EDITORIAL
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Social media in the Arab world before the recent revolutions had been described as marginal, alternative and elitist, and their impact minimal because of the low penetration rates of the internet. The 2011 events across the Arab world have brought 'social media' to the forefront, with many crediting Facebook, weblogs and Twitter with facilitating the revolutions that have taken place. Yet we have not fully understood the role of social media during the recent events and the convergence of social media with not only mainstream media but also with actual street demonstrations. Moreover, the role and significance of social media during recent events across the Arab world has varied greatly. What are the cultural, technical and political variables that are conducive to using social media for mobilization? How have citizens and states used social media during the uprising and beyond? How do we research social media movements in the Arab world?

A total of six articles in this issue aim to answer these questions. Eaton's article investigates the use of internet activism in Egypt during the 2011 events. In detail, the article outlines how social media were used by Egyptian internet activists to increase mobility on the ground, starting from the Facebook campaign 'We Are All Khaled Said' and leading to the ousting of Mubarak.

Gerbaudo's article, on the 'kill switch' as a 'suicide switch', focuses on one critical event during the 2011 uprising in Egypt: the internet blackout imposed by Mubarak's regime during the first days of the 2011 Egyptian revolution and its effect on mobilization. Using empirical research conducted with online activists, the article reflects on the highly complex and ambivalent relation between offline collective action and social media.

Ben Moussa's article takes a step back and examines the strengths and limitations of various theoretical approaches to researching collective action in the Arab world. Critical of the common pitfalls of technological, social and cultural determinism, the author suggests a multidisciplinary approach that draws on social movement theory, radical democracy theory and alternative media theory to study Muslim-majority societies.

Marc Owen Jones turns our attention to a country largely ignored by the mainstream media, Bahrain. His 10-month virtual ethnographic study, conducted during the uprising in 2011, examines how the Bahraini regime used social media in a number of different ways to suppress both online and offline dissent. Such methods included naming and shaming, offline intelligence gathering and passive observation.

This is followed by the insights of an academic and practitioner into the use of social media during the Syrian uprising, which continues two years after the initial revolt in 2011. Harkin's article explores the changing media ecology in Syria since the uprising and focuses on how Syrian society is constructing alternative ways of disseminating information.

The article by prominent blogger Hussein Ghrer is a sober examination of the role of social media during the uprising in Syria. It highlights the importance of cultural, social and political factors that affect how and why people use internet tools. It contrasts the use of social media in Syria with social media use in Tunisia and Egypt, reminding us again of the importance of context. Unfortunately Ghrer was arrested on 16 February 2012, two days after submitting his first draft to WPCC. Online journalist, and friend of Ghrer, Maurice Aaek, comments on the article a year later, in February 2013.

INTERNET ACTIVISM AND THE EGYPTIAN UPRISINGS: TRANSFORMING ONLINE DISSENT INTO THE OFFLINE WORLD

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Tim Eaton currently works for BBC Media Action on media development projects in the Middle East. He previously completed his postgraduate degree at the University of Exeter, majoring in Middle East Studies. He is also a former researcher for Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs. Tim has a long-standing interest in the politics of Egypt, where he worked as a political researcher at the Ibn Khaldun Center throughout the 2005 elections.

This article aims to investigate the role of internet activism in the 2011 Egyptian uprisings. It suggests that the significance of internet activism in Egypt in this period was twofold: first, in its utility as a tool for activists to mobilize, organize and inspire Egyptians to take to the streets on 25 January 2011; and, second, in its use as a medium to document events in Egypt beyond the reach of the authorities. Particular attention is paid to the growth of the 'We Are All Khaled Said' (WAAKS) campaign on Facebook and its capacity to translate online dissent into the offline world. The transformation of protesters into citizen journalists through information and communication technologies, and Twitter in particular, is examined for its success in challenging the narrative set by Egyptian state media and in providing a window into events for the outside world.