Name: Date: Hr:

SOCIAL MEDIA + ARAB SPRING REVOLUTIONS

<u>DO NOW:</u> What forms of social media do you use? How often do you use social media? What are 3 reasons you use it?

<u>DIRECTIONS:</u> Read the following (3) articles and answer the corresponding questions.

New study quantifies use of social media in Arab Spring

In the 21st century, the revolution may not be televised – but it likely will be tweeted, blogged, texted and organized on Facebook, recent experience suggests.

After analyzing more than 3 million tweets, gigabytes of YouTube content and thousands of blog posts, a new study finds that social media played a central role in shaping political debates in the Arab Spring. Conversations about revolution often preceded major events, and social media has carried inspiring stories of protest across international borders.

"Our evidence suggests that social media carried a cascade *(flow)* of messages about freedom and democracy across North Africa and the Middle East, and helped raise expectations for the success of political uprising," said **Philip Howard**, the project lead. "People who shared interest in democracy built extensive social networks and organized political action. Social media became a critical part of the toolkit for greater freedom."

During the week before Egyptian president Hosni Mubaraks resignation, for example, the total rate of tweets from Egypt — and around the world — about political change in that country ballooned from 2,300 a day to 230,000 a day. Videos featuring protest and political commentary went viral – the top 23 videos received nearly 5.5 million views. The amount of content produced online by opposition groups, in Facebook and political blogs, increased dramatically.

"Twitter offers us the clearest evidence of where individuals engaging in democratic conversations were located during the revolutions," Howard said. Twitter provides a window into the broader world of digital conversations, many of which probably involved cell phones to send text, pictures or voice messages, he said. In Tunisia, for example, less than 20 percent of the population uses social media, but almost everyone has access to a mobile phone.

Political discussion in blogs presaged *(foreshadowed)* the turn of popular opinion in both Tunisia and Egypt. In Tunisia, conversations about liberty, democracy and revolution on blogs and on Twitter often immediately preceded mass protests. Twenty percent of blogs were evaluating Ben Alis leadership the day he resigned from office (Jan. 14), up from just 5 percent the month before. Subsequently, the primary topic for Tunisian blogs was "revolution" until a public rally of at least 100,000 people eventually forced the old regimes remaining leaders to relinquish power.

In the case of both Tunisias and Egypts revolutions, discussion spanned borders. In the two weeks after Mubaraks resignation, there was an average of 2,400 tweets a day from people in neighboring countries about the political situation in Egypt. In Tunisia after Ben Alis resignation, there were about 2,200 tweets a day.

"In other words," Howard said, "people throughout the region were drawn into an extended conversation about social uprising. The success of demands for political change in Egypt and Tunisia led individuals in other countries to pick up the conversation. It helped create discussion across the region."

Howard said that although social media did not cause the upheaval in North Africa, they altered the capacity of citizens to affect domestic politics. Online activists created a virtual ecology of civil society, debating contentious *(controversial; hot)* issues that could not be discussed in public.

Ironically, government efforts to crack down on social media may have incited *(caused)* more public activism, especially in Egypt. People who were isolated by efforts to shut down the Internet, mostly middle-class Egyptians, may have gone to the streets when they could no longer follow the unrest through social media, Howard said.

"Recent events show us that the public sense of shared grievance and potential for change can develop rapidly**,"** he said. "These dictators for a long time had many political enemies, but they were fragmented. So opponents used social media to identify goals, build solidarity and organize demonstrations."

1) In 3 sentences, describe the main idea of this article.

2) According to this article, what are 3 ways that social media helped the Arab revolutions?

3) Did conversations about revolution usually occur on twitter before a major event OR after? Explain why this was important.

4) What does the writer mean when he describes the government's efforts to crack down on social media as 'ironic'? (see 2nd to last paragraph)

World Development book case study: the role of social networking in the Arab Spring

…Each element of the digital technology used in communication has a particular function. The internet is useful for information dissemination and news gathering, social media for connecting and co-ordinating groups and individuals, mobile phones for taking photographs of what is happening and making it available to a wide global audience and satellite television for instant global reporting of events. For dissident groups, all of these digital tools allow them to bring together remote and often disparate groups and give them channels to bypass the conventional media, which is usually state controlled and unwilling to broadcast any news of civil unrest and opposition to the government.

Rapid internet interaction through Twitter and Facebook gave information to the protesters about how to counteract the security forces as they tried to disperse the protesters, maps showing locations for protest meetings and practical advice about such things as what to do when teargas is used against groups of protesters. All of these things increased the pressure that the protest movements were able to exert on their governments. The governments in Tunisia and Egypt were very unhappy about the often brutal images of repression of the protests by government security forces and both governments tried to block the social-networking sites. In Tunisia, the effect was to increase the size of protest demonstrations and the Tunisian president, Zine el Abidine Ben Ali, was forced to change his strategy. He apologized for blocking the sites and reopened them. He offered to open talks with the dissident groups but by that time it was too late to save his government. He resigned on 16 January and an interim coalition government was set up….

There is an argument to be made that the role of technology in these events has been overstated. The frequent cry is that it was not laptops that marched on Tahrir Square but people with a common cause that they had already identified. As far as they are concerned, revolution is nothing new and the impact of the new technology in the Arab Spring has mostly been reported by people who are using the technology themselves. Its importance, they say, has been exaggerated…

1) According to this article, what are 3 ways that social media helped the Arab revolutions? (do NOT repeat answers given to prior question)

2) Explain this quote from the last paragraph in your own words: *"There is an argument to be made that the role of technology in these events has been overstated. The frequent cry is that it was not laptops that marched on Tahrir Square but people with a common cause that they had already identified."*

Revolutions, Terrorists, and Tweets: Social Media and the Arab Spring

The Heritage Foundation will be holding a public event on February 13 to discuss the role of social media in the Arab Spring [2] with experts from Heritage, Freedom House, and the Department of State.

Social media showed its political potential during the Arab Spring, allowing "crowdsourcing" and the coordination of large-scale protests. Street activists scheduled demonstrations through mass Facebook messages and globally communicated up-to-the-minute updates through Twitter. The coordination and communication capabilities available previously only to well-equipped and funded forces was at the fingertips of anyone with a cell phone or computer.

But revolutions against autocratic governments aren't the only way social media are being used. Al-Shabaab, a Somali-based Islamist terrorist group, uses Twitter [3] to announce assassinations and bombings. Who needs pamphlets when 140 characters of militant propaganda attract followers by the tens of thousands? After al-Shabaab threatened to kill two Kenyan hostages and tweeted pictures of dead French commandos killed in January's failed hostage rescue [4], Twitter removed their account [5]. But two weeks later, the group has a new Twitter account, gaining over 1,100 followers in just two days.

Al-Qaeda has also jumped on the social media bandwagon. The terrorist group increasingly uses social media to recruit, train, and coordinate members [6]. Recruits can watch training videos on YouTube and connect with terrorist leaders on Facebook.

Social media have even created new fronts in armed conflict. Israel and Hamas waged a tweet war [7] last November, tweeting barrages [8] back and forth of thinly veiled threats and military announcements. Israel fired off a tweet celebrating the "elimination" of a Hamas leader [9]. Hamas responded [10] with a volley of threats. Israel tweeted back a YouTube video[11] of strike attacks.

As cyber activists keep leveraging social networks as tools for change, authoritarian governments are developing increasingly sophisticated means of limiting Internet freedom. Palestine sentenced a man to a year in jail [12] for insulting President Mahmoud Abbas on Facebook. Syria turned off electricity and telephone service [13] to anti-regime neighborhoods to cut off their access to social media. Iran is even attempting to eliminate the Internet [14] entirely in favor of a national government-controlled intranet.

As social media become an increasingly common forum for cyber activism and even warfare [15], developing technology will continue to alter how people and governments face change.

1) In 3 sentences, explain the main idea of this article.

2) Explain the difference between this article and the first two articles.

3) After reading these three articles, do you think that social media in the Middle East has more potential to do GOOD or more potential to cause HARM? Explain why. Answer in 3+ complete sentences.

POST READING REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1) How does reading these articles change the way you view social media? (3+ sentences)

2) List 5 SPECIFIC ways YOU personally could use social media to cause HARM.

3) List 5 SPECIFIC ways YOU personally could use social media to do GOOD.

Cartoon on the Arab Spring

Which conclusion about the Arab Spring is best supported by this cartoon?
- A. Arab leaders have a short life expectancy
- B. The Arab world has a long tradition of democratically elected leaders
- C. Revolutions rarely spread from one country to another
- D. The uprisings resulted in several leaders being removed from power

The Arab Spring can best be understood in the context of which of the following?
- A. Social media sometimes leads to political unrest and rapid change
- B. Democratically elected leaders depend on social media to stay in power
- C. Ideas are slow to spread from one country to another
- D. Single-party rule is an effective way to rule a country