclude that “online political participation [is] reinforcing and in some cases exacerbating some of the existing social inequalities in offline political participation by marginalizing the less educated and those from lower socioeconomic groups” (311-12).

This argument relies on the principle that norms attributed to groups’ offline, for example, divisive ethnic cleavages or revisionist ideologies, are reflected in communities on the Internet as well. Disparities in social, cultural and economic capital are replicated between voices online (Elsadda 2010:316, Harlow 2012:5, Fraser 1990:61, Dahlberg

The major critique of cyber optimists by pessimists is not that they ignore all cleavages or obstacles, but that particular aspects of power dynamics are emphasized over others (Deibert and Rohozinski 2010:51, 56). Technology and engineering, in other words, do not operate in a vacuum (Morozov 2011:64).

Furthermore, pessimists question whether the myriad of diverse views that exist online are actually intersecting, and to what extent online interactions have a positive effect on mobilization efforts (Bimber 2001, Scheufele and Nisbet 2002, Barber 1998). In many ways, cyber-optimists treat organizing much the same way economists look at consumer behaviour; instrumentally (Van Laer 2010). While the number of media portals may be multiplying and empowering more voices they are not all rational or civic minded. Deibert and Rohozinski (2010) argue that rather than an ungoverned realm, virtual communities are, “best likened to a gangster-dominated version of New York: a tangled web of rival public and private authorities, civic associations, criminal networks, and underground economies” (44). Unlike offline mobilization spaces - where one may expect some level of heterogeneity - online individuals often restrict themselves to forums where consensus is a guarantee (Kulikova and Perlmutter 2007:31, Dahlberg 2007: 834, Hill and Hughes 1998, Wilhelm 1999). In this view, online interaction does...
not foster debates or the transfer of meaningful information between different groups of people. It simply involves the meeting of like-minded individuals, where identities, ideologies, and other practices are reinforced rather than openly critiqued. Online enclaves undermine social stability of civil society groups by fostering ever more specialized niche audiences where individuals get their information only from sources that reflect their own views (Sunstein 2001: 65-66, Graham 1999). This leads to further polarization rather than a more inclusive environment for collective action efforts (Diamond 2010: 81, Plattner 2012: 73). Beyond this, the act of expression online in an enclave may assuage dissent, serving as a sort of release valve, and furthering depoliticization and atomization of civil society (Wedeen 1999, Putnam 2000). Therefore, although social media may have made many SMOs peripheral activities easier, it has often made their core activities, such as advocacy to disparate groups more difficult and less effective (Morozov 2009:81-82).

Social media, then, is not always an effective conduit for an alternative free press. The argument that the plethora information resources made available online will contribute to a more fair or open mass media rests upon a highly questionable premise (Marmura 2008:264) In general, trying to gain positive media attention is particularly difficult, and according to Pickerill (2001), the Internet does not provide a satisfactory solution. The most important difficulties facing social movements and others hoping to draw attention to specific issues or causes stem from the reality that the ‘alternative’ sources of information that they put online most likely will be visited and utilized by
those already holding compatible views and ignored by others. Wilhelm (2000) has referred to this phenomenon in terms of ‘homophily’, “the propensity to gravitate to persons with similar viewpoints” (43). Even when members of the public genuinely desire alternative sources of information on topics which they had heard about only previously through the dominant media, considerable confusion may arise with respect to which websites offer the most pertinent or accurate information (Marmura 2008:261). Taylor (2000) observes that “Thanks to the internet, therefore, the fog of war… [is]… merely … thicker” (200).

This review illustrates the cyber pessimist approach, which argues that social media devices are ineffective for mobilization efforts. Pessimists believe that Internet technology cannot overcome social or cultural norms, the power of the state over civil society, fragmentation in virtual space, or provide an effective alternative source of information. This contrast to the cyber optimist view is the final stage of the literature and allows this study to better understand the possible problems that social media users might encounter in mobilization efforts. I argue that the empirical gap in DPT affects the credibility of both sets of theory and the outcomes they analyze. This sets the stage for my case study where I incorporate the different debates into a comprehensive framework to measure how social media is used by activists.
Concluding Thoughts

Overall, I have tried in this literature review to address several different points. As the review of the various literatures demonstrates, there is little agreement between scholars. SMT literature has a gap and debate in the literature that concerns the use of social media as a direct channel for collective action efforts for social movement emergence. While some theorists argue that Internet technology expanded or changed the rules of activism, there was no empirical evidence to back up the claim. In the NT literature a debate between four groups of authors is similarly unhelpful. While these scholars disagree about whether strong and weak were the main networking potential of social media devices, there is little empirical evidence. The two different cyber optimist and pessimist DPT perspectives disagree over the potential of Internet technology for mobilization efforts. These differences are largely due to teleological understandings related to civil society, participatory democracy, the impact of social norms and an overreliance on instrumental or structural world views.

It is evident from this review that the dichotomy between the two DPT scholars should be less clear-cut than stated. Unless the characteristics of cyberspace change radically in the near future and global culture becomes monolithic, linking technological properties to a single social outcome such as liberation or fragmentation is a dubious exercise (Deibert and Rohozinski 2010:56).

Debates notwithstanding, this dichotomy also reveals how little this subject has truly been examined. The core issue of all three theoretical literatures is that their case
studies are largely anecdotal. SMT, NT, and DPT scholars who study the impact of digital media on mobilization and collective action principally focus on the macro level view of how these media changes mobilization and coordination capacities groups within civil society (Clark and Themudo 2003; Hajnal 2002; McCaughey and Ayers 2003; Meikle 2002; van de Donk, Loader, Nixon, and Rucht 2004). Few studies examine actual protest participants, particular movement organizations, and how digital media might change participation dynamics on the micro-level of collective action (della Porta and Mosca 2005, Von Laer 2010). Each group currently supports their hypotheses by a very small pool of observations and measurements that tend to be used selectively (Dahlberg 2010:831). Taking the broad view of the literature into context, there are few consistent theoretical distinctions, proper typologies, or techniques of collecting data among theorists that validate any of the above approaches (Morozov 2009; 2011; 2012, Taylor 2000, Diamond 2010, Howard and Hussain 2010: 47, 2011, Cross 2008, Best and Wade 2009, Groshek 2009). These methodological weaknesses may also be the primary reason why the study of social media and the Internet remains on the periphery of most disciplines.

New research is required to draw clearer generalizations about how social media potentially alters individual efforts to organize (McFaul, 2007, della Porta 2012: 39). Incorporating the theoretical issues and debates in all the literatures will begin to rectify the empirical gaps by synthesizing the different conversations between approaches. I believe that this provides several important theoretical contributions to the literature. It
also provides the basic justification for a critical case study of a MENA country shaken by Arab Spring protest events.
Section II: Methodology

The guiding questions behind this study are: To what extent is social media an effective organizing tool for activists? Do these tools enhance activists’ mobilization efforts? I briefly hypothesized in the introduction that social media may have been used to augment protests and assist in a social movement emerging in a specific country. The objective of this case study then is to understand if and how social media use may augment protest organization efforts.

To answer these questions and test the hypothesis, the first part of this section outlines the case selection, its justification, and the methodological structure of the case study. In the second part I construct a four-layer analytical framework to explain if a social media tool was used by activists and to what effect. These four layers examine Twitter as a means of organizing collective action, as a tool for spreading information, as public space, and as a place to overcome offline obstacles. Through this exercise, I reveal some of the political implications of Twitter in the case study.

Case Selection and Justification

In this part I address the case selection and justification for my case study. I do this by selecting the case study methodology, the criteria for country selection, the country selection, and the social media device I examine. Overall, this methodological process is the first phase in developing a larger framework for studying the relationship between social media and mobilization.
This process has four steps. The first step is to develop a case study methodology. In my view, the most suitable way to answer these research questions is through a “critical case study” of a country where Arab Spring protests took place. A critical case study allows the researcher to obtain information that permits logical deductions and generalizations about certain types of cases (Flyvbjerg 2006:227). I argue that the best way to study the effect of social media and its relationship with mobilization efforts is by selecting a “most likely” case for study. Most likely cases are case studies that clearly confirm or irrefutably falsify propositions and hypotheses made (Popper 1959, Flyvbjerg 2006:231). This method is ideal for generalizing the results of social media’s potential effects on mobilization because it provides grounds for falsification or verification in other MENA countries where similar events took place (Popper 1959).

The second step is creating the criteria for country selection. I argue that there are three criteria are necessary conditions for selecting a ‘most likely’ country for this case study. The first is the emergence of a social movement. By definition social movements must have collective challenge, a common purpose, solidarity, and be able to sustain collective action (Tarrow 1996). They come into existence when activists’ struggles revolve around broad cleavages in society; when they bring people together around inherited cultural symbols; and when they can build on- or construct- dense social networks… and connective structures… these episodes of contention result in sustained interactions with opponents in [Social Movements]. (Tarrow 1998:41-42)
All of the activists and/or organizations in this study are understood as elements within larger social movement networks. The second criterion is major obstacles to mobilization. In MENA countries, three obstacles - identity cleavages, authoritarian governments, and weak civil society groups - were noted as significant obstacles to mobilization in past and current protests (Herb 2002, Bellin 2004, Anderson 2006). Third, the use of social media has to be present. Important indicators of this are the existence of an online community, a proportionate level of Internet penetration, and evidence that activists use social media during mobilization efforts (Zheng and Wu 2005 Von Laer 2010).

The third step is selecting the country that fits the “most likely” criteria. After considering the potential cases, the country which is the focus of this case study is Kuwait, as it matches the criteria necessary for a critical case study I outline in the second step. A social movement emerged in Kuwait between December 2010 and October 2012. A sudden increase in cases of non-violent protests in Kuwait, coinciding with other Arab Spring events in Egypt, Tunisia, and Bahrain exhibit the clear signs of collective challenge, common purpose, solidarity, and sustained collective action required for the emergence of a social movement.

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9 According to Diani, a social movement may be understood as ‘a network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organizations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict on the basis of a shared collective identity’ (2003: 301). Importantly, Diani (2003) understands social movement networks as being constituted by more than one type of identity-based actor. As a result, his approach avoids the trap of equating a given identity network with a single activist organization, lobby group or political party.

Kuwait also has a large number of people who *use the Internet and social media devices*. As Table 1.0 shows, Kuwait has one of the highest levels of Internet penetration
levels in the MENA. The population has wide access to the Internet, and has the instrumental capability to use it for political ends, as is shown by its use during the Orange Movement protests of 2006 (Tetreault 2006). This ensures that the digital divide referred to in the cyber pessimism literature did not infringe on the study in a major way.

Table 1.0: Internet Penetration and Usage in the MENA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MIDDLE EAST</th>
<th>Population (2012 Estimate)</th>
<th>Internet Usage (30-June-12)</th>
<th>% of Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>78,868,711</td>
<td>42,000,000</td>
<td>53.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>26,534,504</td>
<td>13,000,000</td>
<td>49.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAE</td>
<td>8,264,070</td>
<td>5,859,118</td>
<td>70.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>7,590,758</td>
<td>5,313,530</td>
<td>70.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>22,530,746</td>
<td>5,069,418</td>
<td>22.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yemen</td>
<td>24,771,809</td>
<td>3,691,000</td>
<td>14.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>6,508,887</td>
<td>2,481,940</td>
<td>38.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>31,129,225</td>
<td>2,211,860</td>
<td>7.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>4,140,289</td>
<td>2,152,950</td>
<td>52.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oman</td>
<td>3,090,150</td>
<td>2,101,302</td>
<td>68.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kuwait</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,646,314</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,963,565</strong></td>
<td><strong>74.20%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qatar</td>
<td>1,951,591</td>
<td>1,682,271</td>
<td>86.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palestine</td>
<td>2,622,544</td>
<td>1,512,273</td>
<td>57.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahrain</td>
<td>1,248,348</td>
<td>961,228</td>
<td>77.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My final step is the selection of a social media device to investigate. This study focuses on Twitter - the popular social networking and micro-blogging service - that allows users to post and read short messages. The reason I selected Twitter is multifold. First, Twitter has been described in many firsthand accounts of protests during the Arab Spring as a crucial tool for organizing protests and spreading information. Second, such messages – called “tweets” – are visible to anyone on the Internet and are publicly
available making in relative terms - compared to other less accessible social media devices – easy to identify, collect, and analyze.\textsuperscript{10} Third, contrasted with other Arab Spring countries the level of Twitter use is proportionally higher in Kuwait than average (see Table 1.1). While there are approximately 2,000,000 Twitter users in the Middle East, approximately 208,000 Twitter users are active in Kuwait, a country with a citizen population of only 3,000,000.

\begin{center}
\textbf{Table 1.1: Twitter Users in Top 10 MENA countries in 2011}
\end{center}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{chart.png}
\caption{Twitter Users in Top 10 MENA countries in 2011.}
\end{figure}

Furthermore, Kuwaitis consistently produce one-third of all tweets in the region, even though they represent only 1\% of the Arab population in the MENA.\textsuperscript{11} I argue that at the

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\textsuperscript{10} While tweets can be made to be anonymous, Takhteyeva et al. 2012, Shuai et al. 2012, Huberman at al. 2008 have found that less than 10\% of tweets ever fall in this category. Interviews with activists also confirmed that they were unlikely to make tweets anonymous, as that would be counter intuitive to their collective action goals.

\textsuperscript{11} Between January and March 2011, Kuwaitis wrote over 3,690,000 tweets, more than any other country in the Middle East (Dubai Social Media Report 2011). Use of Twitter has not reached a plateau as it surged in 2012, with a twofold increase in the number of user accounts. Twitter use in Kuwait is also augmented by a
very least this means that Twitter can be taken seriously as a source of mobilization efforts, at least on par with Egypt, Bahrain, or Tunisia, which have lower rates of Twitter use and Internet penetration. Lastly, as I demonstrate in the case study below, it became evident that Twitter was used much more widely than Facebook, the other very popular social media device. Activists stated that while Facebook was popular for socializing, it was not an easy place to spread ideas or organize protest events because of its confidentiality, lack of interface sophistication on cell phones, and relative complexity compared to Twitter. My investigation of several groups and individuals’ Facebook pages validate this assertion.

Overall, this part outlines the selection of Kuwait as a “most likely” case for social media and mobilization efforts. Testing Kuwait will clearly confirm or irrefutably falsify propositions and hypotheses made about social media and mobilization efforts.

**Methodological Structure**

For the case study I propose to be meaningful, it must include an analysis of online activity with the development of offline events, and a breakdown of how activists use the medium (McFaul 2007: 78). I construct a comprehensive framework from the debates in the literature review to accomplish this task.

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very high mobile phone rate, with 129.85 phones per 100 people. Data retrieved from Paris-based Semiocast, which compiles Twitter data.

12 Which is where most people in Kuwait access the Internet.
If I am to test the hypothesis comprehensively, all three theoretical literatures need to be taken into account. As I review in the SMT literature, direct channels between activists are a necessary condition for the diffusion of collective action efforts (Soule 2004). To test social media as a possible transmission channel for diffusion, I define social media methodologically as a potential ‘repertoire of contention’- which plays a pivotal role in sustaining collective action among social movements, SMOs, and politically active individuals (Tarrow 1996: 31). This view takes into account:

- The concerns in the SMT literature over the types of frames, tactics, and political opportunities necessary for social movement emergence

It will also assist in answering the SMT approaches debate concerning whether social media enhances mobilization or alters the boundaries of activism itself. Second, this structure addresses the concerns of the NT literature by investigating:

- What types of ties activists used to connect to each other (ie. Whether they knew each other before they were connected on Twitter)
- How effective weak or strong ties - or a combination thereof – were to augmenting mobilization efforts

By taking these two issues into perspective, this paper can help to understand better what ties are useful for connecting novel networks, or reinforcing strong ones. Last is the DPT literature, where two groups debate over the effects of Internet technology for mobilization. Cyber optimists suggest that there is a positive relationship between social media use and mobilization efforts. Meanwhile, cyber pessimists state that social media cannot overcome obstacles in society to allow it to be an effective tool. Instead, Internet
technology degrades mobilization efforts. With this knowledge, I create a four-tiered framework for addressing the theoretical concerns of the DPT literature:

- Revolutionary Organizing – theory that social media for organizing and coordinating protests
- Digital Alternative Free Press – theory that social media is a tool for the diffusion of mobilization information
- Virtual Public Sphere – theory that social media is a tool for debate and conversation and fosters an alternate civil society
- Cyber Pessimism - theory that social media does not organize, coordinate, and spread relevant information. Instead it decreases the effectiveness of mobilization efforts

Overall, this theory driven framework helps me explain if and how social media use effects mobilization.

To test the hypothesis and address the myriad concerns of the SMT, NT, and DPT literatures I implement this theoretical framework in two methodological steps.

The first step is conducting and analyzing qualitative interviews. Using a snowballing method of acquiring contacts I look for firsthand accounts and interactions between individuals in organizations that are not easily accessible. The interview method is non-structured, with open-ended questions. This is the best approach to this type of research in Kuwait, due to the ethical, psychological, and physical constraints to conducting field research in a nondemocratic environment (George and Bennett 2005).

The interview method focuses on seeking information concerning:

- the nature of the protests, particularly their development, activities, and the socio-historical context
- the physical setting and material resources available to activists and civil society groups in general

Following these methodological preparations, interviews with individuals involved in activism, politics, and academia in Kuwait were conducted from February 14 to May 30, 2012 (see Table 1.2).

**Table 1.2: Total Number of Interviews**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Interviews</th>
<th>Number of Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elite</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activists</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These interviews form the basis for most of the contextual data of this study. Through this interview process I targeted specific activists in SMOs that were:

- involved in protests since late 2010
- considered by activists in interviews to be important to civil society mobilization in Kuwait
- from a wide variety of ideological, sectarian, and urban/rural backgrounds

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13 This metric was borrowed from Eltantawy and Weist (2011) and Stake (2005).
I borrow this method from Von Laer (2010), who uses individual level data protest in studying nine different protest demonstrations in Belgium, to compare activists using the Internet as an information channel.

Activists in the following important SMOs met this criteria and were selected: the Kuwaiti Human Rights Society (KHRS), the Women’s Cultural and Social Society (WCSS), Kuwait Youth Association (KYA), Sout Al Kuwait (SAK), Social Progressive Movement (SPM), Fifth Fence (FF), Enough (KAFI), September 16th Movement (S16M), Group 29 (G29), Kuwaiti Bedoone Movement (KBM), Kuwaiti Bedoone Congregation (KBC), and Bedoone Rights (BR). The different ideological, sectarian, and socioeconomic cleavages outlined in Table 1.3 also clearly justify the activist and SMO selection, as they clearly come from different groups that have many difficulties in mobilizing collectively. This is important for testing the uses of social media across societal divides that can block mobilization efforts.

This study focuses on an analysis of 23 specific conversations with activists and other individuals directly or indirectly participating in these organizations (see Table 1.4). I also analyze these specific activists and individuals because of their primary role organizing or contributing to major protest events (see Table 1.5).

Let there be no doubt that there are some issues with this approach. First, there is the issue concerning whether these groups or individuals are representative of the larger social movement. At the very least, the study is designed to be internally generalizable and representative of these groups, and their use of Twitter in the protests. Second, while
some scholars might argue that doing this group level analysis is flawed, and that I should solely focus on individuals that control the Twitter accounts, activists themselves think that their group identity are important, whether in reality they are the most effective way of organizing.

**Table 1.3: Social Movement Organization Affiliations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Ideological Affiliations</th>
<th>Sectarian Affiliations</th>
<th>Socio-Economic Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KHRS</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>Sunni-Shia</td>
<td>Hadhari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCSS</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>Sunni-Shia</td>
<td>Hadhari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G29</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>Sunni-Shia</td>
<td>Hadhari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAK</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>Sunni-Shia</td>
<td>Hadhari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPM</td>
<td>Liberal-Leftist</td>
<td>Shia</td>
<td>Hadhari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FF</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>Sunni</td>
<td>Bedu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S16M</td>
<td>Islamist</td>
<td>Sunni</td>
<td>Bedu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KAFI</td>
<td>Islamist-Liberal</td>
<td>Sunni</td>
<td>Bedu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KBM</td>
<td>Conservative-Islamist</td>
<td>Sunni</td>
<td>Bedu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KBC</td>
<td>Conservative-Islamist</td>
<td>Sunni</td>
<td>Bedu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BR</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>Sunni</td>
<td>Hadhari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KYA</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>Sunni-Shia</td>
<td>Hadhari</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 1.4: Interviewee Affiliations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewees</th>
<th>Affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abdullah</td>
<td>KBM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahmed</td>
<td>KBC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alia</td>
<td>BR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aziz</td>
<td>SPM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fariz</td>
<td>G29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fawaz</td>
<td>SPM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fawaz</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imogen</td>
<td>KAFI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaber</td>
<td>SAK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khaled</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marwan</td>
<td>S16M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryam</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohammad</td>
<td>KHRS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omar</td>
<td>KYA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salim</td>
<td>SAK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sohrab</td>
<td>FF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wali</td>
<td>KYA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ali</td>
<td>G29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: In the case study, organizations, names, and other specific details have been altered to respect the confidentiality of participants and organizations. Please refer to Research Ethics Board Certificate #12JA021 for consideration of these ethical concerns and requirements.

### Table 1.5: Protest Dates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Protest Dates</th>
<th>Venue</th>
<th>Groups Involved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19-Dec-10</td>
<td>Taima</td>
<td>BR, KBM, KBC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08-Mar-11</td>
<td>El Arada</td>
<td>FF, S16M, KAFI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28-Feb-11</td>
<td>El Arada &amp; Al Safat</td>
<td>FF, S16M, KAFI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-Sep-11</td>
<td>Al Safat</td>
<td>S16M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-Nov-11</td>
<td>El Erada</td>
<td>FF, S16M, KAFI</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Subsidiary Protest Dates

| 08-Dec-11           | Kuwait University          | G29, KHRS         |
| 08-Mar-11           | Shuwaikh                   | SPM               |
| 08-Mar-11           | Taima                      | BR, KBM, KBC      |
| 03-Dec-11           | Taima                      | BR, KBM, KBC      |
In the second methodological step, the data I collect through the interviews is complemented by the collection and content analysis of ‘tweets’\textsuperscript{14} from Twitter, which gives me access to attempts, or lack thereof, to mobilize online.\textsuperscript{15} The measurement and analysis of collecting tweet output present researchers’ with a formidable challenge: the sheer volume and diversity of tweets make them impractical to analyze comprehensively with tools that most researchers possess. There are several different ways of sampling, all of which have their own advantages and disadvantages. This metric is an attempt to be methodologically rigorous by providing a balance between depth as well as breadth to a examination of Twitter by incorporating different sampling methods.

One way to sample tweets is to examine the most influential Twitter users who self-identify as activists and members of SMOs. The sample of tweets I analyze are drawn from Twitter accounts of the fifteen influential activists interviewed (see Table 1.4). From these activists’ accounts a random sample of 30,000 tweets (2,000 from each) dating from December 8, 2010 to October 1, 2012 were collected from two Twitter archive sites: snapbird.org and topsy.com. From this random sample, tweets were selected that fit the patterns and themes relevant to studying social media use and activism in the context of Kuwait discussed in the interview section. A second sampling method

\textsuperscript{14} A tweet can be just a statement made by a user, or could be a reply to another tweet. Or a retweet, which refers to a common practice in Twitter to copy someone else’s tweet as one’s own, sometimes with additional comments. Retweets are marked with either “RT” followed by ‘@user id’ or “via @user id”.

\textsuperscript{15} This conclusion rests upon the premise that activists of all stripes typically approach the Internet as an information resource and/or as a toolbox which may be used to enhance the effectiveness of more traditional mobilization practices (Marmura 2008, 260). As Margolis and Resnick (2000) have observed, political activists typically use the internet to ‘locate and disseminate information, to contact and organize political sympathizers and to lobby government officials and political representatives’ (18).
examines tweets with relevant “hashtags”\textsuperscript{16} from the random sample.\textsuperscript{17} Random sample hashtags such as “#kuwait, #bedoon, #kafi, #Dec8 2010” as well as other protest specific labels were selected to provide a contextual base for studying the pre-protest organizing.

The third sampling method is a comprehensive content analysis of tweets. 5,000 tweets were randomly selected (split evenly between the fifteen activists in Table 1.4) from the larger random sample. Each tweet was read and categorized using a simple content analysis metric borrowed from Zheng and Wu (2005) and Java et al. (2012) (see Table 1.6). The framework is based on the four-tiered explanation for digital mobilization in the DPT literature and is used to analyze social media as a repertoire of contention for activists. I utilize this taxonomy of user behaviour to determine the intention of Twitter posts and their relevance to mobilization efforts by looking at users’ daily chatter, conversations, news reporting, information sources, friends, and information. In this way I investigate whether Twitter is used to organize, spread information, and foster debates.

Concerning structural issues, the number of statements that denote the obstacles to mobilization present in Kuwait were coded for, to show if obstacles were discernibly absent or degraded activist efforts on Twitter. This takes into account the cultural, ideological, identity, and state dimensions of power. Lastly, the languages, the number of

\textsuperscript{16} Hashtags are used in tweets on Twitter to rally viewers around a topic, whether it is a country (#Kuwait) or an event (#protest).

\textsuperscript{17} This has become standard practice in emergency communications studies. For example, a brief study out of VirginiaTech uses the #Jan25 hashtag to filter tweets on February 8\textsuperscript{th} 2011, and then looks at the prevalence of certain terms. See Sarah Vieweg, Amanda L. Hughes, Kate Starbird & Leysia Palen. “Microblogging during two natural hazards events: what twitter may contribute to situational awareness,” \textit{Proceedings of the 2010 ACM conference on Computer Human Interaction}, April 2010.
related followers, and whether tweets were related or unrelated to politics were also coded to assist an analysis of the audience for the tweets and potentially novel ties between activists as well as transnational implications.\footnote{All tweets in the paper have been translated into English using Google Translator or by a hired translator.}

Table 1.6: Testing Twitter’s Organizing Capacity\footnote{Posts that were highly ambiguous or for which the author could not make a judgement were placed in the category incoherent/failed translation. Less than 1\% of tweets were coded this way.}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Logistical Tool</th>
<th>Public Sphere</th>
<th>Alternative Free Press</th>
<th>Mobilization Obstacles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i) General protest information such as location, time, character, numbers, general trends.</td>
<td>i) Discussions about critical protest issues.</td>
<td>i) Ground-level narratives, including direct firsthand observations.</td>
<td>i) Negative References to tribal, religious, ideological, affiliations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii) Tactics or strategies for coordinated action, resistance.</td>
<td>ii) Rhetorical expressions of solidarity, demands, metaphors.</td>
<td>ii) Links to news or blogs.</td>
<td>ii) Negative References to Government Repression or Cooptation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii) Links to the aforementioned.</td>
<td>iii) Links to the aforementioned.</td>
<td>iii) Choice of news/blog site.</td>
<td>iii) Negative References to participation among civil society groups</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, I argue this metric combines the different sampling techniques to make the strongest metric possible. Synthesizing online analysis with offline interviews can
lead to several conclusions about mobilization efforts in Kuwait. First, it differentiates the perceived or actual effectiveness of social media as a logistical tool, alternative free press, or public sphere by looking at each area separately and in concert with possible obstacles to their use. Second, it assists in ascertaining what kind of ties and networks are developed and facilitated online, considering the parallel observation of offline networks in interviews. This contributes to an understanding of whether these networks can grow due to novel ties, if they reinforce existent ties, or have no effect. Last and most importantly, it can lay to rest some of the issues surrounding the use of social media as a repertoire of contention used by activists in the Arab Spring. The frequency of protests, the classic obstacles to mobilization, and the high use of Twitter in Kuwait make this a very promising case for this study. If Twitter was not successful in bridging SMOs in Kuwait, it is not likely to have been vital for other collective action efforts elsewhere in the MENA during the Arab Spring.
Section III: Case Study

The timing of the Arab Spring protests in the MENA came as a shock to scholars, diplomats, and observers alike. As a part of this narrative, the use of Internet technology and its relationship to mobilization continues to be a conundrum for researchers. In this case study I seek to investigate social media as a mobilization tool to answer some of the many questions about its usage. I structure this section as follows. The first section is a description of the context of the Kuwaiti protests. This demonstrates the justification in the methodological section about the importance of the protests and the emergence of a social movement in Kuwait over identity, ideological, and sectarian divides as well as an authoritarian state. The second section is an analysis of Twitter and its use by activists as an organizing tool, alternative free press, or public sphere, taking into account the potential mobilization obstacles. In the Kuwaiti context, testing the potential of Twitter for mobilization purposes allow me to make an empirical claim about the uses of social media devices. Overall, the objective of this case study is to show that Twitter cannot coordinate protests or exchanges of ideas or information. Instead it is used more as a space for rhetorical statements and on-the-ground reporting. This goes against the general propositions of cyber-optimists and scholars from the other literatures that argue that social media has democratizing potential.
The Context of the Arab Spring Era

*Kuwait's youth to youth Liberal Egypt: We are with you fighting the tyrants on behalf of all Arabs* - Tweet by Activist

The significance of the political unrest in Kuwait may not have been evident to the outside observer. While images of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali or Hosni Mubarak precipitous declines were being broadcast around the world, no such images of Kuwait’s own political turmoil made similar headlines. For Kuwait, a small country of three million whose foreign relations are mainly conditioned by hostile relations with Iraq, the other revolutions seemed too “remote an event” to take seriously (Kareem, April 2013: 12). In many ways this is not surprising, as strict censorship, a quasi-democratic reputation, and more violent uprisings in other countries took the limelight away from this small state. Yet, as the narrative in this section demonstrates, the effect of the Arab Spring was contagious. While mobilizations fell short of full democratization, since 2010 there has been a substantive transformation in the quality of activist efforts, a widening solidarity between traditionally divided SMOs, the emergence of new SMOs, and a mounting level of collective action that challenge the actions of the state vis-à-vis civil society in the form of a social movement.

Like many of the defining movements that spark civil protest or revolution - as occurred in Sidi Bouzid, Deraa, or Tahrir - the long and complex historical context to the unrest makes it difficult to pin the Arab Spring protests on a single moment or factor. In Kuwait - like other states in the region - decades of economic malaise, political
repression, and decaying institutions had been a symbol of governance that has been intensely disliked by its own citizens. Rampant nepotism, poor economic and social development, well-publicized scandals, and an untenable fiscal situation are just some of the major grievances that have frustrated and angered many Kuwaitis. In the past, the blame for these failures has been aimed at different factions within the Kuwaiti parliament- the National Assembly (NA) – or on poor administrative governance on the part of the bloated Kuwaiti bureaucracy. It has only been in recent years that it has become increasingly common to attribute the dysfunctional environment solely to the autocratic rule of the Al Sabah monarchy. The Al Sabah control of all the major political and economic resources in the country mean that the NA cannot do its job effectively.20

As one activist stated “No solution will come from within the parliamentary halls of Abdullah al-Salem21, but instead must come to it”. It is only in hindsight that intensifying social discontent could incite a single spark into a comprehensive bonfire of political change.

These interrelated grievances came to a head on December 8, 2010, just before Arab Spring protests began in Tunisia and Egypt. A political seminar at the home of a Member of Parliament (MP) organized to discuss a legal case against another MP was interrupted by police attempting to stop the meeting (Arab Times, July 14, 2012). This resulted in an altercation known as “Black Wednesday” in which MPs, well-known

20 Since 1975 the Al Sabah has owned 100 percent of the oil industry, 97 percent of the land, and directly or indirectly employs 95 percent of the labour force (Ghabra 1997:250-251).
21 The name of the National Assembly building.
intellectuals, and journalists were attacked by riot police (The National, December 10, 2010). The event was caught on camera by local news, activists, and Al Jazeera journalists, and was heavily publicized on the Internet. The news shocked and angered many non-political Kuwaitis, who thought that the use of violence against peaceful meetings of respected MPs was a red line that the regime should not cross. From this point onward, the political discourse in Kuwait was forever changed as the legitimacy of the Al Sabah plummeted to new lows. In the background of this civil discontent a vegetable vendor in Tunisia turned this spark into a flame.

But the flame did not start in the place that one might imagine. While parliamentary factions and established activists were still organizing themselves and had not confronted the government with respect to this incident, another segment of Kuwaiti society marched into the gap: bedoon activists. The ‘bedoon’ are stateless Kuwaitis who have lived in administrative limbo since independence and are isolated from the rest of Kuwaiti society politically, socially, and economically (Longva 1997:47, Shiblak 1992).

The first bedoon protest began in an outer suburb of Al Jahra with only a few hundred protesters present a week after Mubarak was forced from office. Egypt’s revolution provided an opportunity to this nascent opposition movement, spurring this

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22 In Arabic, bedoon is ‘bidun jinsiyya’, from which the term bedoon (without) is derived from to denote their stateless status. There is no connection with the Arabic term “bedouin,” although many bedoon are members of bedouin tribes. Until the mid-1980s, the government considered bedoon as lawful residents of Kuwait whose claims to citizenship were under consideration, a status that distinguished them from other foreign residents. Between 1985 and 1988, the government began applying provisions of the Alien Residence Law 17/1959 to the bedoon and issued a series of regulations stripping the bedoon of almost all their previous rights, benefits, jobs, free education, ability to travel, and even driver’s licenses (Bedoon Rights Report).
disenfranchised minority to take up the banner of protest to demand reforms (Kareem, April 2013). Several new organizations - the KBC, KBM, and BR – sprung up overnight and organized these events. The movement’s demands called for Nasser to resign and the swift nationalization of the bedoon. As protests by bedoon SMOs grew, other Kuwaiti SMOs - G29 and SPM - began to voice their support and organized similar demonstrations in solidarity in Kuwait City, at university campuses, and the NA building. Despite a protest ban, hundreds of bedoon protesters turned out en masse on January 13 and 14, 2011 as well as May and October 2012 (BBC, October 21, 2012). In response to the gatherings, the government security forces used tear gas, rubber bullets, sound bombs, beatings, detentions, and trials to quell the bedoons’ peaceful assembly (Refugees International, 2012). Kuwaiti citizens were appalled at the government response, even though most of them did not consider the bedoon to be legitimately Kuwaiti.

Meanwhile, the mobilization of Kuwaiti youths grew in strength. While bedoon activists repelled the advance of the riot police, groups of youth congregated and discuss a course of action concerning Black Wednesday and the larger political issues at hand. Yet, the biggest problem concerning their response to these injustices perpetrated by the regime was creating an inclusive coalition within the protest movement; the wide variety of cleavages between groups made them intensely distrustful of other activists’ intentions. Surprisingly, it was the governments’ reaction to the other regional revolutions that invigorated and propelled Kuwaiti youth activists to organize their first integrated marches and cross these divides (Kareem, April 2013).
First was the reaction to Egypt. Within a day of the start of the Egyptian protests on January 25, 2011, the Kuwait government announced a $5 billion domestic aid package in an effort to quell any grievances against the government (HRW).23 This in many ways had the opposite effect, inflaming the youth activists and many other Kuwaitis, as they saw this tactic as an insult to their intelligence. Activists stated these sentiments, commenting that the regime thought that Kuwaitis were “in a barn and need only food and drink.” Another said that outsiders “think we are mercenaries and will keep silent about our freedom and our dignity and our rights for money, they did not know that the free do not buy or sell his freedom”. The second reason was the government reaction to the protests in the Pearl Roundabout in Bahrain, which further deepened activists’ conviction to take their grievances to the street. While the Egyptian revolution re-energised the opposition with new tactics and inspiration, Bahrain’s uprising rocked Kuwaiti politics (Kareem, April 2013). From the opposition’s perspective, the ruling family and the PM’s alliance with the Shia parliamentary bloc was by default an alliance with Iran. Previously divided tribal, Islamists, and mainstream Sunnis aligned themselves against both the Bahraini uprising and the Al Sabah royal family (Kareem, April 2013).

Spurred on by public anger and the newfound solidarity between groups these youth activists formed the core of a growing movement ran by its young members for

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23 Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Emir of Kuwait, gave every Kuwaiti citizen 1,000 dinars (3580 $) and a free food grant for one year on 18 January 2011, officially to commemorate the 20th anniversary of Kuwait's liberation from occupying Iraqi forces during the First Gulf War, as well as the 50th anniversary of the state's independence. The emir's office claimed that this grant was a one-time deal to celebrate Kuwait's 50th anniversary of independence (Yom and Gause, 2012: 83).
their own aims – a huge break with past movements (Tetreault 2006). They first
demanded political reforms and the immediate resignation of Prime Minister Nasser Al
Mohammad Al Sabah. Nasser had long been become a popular target for Kuwaiti
grievances and was seen as responsible for Black Wednesday as well as many other
economic and social problems. While he was considered untouchable as an Al Sabah,
activist believed that it would be a huge precedent if he was forced to resign by civil
society opposition as opposed to parliamentary procedure. Isolated and sporadic at first,
KAFI, FF, S16M planned and organized meetings, seminars, recruiting campaigns at
shopping malls, and small sit-ins from February 28, 2011 onwards.24 In the first major
sit-in on March 8 - organized by KAFI - at Al Erada25, approximately one thousand
protesters demanded the departure of Nasser. Though the numbers at the time did not
exceed a thousand protesters, in the Kuwaiti context they were nevertheless significant
for attracting hundreds more than previous protests (Kareem, April 2013).

Such protest continued for the rest of the summer ramping up in intensity and
rhetoric. The escalating tensions between the defiant groups and the security forces led to
the November 17, 2011 storming of the parliament by the youths and a few MPs who had
saw the benefits of being associated with the youth movement. In the shadow of a larger
protest, Nasser submitted his resignation on November 28, dissolving the parliament
ahead of a mass rally. Within hours after the resignations, approximately 50,000 people
marched in Kuwait City in solidarity with the youth activists and their allies (Reuters.

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24 Please note Table 1.1 for other protest dates mentioned.
25 Al Erada is the main park in front of the National Assembly Building.
This was a truly remarkable achievement for a few youth activists that talked of political change in their living rooms only a few months before.

These events fit with Tarrow’s concept of protest cycles. A period of increased conflict and contention with the social system led to,

- a rapid diffusion of collective action from mobilized to less mobilized sectors;
- a quickened pace of innovation in the forms of contention;
- new or transformed collective action frames;
- a combination of organized and unorganized participation;
- and sequences of intensified interaction between challengers and authorities which can end in reform, repression and sometimes revolution (Tarrow 1996: 153).

From the beginning, the bedoon activists led the initial civil society unrest, much to their credit and courage. This had inadvertent, but significant, effects on the grievances of the other groups as the struggle of the bedoon created a platform other activist groups needed to expose police violations and to mobilize and report on these events in the media to sway public opinion (Kareem, April 2013). Two factors were particularly significant. The first reason was the fact that the bedoon were organizing protests under duress. With wide publication and pictures of the crackdowns, the public image of the governments’ heavy handed approach to the protests inspired Kuwaitis to demonstrate for their own means against draconian and anti-democratic measures. In late 2012 the riot police were equally heavy-handed with other Kuwaitis which made the analogy complete (Kareem, April 2013). The second reason was because the bedoon grievances, previously unknown to most Kuwaitis, became part of the mainstream discourse. This relatively small issue in Kuwaiti’s minds became part of the popular discourse of protest against a government
that did not respect human rights.\textsuperscript{26} One site of contention spread to numerous other sectors, spreading collective action to all corners of civil society.

Furthermore, the continued collective challenge, a common purpose, solidarity, and the ability to sustain collective action in the protests prove that there was the emergence of a social movement. While Kuwaitis youth activists had protested against government policy before –the Orange Movement protests in 2006, or the Fifth Fence protests in 2009 – there was not, until 2010, a popular movement that was capable of mobilizing the public for more substantial change (Kareem, April 2013). Collective challenge and common purpose is demonstrated in the merging of the KAFI, FF, and S16M organizations into one group in March of 2012. The Civil Democratic Movement (CDM) was the ultimate achievement of these youth movements and is a new and powerful force in Kuwaiti politics (Al Monitor, October 22, 2012). The CDM became the masthead of a movement that includes many Islamist, liberal, tribal, bedoon, and youth movements, bridging a wide swathe of Kuwaiti society. Overall, the diffusion of protests has shattered many of the mental and material divisions between Kuwait’s different protest sectors, forcing the regime to confront them simultaneously, when for 30 years it had done serially.\textsuperscript{27} The movement now has one objective: constitutional monarchy with no concessions.

\textsuperscript{26}Check out this website to confirm the solidarity between widely varying swathes of Kuwaiti society: http://www.bedoonrights.org/2012/10/14/12-kuwaiti-ngos-condemn-moi-violence-against-bedoon/.
The reverberations of these protests are sustained. The resignation of Nasser rocked the foundation of formal politics. In an effort to appease the opposition, the emir accepted the resignation of Nasser. Yet tensions only grew. The parliamentary opposition, now aligned with the protesters, took the prime minister’s resignation as a clear victory, and cemented their gain less than three months later when they won the majority of seats in the February 2012 parliamentary elections (Kareem, April 2013). The election resulted in a 54% turnover of MPs and the inauguration of a majority for opposition MPs. For the first time the majority of MPs were elected on a coalition platform against corruption, the royal family, and economic problems caused by government ineptitude. This was unprecedented in parliamentary politics. Yet, the resulting polarization and dysfunction of the political establishment led the regime to reverse their setbacks and nullified the results of the February elections and changing the electoral system (Gause 2012). Regime change through parliamentary measures was out of the question.

Meanwhile, the broad front organized by the CDM and its allies grew larger, as it continued mobilization efforts. In the “Dignity Marches” that took place throughout the country in late 2012, tens of thousands of Kuwaitis turned out, emulating the smaller protests from the year before on a much wider scale (Kareem, April 2013). On October 21, the largest civil protest in Kuwait history took place with an estimated 100,000 to

150,000 Kuwaitis showing up to protest the election and the new laws (BBC, October 21, 2012). Large protests by the bedoon also continued, their largest protest on record occurred on October 2, 2012 and received widespread international, regional, and domestic coverage (Bedoon Rights Report, October 14, 2012).

Solidarity between the different SMOs was also very high. Kuwaitis directly question the Emir Al Sabah\(^{28}\) no longer limited by any ceiling of rhetoric as in the past. They are also not as beholden to sectarian, ideological, or ethnic divisions. To Kuwaiti activists, their revolution called for dignity and accountability for all (Kareem, April 2013). As one of the most notable opposition leaders, Musalam al-Barrak, stated in a rally,

> in the past, candidates to the parliament would traditionally be supported by a tribe, a family or a sect, keeping young people in the shadows. Today, however, a quantum leap has taken place and the proof is that former MPs have complied with the wishes and aspirations of the youth. Those who have led and are currently leading the political movement are loyal young Kuwaitis who are directly linked to Kuwait (Foreign Policy Magazine, November 23, 2012).

Yet the outcome of these events led to uneven results for activists. New media controls, widespread arrests of activists, and continued repression at protest marches were a fact of life for protesters. Sadly, this means one thing: the regime, although shaken, was not pushed to collapse and remains very much an authoritarian.

Overall, the events in Kuwait reveal several points about the protests that are pertinent to my study of social media. While Kuwait did not witness dramatic structural changes, the

\(^{28}\) At recent protests chants of “we will not allow you [the Emir] to drag us into the abyss of autocracy” have become common. Technically such chants are illegal and can result in imprisonment. Very few arrests have been made in this regard, a huge break in past precedents.
changes to its political system in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, there was an unmistakable new social mobilization (Kareem, April 2013). For the first time, large numbers of Kuwaitis felt empowered to voice their opposition to the government. The co-mingling of protest movements and the fusion of these two parallel efforts is a major achievement, and constituted the emergence of the first genuine social movement in Kuwait’s history. Mobilization efforts have redefined Kuwait’s state-civil society relations. Second and very important to this investigation, is that activists suggested in interviews that their ability to organize protests was far greater than it was in the past.²⁹ Yet, the regimes power means that it was inevitable that the protests fell short of full democratization in the short term. Because violence was not a factor considered by activists and there is a lack of substantive elite divisions in Kuwait, there was no real opportunity for democratization events to take place. Overall, these factors set the stage for investigating if and how social media played a role in this protests.

The Uses of Twitter in Activism and Protest

The use of social media applications to organize and spread information about ideas, tactics, and protests is synonymous with the popular narrative of the Arab Spring. In this section this narrative is put to the test by the analysis of Twitter in protests in Kuwait. The investigation is divided into four sequences to take into account the different theoretical and conceptual debates in the literature review. The first is an exploration of

the revolutionary organizing thesis. The second sequence is an examination of Twitter as an alternative free press. The third is an investigation of whether Twitter functions as a public sphere. And the last sequence is an analysis of the potential obstacles to using Twitter as a collective action tool. This section demonstrates that for users, Twitter is primarily used to transmit first-hand accounts of protest events and to proclaim rhetorical solidarity with protesters. Conversely, it is not used to organize or as a space to debate over topics or ideas related to activism. Therefore, Twitter did not contribute to social movement emergence in an instrumental way; structural issues limited the choices of activists. In the fourth section the different obstacles to mobilization offer a convincing explanation for these results.

*Part I - Revolutionary Organizing*

*Something needs to be done about the corruption* - Tweet by Activist

In the early stages of the mobilization activists wrestled with many problems that constrained their ability to effectively mobilize people for protests. In interviews, many activists wondered, “What is the next step? How will we act? What will we do?” after the December 8th incident. Activists had little connection to each other and were generally working in isolation, divided as they are by ideology, identity, and a lack of information about each other. At the time, it seemed to activists that there was little possibility that organizing attempts would amount to any effective protest events that bridged the various
interested parties. What overcame this? How were they able to spread demands or other tactical information?

A macro-level analysis seems to support that two-way communication through Twitter allowed information to connect these disparate activists, which alleviated collective action costs and helped them organize. This deduction could be accepted as true if one’s only source of information was activist interviews or anecdotal evidence. Indeed, Twitter has enjoyed runaway popularity for Kuwaiti activists, largely due to censorship and a lack of civil society communication channels under its authoritarian regime according to interviews. Twitter is “good as a tool because it can’t be blocked or stopped by the government and is easy to use for whatever purposes one desires” one activist noted. They continued, “That’s the beauty of Twitter; you will only be as rigidly boxed into a ‘pattern of use’ as you allow yourself to be.” Yet objective data does not support the activists’ beliefs. As Table 1.7 and the subsequent explanations illustrate, Twitter remains largely ineffective as an organizing tool.

In the coordinated action category, which made up only 9% of the 5,000 tweet sample, there is a marginal amount of tweets directing coordinated action or resistance tactics. The approximately 450 tweets falling in the coordinated action category mainly give directions, tell people what to wear, or try to recruit members.
Most of the tweets on the cusp between coordinated action and general info as these examples show:

**We will carry orange…Your presence in orange is an important indicator of readiness and promotes the need to change** – *Activist Tweet*

**Parking near Safat Square House funding Mubarakiya souk, parking blocks and beside companies #youth # kuwait** – *Activist Tweet*

**we are the finest of the flags divides us … we invite you to come to the Avenues Mall on Saturday, January 29, from noon to one o'clock wearing orange # Soor5** – *Activist Tweet ''*

Only a few tweets showed the attributes necessary for actual coordination:

**Invitation to all, to join and support for the initiative ** for stateless Kuwaitis ** Record Your Name and Your Email now** – *Activist Tweet*

**R u frustrated with the situation and wanna channel it positively? Join us tomorrow at 6:30 and volunteer! Work for Kuwait** – *Activist Tweet*

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30 In this tale and all following tables, tweet categories have been rounded to the nearest common denominator. It should be noted that because of the use of different sampling methods that numbers are not always statistically representative.
teams will guide protesters, tell people to follow these guides advice as will be tweeted – Activist Tweet

Links to sites which post general protest information, resistance tactics or forums used to coordinate action were also rare, making up only 4% of the sample. Most notable in their absence were links to Facebook or other social media sites, which could have been an alternate site of mobilization linked to Twitter. This confirmed the statements of activists that they did not use Facebook for protest organization.

The most prevalent type of tweet, making up 48% of the sample, was the general info category, which includes dates and times of protests, and other characteristics. A few examples, including text, pictures, and videos show this type of tweet:

Some are not leaving the parliament, some are staying in #Erada square. Security is blocking others from joining both groups #Kuwait – Activist Tweet

Situation is calm now in #Erada square. Protesters are staying over for another night. Sorry for 'occupying your timeline' I'll keep updating – Activist Tweet

Security Forces give demonstrators Ahmadi ten minutes to break up the demonstration with a threat that the special forces come road – Activist Tweet

While these results largely refute Twitter’s organizing effectiveness, the negative effects go further than that when combined with qualitative interviews. While alternative sources of information might be something that could be seen as positive for mobilization efforts, there seems to be gap between information acquisition and collective action. Many activists from different organizations indicated that they were unlikely to attend seminars, rallies, or protest events of other SMOs they found out about on Twitter. As
one activist stated, “it is not that I directly participate in the event it is enough that I know about it”. If individual’s private action cannot be transformed into collective action aimed at public political participation; mobilization will be less likely to take off (Zheng and Wu 2005, Von Laer 2010). These results also go against the idea that coordinated collective action can therefore take place without physical interaction, with asymmetric goals, and nonaligned campaigns that are disassociated from larger social movements or SMOs (Marmura 2008). No evidence exists to prove that that thesis was correct. Instead, these results fit more with the fragmentation or release valve thesis, where Twitter use reinforces offline norms and civil society weaknesses.

In conclusion, Twitter’s chief organizational value is to inform activists and their audiences of major ongoing events. This analysis of Twitter indicates that regardless of its capacities as a novel, two-way communications network, it is rarely used to mobilize or direct the actions of activists, or large groups of independent protesters. Therefore, the hypothesis that this particular social media device could have played an active organizational role is incorrect. As the next section will corroborate, the trend that Twitter is used only for general information is far more prevalent for activists.

*Part II - Alternative Digital Free Press*

*It acts as a virtual newsroom!* - Tweet by Activist

This part demonstrates that Twitter is used to provide general information that is not available to most Kuwaitis in the mainstream media. Yet, its use is not a fundamental
impetus for mobilization because the sample demonstrates that it is not representative of the larger trends I discover in this paper.

Kuwait has a significant print media tradition outside of government control that dates back to the 1920s. Discussing and respecting divergent opinions is one of the most prominent features of societal discourse in the Kuwaiti press and its related electronic media. Yet, while the country may consistently rank as having the freest media in the Arab world, Kuwait's relatively liberal media and public dialogue is just that: relative. It is also in decline. Self-censorship is rife with editorial policy often reflecting the orientation or interests of their well-connected owners, or both (Kinnimont 2012). This bias makes protest coverage uneven. Often the media covers protests without mentioning the names of prominent activists, instead only naming formal political figures like MPs or tribal leaders. In addition, low salaries dissuade Kuwaiti nationals from pursuing journalism as a profession; at the end of 2006 only 2 percent of workers in the local media were Kuwaitis. It is in this environment that Twitter is used as an alternative digital free press.

Via an anecdotal sampling method it may seem easy to explain the important of tweets as a replacement for traditional press sources. Many tweets reported on the inaccuracy of regional and local media reports as these examples show:

**Al-Arabiya, the official sponsor of Arab nonsense – Activist Tweet**

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31 For comprehensive reports on press freedoms in Kuwait, visit www.freedomhouse.org or www.hrw.org.
Egypt's ONtv tackles the bedoon issue while the free Gulf based news channels ignore it – Activist Tweet

Must send them a video of what is happening and images... Local articles are no longer going to work boycott the channels and newspapers that are lying and defaming and provoke sedition – Activist Tweet

The Interior Minister called an urgent meeting of newspaper editors to censor the response to the crackdown – Activist Tweet

But as the sample in Table 1.8 outlines, Twitter’s use as an alternative free press is not as influential as some might assume.

**Table 1.8: Twitter as a Digital Alternative Free Press**

The most prevalent tweet was on-the-ground-reports, making up 22% of the sample, follow by links and pictures/videos, which made up approximately 8% of tweets each. Protesters took it upon themselves to tweet what they saw, in an attempt to fill the information vacuum as shown in the below examples of text, pictures, and videos (See Image 1.2):
One of the most interesting instances of ground-level reporting was the tweeting of demands by SMOs, which shows an alternative view of politics and protest events as opposed to official media sources. A few SMOs posted tweets of such demands to improve their credibility:

- **Guide to protest:** 1. law-abiding and peaceful expression 2. bring carpets to sleep on the ground 3. maintaining a clean yard will # kafi. # 8Dec2010 – Activist Tweet

- the idea of the campaign is to deliver a message to decision-makers and the security men that bedoon will not despair to claim their rights and they continue peacefully whatever the cost goal arrests and repression – Activist Tweet

- Constituents: call on the masses of protesters in Kuwait and in any state to abide by the limits and controls the peaceful expression to avoid offending any just cause – Activist Tweet

Yet, these postings were too infrequent in number to be considered representative of a larger trend of spreading collective action frames or protest advice.

Examining the hyperlinks, which made up 8% of the sample, there were many that offered greater depth to commentary from a wide variety of sources. In the total sample there were 783 links to 122 different sources.
The three most popular linked sites were:

1. Mizan (55)
2. Al Jarida (42)
3. Al-Monitor (34)

The most important medium amongst these links were blogging sites. Mizan, a blogging site where one of the government’s most vocal critics Mohammad al-Jassem writes, is widely read for its critiques of the authoritarian tendencies of the government. The second most disseminated medium through links the online newspapers Al Jarida and Al Monitor. Many articles by academics, MPs, and other observers that are not allowed to be published in daily Kuwaiti newspapers end up online. This is especially true of editorial pieces that go into depth about contentious political issues. The third medium that was very prevalent in the rest of the hyperlinks in the sample was YouTube. While protest events were forming, citizen journalists made videos. YouTube in particular was a key place for videos of news about protests to be disseminated. Some activists erected cameras around specific protest locations to monitor human rights violations by security forces and post them on YouTube links on Twitter. Other tweets were requests for information so that they could do this, as in this case after the events of December 8, 2010:

I hope to have pictures or videos or any documentation of the crime the government committed on Wednesday send to khaled32@hotmail.com if you want to share the episode in full #8Dec2010 –Tweet by Activist
With these examples being outlined, there are serious concerns that the use of Twitter as a free press was not vital for mobilization when linked with the interviews. This is because there are not that many tweets that actually cover issues (even through links) that can be directly corroborated for reasons to go to protests by activists. Also, people who participated in protests never mentioned whether they went to a protest because of something they saw or read on Twitter.

Furthermore, while there is a higher than average number of active users in Kuwait (compared to the rest of the region), there is also a disproportionate number of automated Twitter accounts, which programmed to re-tweet other accounts' tweets, as opposed to actual individuals (Arab Social Media Report, 2011, Takhteyeva et al. 2012, Shuai et al. 2012). In the Arab Social Media Report, approximately 200 Twitter users in Kuwait were considered to generate new information, supporting the claim that most information on Twitter is generated by a minority, while the majority use Twitter as a newsfeed. Obviously, a small number of participants is not the best way to foster a public sphere. The prevalence of re-tweets in the sample - 62% of tweets were re-tweets as opposed to a conversation or statement - supports the theory that only a handful of Twitter users were influential during the protests (Shuai et al. 2012). This means that there was not a lot of different information being provided to a wide audience – yet it was generally the same information regurgitated over and over. Overall, this means that there are not enough representative examples to make Twitter an important impetus for mobilization efforts through information diffusion.
Thus, the major contribution in terms of an alternate free press was direct and largely unverified reports of what protesters were experiencing at any given point in time. These demands, links, videos, and pictures were unlikely to be reported by a mainstream media organization. But these types of tweets were very few in number to make them statistically significant in the overall sample or as an impetus to mobilize as was examined in interviews. This was because a very small number of activists were tactically providing a few pieces of information to the wider public. While interesting information was being shown, its wider effect appeared to be negligible to protests do to a lack of widely varying information.

Part III - Virtual Public Sphere

*we have to learn to live together as brothers, or die together... I know people who prefer to live and die alone* - Martin Luther King – Activist Tweet

One of the primary components for democracy is an active forum for debate and ideas for members of civil society. For the emergence of social movements, such sites are crucial to mobilization, by diffusing collective action frames, ideologies, and other ideas necessary for solidarity. This section illustrates that Twitter does not contain such forums. Instead, it is solely a place for rhetorical statements or slogans of solidarity.

To assess the use of Twitter as a virtual public sphere, I examine direct exchanges of ideas pertaining to the protest or protest strategies, rhetorical pronouncements, and
links to sites that provide forums or chat rooms. Table 1.9 outlines the results of such an analysis.

**Table 1.9: Twitter as Virtual Public Sphere**

![Bar Chart]

Given that it is common to use Twitter in a conversational fashion, it is surprising that almost every user did not use the medium to engage in debates about protests, political issues, or underlying ideals. Less than 1% of activists used Twitter for this purpose. Whatever criticisms of other parts of this study, I can say with surety that Twitter was not used as a virtual public sphere.

According to the few sample tweets found that fit this category, combined with interviews, some activists did try to use Twitter to spread their views to the wider public and other groups. An example of this is a planned dialogue in early November 2011 on Twitter by KAFI members, to parallel protests planned at the NA each week. Each dialogue and protest was under a different hashtag (eg. #anger, #constitution, #shabab,
#sour, #Dec8, 2010). Polls and campaigns by other groups also attempted by groups to spread debate and dialogue by activists as the below examples show:

within two days only 95% of voters demanded a trial Nasser harming national security here: Http://t.co/83DzvWE # Kuwait# Kafi -Tweet by Activist

Support Save our constitution, add a #twibbon now! - http://t.co/pUfyte1Gz - Create one here - http://t.co/0fyEfdrkAv 11/15/2011 -Tweet by Activist

Flip your Avatar, Show Support to the Bidun! http://bit.ladsa1Aci0 -Tweet by Activist

These efforts had minimal effect because of poor participation by Twitter users. Activists stated that responses were non-existent because people did not care to respond. This included members of their own movements.

Instead the most tweets - making up 51% of this sample is represented by broad rhetorical slogans and statements. These statements include everything from quoting Bob Marley to general slogans. A wide variety of examples are shown below:

Don't let them change ya! Or even rearrange ya! We've got a life to live. - Bob Marley – Activist Tweet

Tunisia: people want to topple the government Egypt: The people want to bring down the regime Kuwait: the people want to topple the government – Activist Tweet

Rotten tooth extraction [is] painful ... But his [Nasser] survival even more painful – Activist Tweet

A thousand dinars will not work, pension increases will not work, oppression will not work, internment will not work, Nasser leave – Activist Tweet

We no longer accept discrimination and apartheid – Activist Tweet

We don’t want the parliament to be a supermarket – Activist Tweet
General statements to show or request solidarity for protest movements were also common. It is interesting that statements by users generally were non-descript, meaning they were not revealing specific locations or planned activities; information that could be used for the purposes of counter-strategizing, incarceration or prosecution. Several examples illustrate this:

**Bedoon activists call on all events and civil society organizations in Kuwait to support them in their movements and their claims for the immediate release of all detainees – Activist Tweet**

**Thank God for the response of youth movements and political forces to call for gathering in solidarity with our brothers and our partners – Activist Tweet**

**Political events will not make us forget the duty of solidarity with Kuwaitis bedoon in their just demands and against the positions of the non-government based on valid legal grounds – Activist Tweet**

Twitter also suffers from several disadvantages that may explain the negligible use of Twitter as a public sphere. It is structural and may be the greatest disadvantage. Tweets are limited to 140 characters each, signifying that meaningful participation in dialogue or debate would be difficult in the best of times and under the most conducive conditions. As Palfrey et al. (2010) observe, this format prohibits the sort of serious political exchange and persuasive messaging one might expect from a truly flourishing public sphere.

Overall the wide disparity between information and discussion illustrates that Twitter, in this case, cannot promote the transition from private action of information acquisition to collective action processes concerning political participation. While cyber pessimists argued that Internet technology gives rise to a pluralistic public sphere - that
creates a socially favourable setting that encourages democratic thought – this was clearly not the case in people’s consciousness and daily social practice on Twitter. Aside from very general comments and rhetorical slogans there is little evidence that this social media device in any way augments the ability of SMOs to directly connect with each other through debate.

Part IV – The Main Use of Twitter

While I outline many critiques of Twitter in this case study, the main usage of this social media device – as a source of on-the-ground reports and rhetorical statements and slogans - does say some important things about what is going on in Kuwaiti civil society in general. More explicitly, it illustrates the collective action frames and discourse of the wider public in a surprisingly accurate way.

For example, there was not a single tweet or re-tweet in the entire sample that explicitly endorsed or even debated support for the regime, indicating that state presence on Twitter is severely limited. A joke is made against PM Nasser in this regard:

Nasser only has 40 followers...maybe I should sell him my account –Tweet by Activist

The content of rhetorical tweets indicate that users did not fear the regime meaning there was a strong consensus that it was illegitimate. The rhetorical expressions condemning the regime and its tactics were the most common finding in our sample:

The fall of the Nasser government is not only the end of a failed Prime Minister in the management of the State, but the fall of the idea of the necessity that the Prime Minister is from the Al Sabah family –Tweet by Activist
The next time a prime minister is present always in his thinking will be a former prime minister named Nasser who the people rejected –Tweet by Activist

It is not permitted for [MP] candidates to play on the emotions of the stateless or their case. Either seek them sincerely or shut up... –Tweet by Activist

It is not morally justified to force me to choose between the authoritarian regime and the [formal] opposition, the two sides are the death of each –Tweet by Activist

Your highness, the best unity between Kuwaitis happened in Erada square and you targeted it –Tweet by Activist

Humour is also included in this category, with cutting jokes about the regime. Here are a couple of the most common re-tweets:

Cabinet reshuffles in which Nasser was still the PM was like “switching the right car tires” and didn’t change a thing – Tweet by Activist

Thomas Edison took 99 times to discover the material to use in the light bulb, Nasser has had seven opportunities to run the country, how many opportunities does he need to eventually run it right? – Tweet by Activist

Having Fadalah in charge of the Bedoon Committee was likened to “letting Dracula be in charge of the blood bank” – Tweet by Activist

Therefore, Twitter does something that cannot be discounted from the effect: telling the user the general tempo of emotion in a civil society. Twitter feeds seem to have served as a vocalization of illegitimacy. Support for the regime appears to have eroded significantly, and this is in line with interview data, which states that the state and the royal family in particular have gradually been losing the respect of citizens since the early 2000s. Activists stated that it was only their discursive unity at the “hideous sight of Nasser and his entourage and the way the government has been managed” that brought

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32 Saleh Fadala is the Chairman on the Committee to address the situation of the bedoon. He has a well known anti-bedoon stance in which he claims that the bedoon don’t exist or are just Iranian and Iraqi spies who are there to subvert national interests.
SMOs together. Using Internet technology seems to relate somehow with sustaining and reinforcing particular motivational elements: in interviews activists who were also “online” activists show higher levels of group-based anger. Activist really believe, as one commented, that in Twitter, “we found that the mighty power really is not reactionary, but in the hands of the people.” A significant example can be related to this discourse change. An activist stated, was a new trend of getting rid of anonymity on Twitter account. In the past it was rare to have activists use their own names on Twitter; only since 2010 that this had completely changed. Anonymity is no longer thought of as required – activists used their real names and put up their own profile pictures (Kareem, March 22, 2013).

Therefore, Twitter does demonstrate changes to public opinion in a remarkably accurate way. While this does not have any impact on mobilization efforts or democratization it is an interesting result that is worth noting.

Part V - Obstacles to Mobilization

“Every Kuwaiti pitted against a prisoner of conscience...do not spit in the river, you shall drink it someday” - Tweet by Activist

Tarrow (1998) wrote, that overcoming collective action problems requires “shared understandings and identities” (21) because they are the foundation of trust and cooperation. This section shows that the obstacles to mobilization degrade activists’ attempts to organize online due to the fact that activists are largely disconnected from
each other in radicalized enclaves and suffer from self-selection bias that is critically
distorting to the potential of digital discourse. Social, political, and structural obstacles to
civic participation were the primary reasons for this.

In interviews, activists said that one of the primary motivations for organizing
protests was to overcome political and ideological obstacles to foster solidarity. Activists
genuinely believed Twitter was a place for social solidarity, bridging communities, and
drawing supporters from across all divides. Some selective tweets echoed this sentiment:

I do not belong to any policy or ideological movement – Tweet by Activist

Our movement is not about ideology that closes doors but about making politics in
Kuwait free and fair – Tweet by Activist

The beauty of Twitter is the discovery that we are all not the sons of tribe, the sons
of Shia and the sons of urban thieves – Tweet by Activist

Without further sampling, appearances can be deceiving. Although these tweets are
interesting, they are also anomalous as Table 2.0 shows. Negative references to obstacles
reveal that social and political cleavages play a key role on Twitter, demarcating a sharp
divide between theoretical propositions to the effectiveness of Internet technology as
independent from societal and political norms. Over 50% of the sample (2,531) tweets
were coded as containing references to obstacles of some kind.
Obstacles references were broken down as follows: Tribal Identity (231), Ideology (567), Sectarianism (432), State Co-optation (979), and Civil Society Weaknesses (322).

When investigated closely, many tweets had divisive connotations that emphasize the cultural, ideological, and political differences between users as these examples illustrate:

- disproportionate use of force against them at their protests while police had been handing out juice to opposition groups at Al Erada –Tweet by Activist

- security forces were preventing the picketing by bedoon activists, held in support of the Bahrain revolution –Tweet by Activist

- A large number of protesters from the Shiite community demonstrating in the Square [Taima] will insult the faith –Tweet by Activist

- The storming of the parliament by them is no less dangerous than what the government is doing –Tweet by Activist
Overall, this means that Internet technology can be radicalized by different ideologies and social or cultural norms if users, as all humans seem to be, are in calculated with such norms.

Adding to the radicalization coming from these divides is an interrelated issue. The way Kuwaiti activists use Twitter is hierarchical and status oriented. While some observers may attribute this hierarchy to the way Twitter is designed because of the rigidity of the medium, as I mentioned earlier, it is important to consider here the cultural context because of specific social norms in Kuwait. Kuwait is largely a tribal society, where status and hierarchy are an important part of private and public life. In interviews, activists stated that their use of Twitter was a sign of their status and importance in Kuwaiti civil society. As the example below illustrates, these comments were also confirmed in tweets. Interviewees tweeted increases in the number of users following them as a sign of their political importance:

**Khaled achieves record in less than 24 hours God bless... #Worthy** –Tweet by Activist

Such hierarchies also affect how lower ranking members of organizations used their accounts. In one instance an interviewee stated that as a new recruit, their job was to retweet the leaders’ tweets, not to provide their own information or views. Another
commented that this results in a “groupthink” mentality that reinforced activists’ beliefs and makes them less easily adaptable to changing situations. This forestalls the decentralized protest structure argument feted by Rheingold (2003) and Diamond (2011) among others, who argue that individuals can be more efficient and independent sources of mobilization.

The evidence I collected demonstrates that whatever the reasons for these hierarchies most activists were not connected to other activists from different SMOs on Twitter, as shown in Table 2.1. Simply put, SMOs don’t have substantive direct connections with each other on Twitter: they act as enclaves. Activists O and P were the only glaring examples of activists who were highly connected to others on Twitter. Their dense connections are contrasted with the fact that the SMOs they are part of are among the least effective of the SMOs studied. They also had the fewest recruits, capabilities, and offline connections to other groups. Interviews corroborated this isolation on Twitter. One activist stated that during a major protest, all of the members of their group were arrested. During another major protest the next day, this activist couldn’t find any information on Twitter; they did not know anyone else on Twitter who was at the protest. This finding confirms that Twitter users are in enclaves.
Table 2.1: Twitter Audiences for Activists

Table 2.2: Related versus Unrelated Tweets
My argument that Twitter is radicalized and can produce ‘enclave like’ domains can be taken further to prove my point. After all these obvious failures to use social media to organize protests activists still think that Twitter is important for political participation. The relevance of tweets to political issues, mobilization efforts, and other relevant tweets is also a telling result as I demonstrate in Table 2.2. Approximately 87% of tweets relate to politics, while only 13% of tweets do not relate to the context of politics in Kuwait. These results are also validated by other sources. A survey by Mintz and Wheeler (2010) established that 80.5% of Kuwaitis believe “the internet was significantly impacting local politics”, and that it was undermining the legitimacy of the Kuwaiti regime.

These findings are consistent with a macro level view of Kuwaiti civil society, where such disadvantages are serious impediments to mobilization. Other traditional mobilization meeting places in Kuwait - like mosques and political seminars - have similar issues brought about by radicalization, enclave like environments, and a lack of direct connections between activists. Homophily was therefore a major obstacle to spreading out and connecting with activists from different ideologies, or social and political grouping.

Furthermore, an activist explained that each SMO was a “movement of a small finger”. They commented that each SMO was poorly equipped to handle offline and online tasks in tandem. There was little time for them to monitor what other groups were doing offline - much less online - without jeopardizing their own activities and planning.
Overall, the difficulty in recruiting and maintaining the policies within each organization is a daily struggle which took all the energy of the main activists to maintain.

It may be that some users acknowledge the inherent weakness of Internet technology through choices in how they use it, as these to tweets sent in quick succession note:

Your tweets are not enough!! Do Something!!!! @ZHR - Tweet by Khaled

I hope that none of us imagined that we could live free and establish a true democracy and the rule of law without sacrifices, arrests, and blood -Tweet by Khaled

What is the audience then for these tweets, if it is not to connect to different activists and groups? Looking at the languages used is one way to look at this. As shown in Table 2.3, Arabic (55%) and English (42%) were the dominant languages used by activists with only 3% of all posts were in other languages.

**Table 2.3: Languages Used on Twitter**
Taken into account with other factors, Twitter users in Kuwait were largely concerned with domestic issues, as opposed to the regional focused forms of political action, which were mostly absent in the sample. Other important colonial languages - like French or Italian – or important regional languages – like Turkish or Farsi - were absent from the sample. This finding is supported by Huberman et al’s (2012) analysis of the limited reach of Twitter, which argues that mobilization online is only likely to involve messages, symbols, and images that resonate with the domestic population. From the random sample it seems that mobilization messages from Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, and Jordan had very limited appeal to Kuwaitis, who have widely varying economic, social, and political differences that are not transferrable for Kuwaiti collective action frames.

What the results in this section illustrate is that the obstacles that hinder mobilization in offline efforts have many similar effects on those in the virtual sphere. The specific social and political conditions had a strong influence on the way Twitter was or was not used. Obstacles to social movement emergence are very strong in Kuwait. What this may mean is that spending too much time attempting to use social media to organize may in fact jeopardize attempts to mobilize by delaying other more important aspects of mobilization; like face-to-face discussions, debate, and coordination.

Interviews suggest that the difficulties of offline mobilization in Kuwait meant that organizing these types of events were the primary objective of activists. This likely means that face-to-face organizing is the only way to successfully link SMOs in Kuwait. Online participation was definitively unrelated.
Section IV - Overall Results

The youth changed the regimes, the youth did not change the general mentality, that needs a decade or two - Tweet by Activist

At the start of this paper I asked two questions: To what extent is social media an effective organizing tool for activists? Do these tools enhance activists’ mobilization efforts? These questions focus on contributing to the theoretical gap in the SMT, NT, and DPT literature concerning the uses of social media in mobilization efforts. This section goes into more details about the results found in the case study and links them with the theoretical understandings discussed in the literature review. Overall, it provides theoretical contributions, suggestions for future research, and my concluding thoughts. My objective is to provide a comprehensive explanation for the empirical results discussed above and close the circle concerning a discussion of social media, mobilization, democratization, and the Arab Spring.

When examining the impact of Twitter on mobilization efforts in Kuwait, this study has, in detail, singled out four tiers of analytical framework upon which Twitter may or may not use to promote collective action. At the first tier it found that the Internet is not capable of facilitating organizing or coordinate protest events; instead it was mostly used for ground level reports of protests. At the second tier it was primarily used as a medium for on-the-ground reports providing alternative news sources. Yet, there was a statistically insignificant amount to say that it had a major effect on mobilization. At the third tier it did not foster online debate and foster an online public sphere. Instead, it was
primarily as a space for rhetorical statements and slogans. In the final tier it found that Twitter did not overcome the obstacles to mobilization present in offline spaces. In sum, Twitter users in Kuwait primarily used the social media device as a way to express their individual views on what was going on and how the supported or did not support it. It is a surprisingly accurate way of discerning public opinion or changes in discourse.

In the DPT literature the potential of social media is regarded as a zero-sum game. As the Kuwaiti case illustrates this is not necessarily true. Twitter is not an organizing tool for SMOs and did not have any major effect on mobilization or emergence. Nonetheless it has an important role of spreading various discourses among the wider population. These empirical findings pose a stark challenge to the cyber optimist narrative outlined in the literature review. These approaches are based on teleological conceptions of instrumental individual choice, participatory democracy, and civil society dynamics and are heavily invested with ideals present in democratization literature that have been heavily criticized by many scholars as being flawed (Carothers 2002, Bunce 2000). Furthermore, many of these assertions are made based on theory that was developed before the birth of the Internet; a fundamental empirical flaw. The results clearly show that the concerns of cyber pessimists need to be taken more seriously, and more clearly interwoven with cyber optimist conceptualizations of online mobilization. As this study shows, local norms and practices have a major effect on mobilization efforts, in the guise of homophily, and interactions at the micro level.
Concerning how social media can contribute to understandings of social movements and SMT, a few comments can be made. Because Twitter did not connect SMOs and seriously contribute to collective action, it does not seem likely that it needs to be looked at seriously as a repertoire of contention that augment mobilization efforts or alters the boundaries of activism. Neither approach can satisfactorily explain my results.

In a larger context, there is orthodoxy in SMT that overemphasize social movements as globalized, transnational entities that connects multiple and diverse participants. This relates to how it views mediums like mass media in general. At one time the democratizing potential of the mass media – newspapers, pamphlets, radios, and television - was seen as the future instigator of mobilizations and many of the same positive assertions about its role were made. A variety of SMT theorists have shown that the modern mass media (print and broadcasting) have largely failed to play this role in mobilization efforts in a logistical sense (Boggs, 2000; Curran, 2000; Gandy, 2002; Habermas, 1989 [1962]; Kellner, 2004; McChesney, 1999; Savigny, 2002). The restrictions mentioned in this paper make it clear that a digital action repertoire can be added to this list – it does not and probably never will be able to replace traditional forms of activism and face-to-face communication as effective mobilization spaces.

Furthermore, audiences for tweets in Kuwait were interested almost solely on domestic affairs – not regional or international ones.

Several aspects of Twitter made it a particularly valuable case for NT analysis. Taking the debate between authors of SWT versus SH theory into perspective I found
very interesting results here. The first relevant aspect is the relative weakness of Twitter ties. Twitter is a “weak-tie” instrument that is able to attract easily and rapidly a large number of people to join an action or event. Yet, Twitter-based interaction in this study fails Granovetter’s definition on all counts. It appears as if the costs of mobilization were too high for novel connections to happen. Twitter’s ability to support novel weak ties do not appear to be the typical result, as a few other scholars have observe (Takeyev et al. 2012, Kwak, Lee, Park 2010). The instrumental world of SH more accurately portrays social media use than SWT. This being said, as far as I can tell strong personal ties in networks did not play a major role in reinforcing network connections either. I tend to agree with della Porta (2012), that all the all theorizing about network ties is not effective because it does not properly take into account the social and political context in which networking takes place. It has long been hypothesized that the evolution of social networks follows a path-dependent process in which the future development of a network relies on its current structure (Gulati and Gargiulo, 1999; Shipilov and Li, 2008; Watts, 1999, Carpenter et al.). This appears to be the case here as online networks take on the shape of offline ones.

The first step for future research after looking at this case is the “least likely case” to verify these findings according to the “critical case” methodology. Egypt or Tunisia would both be good cases for selection due to their low social media usage, intense civil protests, and similar obstacles to mobilization. Triangulating the results in Kuwait by looking at Facebook as well as other social media devices, and interviewing more
nonaligned protest participants would be imperative to confirming the data collected and analyzed here.

While this paper mainly focuses and discusses the strategic processes of social media, it is much more difficult to explain its discursive effects or how framing theorists could use this data of framework. Data similar to that collected in this study could be used to look at the frames used in protests, judging them for accuracy compared to offline ones, gauging their evolutionary development, and investigating further the indirect proximal diffusion of collective action. A discourse analysis seems to be the most important step for new research. As I mention in the case study, what emerges from the data is a relatively consistent discourse which is deeply at odds with the Kuwaiti regime. Internet mediums that document protest victories or narratives may provide an important source of inspiration and sustain collective action for activists that have a positive effect on future commitment and participation (Marmura 2008: 265). The question of whether emotive participation in collective action mediated through digital information channels can be turned into real sustained commitment remains open for further research. Since our dataset is a snapshot of collective action participation this question cannot be answered at this stage.

The data could also be used to test relationships with elites and policy making as it pertains to state-civil society relations. The importance of this medium for SMOs is evident due to state reactions and attempts to crackdown on social media users, charging and arresting activists for expressing their opinions online (Al-Monitor January 25,
2013). While state officials do not have a presence online in Kuwait - in Saudi Arabia for example - elite responses and interactions with citizens on Twitter over a variety of local issues are quite common. Comparing data collection with domestic events in Saudi Arabia would be very useful, especially considering how hard it is to do field work in a politically stifled environment. This type of research would also have special implications for research on the links between policy making and social movements, and political opportunities.

**Broader Implications**

Based on the evidence presented in this paper, I demonstrate a series of broad implications that are critical for understanding social media-based political action. This being said, like other case studies on mobilization this one is complicated, somewhat descriptive, and inconsistent with others. Processes of democratization vary enormously by region and even with a nation’s boundaries. This study cannot deny that the Internet has introduced changes to state-civil society relations. It is important to remember that Twitter is just one part of a much larger subject matter – on what interactions on the Internet mean for civil society, and how it may change the conditions within which individuals connect with each other in positive, negative, or often times it seems neutral ways. The Internet clearly provides organizations with what has become an indispensable information resource. Although social media has not been able to bring about logistical support for mobilization in Kuwait, it has certainly promoted incremental
political liberalization by providing a window into the collective action frames of groups (Zheng and Wu 2005). Democratization is a process through which different elements of democracy develop, such as representation, participation, deliberation, transparency, accountability, and rights (Dahl, 1989). All these elements that are embedded in advance democracies have developed over a long historical period. The exploration of the impact of the Internet on democratic development in Kuwait requires continued investigations into whether the Internet helps produce these elements.

With this caveat being made, the evidence strongly suggests that there are few credible grounds for believing that, in and of itself, that social media will offer activists with any special advantage or ‘edge’ in their attempts to influence state policies and/or public opinion. It would be unrealistic to expect that the Internet alone or any other instrumental tool can lead to democratization in such a short period. This is because the greatest obstacles activists face do not stem from an inability to organize effectively or make optimal use of technologies such as the Internet. Rather, they derive from a battle with very powerful and entrenched state interests with a clear stake in the status quo.

Furthermore, this case emphasizes that popular mobilizations brought about by decreasing legitimacy for a personalist regime amongst economic problems cannot lead to democratization without splits in the regime or violence (Geddes 1999, Bratton and van de Walle 1997:83).³³ Analogies for popular protest that are sometimes made

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between Eastern Europe in 1989 and the Middle East in 2010 have been shown not to bear out. Events in Kuwait and the Arab Spring in general clearly show that this is not happening (Gause and Yom 2012) While popular protests shook the political elites of many states and resulted in repression, civil war, international intervention, elite rotations, and more inclusive bases of regime support, the fact remains that none of the countries affected have democratized or enacted more than surface level reforms that would achieve an orderly transition.

Instead, the impact to Kuwait and the region in general speak more to Bunce (2000) and Carothers (2002) theories on the flaws of studying transitions in the developing world as having a linear trajectory. Regimes in the region are in fact in a gray zone, exhibiting feckless pluralist or dominant power tendencies that do lend any credence to the idea of democracy. (Carother 2002: 10-11). Not enough is known about the process of transitions in Middle East, or the facilitation of democratic norms to make any substantive generalizations about transitions. The same can be said of Internet technology and using monolithic conceptions of instrument or structure. As the moniker goes ‘the devil is truly in the details’.
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