

Revolution in the Digital Age:
Egypt's Facebook Revolution and Internet Freedom

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Introduction: Innovation that Changed the World

Every so often the history of mankind is dramatically transformed. The past century has brought many technological advances including the automobile, television, radio and computers. Although each are integrated into daily life worldwide, none can compare to capability of the most important technology the world has known. For, “[i]n the early 1960s, a nuclear clash between the Cold War superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, seemed imminent” (Clemmitt). Fear and uncertainty reached dangerous levels and, “U.S. researchers wondered: Could they build a communications network that could survive nuclear combat? Their efforts spurred creation of the Internet, whose technological and social ramifications we are only today beginning to understand” (Clemmitt). With the invention of the internet average citizens had access to immeasurable amounts of information which created a sense of empowerment. Mass media, newspapers and water-cooler gossip were no longer the only sources people could seek information from. Therefore, the internet is significant because it has altered communication and the distribution of knowledge. Yet the most alluring aspect of the technology rests within a social context. In the past decade alone, the internet has reconstructed itself to include the desire of human connection, for that reason it has also become a social outlet. One of the most fascinating elements is social networking websites, in particular Facebook. Launched in 2004, it has already, “changed how people communicate and interact, how marketers sell products, how governments reach out to citizens, even how companies operate. It is altering the character of political activism, and in some countries it is starting to affect the process of democracy itself. This is no longer just a plaything for college students” (Kirkpatrick 15). Facebook has evolved into a revolutionary tool with an extraordinary amount of potential that is only just beginning to surface.

Recent incidents of political activism and protests along with the fallout of the Hosni Mubarak regime in Egypt have been deemed the Facebook Revolution. Certainly, the title presents itself with criticism because the social networking website should not receive credit for the bravery of the Egyptian people. It is important to point out that, “technology is a tool, a methodology for mobilizing movements, not the reason for civil upheaval,” In fact, “[s]everal conditions--social, political and economic--converged to ignite the discontent of the citizens of Egypt. The technologically savvy leaders were tuned into the times, accurately read the emotional state of the public and seized the opportunity to channel the ever-growing discontent into a massive protest” (Tyler-Scott). Facebook did not start the revolution in Egypt. What it did, was act as a tool used to ignite revolutionary thought across the country as well as the world. Regardless of the circumstances, revolutions are fundamentally the same. Blood is shed and citizens are pushed to their limits all in hopes for the eventual shift of power. Although technology and social media have been utilized both successfully and unsuccessfully in pre and post revolutions in various countries, Egypt was able to accomplish their goals as a virtually united nation. The essential feature of the revolution in Egypt was the ability of Facebook to unite suppressed citizens and eventually assist in toppling a corrupt regime. “Indeed, the human race is beginning confusedly to understand at last that it is living in a new and unfamiliar universe,” that can be life altering if used ethically (Ellul 428).

Purpose

My paper will focus on the integral role the Internet and social media have on a global scale. Now more than ever Internet technology is leading the way in all realms of life, most importantly politically. In this paper, I will analyze the Internet and specifically how the social media giant, Facebook was utilized to spark a successful revolution in Egypt in terms of its

magnitude and effects. The Internet is the most important tool to date because it gives people who have traditionally been silenced an opportunity to not only have a voice but unite; making it a dynamic tool subject to both malevolent and virtuous intent. Therefore, the next endeavor requires Internet freedom to be addressed. Arguments regarding the power associated with the Internet, and the fate of Internet freedom have taken precedence in recent debates. American ideology is seen as an indigenous trait of the Internet with freedom of speech and assembly instilled within, resulting in criticism and censorship. The immeasurable magnitude of this relatively new and perplexing technology presents a unique set of challenges, primarily in regard to approach. Evgeny Morozov and Clay Shirky have devoted their careers to analyzing the impact and overall significance of the Internet. Polar opposites, the two scholars provide valuable insight on the direction that should be taken in regards to a freer Internet. By focusing on the arguments presented by Morozov and Shirky, I will introduce alternative viewpoints that dispute the current position of the United States on the topic of Internet Freedom. The global relevance and consequences connected to this issue make it one that needs to be urgently and delicately addressed.

Net Deulsion vs. Political Power

Evgeny Morozov, author of, *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*, claims the Internet is only disguised to be the embodiment of freedom and democracy. In a world where the Internet has been glorified, his book can be criticized as overly pessimistic. Regardless of ones personal opinion, it is important to understand alternative reasoning, and to utilize it as a system of checks-and-balances. Morozov is skeptical of the Internet's ability to produce significant democratic change in traditionally authoritarian regimes. He explains, "the cyber-utopian belief that the Internet would turn us into uber-tolerant citizens of the world, are all too

eager to put our vile prejudices on hold and open up our minds to what we see in our monitors, has proved to be unfounded” (Morozov 247). The argument he makes is based on a utopian lens through which a perfect global community exists. Certainly, any utopian belief is unrealistic. If people believe the Internet is the savior and answer to all, only disappointment awaits them. Although Morozov credits the Internet and social media in certain cases as powerful tools utilized to implement change, he inherently and ultimately discredits them altogether. It is important to understand that, “once a technology is admitted, it plays out its hand; it does what it is designed to do. Our task is to understand what that design is—that is to say, when we admit a new technology to the culture, we must do so with our eyes wide open” (Postman 7). Now more than ever, as inhabitants of a globalized society, it is crucial to understand the impact and significance of our most readily available tool, the Internet. Otherwise, as Morozov warns, the risk of becoming enslaved within it will only continue to intensify.

Clay Shirky, a distinguished writer, consultant and a Professor at New York University, has made a career of studying new media, with a focus on the effects technological networks have among cultures. In stark opposition to Morozov, Shirky is optimistic of the potential embedded within the digital age. In his book, *Here Comes Everybody: the power of organizing without organizations*, he explains that through Internet collaboration social justice can be achieved. Individuals now have the capabilities to operate outside of traditional hierarchical systems and deliver effective results within cyber groups. The Internet provides the masses with free and timely information which has the power to enable attention, awareness and eventually activism. Published in 2010, *Cognitive Surplus: Creativity and Generosity in a Connected Age*, further explores the impact of the Internet, predominantly focusing on social media. Shirky points out that, “[m]ajor new possibilities always create some restructuring of society, because

both the arrival of a new way to communicate and the ending of old constraints alter our connective tissue” (Shirky *Cognitive Surplus* 207-8). Following a post war era, Americans were faced with enormous amounts of free time. Shirky explains this excess amount of time was devoted to watching television. As a result, we became incoherent to more pressing matters. Luckily, as he points out free time has evolved with the standardization of the Internet and intellectuals are becoming actively involved in productive endeavors in cyberspace. Critics of Shirky have argued that consumption of information does not reflect active participation. Certainly, movements require more than just clicking ones mouse or joining a group. Shirky clarifies that internal motivation in conjunction with public value can mobilize people to become agents of the greater public good. Although Shirky’s books are insightful, his article, *The Political Power of Social Media*, summarizes his approach to the dilemma of Internet freedom. Shirky is an important reference because he is one of the most influential advocates of social networking.

Technology is a Tool

Technology is a tool humans have used to redefine the world. A civilization is no longer measured upon their military conquests but their technological advances and capabilities. The invention of the Internet has impacted the world substantially. Communication, politics and the daily life of people worldwide have forever been altered as a result. In 1931 Lewis Mumford stated in his classic book *Technics and Civilization*, “mechanization and regimentation are not new phenomena in history: what is new is the fact that these functions have been projected and embodied in organized forms which dominate every aspect of our existence” (Mumford 4). Certainly, Mumford’s remark remains true today. Contemporary civilization exists within a technological world. The Internet is the most fundamental tool of our existence because, “our

understanding of what is real is different. This is another way of saying that embedded in every tool is an ideological bias, a predisposition to construct the world as one thing rather than another, to value one thing over another, to amplify one sense or skill or attitude more loudly than another” (Postman 13). The Internet is surrounded with the belief that it is the tool which will be used to spread democracy worldwide. Despite the American hope of spreading freedom of speech and access of information to all, we must be patient and realistic in our approach. If effectively harnessed, the Internet has the ability to promote significant change. Likewise, “Facebook and other social networks are widely available around the world [except in countries like China, and Iran, which have restricted access] and encourage the free flow of information for anyone with access to the Internet” (Preston). Undoubtedly, the Internet is one of the most momentous tools ever invented which is rapidly altering ideological boundaries around the world.

The immense influence of technology on the Middle East has been critical to revolutionary thought. Although some believe Eastern countries are technically inferior, the populace has proven otherwise through the application of advanced, liberal technologies. Without uncensored outlets such as Al Jazeera television and the Internet, average citizens would have limited access to beliefs and ideas that challenge suppressive governments. From being, “relatively free from the control of governments [except its own Qatari government], near or far, Al Jazeera is trusted as a chronicler of Arab and Muslim interests” (Seib 15). Within a government that controls the majority of popular media this characteristic holds much more promise in the Middle East than elsewhere. Not surprisingly, “in the opinion of many of its viewers, if its new coverage stirs passions, fine; if those passions swirl out of control, so be it. In the surge of journalistic-political freedom that Al Jazeera’s freewheeling style exemplifies,

restraint is merely an afterthought” (Seib 15). The twenty-four-hour coverage Al Jazeera and the Internet provide loosens a government’s hold on propaganda and, therefore, their influence on public thought. These tools work in conjunction with one another to produce an unprecedented amount of information available to all. As events in the Middle East have proven, the revolutionary nature of uncensored technologies can strengthen the capabilities of those who need it most. The sheer volume of information available provides people the opportunity to acquire the knowledge necessary to make informed decisions that have direct affects. Even, “Mideast experts have pointed to the organizational usefulness of the Internet, but also the influence that news channels like Al-Jazeera have had in both fueling unrest and documenting violence” (Kingsbury). Constant connection permits people to share thoughts, feelings and overall insights to the haunting images seen on television and computer screens. Al Jazeera and the Internet have changed the operation of daily affairs because governments can no longer monopolize the thoughts and actions of its citizens.

In the decades leading up to the revolt, internet technology and social media were scrutinized and labeled as dangerous. No technology is inherently good or evil, the ways it which it is used determines its destiny. Neil Postman, a communication scholar and cultural critic begins his book, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*, by referencing the story of King Thamus of Upper Egypt as told in Plato’s *Phaedrus*. As the story recalls, Thamus was approached by Theuth, who invented among several valuable instruments, writing. Upon claiming his new invention would cultivate not only wisdom but memory, Thamus grows skeptical. The king explains, “as for wisdom, your pupils will have the reputation for it without the reality: they will receive a quantity of information without proper instruction, and in consequence be thought very knowledgeable when they are for the most part quite ignorant. And

because they are filled with the conceit of wisdom instead of real wisdom they will be a burden to society” (Postman 4). Thamus’s insight is inadequate because he neglects to recognize the full potential of the tool. The justification of his argument is insufficient because,

“no matter how completely technics relies upon the objective procedures of the sciences, it does not form an independent system, like the universe: it exists as an element in human culture and it promises well or ill as the social groups that exploit it promise well or ill. The machine itself makes no demands and holds out no promises: it is the human spirit that makes demands and keeps promises” (Mumford 6).

Without doubt, the same can be said of the Internet. The seemingly limitless scope of the technology can either be abused or benefited from. Just as those before it, “unforeseen consequences stand in the way of all those who think they see clearly the direction in which a new technology will take us. Not even those who invent technology can be assumed to be reliable prophets” (Postman 15). With every tool comes responsibility. If the Internet is to be utilized to its maximum capacity the human operating it must do so with good intention and we should all be able to recognize if it is not.

The Age of Social Media

Social media is much more valuable than its critics proclaim. No longer is it used within boundaries confined to purely social contexts. Internet sites such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter have exceeded expectations and have been transformed into priceless tools of activism. Social media, “is a multifaceted, multiscensory environment where communication and content are not immersive learning environments, *per se*, they are platforms for creating a sense of realism particularly in the development and presentation of content and in their use of communication tools that students find engaging, and therefore more realistic” (Rosen 106). The

youth, who are traditionally more apathetic, have responded because they now have a platform for their generations to do so. Younger individuals are becoming more empowered because they are able to use their voice in a powerful platform and are taken seriously. At this point it would be suicidal for those with power to ignore the demands, requests and ideas expressed within social networking. It is no surprise, “the Mubarak regime recognized early on that social media could loosen its grip on power. The government began [disrupting Facebook and Twitter as protesters hit the streets on Jan. 25](#) before [shutting down the Internet](#) two days later” (Calderone). Fortunately, the revolution was already firmly rooted and was able to prosper during the disruption. Cleverly enough, representatives at Google allowed social media find a way to be present by opening up phone lines so Egyptians could call in and their comments would be uploaded onto the Web. This act only exemplified the important role social media played during the revolution. Those who fail to modernize risk deterioration. Instead of being feared or shunned, social media should be used as the ultimate source of feedback. Users supply endless amounts of opinion and information which is made publically available. If anything, social media has proved to be liberating for those logged on.

With five hundred and fifty million users, Facebook is the most significant social media outlet of our time. Founded by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004, the social networking site began as a medium restricted for college students and evolved into a worldwide phenomenon. Facebook proved to be appealing because it, “is a free tool that allows people to express themselves however they choose, and it requires little technical expertise. It has allowed those who would have otherwise be unheard to have a voice, and has allowed people to form connection and to express themselves in ways that would have previously been impossible” (Accidental Activists). The service has provided a virtual community where people are pushed to interact and are

provided a platform in which to do so. Unlike other popular sites, Facebook incorporates various capabilities within it. Not only can you keep in contact with friends but stream video, share links and photos, provide updates and follow interests. With numerous options available users are constantly sharing or posting a wide-range of information, most notably social and political activism. By having tools readily available people are able to discuss issues and become organized. It is becoming increasingly difficult and ignorant to doubt that, “Facebook is bringing the world together. It has become an overarching common cultural experience for people worldwide, especially young people” (Kirkpatrick 15). Recent generations see the potential in this new technology. Social media, such as Facebook has proved to be a powerful force and it will only continue to prosper.

Facebook: A Freedom Fighter?

Facebook has been challenged as a universal tool because it promotes the American ideology of democracy. Certainly, an American based company which originated as a social networking site for college students will reflect the values of its creator. Although the company had national aspirations nobody could have predicted the impact it has made overseas. It is important to understand, “Facebook’s Americanness is revealed not because some Azerbaijan teenager meets a kid from Oklahoma, but it by its intrinsic assumptions about how people ought to behave. Zuckerberg’s values reflect the liberties of American discourse. Facebook carries those values around the world, and that’s having both positive and negative effects” (Kirkpatrick 279). As a tool, Facebook does promote freedom of speech. Even though the right is associated with American democratic ideals, freedom to speak without consequence should be a requisite for citizens worldwide. Certain leaders who deny citizens their voice are depriving them of their humanity. Here, on United States soil many of us take our natural born liberties for granted. It is

important to recognize that, “in some countries Facebook’s empowerment of the individual may feel even more important than elsewhere. Educated young people in the Middle East are often passionate and active Facebook users” (Kirkpatrick 281). Since the Mubarak regime came to power just over three decades ago, the people of Egypt have had their rights restricted. Critics who callously judge Facebook’s role in the revolution may only have a skewed vision of an American born company deceiving destitute individuals for their own interests. Clearly, those with such beliefs are ignorant about the revolution itself. Egyptians chose to use Facebook as a platform to rise-up against corruption. For victims of government repression, democratic ideology is not an unhealthy or senseless reason to fight. Facebook, and the American values it promotes should be acknowledged as a tool armed with ideals that can result in liberation.

We Are All Khaled Said

Khaled Said became the symbol of the revolution across Egypt through the use of Facebook. June sixth, two-thousand-and-ten, sealed the fate of the young business man while at an internet café in Alexandria. Said was targeted because he was planning to release video evidence of Egyptian police officers dividing the contents of recently confiscated marijuana. When the officers entered the café, demanding to see identification from everyone, he refused. At that point his fate was sealed, for the officers dragged him out of the establishment and threw him in the street where they continuously beat him for twenty minutes as on-lookers watched in horror. Upon realizing Said had died and receiving the order to leave his body in the street, it seemed as though yet another Egyptian casualty was to go unnoticed. Yet, as the gruesome photos of Said’s disfigured face began to circulate across the Internet, one man responded and changed the momentum of the movement as a result. Egyptian native, Wael Ghonim, a Google marketing executive in the Middle East, had been secretly utilizing Facebook to spur protests

under the guise of El Shaheed. After seeing the photos, Ghonim created a new Facebook group title, “We Are all Khaled Said”. The title reflects the grim reality of police brutality all Egyptians are threatened with. Ghonim anonymously called for Egyptians to participate in a mass demonstration against the Mubarak regime. His request was answered, “as the page’s following approached 400,000 people, and word of the event spread, it hosted a constant stream of news, photo and video, downloadable flyers, and emotional entreaties for all Egyptians to join the push” (Giglio). Facebook had done its part, the fate and success of the protest now rested within the citizens. To ensure participation one post read, “We are all Khaled Said: Activists from all over Egypt have now agreed to make the 25th January, the day to start Egyptians’ peaceful uprising against torture, poverty, corruption and unemployment in Egypt. Stand up for your rights Egyptians. To our International friends: Support us please in every possible way to make this day a success” (“How Facebook Started”). To consider the protest in Cairo and others across Egypt on January twenty-fifth a success would be an injustice to the activists who bravely took a stand against an oppressive government in order to regain what was rightfully theirs. Khaled Said and others who suffered the same fate did not die in vein.

Social Media as a Political Tool

The debate surrounding the power associated with social networking as a political instrument has stimulated interest worldwide since the success of the Egyptian Revolution. “There are, broadly speaking, two arguments against the idea that social media will make a difference in national politics. The first is that the tools are themselves ineffective, and the second is that they produce as much harm to democratization as good, because repressive governments are becoming better at using these tools to suppress dissent,” explains Shirky (Shirky, *The Political Power* 7). Certainly the achievements of Egypt followed by Syria and

other authoritarian countries diminish the first argument that social media is inadequate. Political dissent is considerably more threatening in a technological age. Consequently, repressive governments are constantly working to restrain opposition. Despite some unfortunate success, complete control is unachievable. Instead, some governments are restricting access altogether, creating a whole new set of problems for both themselves and their citizens. Although these concerns are prevalent, the crucial element to consider is whether social networking will be abused by powers who wish to impose their ideals on vulnerable countries. Social media has been described as a tool with the ability to spread democratic ideals on a global scale. As a result questions of American imperialism have arisen. Morozov argues that: "When American diplomats call Facebook a tool for democracy promotion, it's safe to assume that the rest of the world believes that America is keen to exploit this tool to its fullest potential rather than just stare at it in awe" (Morozov 25). Morozov assumes other nations will be led to believe that armed with technological innovations which appear to be inherently democratic, The United States will further their quest for democratization of the world.

Social justice and freedom are not universal rights. Even in the twenty-first century, governments are still overpowering and silencing their people. Iran, China, Burma and Cuba are among the most repressive. The fear surrounding the idea that, "social media can help bring political change is that both dissidents and governments think they can. All over the world, activists believe in the utility of these tools and take steps to use them accordingly. And the governments they contend with think social media tools are powerful, too, and are willing to harass, arrest, exile, or kill users in response" (Shirky, *The Political Power* 9). As civil unrest becomes more widespread with the assistance of social media, governments become vulnerable. Control is then maintained through the threat of violence. Still, as Egypt was proven intimidation

is not always successful. Governments are also beginning to be held responsible from other countries and organizations for their actions. In response to the issue, various human rights organizations, Universities and companies, including Google, Yahoo and Microsoft, have created The Global Network Initiative. The organization was designed to prevent human rights and freedom of expression and privacy from being censored and abused (Global Network Initiative). Already, “[a] united front has proved effective, as was shown last summer when international tech companies forced the Chinese government to back away from its plan to require the instillation of filtering software called Green Dam/Youth Escort in every computer sold in China” (Simon). The organization exhibited that common regard for human decency could overcome barriers forged against independence. Certainly, there is still power in numbers.

The internet has the capability to produce political change more effectively than other technologies because of social media. Public, virtual forums such as Facebook allow citizens to react to issues and topics in an open environment where discussion is free to flourish. In the article, *The Political Power of Social Media*, Shirky references a prominent study done by two leading sociologists Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld. After the nineteen forty-eight presidential election the two scholars found that mass media did not have as heavy of an impact on political beliefs as expected. The two scholars justified their findings by proposing that, “opinions are first transmitted by the media, and then they get echoed by friends, family members, and colleagues. It is in this second, social step that political opinions are formed,” Shirky expands on this idea by explaining, “[t]his is the step in which the Internet in general, and social media in particular, can make a difference” (Shirky, *The Political Power* 5). Social media allows users to engage in conversation with not only people in close proximity but people whom face-to-face interaction is limited which in turn impacts decision-making. Accordingly, Shirky further acknowledges that,

“access to information is far less important, politically, than access to conversation. Moreover, a public sphere is more likely to emerge in a society as a result of people's dissatisfaction with matters of economics or day-to-day governance than from their embrace of abstract political ideals” (Shirky, *The Political Power* 5). Thoughts and ideas shared by people whom an individual respects and values are greatly influential. No longer are the hegemonic ideals of the local media and dinner-table conversation the only outlets for information and interaction. The Internet has altered access to knowledge because it can now be acquired unfiltered. Just, “[a]s with the printing press, the Internet spreads not just media consumption but media production as well—it allows people to privately and publicly articulate and debate a welter of conflicting views” (Shirky, *The Political Power* 5). Social media has become the platform of political freedom.

Internet Freedom

Now that the political power of the Internet has been recognized the next step is to determine the fate of Internet freedom. The challenge with proposing a strategy to protect Internet freedom rests within the definition of the phrase itself. Certainly, the translation of freedom is not consistent across borders. Therefore, it is important to consider who will get to determine a universal doctrine that will impact nations, cultures and individuals. Another challenge to confront is enforcement of such a policy. What measures will be taken if countries refuse to comply? Surely these are questions that need to be answered if the concept of freedom in the digital age is to be taken seriously, as it should be. The world was able to witness the influence the Internet can have upon liberating a suppressed nation and therefore the gravity of protecting technological freedom should not be taken lightly. The revolution in Egypt has, “bolster[ed] the idea that the Internet cannot be controlled, and that even the most repressive and

determined government cannot stop the flow of information” (Simon). Unfortunately this is inaccurate because repressive governments do heavily censor mediums that criticize and question their authority. This is precisely why Internet freedom is an issue in the first place and needs to be addressed. As John Mathiason, “an adjunct professor for international education and distance learning at Syracuse University” explains: “To keep the system interoperable, a new governance structure must develop that is embraced by an unusually diverse group of players, including governments, domestic and international businesses and individual users” (Clemmitt). Global policies should be assembled that establish a clear protocol for maintaining the universal information infrastructure. Together much more can be accomplished because any imbalance in the system can jeopardize the stability of the foundation. The debate surrounding the independence of the World Wide Web is nothing new, but, now more than ever it is important to a stable solution.

The United States and Internet Freedom

Currently, The United States practices a policy of commitment to internet freedom. Hillary Clinton, the United States Secretary of State, gave an important speech where she discussed both the challenges and opportunities associated with the technological tool. Clinton expressed that, “on their own, new technologies do not take sides in the struggle for freedom and progress, but the United States does. We stand for a single internet where all of humanity has equal access to knowledge and ideas. And we recognize that the world’s information infrastructure will become what we and others make of it” (Clinton). After listening to the speech, critics proclaimed it was full of empty rhetoric that fundamentally undermined its intent. Throughout the speech, Clinton explicitly proclaims that Internet freedom should be consistent with American philosophy. The problem here is that an uncensored Internet may not align with

other countries' definitions. Regardless, Clinton was emphasizing an important point that, "[t]he potential for improved access to increased volumes of better information to move greater numbers of people to more intensive and consistent political engagement has been routinely held out as one of the key democratic promises of emerging media technologies" (Barney 5).

Certainly, such promises can only be upheld if Internet freedom is not endangered. By spreading such freedoms, the United States and its allies can hope to extend liability to governments who have a history of subduing their citizens. Meanwhile, messages spread should not include false hope. For, "amid this unprecedented surge in connectivity, we must also recognize that these technologies are not an unmitigated blessing. These tools are also being exploited to undermine human progress and political rights. Just as steel can be used to build hospitals or machine guns, or nuclear power can either energize a city or destroy it" (Clinton). The possibility of eventual expansion of independence is much more valuable than condemning a technology prematurely based on uncertainty.

Internet freedom, as described by the United States government sounds splendid but in retrospect may not be applicable. Undoubtedly, Internet freedom will always be connected with American ideology. Morozov and Shirky both believe Internet freedom cannot be achieved if countries, especially those who do not affiliate with the United States, believe it is a purely democratic tool. Shirky believes, "the U.S. government should work for conditions that increase the conservative dilemma, appealing to states' self-interest rather than the contentious virtue of freedom, as a way to create or strengthen countries' public spheres" (Shirky *The Political Power* 7). A repressive government is much more likely to adopt a policy if there is something to gain, especially monetarily. According to Shirky, reopening access to censored websites is, "politically appealing, action-oriented, and almost certainly wrong. This strategy places too

much emphasis on access to outside information sources and not enough on encouraging communication among citizens, which would strengthen civil society” (“Tweeting Toward Internet”). Since the ultimate goal of Internet freedom proposed by Clinton is for citizens worldwide to have the right to hold their government’s accountable, simply reopening access to foreign opinion is not enough. In Morozov’s view of the topic of Internet freedom is important but undermined by the government. He explains: “The danger here is that Washington’s noble and idealistic push to promote Internet freedom may serve as yet another excuse not to re-examine and correct the deeply cynical realpolitik foundations of US foreign policy” (Morozov 4). Before advocating a policy about Internet freedom, the United States should restructure its existing policies that may be hypocritical. Furthermore Morozov, “argues that it’s too late. Washington has already violated the number one rule of promoting Internet freedom: ‘Don’t talk about promoting Internet freedom’” (“Tweeting Toward Internet”). The United States cannot rely upon barren rhetoric to promise emancipation for the Internet from restraint and censorship.

Alternative Standpoints

Morozov maintains that although the Internet has achieved undeniable success as a prominent tool of the twenty-first century, a regulation policy needs to be adopted. He cautiously admits, “the irony of the Internet is that while it never delivered on the uber-utopian promises of a world without nationalism or extremism, it still delivered more than even the most radical optimists could have ever wished for” (Morozov 282). Although the self-proclaimed Cyber-realist recognizes the significant impact the tool has been used for, he like many others is still skeptical of our reliance on it. Furthermore, it cannot be assumed that the technology will deliver American ideology to all its users. In fact, no one can be certain of the impact the technology will make in the future. Morozov explains, “the risk here is that given the relative success of this

young technology, some may assume that it would be best to leave it alone rather than subject it to regulation of any kind. This is a misguided view. The recognition of the revolutionary nature of a technology is a poor excuse not to regulate it” (Morozov 282). The excitement surrounding the tool may be short lived because globalization with Internet freedom may create an even more complex set of consequences that we are not prepared for. Therefore, he argues, “smart regulation, if anything, is a first sign that society is serious about the technology in question and believes that it is here to stay; that it is eager to think through the consequences; and that it wants to find ways to unleash and harvest its revolutionary potential” (Morozov 282). Without taking precautions and treating this tool with careful attention others may be tempted to utilize it with ill intention. Recognizing that both good and bad can stem from such a unique technology is vital to maintain its longevity. For Morozov, protecting Internet freedom may not include unlimited access but it strategically allows its potential to be harnessed for good. Otherwise the harsh reality of an untamed Internet might surpass expectations for the wrong reasons.

Shirky, on the other hand, bears a different approach to Internet freedom. As previously mentioned, he strongly advocates the use of the Internet and social media in particular to build a sense of shared awareness that has the ability to strengthen public spheres. Surprisingly, despite his optimism of the tool he takes a very realistic approach. He explains that although certain countries may not support a freer Internet, “nearly every country in the world desires economic growth. Since governments jeopardize that growth when they ban technologies that can be used for both political and economic coordination, the United States should rely on countries' economic incentives to allow widespread media use”(Shirky, *The Political Power* 7). Globalization has transformed the way the world operates, with the Internet being the fundamental tool. Without access to global markets a country's economy will suffer and if

upheld long enough could eventually deteriorate altogether, which is also likely to end in civil unrest. Thus, “for these reasons, it makes more sense to invest in social media as general, rather than specifically political, tools to promote self-governance” (Shirky, *The Political Power* 7). By appealing to loose objectives Internet freedom would have a chance to thrive. Still, not every country will embrace a freer Internet especially if their affiliation with the United States is unfriendly. Economic incentives should make it more attractive even if this requires a more open Internet. Clearly, “the norm of free speech is inherently political and far from universally shared. To the degree that the United States makes free speech a first-order goal, it should expect that goal to work relatively well in democratic countries that are allies, less well in undemocratic countries that are allies, and least of all in undemocratic countries that are not allies” (Shirky, *The Political Power* 7). Due to the sensitive nature of Internet freedom, alternative methods must be thoroughly examined if a freer Internet is to prevail.

Internet freedom is as complicated as the tool itself. In order to seriously entertain the idea of it, the approach taken needs to be both realistic and optimistic. Although Morozov and Shirky are on opposite ends of the spectrum, both agree the integrity of the tool needs to be addressed. At this point, the only kosher solution is to let the technology evolve naturally because Internet freedom ultimately reflects the freedom of the people who use it. Albeit, the Internet itself can be viewed as a tool for regulation because it provides a system of checks and balances by holding individuals, organizations and governments alike, accountable for their actions. The Internet and the freedom associated with it will mature despite proposed intervention. Regardless of opinion, the reality is, “media technologies have effect and the people who use them have responsibilities; they are not mere bystanders while conflict and change occur. More specifically, any appraisal of the many elements of international relations should

include careful evaluation of media roles.” New media has now taken digital form and is much more complicated than previously anticipated. With the advancement of the Internet, careful consideration needs to be taken because, “the increasing speed, pervasiveness, and influence of media-borne information require revised evaluations of these phenomena” (Seib 3). Before interfering with such an obvious significant tool we should let it develop through the minds of those who consume it. After all, the Internet does not have a predetermined course in which it will evolve, for that responsibility is left up to humanity.

Conclusion

The world has only begun to see the universal effects of technology. The Internet is a unique tool because it is an abyss of information that cannot be completely controlled. Decisions about Internet freedom made today will have a lasting effect; making it the responsibility of those who utilize the Internet to do so with good will. As the iGeneration (those born after 1990) matures, revolution and change sparked by the internet could be common practice. Already, the tool has had a profound effect on the new generation because they are the first to enter the world where the most significant tool to date already exists. Growing up in a technological world can be hazardous if the tools themselves become unrecognizable. Both the tool and user become susceptible to manipulation and fraud when blindly used. Dr. Rosen, author of *Rewired: Understanding the IGeneration and the Way They Learn*, shares an example of this phenomenon by asking a ten-year-old girl, “why she liked technology so much” to which she replied:

“What do you mean why do I like technology? Isn't everything technology? I guess I don't even think about it. It's sorta like the sky, ya know. I don't think about the sky. I just know that when I look up it's there. Same with technology. It's just everywhere.” To Ashley, technology is not a tool to use, as it is for many adults. It is the center of her life

and... she most certainly is consumed with it and by it” (Rosen 27).

Although much of the world is already immersed within technology we must not come to rely on it. By protecting Internet freedom, we will be simultaneously protecting those who will inherit the responsibility. Future generations must learn from example that technology and the Internet in particular, are instruments that should be used with purpose. The capabilities that rest within the Internet are only as enduring as those who operate it.

Internet technology and social media have been established as paramount forces in spreading political autonomy after the Egyptian revolution. The modern tools assisted in toppling archaic barriers that suppressed a nation and permanently altered critical perspectives of political mediums. By having access to efficient and unlimited amounts of information, citizens worldwide can follow suit and begin to hold their governments accountable. Evgeny Morozov and Clay Shirky denounced the United States present position on managing the growing issue of Internet freedom. Despite their differences, both agree that the Internet has already surpassed expectations and needs to be safeguarded. As with any technology, ambivalence exists: “So while it is clear that the spread of these technologies is transforming our world, it is still unclear how that transformation will affect the human rights and the human welfare of the world’s population” (Clinton). Still, despite abrasive speculation, the future of the Internet is certain; it is here to stay. Progressive ideals of the technology were reflected within the uprising because, “everything was done by the people [for] the people, and that’s the power of the Internet...If you want to liberate [a people] give them the Internet” (“Tweeting Toward Internet”). The technology can provide relief and even freedom to suppressed individuals more successfully than any that preceded it. Again, “as Egypt and Tunisia have proven, social media tools can play a significant role as activists battle authoritarian regimes, particularly given the tight control

dictators typically wield over the official media. Tomorrow's revolution, as Ghonim would likely attest, may be taking shape on Facebook today" (Calderone). A voice and a platform can be exceptionally powerful and every once in a while a dictatorship can fall as a result. Facebook was that platform and anyone be the voice. If you find yourself wondering what is going to happen next, take Ghonim's advice and, "ask Facebook" (Calderone).

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