

Evolution not revolution: A longitudinal study of the role of the Internet in Morocco's "Third Way"

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Abstract

Using a longitudinal approach and content analysis, this article examines the implications of the Internet and social media for collective action and democratic transition in Morocco. The article argues that the impact of the Internet and social media on Morocco's political scene is an evolutionary rather than a revolutionary one. The new communication tools have certainly empowered oppositional groups and organisations to challenge Moroccan state's firm grip over power and the public sphere, generating a pseudo process promising democratic transition in the country. New technologies, however, have not been a game changer as they are conditioned by and filtered through existing socio-economic and power dynamics, and the failure of political actors themselves to build a genuine agonistic public sphere built on inclusion rather than exclusion.

Keywords: *Morocco, Internet, Arab Spring, Facebook, agonistic public sphere, longitudinal approach.*

Introduction

The popular uprisings, generally dubbed the “Arab Spring,” that broke out five years ago in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, triggered a lot of euphoria because of their perceived democratic and liberating potential. Far from ushering the region into democracy and stability, the uprisings have, on the contrary, culminated in counter-revolutions, civil wars, and deep political and sectarian divisions of unprecedented scale in the modern history of the MENA countries. Beyond the debate about the significance and implications of these events for the future of these countries, the role of the new information and communication technologies in the uprisings continues to be a deeply polarized topic in academia. Davison (2015, p. 4) identifies two dominant perspectives in the literature. The first one stresses that the Internet and social media played a significant role “by mobilizing people, giving them a space to express their dissatisfactions, to increase solidarity around a common cause, and to organize themselves.” In contrast, the second one argues that these tools have had a minimal role, with historical, political and socioeconomic reasons as the main motivators. The effects of globalism on the region, failure of development policies, epidemic corruption and cronyism, soaring unemployment rates, especially among young and highly educated people, the expansion of middle classes, repression and abysmal records of basic human rights are among the most cited factors that have coalesced to produce an optimal setting for radical dissent and popular revolutions to flourish (Allam, 2014; Beinine 2012; El Amrani 2012; Frangonikolopoulos & Chapsos, 2014; Harb, 2011; Khosrokhavor 2012; Mason 2014).

The polarization and inconclusiveness around the role of the Internet and social media in the uprisings can be partly attributed to the fact that most studies have focused on short periods of time, specifically around “high visibility” events, to borrow Melucci’s (1989) nomenclature,

such as street protests and sitings, which does not always yield clear results supporting or refuting the impact of technology on collective action. What's more, by doing so, scholars tend to favor the role of social media in political dissent to the detriment of understanding the implications of these media for civil society building and democratic transition, a process that started long before the first uprisings took the world by surprise in late 2010 and early 2011. The descent of the region over the last years into chaotic civil wars, societal disintegration, and military dictatorship testifies to the urgent need to look beyond examining the role of the new information and communication technologies in direct collective action and contestation into how they can or may contribute to civil society building and strengthening and democratic transition.

The present study contributes to filling this gap by examining the implications of the Internet and social media for collective action and democratic transition by focusing on the case of Morocco, a country that has been praised for offering a viable alternative between static dictatorship and chaotic change that have characterized most of the region in the last years. Adopting a longitudinal approach, the article combines qualitative and quantitative analysis to study more than fifty platforms used by civil society and social movement groups in the country over three years, between 2010 and 2013. Drawing on radical democracy theory, specifically Mouffe's concept of 'agonistic public sphere', the article attempts to answer the following three main questions:

Q1: To what extent had the Internet been appropriated by Moroccan oppositional groups before the start of the Arab Spring?

Q2: To what extent has the appropriation of social media after 2011 transformed the capabilities of oppositional groups after the Arab Spring?

Q3: Does the Internet contribute to building an agonistic public sphere and a civil culture and, thus, to ensuring the democratic transition in the country?

The article argues that the impact of the Internet and social media on Morocco's political scene is an evolutionary rather than a revolutionary one. In fact, the mixture of patterns and dynamics in the deployment of new communication tools proves to be characterized by continuation and progress rather than by raptures and metamorphosis. The phenomenal diffusion of Facebook and other social media platforms in the aftermath of the Arab Spring has significantly boosted the collective action capacity of civil society and social movement groups in the country. It has done so, however, without altering the dominant communication paradigms and political culture marked by antagonistic exclusivism rather than genuine pluralistic agonism.

The case of Morocco: The Third Way?

While Morocco has not witnessed large-scale protests and regime change uprisings similar to those witnessed in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, the country still offers an optimal context where to examine the ramifications of social media in political dissent and collective action, and their implications for democratic change. Like the majority of the Arab world, the powerful ripples of Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions shook the country to its roots. Inspired by the adjacent revolutions, young activists from diverse ideological backgrounds soon launched the February 20 movement on Facebook, which coordinated a series of protests throughout the country. Unlike in Egypt and Tunisia where mainly nonpartisan youth called for and spearheaded protests, many of the people who helped coordinate the February 20 movement were politically active in various human right NGOs, small leftist parties, in addition to Islamist social movement organizations, mainly the Justice and Charity, one of the most important, if not the largest political groups in the country. Nonetheless, the February 20 movement was not just a coalition

of existing political forces as it incorporated much of the spontaneous and non-partisan elements that endowed it with a distinct and fresh identity in the stagnating political arena of the country (Hamblin & Hopkins, 2015). The protests were not always massive, but the slogans raised were unprecedentedly bold and strident. Protestors rarely called for the fall of the regime, but their demands were just short of it: the need for immediate radical democratic reforms, including within the Monarchy institution itself. The message was received, and King Mohamed VI quickly delivered a speech on March 20, promising profound constitutional changes that would enhance the powers of the government and the legislative body.

Morocco's promised reforms were widely praised by the country's Western allies who saw in them a 'Third Way' between crude authoritarianism and chaotic transformation and turmoil that brought down their 'protégés' in the region, namely Ben Ali and Mubarak (Maggi, 2014). The proposed reforms were rejected by the February 20 movement, which vowed to continue to pressure for a full constitutional monarchy. Nevertheless, the new constitution was upheld after it received more than 98% of yes votes in a referendum in which the state claimed a turnout of 72%. The new constitution paved the way for legislative elections in November 25th, 2011, in which the now governing Islamist party of Justice and Development (PJD in French) emerged victorious with 107 out of 395. Morocco's 'Third Way', as many pundits claimed, could now pave the way for a gradual and secure transition towards democracy, a happy outcome for one of the most vibrant and established civil societies in the Arab world.

These developments were, in fact, just another round in a long and bitter struggle that opposed Morocco's Makhzen (Monarchy and its power apparatuses) and civil society since the country's independence from French colonial rule in 1956. In over half a century, this relationship has gone through cyclical periods of uneasy coexistence, confrontation, cooperation,

co-optation and suppression, during which the monarchy has often succeeded in emerging as the most powerful institution in the country, without being able to completely monopolize the political scene and public sphere. Still, most Moroccans seem to be reluctant to support a radical revolution to change the regime. As the Arab spring developed into bloody insurgency and civil wars in Libya and Syria, and has plunged Egypt into a chaotic military authoritarianism, Moroccans are still reluctant to renounce the 'Third Way', hoping that democracy might be at the end of the tunnel. Smith and Loudy (2005) succinctly observed that Morocco's case is not a democracy in transition, but rather a semi-authoritarian regime that will never change unless it is challenged. The "third way" phase is not exception as it should be interpreted as a political maneuvering used by the Monarchy over many decades to contain discontent and manage opposition. Whether this experience can lead towards genuine constitutional monarchy relies on many factors, chief among them is the ability of oppositional groups to keep pressure on the "Makhzen" to deliver its promises and continue with the reforms.

From deliberative to agonistic public sphere

Research on the political role of the Internet has been dominated by considerations pertaining to the Western historical experience, particularly the search for a way to strengthen deliberative and participatory democracy. Many scholars have pointed out the inadequacy of applying this model to different historical contexts, especially where democratic institutions are lacking. Scholars have also noted that the deliberative model of democracy is based on eliminating conflict by building consensus between rivals. The dominant ontology of "consensus" within liberal democracy, according to Mouffe (1999) is bound to fail, because "consensus exists as a temporary result of a provisional hegemony, as a stabilization of power, and ... always entails some form of exclusion" (p. 756). Hence, building democratic politics on

consensus and reconciliation “is not only conceptually mistaken, it is also fraught with political dangers” (Mouffe, 2005a, p. 2). This requires an approach that places the questions of power, antagonism, and adversarial relationships at its very center. The role of democracy, however, is to turn antagonism into agonism:

While antagonism is a *we/they* relation in which the two sides are enemies who do not share any common ground, agonism is a *we/they* relation where the conflicting parties, although acknowledging that there is no rational solution to their conflict, nevertheless recognize the legitimacy of their opponents. They are adversaries, not enemies. (p. 20)

The concept can better account for situations where democratic institutions are absent or weak and the level of discord and splintering in the public sphere is high, as it is the case with the MENA countries. In the same vein, Van Bouwel (2009, p.129) distinguishes between three normative approaches to political pluralism: (1) “consensual mainstreaming” that presumes “a consensus like [that pre- sumed by] consensual deliberative theorists”; (2) “agonistic pluralism” that “emphasizes (nonconsensual) difference as well as highlights the importance of dissenting and adversarial engagement”; and (3) “antagonistic exclusivism” that “does ‘realise’ the plurality of systems of representation, but denies every possibility of consensus, engagement or interaction between the (allegedly) inimical positions”. Van Bouwel’s taxonomy offers a useful ground on which to explore nuances and layers within the public sphere as communication networks, especially as enacted through the Internet.

Early research on the political impact of the Internet identified several merits of the technology such as “enhancing community cohesion, political deliberation, and participation” (Chadwick, p. 83). But many studies have failed to find strong evidence to these claims as they highlighted many shortcomings such as low level of interactive features on many political sites, and lack of openness that restrict participation (Bachen, 2008; Bennett and Segerberg, 2011). On the other hand, various commentators have argued that the Internet’s main contribution to

democracy is its promotion of agonistic politics (Atton, 2002; Carroll and Hackett, 2006; Dahlberg and Siapera, 2007; Kahn and Kellner, 2005; Macnamara, 2012). Norris, for instance, has pointed out that the emphasis on the deliberative function of online communication is “an unduly limited, and thereby misleading normative yardstick” (p. 103). As an affordable, non-hierarchical and interactive communication medium, the Internet has allowed antagonistic politics to mushroom, as countless oppositional and often persecuted groups and individuals have been able to voice dissenting opinions online. But the Internet also has the potential to link adversaries through webs of hyperlinks, thus facilitating the development of agonistic politics.

This study: a longitudinal perspective.

The paper combines both qualitative and quantitative content analysis, particularly feature analysis. The advantage of using this method, as Gerodimos (2008) points out, is that it can produce “formal and rigorous data that is comparable across cases, while also allowing for further exploration within cases, thus avoiding common pitfalls such as informal or impressionistic assessments, as well as an excessive focus on frequencies and numbers” (p. 972). Moreover, while feature analysis relies on quantitative content analysis, it is also qualitative, in that the occurrence or nonoccurrence of features, rather than their frequency, is analyzed (George, 2009, p. 144).

The study is divided into two parts. The first one focuses on the use of the Internet by oppositional social movements and actors prior to the eruption of the Arab Spring, namely during fall 2010, a period that was characterized by high tension between the Moroccan state and various civil groups mobilizing over two overarching demands: Economic/social justice and political/democratic reforms. The second study covers the period between December 2012 and January 2013, a post February 20 movement period where political actors were very active trying

to benefit from the relative consensus achieved to building stronger civil society and civic culture. The paper draws on Stein's (2009) political Internet main functions. Summarizing existing literature on the implications of the Internet for social movements and collective action, Stein (2009) points out six main functions: a) providing information; b) assisting action and mobilization; c) promoting interaction and dialog; d) making lateral linkages; e) serving as an outlet for creative expression; and f) promoting fundraising and resource generation (p. 757).

For the purposes of this article, four functions have been analyzed: 1) updating; 2) interactivity; 3) networking; 4) direct action. The study combines representative and purposive sampling at various levels in the process of selecting websites for analysis. Sampling was carried out at two stages. First, social movements that were to be the subject of study were identified. These movements represent the key ideological paradigms and collective action-oriented groups constituting Moroccan civil society (Kausch, 2008; Sater, 2007; Sidi Hida, 2007), especially those adopting oppositional agendas in the country. These movements are: the Islamic-oriented movement; the alter-globalization movement; the human rights movement; the feminist movement; the Amazigh cultural movement; the graduate unemployed movement; the radical left movement; the trade union movement.

Using the above categories, a preliminary set of codes was derived from both existing literature and the data itself. An initial set of codes was derived mainly from existing literature. This set of codes was then tested in a pilot study on part of the data before it was ultimately refined and expanded by adding new codes as coding of data progressed. Additional analysis was performed in order to determine the efficiency of the codes and their compatibility with the objectives of the study. The process of testing and refining the codes was carried out several times until a satisfactory set of codes was obtained. Three coders were used to code data

independently at each stage of this study. In each stage, the first coder was the researcher; the other four were graduate students who were sufficiently trained for several hours on using the codes developed for the study. Several pilot rounds of coding were conducted to test the coding scheme and the level of compatibility between the coders. Krippendorff's alpha was used to measure intercoder reliability, as this method is considered to be conservative and "allows for any number of coders and is explicitly designed to be used for variables at different levels of measurement from nominal to ratio" (Lombard et al., 2002, p. 592). Because the vast majority of codes deal with manifest content or features, they had a reliable alpha higher than .90.

Given that social movements can comprise a large number of organizations and groups, web platforms were selected on the basis of their update frequency or on the basis of the number of visits they receive. In the first study, 16 platforms were analyzed, which include 10 websites, 4 blogs, and 2 Wikis (see Table 1). In the second study, 27 Facebook pages belonging to groups and organizations adhering to the aforementioned social movements were studied (see table 3).

Table 1	
SMO	Platform
1. Justice and Charity	http://www.aljamaa.net/ar/index.asp
2. Unity and Reconstruction	http://www.alislah.org/
3. AMDH	http://www.amdh.org.ma/ar
4. OMDH	http://www.omdh.org/def.asp?codelangue=29&po=2
5. ADFM	http://www.adfm.ma/index.php?lang=ar
6. Sisters of Afterlife	http://www.mouminate.net/ar/index/index.shtml
7. ATTAC–Morocco	http://www.maroc.attac.org/attacmaroc/index.php
8. Forum des alternatives Maroc	http://www.e-joussour.net/ar
9. Amazigh blog–Ageddim	http://ageddim.jeeran.com/
10. Amazigh–Ameghnass	http://ameghnas.blogspot.com/
11. The Youth Group	http://alfatiya.maktoobblog.com/
12. Forum Group	http://marocchomeurss.blogspot.com/
13. Democratic Path	http://www.annahjaddimocrati.org/
14. Unified Socialist party	http://psu.apinc.org/index.php
15. Democratic Labor Confederation	http://www.cdt.ma/
16. Moroccan Labor Union	http://www.umt.ma/ar/

Study 1: collective action in the pre-revolution era.***Website updating.***

Studying the freshness of a website (i.e. how often the site is updated and to what extent), provides valuable insight into the quality and potential of the web platform as an information provider and resource, and its ability not only to attract users, but also and more significantly to make them return and gain their loyalty (Gębarowski & Wiażewicz, 2013). The effort deployed by a group to update a platform provides insight into its importance in the group's daily activities, and the extent to which it is used in collective action. While analyzing many structural aspects of a website, such as interactivity, can provide an idea about the platform's potential as a tool of communication, studying how up to date a site is, or its "updatedness," reveals whether some of this potential is being actualized in practice.

To examine the freshness of the platforms under study, the textual content was coded for the number of new items added and the frequency of updating during a one-month period in November 2010. The frequency of updating was measured using three codes: daily updating, weekly updating, and longer-than-weekly updating. To homogenize results, the data was further coded on a scale from (1) to (4), with (1) corresponding to "very low," (2) to "low," (3) to "medium," and (4) to "high."

Results demonstrate that more than half of the websites (nine) scored "low," as they were updated only a few times during one month. Three websites scored medium, as they were updated on a weekly basis, while only six scored high (i.e., they were updated on a daily basis). The majority of medium- and high-scoring websites belonged to grassroots movements, namely Islamic, Amazigh and, to some extent, alter-globalization movements. Low-scoring websites belonged to professional and leftist-oriented SMOs and parties, trade union organizations, and

included the two blogs belonging to the unemployed graduates' movement. Moreover, with the exception of the Islamic movement's websites, those that scored satisfactorily on this function are either wikis or collective blogs, in contrast to low-scoring ones that have a standard website format and are maintained by a single organization. Gębarowski and Wiażewicz (2013, p. 447) observe that there are two factors that can determine a platform updatedness, namely the amount of information produced by the managers and the type of the website itself. The two factors are interconnected since, as the results above show, the amount of information produced by the platform's managers can depend on the type of website, such as a collective blog VS a website (see table 2).

Interactivity

Interactivity has been widely understood as the key characteristic distinguishing the Internet from other media as it is the genetic key at the root of its inception and development (McMillan, 2006; Scilia et al., 2005). As far as computer mediated communication (CMC) is concerned, various definitions and conceptualizations have been advanced in studying this key notion. For the purposes of this paper, three types of interactivity are identified and used as a guide for the coding system used to analyze interactivity features on the websites under study—namely, user-to-document, user-to-system, and user-to-user or interpersonal interactivity. These types of interactivity, McMillan (2006) argues, “do provide a basic framework for the investigation of the past, present, and future of interactivity” (p. 209). Thus, user-to-user interactivity deals with the “ways that individuals interact with each other” (p. 209). User-to-document interactivity refers to users' interaction with documents and their creators, which involves “both perceived interaction with content creators and actual creation of content” (p.

213). Finally, user-to-system interaction focuses on the ways that “the human communicates directly with computers and other new media systems” (p. 218).

In the first phase of the study, interactivity features were coded either as (1) if they are allowed by the website, or as (0) if they are absent. In order to provide accurate results, features were considered as “present” only when their links were active; features leading to broken links were disregarded. In total, 15 features were coded. These features were distributed among the three categories identified above, namely user-to-content, user-to-user, and user-to-system. Results were then transformed into percentage categories to unify and facilitate overall presentation of data.

Results show that the majority of the websites scored highest on user-to-system interactivity, medium on user-to-user interactivity, and low on user-to-content interactivity. Only eight of the 16 studied websites (50%) allowed users to comment on articles and other content; four websites had the “contact the author” feature; and only three invited users to contribute content. User-to-user interactivity scored slightly higher than content-to-user interactivity since five websites had a “synchronous chat” feature, and six had discussion boards or forums. But user-to-system interactivity is clearly the dominant type on the majority of websites insofar as four features are found on at least half of the studied websites.

Direct mobilization.

The notion of mobilization is commonly associated with direct forms of collective action, such as street dimensions and processes in collective action, from access to material and non-material resources to the production of frames and symbols that delimit a movement’s collective identity and field of protests. Scholars have argued that the Internet favours a wide range of mobilization actions, such as disseminating information and symbols, coordinating action and

building alliances and solidarity networks (Atton, 2004; Downey & Fenton, 2003; Ganesh & Stohl, 2013; Bennett & Segerberg, 2011). To analyze this function, eight codes have been used to designate various online-based and offline forms of direct mobilization: 1) becoming a member or joining; 2) volunteering; 3) donating; 4) boycotting; 5) signing a petition; 6) e-mail campaigning; 7) creating urgent alerts; 8) creating an action calendar. Analysis was conducted by observing the studied websites for the absence or presence of these features, and coding them with either (0) for absence or (1) for presence.

Results show that the use of online-based mobilization functions is very limited in the majority of the studied websites (see Table 2). The most used features are the “action calendar,” found on 16 websites, followed by “urgent alerts,” which are found on nine of the websites. However, only five websites have a “sign up” or “become a member” feature; two have “a petition to sign” and “join e-mail-campaign” features, while the “boycott” feature is present on only one website. Finally, none of the websites contains either the “donate” or “volunteer” features.

Table 2

Website/SMO	Freshness	Direct Action	Outbound links	Interactivity
Justice and Spirituality	3	33.33%	4%	53.2%
Unity and Reconstruction	3	66.66%	4%	80%
Justice and Development	3	50%	8%	33.3%
E-Jousour	3	16.66	4%	20%
Ageddim blog	3	33.33%	52%	33.3%
Ameghnas blog	3	83.33	39%	33.3%
Sister of Afterlife	2	33.33%	13%	13.3%
ATTAC	2	33.33%	21%	46.6%
AMDH–Rabat	2	50%	18%	40%
ADFM	1	16.66	18%	66.6%
AMDH–Essaouira	1	16.66	33%	53.2%
ANFC	1	16.66	1%	33.3%
Youth Group	1	33.33%	41%	73%
Forum Group	1	33.33%	14%	46%
Democratic Path	1	16.66%	20%	20%
Unified Socialist Party	1	33.33%	23%	33.3%
Labor Confederation	1	33.33%	18%	6.66%
Employees' Union (USF)	1	16.66%	19%	40%

Hyperlinks and networking

The notion and practice of networking have been popularized by newer social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter. The networking potential of the Internet, however, has always been a defining characteristic of the medium and technology, especially through the feature of hyperlinks (Bennett & Segerberg, 2011; Holt, 2004; Ganesh & Stohl, 2010; Killoran, 2001; Liu, 2003; Warnick, 2012). Hyperlinks serve diverse functions such as providing sources of information, expressing membership or affiliation in a group or organization, and advertising a product, among many others (Halvais, 2008, p. 45). Moreover, hyperlinks can serve as a tool to boost the visibility, i.e. the ranking on search engines of a website (Webster, 2008). Koopmans and Zimmermann (2007) distinguish between two means through which political websites can achieve visibility, namely “vertical, hierarchical selection” via search engines, and “horizontal, network selection” via hyperlinks found on other websites (p. 22).

The importance of hyperlinks extends beyond linking people and groups, to connecting ideas, symbols and frames. By linking sites, texts, sources, and frames that share particular interpretations of the world, hyperlinks help establish what White (1992) calls “networks of meanings,” thus contributing to the reinforcement of the social movement’s capacity to challenge hegemonic discourses and to negotiate power (p. 65).

For the purposes of this article, analysis of hyperlinks was performed, first, by identifying the number of external links on the studied websites as 0 (absent) or 1 (present). The identified links were then coded through the following categories: Affiliated websites (aff.); National civil society (NCS); Regional civil society (RCS); International civil society (ICS); Mainstream media

(MSM); Alternative media (Alt); Other. Final results were grouped and transformed into percentages to unify and facilitate data presentation.

Analysis revealed two dominant types of hyperlinks on the websites in this study: links to “affiliated organizations and groups” (34%) and links to “international civil society groups” (20%). Paradoxically, results reflected a very low linking to national and regional civil societies’ organizations. Results also revealed that links to mainstream and alternative websites are almost equal. However, these two categories were not equally distributed among all types of social movements and SMOs. Though linkage to affiliated websites is high on most of the websites under investigation, links in this category constitute all the hyperlinks found on Islamic-oriented websites, and Amazigh cultural movement. In contrast, links to international NGOs are dominant, specifically on leftist-oriented SMOs, namely ADFM, ATTAC, and E-Joussour.

Study 2: Facebook: the game changer?

As argued earlier, the use of social media by Moroccan SMOs was limited to blogs, wikis, email-lists and, to some extent, video sharing platforms, mainly YouTube. Until the outbreak of Tunisian revolution in December 2010, none of the major social movement organizations in the country had had any Facebook account. This is also true about non-institutionalized social movements, such as the Amazigh cultural movement. What’s more, only Islamic-oriented Justice and Charity had a dedicated YouTube Channel.

Despite the improvement, a closer mapping of the presence of Moroccan SMOs on Facebook yielded mitigated results. Islamic-oriented organizations and groups continued to enjoy a strong presence on the Internet in general, and this equally applies to newer social media platforms, such as Facebook. In addition to the Islamic Unity and Reconstruction’s main page on Facebook, twenty of the group’s chapters equally have pages on the platform. This presence is

supported by dozens of other pages belonging to satellite bodies such as the Student Union. In the case of the other Islamic SMO, the Justice and Charity, its deployment on Facebook was less smooth as it had initially opted for an open group page that was quickly flooded with hostile posts. As a consequence, the organization soon shifted towards a 'Fan Page' where posting can be better controlled. In fact, for grassroots SMOs that have well developed websites, Facebook may be used as a gateway to drive traffic from Facebook to the website, and as a broadcasting platform for content generated on other websites.

Islamist-oriented groups were not alone to benefit from Facebook. In 2010, only one human right organization, namely AMDH, was active online with an official website that was barely functional, and numerous blogs belonging to its chapters. Two years later, eight out of fifteen human rights organizations possessed Facebook pages. Grassroots movements like the Amazigh and Unemployed movements shifted in the last three years from the blog format to Facebook as a large number of pages appeared recently. The Alter-globalization movement yielded mixed results. ATTAC- Morocco was able to launch a Facebook page while continuing to regularly update its collective wiki. FMAS, however, launched first a Facebook page in 2010, then closed it later, and continued to operate through its wiki e-Joussour. The Feminist movement's presence on Facebook is also marked by conflicting trends. In fact, in 2010, and in addition to J&C women section's website, only one leftist feminist group, namely ADFM, had a website that was not functional most of the time. In 2013, and in addition to these last two groups, two other NGOs were present on Facebook, namely UAF, LLDF. Despite this relative progress, the vast majority of major feminist NGOs, let alone local associations, were still lagging behind in terms of the use of ICTs, which only reflects the gender digital gap in the

country as the number of women using the platform constitutes only 38% of users (socialbakers.com).

In addition to the seven social movements studied above, this second part examines also the February 24 movement that developed in the wake of the Tunisian and Egyptian movement. It is the first movement in which the Internet played a pivotal role in its development and organizational formation, as it was launched initially on Facebook before some offline structures were set up at the local and national levels. It is also a movement that lacked a coherent ideological agenda because it incorporated a cacophony of groups from all ideological backgrounds, which contributed later on to internal divisions and conflicts, and eventually to disintegration. Accordingly, for the purposes of this study, 26 Facebook pages were examined (see Table 3).

Table 3

Movement	Facebook page	Fans No.
Islamist	http://www.facebook.com/groups/149933735027039/?fref=ts	3788
	https://www.facebook.com/alislah.ma	6738
	http://www.facebook.com/groups/150607521730108/?fref=ts	
Human rights	http://www.facebook.com/amdh1	4619
	http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=119756935194	1172
	http://www.facebook.com/groups/LMCDH/?fref=ts	44
Feminist	http://www.facebook.com/mouminate.net	5596
	http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100001410212551&sk=w	1455
	all	319
	http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100000763314340&sk=w	all
Alter-Glob	http://www.facebook.com/attac.maroc?fref=ts	940
Amazigh	http://www.facebook.com/theamazighs	4987
	http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=1198467376	500
	http://www.facebook.com/Amazighe.Libre.Atlas	2839
Radical left	http://www.facebook.com/groups/journalANNAHJ/?fref=ts	146
	http://www.facebook.com/pages/Parti-Socialiste-UnifiAF/116373195986	371
		1504
GU	http://www.facebook.com/groups/167211776663736/	718
	http://www.facebook.com/andcmaroc	741
	http://www.facebook.com/groups/moujaz/	1261
Unions	http://www.facebook.com/groups/121741561250983	1643
	http://www.facebook.com/ugtm.ma?fref=ts	1633
	http://www.facebook.com/groups/FNE2011/?fref=ts	536
Feb20	http://www.facebook.com/MAMFAKINCH.Official?fref=ts	8042
	https://www.facebook.com/sarkha20?fref=ts	133000
	http://www.facebook.com/Maroc.Revolutionnaires?fref=ts	53000
	http://www.facebook.com/groups/ScreamingofMoroccans/?fref=ts	

Facebook updatedness

As in the first part of this study, updatedness (freshness) was analyzed using four codes measuring whether the pages were being updated “around the clock,” “daily,” “weekly,” and “more than weekly.” Results showed a net progress in the capacity of SMOs to produce online content compared to three years ago. While in 2010 there was no platform updated around the clock, and only 3% that were updated on a daily basis, more than 70% of Facebook pages were updated either around the clock or daily in 2013. The first study demonstrated that collective grassroots movements’ platforms were the most updated ones, while leftist organizations were the least updated. This trend remained unchanged in the ‘Facebook’ era. Apart from AMDH’s page, which has attracted thousands of followers/friends, only OMDH, the other major human rights organization, has a lively page with a few hundred friends. Islamic oriented organizations’ pages are not among those that are updated around the clock, either.

The sharp rise in content production and sharing on Facebook is mainly due to collective contribution of content allowed by the platform. The choice of one category of page over another determines to a great extent the level of freshness of the page. Half of the studied groups have opted for the “Page” format, which allows administrator to block ‘fans’ from posting on the page. Less than a third of the sites are ‘groups’ pages, a choice that allows for greater horizontal communication to take place since members can add content to the page. Some groups, such as the Justice and Charity, initially used the ‘Group’ format only to switch to the ‘Page’ later on, after their Facebook site became flooded with hostile comments.

Facebook: Direct Action

Analysis of the role of Facebook use in direct action during the two-month period covered in this study draws on the same set of features used to analyze this function in the first part, namely: a) join or like; b) volunteer; c) donate; d) boycott; e) petition; f) calendar; g) alert. Analysis has revealed a significant increase in the use of the Internet for mobilization purposes since the first study 3 years before. The key development at this level, compared to the first study, is that Facebook allows for the recruitment of members and sympathizers through the in-built feature of joining or liking a group. While the number of a Facebook page's followers may not accurately reflect the strength of a group or the number of its members in reality, it can still be taken as an indicator of the ability of the group to mobilize support to its cause. Observation of the studied pages revealed that the vast majority of groups attracted a limited number of "members," ranging from a few hundreds to five thousands. The only exception to this trend were the pages belonging to the February 20 movement that reached over a hundred thousand (Table 3).

Moreover, the majority of the studied groups (86%) used Facebook to disseminate information on up-coming rallies, sit-ins, and other events, while 76% of the studied pages posted alter messages about instantaneous events and calls for action. In addition to these two key features, there was also a noticeable increase in the use of other features, namely online petitions (32%), and call for volunteers (16%). The other remaining features were either very little used, as with boycott (4%), or not used at all, namely "donate" and "coordinate supplies".

Table.4

SMO	Freshness	Direct Action	Networking	Interactivity
J & C	4	33.33%	9.5%	41.61%
U & R.	3	33.33%	16.12%	25%
C Alt	1	16.66%	11%	33.33%
AMDH	4	66.66%	11.33%	33.33%
OMDH	3	33.33%	25.21%	33.33%
LMCDH	1	33.33%	17.24%	33.33%
Sisters	3	50%	13%	33.33%
ADFM	4	66.66%	21%	41.6%
UAF	2	33.33%	18%	25%
ATTAC	3	66.66%	18%	50%
Amazigh	3	66.66%	33%	83%
Ageddim	3	50%	56.5%	50%
A. Libre	3	66.66%	41%	41.61%
Dem Path	2	50%	14%	50%
PSU	2	50%	20%	41.61%
UG-NG	4	50%	23%	41.61%
UG-NA	4	50%	18%	41.61%
UG-NC	4	66.66%	44.23%	58.33%
FSU	2	50%	9.33%	41.6%
CDT	3	50%	9.33%	41.6%
UMT	1	66.66%	11.13%	75%
Mamfakinsh	4	100%	63.13%	50%
Feb20	4	66.66%	56.5%	41.61%
Mamfakinsh2	4	66.66%	55.17%	58.33%

Facebook: Interactivity

Social media have taken Internet interactivity to another level where this feature has become less part of online communication and more and more as communication itself. Communication on Facebook, for instance, is based on a multidirectional process involving networks of users interacting with one another and with the systems supporting the communication. As a social media platform, Facebook pages are by default equipped with many interactive features, such as the possibility to comment on or share content. Some of these features depend on the type of the Facebook platform opted for by users. Each type of the available platforms has certain advantages, but also limitations. For instance, while the 'Profile' and 'Group' versions allow users who are 'friends' or 'members' to post messages on the page, in the 'Page' version only allows the organization to post updates. Moreover, in the 'Profile' and 'Group' platforms, users who want to become friends or members have to be approved by the platform administrator; on the 'Page' version however, users only have to click on 'like' to become fans of the page and start receiving updates. Facebook also permits users to enable or disable many of the default features through the privacy setting options available on the platform. For instance, a page owner or administrator can turn on or off the feature allowing users to share content outside a group. In addition to the basic features that are present by default, other optional applications and features are available on Facebook, such as receiving notifications through mobile, email, RSS, among others.

Examining how each civil society group taps into available interactive possibilities can allow us to look into the communication strategies and priorities adopted by the group. Likewise, it sheds light on the extent to which the use of Facebook in collective action departs from how older Internet platforms have been used by oppositional social movements in dissent

and mobilization. Interactivity on Facebook was analyzed through a two-step process. First, the Facebook pages used by the studied organizations were coded and grouped according to the four main types offered by the platform, namely profile, page, group and community. Results reveal that 9 (34.6%) of the platforms are “pages,” 3 (11.53%) are “profile,” 14 (53.84%) are “group”, and 3 (11.53%) are “community” pages. These results show that half the studied groups (50%) opted for platforms where they are able to exercise control over what is posed on their pages (9 pages, 3 profiles, and 1 secret group). Moreover, while the majority of pages allow users to add comments (92%), only 52% of them permit users to post content. This result reflects a small development on the one found in the first study (44%). Moreover, the option to post content was also disabled in a number of the studied ‘Group’ platforms, especially those belonging to institutionalized groups, which account for the remaining pages not supporting this feature. Results also reveal that the vast majority of groups who opted for the “page” format are institutionalized organizations compared with groups belonging to grassroots social movements, particularly the Amazigh and February 20 movements. Organizations with formal structures try to use Facebook to create spaces in the public sphere and to mobilize actual and potential adherents without relinquishing control over discourse online. Though this strategy has its advantages, it does not allow horizontal communication to flourish, and the burden of animating and updating the organization falls on the organization itself.

In addition to standard features built in Facebook, there are thousands of additional applications that users can choose from to enhance the interactive effectiveness of their pages. There are features that help in collective action, such as social RSS that allows for the integration of blogs or news feeds on a page, and Involver, an application allowing the integration of YouTube and Twitter feeds. The Facebook pages under scrutiny were scanned for the use of such

features. The latter were coded as 1 (available) or 0 (absent), then the results were transformed into percentages using 10 as the highest score for the number of applications on a given page¹.

The preliminary survey of the studied Facebook pages indicated a huge use of multimedia data on most of the pages (photos and videos, caricature) that are shared on Facebook or downloaded from other devices. In many cases, multimedia content was prevalent over text, which kept the sites active and fresh when textual data was not available. A closer analysis of the sites shows that most of them draw mainly on the basic interactive features and rarely on the optional ones, especially those serving user-to-system interactivity. Compared to the first part of the study, the use of multimedia content (photo, video) increased from 77% to 92%. Besides, while user-to-user interactivity is well served on the studied platform thanks to the basic default features of 'share' and 'like', these interactive features have also been disabled in a small number of pages. In general, despite the strong interactive potential and structure of Facebook, analysis has not demonstrated a significant improvement on the way civil society groups used this feature over various online platforms within the last few years.

Facebook: Networking

As discussed earlier, Facebook is by default a networking platform since it was developed primarily to connect people and, most importantly, to maintain connections through constellations of interrelated networks. The role of these networks extends beyond connecting people to maintaining networks of meaning and discourse that form around nodes of hyperlinked texts and multimedia shared by users. This issue is closely connected to the question of whether social media support genuine horizontal and dialogic communication as opposed to vertical and monologic communication. The dichotomy between dialogic VS monologic communication

¹ By observing many professional and highly interactive Facebook pages, it is very rare that this number is ever exceeded.

acquires a particular urgency in the study of the implications of social media for political change in the Middle East and the MENA region. In the first few months, the revolutions that engulfed Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, Libya and beyond generated some euphoric opinion about civil and peaceful coexistence, even if tense, between different ideological factions and movements that took part in the uprisings against dictatorship. This image was violently shattered by subsequent confrontational politics and sectarian divisions in these countries. The aim of this section, then, is not just to examine the role of Facebook in connecting people, but to also probe the extent to which it is contributing to building a more open and dialogic public sphere where online platforms are not used to merely “preach for the converted”, but to expose public opinion to a range of different opinions and networks, both online and offline.

A two-step scheme has been used to code the use of hyperlinks on the studied pages. First, the number of external links used during the two-month period was observed and coded as either 0 (absent) or 1 (present). The results were then calculated into percentages using the total number of links found on the pages (see Table 4). In a second stage, the external links were grouped into seven categories, namely: 1) Affiliated websites (aff.); 2) National civil society (NCS); 3) Regional civil society (RCS); 4) International civil society (ICS); 5) Mainstream media (MSM); 6) Alternative media (Alt); 7). Other.

Compared to the first part of the study, analysis has revealed a minor rise in the use of hyperlinks on Facebook (see Table 4). Moreover, unlike in the first part above where links to alternative media constituted less than 14% of the total external links on the studied platforms, alternative media made up more than 50% of the links on the studied Facebook pages. Two dominant types of alternative media links are found on these pages, namely YouTube, and online newspapers that have mushroomed in the country in recent years. In fact, YouTube is the third

most popular site in the country after Facebook and Google search engine (alexa.com). A large number of these videos show rallies, protests, and other forms of mobilization filmed by mobile phones and uploaded on YouTube, before they were shared on social media, mainly Facebook. Unlike the case with older platforms such as websites and blogs, users and page administrators can easily share or upload a large number of videos on Facebook without worrying about bandwidth or technical issues since Facebook automatically transforms videos into compatible formats. Daily and, sometimes, hourly videos on rallies and protests constitute the bulk of these videos.

The second most popular category for alternative media are online based “newspapers”, most of which appeared after 2011. The first online newspaper in the country, *Hespress*, was launched in 2007, and has now become the most visited local site and the sixth most popular web platform in Morocco in general. The success of *Hespress* prompted many activists and amateur journalists to launch others online new platforms, the majority of which have not achieved a comparable popularity. Many of these sites try to imitate *Hespress*’ layout and, sometimes, even its names. They include *Hebapress*, *Ashpress*, *Khebarkom* (your news), *Klamkom* (your words) and *Sadabladi* (echoes of my country). Some other such online newspapers focus on regional news or cities, such as *Rabatpress*, *Kenitra 24* and *Ifra24*. In addition to transforming the way news are produced and consumed in the country, these sites have provided civil society groups and social movements with platforms where to publish alternative news and from where to “borrow” content to share on their own Facebook pages.

Despite these differences, many trends in the use of hyperlinks reflected in the first part of this study were also found in the case of Facebook. Results show that pages belonging to grassroots movements oriented ones, are the ones that extensively use external links. Smaller

groups and organizations with high level of institutionalization such as Feminist groups' pages, leftist groups and parties' pages, and Islamic organizations and parties' pages feature much less use of external hyperlinks, and when they do, they mainly link to other affiliated pages and groups. Moreover, like in study one above, external links to local, regional or international civil society's websites continue to be generally very low with 5%, 2% and 7% respectively of the total links found in the studied pages.

Discussion and conclusions

The popular uprisings that have engulfed the Middle East and North Africa since 2011 have been widely associated with the rapid diffusion of new communication tools, particularly social media. Technology-centered stances may not give much insight into the role of the new media; nonetheless, alternative studies have not provided enough evidence supporting a more nuanced understanding of the impact of the Internet and social media on collective action in the region. Drawing on a longitudinal approach and applying it to the case of Morocco, this article has demonstrated that social media have certainly boosted the capacity of oppositional social movement organizations and groups, but the impact has been more of an evolution than a revolution. In fact, the mixture of patterns and dynamics in the deployment of new communication tools prove to be characterized by continuation and progress rather than by raptures and metamorphosis. The phenomenal diffusion of Facebook in the aftermath of the Arab Spring has boosted the collective action capacity of civil society and social movement groups. It has done so, however, within the framework of existing paradigms and trends underpinning the use of the Internet in political dissent in Morocco in the last decade.

Civil society actors had indeed been very active in using various Internet platforms prior to December 2011. The Internet was already playing a key and influential role in creating and

expanding alternative spheres and spaces that escaped the stifling hegemony of the state and its various apparatuses over the public sphere and discourse. These positive effects, however, were countered by important shortcomings that imposed significant constraints on the capacity of technology alone to correct political and social injustices. Three main interconnected sets of problems limited the use of the medium in collective action in the pre-Arab spring phase: lack of sustainability, as reflected in the lack of platform freshness or updatedness, low interconnectedness, especially at the local levels, and the high level of control over online discourse culminating in top-down, rather than horizontal and participative, communication.

The second question attempts to explore the degree to which the adoption of new Internet platform and software, mainly Facebook was a major shift in power relations between oppositional SMOs and the Moroccan state in the aftermath of the first Arab Spring wave of protests. One of the clearest positive developments highlighted in the study lies in the level of sustainability. The first phase of this study has demonstrated that the incapacity of most SMOs to update and maintain websites over significant periods of time was a major hurdle hindering the appropriation of the Internet in collective action. Analysis has shown that there is a net improvement at this level with most of the studied Facebook pages being updated on a daily or hourly basis. Another clear improvement is the capacity of new social movements such as the February 20 to mobilize a large number of people as reflected in the number of their followers on Facebook.

However, analysis has also demonstrated that, as with older Internet platforms, grassroots movements are the ones to tap the most into the potential of Facebook in this domain compared to institutionalized and professional civil society organizations. The loose and non-hierarchical organizational structure of grassroots movements, their geographical diffusion, and preference

for horizontal modes of communication allow them to overcome limitations associated with the scarcity of resources through collective production of content, which is only the sum of the communicative interaction of their members. This confirms the idea that what is usually framed as the “impact” of technology is only the outcome of a complex interplay between artefact and its appropriation by users as social and political actors.

Equally important, analysis has shown that there is only a slight improvement in the use of direct action features on Facebook. In the context of Morocco, the Internet is mainly used to support offline mobilization, rather than to create online-based ones. Many types of digital divides contribute to this: inequalities between members in terms of access to and use of the Internet; a general societal digital divide that affects the bulk of people in Morocco; and insufficient access to material and human resources. In many cases, groups prefer to use other online tools, such as e-mail lists, which are more private and less susceptible to state monitoring, mobile phones and SMS. Moreover, social movement organizations and groups have access to various facilities belonging to oppositional trade unions, political parties and major NGOs where they were able to hold meetings and coordinate action.

In the same vein, analysis has confirmed that the use of interactivity on Facebook only marginally improved compared to older online platforms, since the bulk of interactive features found on the studied pages are default ones generated by the Facebook platform itself. One noticeable rise at this level is the extensive use of multimedia on most studied pages, as video, photos and caricatures shared far exceed textual data. Such a phenomenon is the outcome of heightened media convergence between online platforms allowing users to easily share media material across multiple digital interfaces. A large number of videos and photos shared during the studied period feature rallies and protests, speeches, songs, and critical caricatures and satire

featuring political elites and the monarchy. The interactivity paradigm on the studied Facebook pages is identical to the one found on older platforms examined in the first part of the study. It favours mainly user-to-system and user-to-user interactivity, while user-to-content remains limited since nearly half of the pages do not allow users to post content.

This brings us to the third question about the implications of the Internet and social media for the enhancement of the public sphere and civil culture and, thus, for democratic transition. By expanding the spheres of claims and contestation for oppositional SMOs, the Internet has undoubtedly strengthened the capacity of various groups to challenge the hegemony of the state over the public sphere and discourse sphere. This has manifested itself when public protests and unprecedented open and harsh criticism of the state and its apparatuses offline and online compelled the monarchy to respond quickly by offering some, albeit symbolic, concessions in a bid to contain growing pressures. The pressure allowed the first Islamic-oriented party in the history of the country to lead the government; however, these concessions did little to alter power dynamics that clearly favour the Monarchy, which still wields quasi absolute power and influence.

Nonetheless, the multiplication of subaltern public spheres through militant online interventions was not necessarily translated into an agonistic public sphere where civic culture could flourish. The adoption of civil society actors of more interactive tools genetically structured around ‘social’ communication has contributed to a more pluralistic public sphere but at the same time exacerbated “antagonistic exclusivism”, to borrow Van Bouwel’s term between inimical political actors. In agonistic politics, political rivals do not attempt to hide or suppress conflict. Rather, they avoid transforming adversaries into antagonistic enemies. In fact, the virulent lambasting of the state and its violations of human rights and social equality on many of

the online platforms is often accompanied by no less vigorous and often demonizing attacks on ideological opponents in the right or left political spectrum. It is true that Facebook, along other new social media, boasts a high potential for supporting mutual dialogue and horizontal communication. This potential, however, is hindered by many difficulties for establishing meaningful, cohesive, and effective discourse. A case in point is the powerful Islamist SMO Justice & Charity that was among the first civil society groups to launch a Facebook page in the beginning of 2011. The 'Profile' page first allowed all "friends" to post on it, and it soon became flooded with pro-*Makhzen* and anti-Islamist comments and material. The page was then closed down and substituted with a 'Group' where the page's administrator can filter posts and members. Other groups have opted for closed Facebook pages, while yet others have preferred to simply disable the comment or post content features. According to Mouffe (2005a, p.20), in the agonistic public "conflicting parties, although acknowledging that there is no rational solution to their conflict, nevertheless recognize the legitimacy of their opponents." Recognizing the legitimacy of political opponents seems to be missing from Moroccan and Arab public spheres where political actors are refusing to "share a common symbolic space within which the conflict takes place" (p.20).

Another level through which civil society groups and SMOs try to exercise control over discourse online is through the limited use of outgoing or external hyperlinks. Analysis has demonstrated that there is little difference at this level over the last few years and across various platforms. Results show that notwithstanding the sharp increase in the number of outgoing links to alternative media in the second part of the study, the fields of discourse and networks of meaning online remain overall isolated and closed with limited possibilities of crisscrossing or building direct or indirect interaction between actors and groups. It is a situation that reflects the

much-fragmented public sphere in the country and across the Arab world where political polarization and ideological and ethnic entrenchment are dominant. Against the background of this fragmentation, social media, like Facebook, are exacerbating, rather than alleviating, this situation. Mouffe (2005b) asserts that “far from jeopardizing democracy, agonistic confrontation is in fact its very condition of existence” (p.103). In the context of nondemocratic countries in general and Arab countries, in particular, radical politics and collective action alone cannot provide a viable transition towards liberal- not only electoral- democracy because it rarely transgresses antagonism towards agonism. The “third way” in this sense needs to be explored less as a political process between dictatorship or chaos, and more as a project that seeks to find balance between deliberative democracy and agonistic politics where a minimum of consensus exists between rivals.

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