

## Chapter 3

# Social Media and Fake News Impact on Social Movements: Examples From Tunisia and Egypt

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Social media has become the favored digital communication channel and offers many advantages, such as spreading information faster than conventional media. However, social media's disadvantages have been the increase in fake news driven mainly by the growing digitalization of information and the increase of deepfakes. Nowadays, fake news has a new scope beyond traditional, cold war-style disinformation because of its unprecedented capacity to mobilize an assortment of news and media simultaneously. The impact of social media and fake news so dramatically impacted social movements in both Tunisia and Egypt that it is often characterized as the first social media-influenced social movement. These movements became known as the Arab Spring, which was mainly in response to oppressive regimes and low standard of living. This chapter focuses on the lead-up and impact of social media, and online-activists that influenced the Arab Spring. The authors use a narrative and exploratory research approach to conceptually understand digital communication's role and impact throughout the Arab Spring.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In the last two decades, technological advancements such as the Internet and other Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have facilitated the fast-spreading of information. The Internet has changed the way people communicate with others and how they see the world. Social media platforms came because the Internet arrived. Much as they have provided easier access to millions of people to create and pass across their messages, they have also increased the chances of misinformation and manipulation of information. Indeed, individuals are left to rely on their judgments to determine if the messages they read, see, or hear are true or not (Tsipursky and Morford, 2018). Nowadays, the younger generations are getting their news from social media and the Internet.

People have different interpretations of what is considered fake news. However, many definitions are ideological because fake stories promote specific ideas or people, usually by discrediting others (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017). Misinformation, fake news, and propaganda have historically been present in political campaigns as far back as the 1800s (Hundley, 2017). Additionally, certain politicians misinform to deceive the people and to attract more supporters. There exists a relationship between society and the media. The media provide avenues to reach more people. However, the more society depends on the media to function, the more the media influence society (Ball-Rokeach et al., 1990).

The increase in the spread of fake news potentially leads to volatile consequences (McKernan, 2017). This view is not new. Some governments and organizations gain from misinformation because some of the recipients of their messages get confused from their deliberate, vague, or ambiguous messages. These keep such governments in control of the flow of information. With the extensive prospects of the Internet and other digital communication tools, it is even easier to hide dark motives and further spread misinformation in different formats. Indeed, social media have shown how political participation, including social movements, can be transformed.

Social movements mobilize society members for social action against a perceived social problem by operating on multiple levels: interpersonal, structural, cultural, and institutional (Dill and Zambrana, 2009). With the spread of Internet technology, social movements have created a glocalization atmosphere. In other words, social movements are global and local at the same time while collectively coming together to challenge what individuals can see as inequality. They create challenges or call for protests. Other people become aware of these because their causes are posted on social media. Some social movements are national or international based. Either way, they have remarkable mass media coverage reaching the global audience. Historically, protests for social inequality are in formal policy and legislation (Gutherie, 1997; Keller, 1990), but these protests start with some individuals who have power in that society

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