The Role and Implications of ICTs in the Egyptian Revolution

Khaled Galal

Introduction

Khaled Galal

- Branding and communication consultant.

- Working with businesses and organisations to integrate new media solutions into their communications strategies.

- Developed communications programme based social and new media for Amnesty International's Arabic Growth Project.

- Previously Creative Director with McCann Erickson handling key accounts in the Middle East including Exxon Mobil, Kodak and MasterCard.
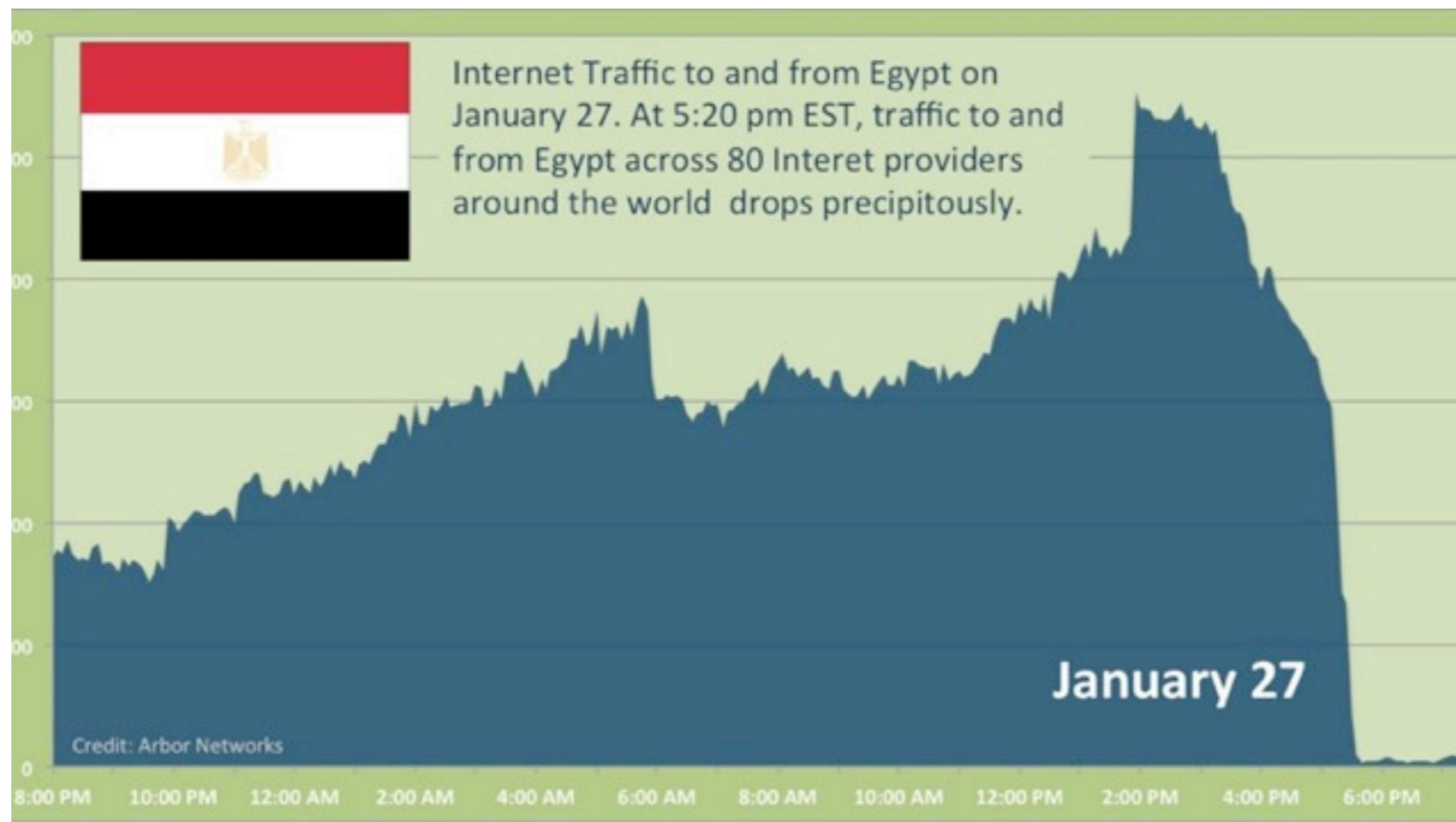
'The revolution is the brainchild of the internet'

Egyptian opposition leader *Mohammed ElBaradei* referring to how young Egyptians rallied through Facebook groups to create an agenda for change in the country.

A Horizontal Revolution

- A revolution without a leader, a fixed structural or organisational hierarchy, reflecting the nature of the medium where it was born.

- Positive: Difficult to target or weaken by conventional methods.

- Negative: Inability to engage with the following political process and negotiations that require a traditional organisational structure.

The Communication Blackout

Internet Traffic to and from Egypt on January 27. At 5:20 pm EST, traffic to and from Egypt across 80 Interet providers around the world drops precipitously.

January 27

Credit: Arbor Networks

The unprecedented total communication blackout aimed to
1) Eliminate the use of social networks in the organisation of protests.
2) Coverup security forces repressive actions against protestors from international media and community.

Despite the Communication Blackout ...

- The medium demonstrates its decentralised, flexible and horizontal nature.

- 'Local' Internet hubs created across the country to facilitate communication and replace centralised 'global' servers such as FB and Twitter.

manal Manal Hassan
♻ @alaa: I'm hearing news of a local internet being established in Alexandria (basically dns servers and local websites) #Jan25
31 Jan

Despite the Communication Blackout ...

- With 'Local' Internet hubs facilitating national communication, Twitter launched Speak2Tweet in response to the Egyptian situation, allowing landline phone users to voice-tweet through the phone and informing the world about real events in Egypt.

31 Jan

alaa Alaa Abd El Fattah ↺ by manal
How Egyptians Can Tweet Without Internet - http://goo.gl/PddjO
"access Speak2Tweet Call +16504194196/ +390662207294 or +97316199855"

31 Jan

The Divide Between the Egyptian 'Electronic' Opinion and Public Opinion

- In the referendum on constitutional changes in Egypt, there was a clear contrast between the 'electronic' opinion and the real results. The internet community overwhelmingly rejected the changes, the changes however were approved by 78% of the popular votes in the actual referendum.

نعم

(23 صوت) 42%

لا

(32 صوت) 58%

لا أهتم

(0 صوت) 0%

إجمالى عدد الأصوات : 55

نعم

(3 صوت) 20%

لا

(12 صوت) 80%

لا أهتم

(0 صوت) 0%

إجمالى عدد الأصوات : 15

Do you agree with the suggested constitutional changes?

Yes: 42%   No: 58%

Do the approved constitutional changes represent the demands of the revolution?
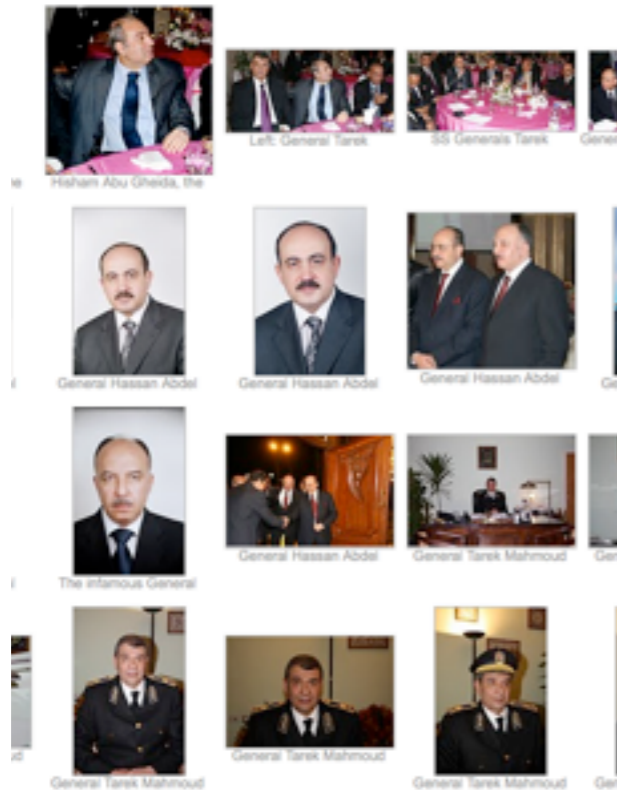
Yes: 20%   No: 80%

Ethical Issues Facing Social Media

- Content posted by Egyptian Activists is being removed from Social Networks such as Flickr and YouTube.

- Growing pressure from governments across the Middle East on Facebook to remove pages calling for demonstrations.

- "That new role for social media has put these companies in a difficult position: how to accommodate the growing use for political purposes while appearing neutral and maintaining the practices and policies that made these services popular in the first place." (NY Times)

Ethical Issues Facing Social Media

Pictures of Egypt's SS officers removed from Flickr.

FB page calling for a 3rd Palestinian Intifada is under increasing pressure.

YouTube removed a video showing Egyptian police using torture.

We are all Khaled Said, Literally

- **'We are all Khaled Said'** was the Facebook page that ignited the revolution.

- Now, the Egyptian interim government, the ruling military council and all major governmental departments are actively using Facebook and Twitter with significant numbers of followers.

Research Directions

- How can digital movements in Egypt and across the ME translate their distributed and decentralised communication power into focused political power?

- What are the lessons learnt by the states, activists and technology companies from the Egyptian communication blackout?

- What is the effect of the increasing use of social media for political purposes on their policies?

Research Directions

- The internet penetration in Egypt is 21% versus 35% in Tunisia and 5.5% in Libya, would this difference reflect on each revolution and the influence of digital movements in shaping the future?

- The increasing use of social media by the states and governments.

Thank You