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The American University in Cairo
School of Global Affairs and Public Policy

MEDIA DARLINGS: THE EGYPTIAN REVOLUTION AND AMERICAN MEDIA
COVERAGE

A Thesis Submitted to
Middle East Studies Program

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

by Rebecca Suzanne Fox

under the supervision of Dr. Benjamin Geer
11/2012

ABSTRACT

Title: Media Darlings: The Egyptian Revolution and American Media Coverage

Throughout the first few months of 2011, a handful of protesters dominated mainstream American media coverage of the Egyptian Revolution. Activists such as Wael Ghonim and Gigi Ibrahim were called “the Facebook youth” and “digital revolutionaries”. This thesis explores various characteristics of these “media darlings” and the ways in which their messages were portrayed in American media outlets. Why did so many news outlets focus on these individuals? This research first establishes a quantitative argument that shows reporters focused on young, tech-savvy, and westernized individuals. Then, through case studies and the application of Bourdieu’s field theory, this thesis argues that American journalists chose their interview subjects primarily through the influence of news organizational routines/constraints and their personal and professional habitus. In making this argument, this project not only provides valuable context for the revolution itself, but also sheds light on American media biases and how those biases translate into coverage of an event in the MENA region in the early 21st century. This thesis was researched and written by Rebecca Suzanne Fox for American University in Cairo, under the supervision of Dr. Benjamin Geer.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Before January 2011, few people outside of the Arab world heard of the name Gigi Ibrahim. Followers on the popular microblogging site Twitter simply knew her as @Gsquare86. Yet, Ibrahim's prolific postings on the site throughout the January 25th Egyptian revolution helped propel her into the mainstream media spotlight. Soon, news organizations such as BBC, Frontline, ABC, The Daily Show, and Al Jazeera began featuring Ibrahim in their coverage of the protests. Frontline went so far as to call their piece "Young Woman Becomes the Face of the Revolution". Ibrahim is one of a handful of Egyptians whose faces and voices dominated foreign media, particularly American media, throughout the momentous events of early 2011. This thesis explores various characteristics of those Egyptians and investigates how they interacted within the field of U.S.-based foreign news coverage. Specifically, *why* did U.S. reporters and editors feature these "media darlings"? How did U.S. news organizations portray their messages? In answering these questions, this project not only provides valuable context for the revolution itself, but also sheds light on American media biases and how those biases translate into coverage of an event in the MENA region in the early 21st century.

Brief Historical Context

For many outside observers, the events of 2011 in Egypt perhaps seemed sudden considering the nearly thirty year uninterrupted rule of President Hosni Mubarak. Yet these protests should not be viewed as isolated phenomena. Instances of collective action, in various forms, took place in Egypt for years prior to the 18 days of mass protest that riveted the world's attention to Tahrir Square. Between 2004 and 2010 alone, the country experienced more than 3,000 labor protests.¹ Likewise, in the first decade of the century, religious-based groups held occasional demonstrations against such issues as "books they deemed offensive"², government policy towards Israel³, and against real or perceived

¹ Joel Beinin et al., "Labor Protest Politics and Worker Rights in Egypt," (paper presented at Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C., February 17, 2010).

² "Cairo book protesters released," *BBC News*, last modified May 12, 2000, accessed October 12, 2011, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/746766.stm.

³ Jessica Desvarieux, "Hundreds Protest Closed Egypt-Gaza Border," *Voice of America*, January 3, 2009, accessed October 12, 2011, <http://www.voanews.com/english/news/a-13-2009-01-03-voa3-68760977.html>.

transgressions committed by members of other religions.⁴ The country also witnessed the growth and contraction of the Kefaya, a self-described “national coalition movement” that centered their protests on Hosni Mubarak’s presidency.⁵ It should be noted that President Mubarak’s government quickly and often violently quelled these instances of collective action, utilizing the infamous decades-old emergency law to its advantage. Egyptian activist bloggers, the “darlings” of the 2011 uprising, were no exception. In 2008 alone, the Egyptian government detained more than a hundred bloggers.⁶ Ironically, the Mubarak regime pointed to expanding Internet access as a sign the government was supportive of free speech and the principles of democracy. A 2010 government release stated as evidence of this, Egypt had the most Facebook users among Arab countries and the second most number of registered YouTube accounts.⁷ The release also boasted that as of 2009, Egyptians had produced more than 160,000 blogs, which became “an important source of social networking and activity”.⁸ This thesis will show that the use of social media as a tool for dissent and opposition has been a significant, though *not* an overnight phenomenon in Egypt. At the same time it will argue that mainstream American media emphasized the “digital activism” narrative during the 2011 uprising. *“Egyptian Revolutionary Darlings of American Media”*

This thesis examines characteristics of the “Egyptian media darlings” through two approaches. First, I conducted a qualitative and quantitative review of *The New York Times* from January 24, 2011 through February 12, 2011; a time period that encompasses the core 18 days of mass protests that led to the resignation of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. This review of the “January 25th Revolution” follows the initial and sometimes unsure narrative of the protests as it unfolded in the *Times*. Out of more than 300 articles/features that ran during this time period, *Times* reporters and op-ed contributors

⁴ “Three Killed in Egypt church riot”, *BBC News*, last modified October 22, 2005, accessed October 12, 2011, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/4366232.stm>.

⁵ Sara Khorshid, “A Cry of Distress: The Egyptian Movement for Change-Kefaya,” *IslamOnline*, August 28, 2005, accessed October 22, 2011, <http://www.islamicawakening.com/viewnews.php?newsID=5599&>.

⁶ Helmi Noman, “Internet in the Middle East and North Africa,” *OpenNet Initiative*, 2008-2009, accessed May 11, 2011, <http://opennet.net/research/regions/mena>.

⁷ Karim Haggag, “Egypt’s Renewal of the State of Emergency,” Washington: Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt, 2010, accessed May 11, 2011, <http://www.modernegypt.info/userfiles/Emergency%20Law%20Paper%20Final%20May%2010.pdf>.

⁸ Haggag, “Egypt’s Renewal of the State of Emergency.”

often depicted the archetypical Egyptian activist as young, “tech-savvy” and “westernized”. Interestingly, journalists most often attributed “tech-savviness” to youth organizers as a collective and often did not mention individual activists by name, though some organizers (namely Wael Ghonim) began to make appearances in the paper toward the end of the 18 day period. This depiction should stand in contrast with the social reality⁹ of the Egyptian population, in which the majority does not have Internet access. In a related vein, the narrative of a “social media revolution” gained traction in the absence of clear anti-regime leadership. This is not to suggest the *Times* completely ignored other types of protesters, such as the Egyptian worker’s movement or Islamist demonstrators; it did not. However, analysis shows that the *Times* reporters placed undo emphasis on a broad-based non-ideological movement, led by young Egyptians. It was not just the *Times*; analysts from a number of media and academic circles “lump(ed) together the contradictory and often conflictual interests of ‘yuppies’ . . . with those of the unemployed, who live under the poverty line in rural areas and slum-areas”.¹⁰ Furthermore, many of the tactics used by demonstrators were often minimized or tailored to “fit a ‘Western’ and ‘local’ upper-middle class audience”.¹¹ For example, Rabab El-Mahdi argues that journalists often excluded from their coverage demonstrators who set fire to police stations because they did not fit the “‘educated,” “Western,” and “exposed” cosmopolitan Egyptians who are portrayed as the sole agents of this “revolution””.¹² Additionally, it is interesting to note that prior to the protests on January 25th, there were more than a dozen reported cases of self-immolations or attempts in Egypt, which were seemingly inspired by the December 2010 self-immolation of Tunisian Mohamed Bouazizi.¹³ His act received considerable foreign media attention and is often cited as the

⁹ Social Reality: “a view of the world that is socially derived; that is, what society knows about itself”. Pamela J. Shoemaker and Stephen D. Reese, *Mediating The Message: Theories of Influences on Mass Media Content*, 2nd ed. (White Plains: Longman Publishers, 1996), 4.

¹⁰ Rabab El-Mahdi, “Orientalising the Egyptian Uprising,” *Jadaliyya*, April 11, 2011, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/1214/orientalising-the-egyptian-uprising>.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Hamza Hendawi, “Self-Immolation Protests in Egypt Continue,” *The Huffington Post*, January 18, 2011, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/01/18/selfimmolation-protests-i_n_810226.html.

“spark” that led to demonstrations in that country.¹⁴ Yet, the significance and role of the Egyptian self-immolations remained largely forgotten once the protests in Tahrir Square began. The reason for this difference in coverage will be explored in greater detail in chapter two.

Given these findings, I then broadened my news review and selected two Egyptian activists who best fit the *Times*' profile bias *and* received significant mainstream American media coverage throughout spring 2011: 31-year-old Wael Ghonim and 25-year-old Gigi Ibrahim. These two media darlings appeared on and in such shows and publications as: ABC News, CBS News, *The New York Times*, *Newsweek*, Fox News, CNN, NPR, *The Los Angeles Times*, and *USA Today* among others. Both Ibrahim and Ghonim readily displayed many of the attributes of a young, tech-savvy and westernized revolutionary. Both Ibrahim and Ghonim spent extended periods of time in the United States. Both attended the American University in Cairo. Both use social media for their advocacy efforts. Ghonim even previously headed the MENA region marketing department for Google, a US-based company. Yet, there are important distinctions between the two; for example, Ibrahim is a prominent member of the Revolutionary Socialists organization and was openly critical of Wael Ghonim's later involvement in 2011 uprising, saying he was not a part of the “real revolutionaries”.¹⁵ Ghonim is also more vocal about his religious beliefs than Ibrahim. Their similarities and differences allow us to make educated inferences about American media coverage, as elaborated in the next section.

Thesis arguments

In examining these individual case studies along with the *Times*' initial coverage of the revolution, this thesis asserts that many of the American journalists who covered the 2011 Egyptian uprising chose their interview subjects primarily through the influence of *news organizational routines/constraints and their personal and professional habitus*. By news organizational routines, specifically I refer to “patterned, routinized, repeated

¹⁴ Leila Fadel, “Self-immolation Cases in Egypt and Mauritania Follow Tunisian Incident,” *The Washington Post*, January 17, 2011, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/01/17/AR2011011703381.html>.

¹⁵ Charles Levinson, “Splits Emerge Among Egypt's Young Activists,” *The Wall Street Journal*, February 18, 2011, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703561604576150604132131990.html>.

practices”¹⁶ that communicator’s adopt or unconsciously adhere to in order to meet the demands of daily news gathering. In short, constraints such as time and location, along with organizational routines, such as reliance on the Internet and a focus on *Central Compelling Characters* (CCC)¹⁷, influenced the way U.S. journalists covered Egyptian revolutionaries. Additionally, a communicator’s personal and professional background and characteristics, or habitus, *appears* to have biased reporters towards individuals with similar interests, namely tech-savvy individuals. To support this argument, this thesis primarily engages with Pierre Bourdieu’s field theory and augments with evidence from news ethnographic studies. Additionally, I refer to some concepts presented in the Propaganda Model, as outlined by Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky. However, because the Propaganda Model fails to bridge the structure-agency divide, field theory remains the research umbrella under which all other concepts presented in this work reside.

This research further contends that by focusing on a narrow demographic of the Egyptian population, many American media outlets failed to present a balanced view of the revolutionaries. To support this argument I examine communication habits during Egypt’s media blackout, which lasted approximately from January 28, 2011 until February 2, 2011. This is a particularly interesting aspect to explore as during the uprising and its immediate wake, a variety of analysts extolled the organizational virtues of social media, going so far as to label this event a “Facebook Revolution” and calling its organizers “digital revolutionaries”. The disconnect between that narrative and the reality on the ground quickly becomes apparent when you consider the country remained in the digital dark for nearly a third of the 18 days of sustained protest. How did the population within Egypt work around these cell phone and Internet restrictions? To what extent did they hamper a person’s ability to take part in the uprising? These two questions address the more comprehensive debate surrounding the extent and influence of social

¹⁶ Shoemaker and Reese, *Mediating the Message*, 100.

¹⁷ This is a common term in the journalism and creative writing field, often used to teach students how to structure their story. For examples, see descriptions of courses at: <http://www.journalism.cuny.edu/academics/course-descriptions/> and <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/article/101490/Pick-compelling-characters-Think-in-scenes-Create-suspense.aspx>

media in modern social movements. The exploratory research presented in Chapter three begins to outline a more nuanced narrative by examining the communication habits of protesters during the five-day media blackout, especially when compared to the other 13 days of protests when Internet and cell phone services were functioning.

Contributions and Limitations

In studying a revolution, there is perhaps no more pertinent question to ask than, “Who were the revolutionaries?” At a minimum, this research fills a particular niche in the January 25th narrative, which has not been explored beyond the scope of newspaper articles or daily news clips. Case studies of Wael Ghonim and Gigi Ibrahim go beyond keywords and attempt to present a variety of information regarding their: socio-economic background, childhood narratives, observable personality traits, educational background, physical appearance, religious beliefs, environmental surrounding, experiences abroad, family life, languages spoken, stated values and beliefs, and overall qualifications. In doing so, this thesis provides insight into a particular segment of the Egyptian population who participated in the 2011 mass popular uprising. While it is unreasonable to extrapolate these findings to the Egyptian revolutionary population at large, these case studies contribute to the overall historical record of this revolution. Additionally, the review of the *Times*’ articles/features provides quantitative evidence of media bias in the coverage of the 2011 Egyptian uprising. Until now, systematic reviews of U.S. news sources covering the revolution have been limited and this research can serve as a starting point for an expanded analysis of news organizations that run the ideological spectrum (i.e. from MSNBC to Fox News).

Perhaps most significantly, this thesis utilizes a comprehensive theory, Bourdieu’s *field theory*, to address the question of why so many American journalists choose to repeatedly interview their respective “media darlings”. Until now, scholars have largely explained a reliance on familiar or established sources using the *organizational routines* approach; that is, the structure of news organizations primarily dictates the type of person a journalists interviews. Yet, this approach seems lacking in that it suggests agency is a negligible factor. It suggests that journalists are interchangeable cogs in a much larger system. As stated earlier, organizational routines *do* play a role in how communicators

cover a story. However, it is not a thorough explanation. Where this research breaks new ground is in the thoughtful reexamination of agency using Bourdieu's field theory, which bridges the agency-structure divide. It does this primarily through the concept of habitus. In recent years, media scholars have conducted studies that show conflicting results as to the extent a journalist's personal attitudes, beliefs, and values influence news coverage.¹⁸ This thesis argues that these factors, along with background and experience should not be overlooked. While ethnographic news studies have not definitively traced the influencing effect of personal habitus, there is enough evidence to state that a journalist's *professional* ethics and roles (professional habitus) have a direct effect on mass media content¹⁹ and are influenced by personal habitus.²⁰ So why not focus exclusively on professional ethics and roles since there is a more established link with content influence? The problem again is that this suggests that once a journalist accepts a position at a news organization, their personal habitus is subsumed into the professional habitus created by an overarching journalism structure. While it may be difficult to identify a direct link between personal habitus and content bias, that does not mean an influential force is absent. With this being explicitly stated, this thesis identifies *some* elements of the habitus of U.S. journalists who covered the revolution and makes plausible conclusions about whether those factors reflected a *predilection towards bias*. Unfortunately, attempts to interview several prominent journalists, including David Kirkpatrick of *The New York Times* proved unsuccessful so this brief analysis rests on information culled from public sources.

Methodology

This thesis utilizes a variety of sources to support its arguments. First, in Chapter two, I reviewed a number of media ethnographic studies to establish a working knowledge of modern research into news bias. Almost all of the studies I cited were conducted within the last thirty years, many within the previous decade. This review also

¹⁸ See Shoemaker (1984), Rainville and McCormick (1977), Pasadeos and Renfro (1988), Flegel and Chaffee (1971), Drew (1975), and Peterson, Albaum, Kozmetsky, and Cunningham (1984).

¹⁹ Morten Skovsgaard et. al., "A Reality Check: How Journalists' Role Perceptions Impact Their Implementation of the Objectivity Norm," *Journalism* 1, no. 21 (April 13, 2012). See also Stark and Soloski (1977), Culbertson (1983).

²⁰ Shoemaker and Reese, *Mediating the Message*, 87.

covered three primary media theoretical perspectives, including a *communicator-centered* approach, an *organizational routines* approach, and the idea that external factors (such as the economy and cultural norms) influence content. After assessing these perspectives, I chose to devote more attention to the Propaganda Model outlined by Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky. This analytical framework is particularly useful because it addresses both contextual and structural features of journalism. However, it is lacking in other areas, namely it does not account for the agency of media professionals. To bridge the agency-structure gap, I turned to Pierre Bourdieu's field theory. The concepts found in field theory allow media researchers to analyze findings from news ethnographic studies and theories such as the Propaganda Model in a more integrated fashion. Together, these sources form the body of my literature review and the theoretical basis of my arguments.

One of this research's central assertions is that social media was one factor, out of many, that facilitated protest during the Egyptian revolution and its role should not be overstated. To support this claim, I provide exploratory research in Chapter three. In Spring 2011, I created an online and paper survey (in Arabic and in English) to examine the communication habits of people living in Egypt throughout the 2011 revolution. The survey consisted of 24 elements/questions, including demographic information. It focused on 11 types of communication sources and asked participants to rate *each* according to how often he or she used them to send and receive protest information throughout the revolution. In total, I collected 90 complete surveys and 19 incomplete surveys, which were not included in the final results. Though a large sample size is always preferable, the 90 completed surveys nonetheless begin to illustrate how people in Egypt, primarily in the Cairo metropolitan area, worked around cell phone and Internet restrictions during a roughly five day period from January 28 to February 2, 2011. Not surprisingly, respondents reported that they turned to other routine sources of information in the technological absence of their regular means of communication. Since the survey responses largely reflect a middle- to upper class demographic, these results cannot be extrapolated to the population at large. However, it was possible to make some concrete observations based on the data and those are elaborated in Chapter three.

As mentioned earlier, as basis for selection of my case studies, I conducted a review of the *New York Times* using the online database LexisNexis. While the *Times* is not the largest American newspaper by circulation, it is widely regarded as “the newspaper of record in the United States”.²¹ Certainly this point is debatable; however, given the scope of this thesis, I am confident a review of the *Times* articles allowed me to establish a quantitative and qualitative baseline from which to direct further inquiry. I began my search using the broad term “Egypt” and LexisNexis returned 314 articles/features, two of which were repeats. Of the 312 articles I reviewed, I coded every Egyptian name that appeared *at least once* in each piece, which totaled 727 named Egyptians. I recorded all names, ages, and occupations when listed; then analyzed the data to see if any trends emerged. In brief, my findings show that *Times* reporters and op-ed contributors emphasized a broad-based non-ideological movement, led by young, tech-savvy, and westernized Egyptians. Using these results, I then selected Wael Ghonim and Gigi Ibrahim as my case studies because they received significant media attention. Ghonim’s name appeared in the largest number of American news outlets while Ibrahim was featured more prominently in some of the most prominent sources. After numerous unsuccessful attempts to arrange one-on-one interviews with these individuals, I reviewed their media appearances between the dates of January 24, 2011 and June 30, 2011, using LexisNexis and Google searches. Additionally, I studied in detail Ghonim’s post-revolution memoir, *Revolution 2.0* and Ibrahim’s personal blog. These sources allowed me to compile brief profile sketches, which are elaborated in Chapter four.

Finally, in discussing common news constraints/routines and the linked idea of professional habitus, I supported my conclusions in Chapter five with interviews from two American correspondents working in Egypt: Scott MacLeod, a veteran correspondent for *TIME* magazine who now teaches at the American University in Cairo and Matt Bradley, the Cairo correspondent for the *Wall Street Journal*. I selected MacLeod because of extensive experience reporting from the Middle East region and Bradley because he reported from Cairo during the 2011 revolution. I conducted the recorded

²¹ “The New York Times,” *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, accessed October 12, 2011, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/412546/The-New-York-Times>.

interviews in May/June 2012, at MacLeod's office on the AUC campus and Bradley's home in Dokki. While both men were extremely busy and I had limited time, each provided much-needed insight into common news constraints and routines, which allowed me to draw conclusions about a foreign correspondent's professional habitus, supported by news studies and my own experience in the journalism field.

My personal experience working as a local television news reporter and later, helping launch a social media website, served as primary impetus for selecting this thesis topic. Upon graduating with a Bachelor's degree in Journalism from the University of Missouri in December 2002, I reported full time for two ABC affiliates in South Carolina and Alabama (previously I reported part time for an NBC affiliate in Missouri). In total, I worked more than seven years shooting, reporting, and editing television news and I was acutely aware of the news constraints that shaped the stories I produced. The people I interviewed were largely determined by their accessibility, whether they were telegenic, or whether they advocated a certain point of view I wished to highlight. As a graduate student in Cairo, I wondered if foreign correspondents worked under similar constraints and routines. My experience at a social media website from 2007 to 2009 also led me to question the role and impact of the Internet on instances of collective action, such as Iran's "Green revolution" and later the 2011 Egyptian revolution. Was the core 18 days of protest in Tahrir Square really a "Facebook Revolution"? Given my background, this thesis topic developed organically as I used many of my experiences to help formulate questions and direct my research.

Conclusion

With more than 80 million residents, Egypt is the most populous country in the Arab world; yet only a handful of voices and faces dominated American media outlets throughout the 2011 uprising. In-depth case studies of two of these "darlings" provides valuable context for the momentous events of 2011, otherwise known as the "Arab Spring". This project also sheds light on American media biases and how those biases translate into coverage of an event in the MENA region in the early 21st century. The underlying assertion of this thesis is that the majority of American media outlets chose their interview subjects under the influence of *news organizational routines/constraints*

and their *personal and professional habitus*. The result is that in a rapidly evolving news environment, journalists focused on protest leaders who were urban, tech-savvy, and liberal. This research further contends that by focusing on such a narrow demographic of the population, many American media outlets failed to present a balanced view of the Egyptian revolutionaries and disseminated messages that tended to reflect dominant American ideology. These arguments begin to address the question of *why* American media outlets chose to emphasize the “digital revolutionary” frame, and should contribute to scholarship on both social movements and journalism.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

*“Journalism and social science are both systems of information-gathering, and the two have a lot in common. Both are activities that try to represent the world as truthfully as possible; both make claims of objectivity; and yet both by their nature present a restricted view of reality.”*²²

This project is informed by three sets of scholarship. Primarily, it builds upon and merges current research in the fields of sociology and journalism/mass media; including Pierre Bourdieu’s work in field theory and participant objectivation, studies of *communicator’s personal and professional orientations*, and research into media routines, *craft norms*, and ideological influences on content, such as Herman and Chomsky’s Propaganda Model. In addition, I utilize a variety of social movement concepts in order to support my contention that online activism in Egypt was neither “new” nor the primary protest organizational method used throughout the majority of the 18 days of mass unrest in January 2011. While not a radical observation in and of itself, this argument serves as the basis for my hypothesis that American journalists failed to focus on a representative sample of the “Egyptian Revolutionaries”.

Social Movement Concepts

As a foundation, this thesis adopts the perspective that collective action is linked in history and space to other occurrences of collective action.²³ The 2011 Egyptian uprising (used interchangeably with the term “Egyptian revolution”) should not be analyzed as a unique event, nor should researchers transpose it with other “general classes of events”.²⁴ I define the 2011 uprising using the social movement concept of “protest cycle”²⁵; “a phase of heightened conflict and contention across the social system”.²⁶ I also refer to Ruud Koopmans modified terms of “protest wave” and “wave of contention” because these metaphors do not imply that social movements or protests are a

²² Shoemaker and Reese, *Mediating The Message*, 15.

²³ Ruud Koopmans, “Protest in Time and Space: The Evolution of Waves of Contention,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, ed. David A. Snow, et al. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 19.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁶ Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 153.

regular, predictable occurrences.²⁷ The events of 2011 were not regular, yet nor were they isolated phenomena. In the case of Egypt, groups from a variety of ideological and political backgrounds participated in forms of collective action for years prior to 2011. These actors included Islamists, Nasserites, secularists, and workers, among others. Some of their goals aligned with those of the January 25th revolution, some did not. While it is unreasonable to conclude all of these groups were working towards a common goal (e.g. the January 25th revolution), it is possible to conclude that these earlier protest waves contributed *resources*, notably in the form of *conceptual tools and specialized knowledge* to many of the actors who participated in the events of 2011. In other words, the protesters of 2011 gained from the experience of previous waves of contention. In particular, this research shows that many of the online activists used the Internet as a tool for dissent and organization *several years* prior to the January 25th Revolution. So what made the “Egyptian digital revolutionary” story or “frame” stand out to American media *at that time*? Part of the answer can be attributed to the revolutionary events that occurred in Tunisia in December 2010 and January 2011. Following a month of popular protests against his regime, longtime Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali fled the country on January 14th and officially resigned from office. It can be argued that this change in the Tunisian government led to an increased perception of “political opportunity” among anti-regime dissidents in other MENA region countries. Because the “power disparity between authorities and challengers” was reduced in Tunisia, because the *revolution was successful*, activists in Egypt were more likely to adopt a similar collective action approach.²⁸ This is perhaps most apparent when you consider how more than a dozen Egyptians set fire to themselves in early January 2011, seemingly motivated by the self-immolation of Tunisian Mohamed Bouazizi, whose act incited mass anti-government protests in that country.²⁹ Though the tactic of self-immolation was the same in both Tunisia and Egypt, the Egyptian cases largely faded from the media spotlight once the January 25th revolution began, while Bouazizi’s self-immolation is still directly linked to

²⁷ Koopmans, “Protest in Time,” 21.

²⁸ Ibid, 24-26.

²⁹ Hamza Hendawi, “Self-Immolation Protests in Egypt Continue,” *The Huffington Post*, January 18, 2011, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/01/18/selfimmolation-protests-i_n_810226.html.

the Tunisian revolution. This is not necessarily due to a lapse in journalism coverage. Part of the difference in media coverage between the Bouazizi and the Egyptian cases *could* be attributed to “the way the spectacle of sacrifice is received by the community to which one offers the sacrifice”.³⁰ To elaborate, Sami Hermez writes:

Bouazizi committed his act partly based on a belief in the absurd notion that burning himself would restore his dignity and bring about justice in his life... The copycat cases, on the other hand, seemed to believe that their acts would start a revolution. This belief, however, poses a dilemma because the conviction of the copycat self-immolators that their acts would start revolts in their countries invalidates the strength of their sacrifice in the eyes of witnesses. If observers are going to react spontaneously, rather than be led by an army or group that can consciously engineer the terms of sacrifice and martyrdom, then they must believe the sacrifice to be out of pure passion if it is to take on a meaning of greatness. The sacrifice cannot be seen to be an imitation, and it cannot appear to have expectations of personal interests other than being a response to an injustice.³¹

In other words, journalists may have reported the self-immolation cases in Egypt differently than Bouazizi’s act because they were interpreted or received differently by the majority of the population in Egypt. As Hermez writes, “Egypt has its own heroes of Tahrir Square” and in this case, it appears *Times* reporters often viewed these heroes as young, tech-savvy and westernized.

Despite the fact that self-immolations in Egypt received less international media attention than the Bouazizi act, this thesis contends that the events in Tunisia still led to an “expansion of contention”³² in the protest wave in Egypt and motivated many activists, such as Wael Ghonim. By the time American media devoted more attention to unrest in Egypt, several Egyptian youth activist groups, such as “We Are All Khaled Said” and the “April 6th Youth Movement”, had already invested in foreign language outreach on popular social media sites. In doing so, they established a ready-made “frame” for foreign news outlets to embrace. In the social movement arena, the issue of framing is built upon the idea that “meanings do not automatically or naturally attach themselves to the objects, events, or experiences we encounter, but often arise, instead,

³⁰ Sami Hermez, “Sacrifice and the Ripple Effect of Tunisian Self-immolation,” *American Anthropological Association*, February 16, 2011. <http://blog.aaanet.org/2011/02/16/sacrifice-and-the-ripple-effect-of-tunisian-self-immolation/>.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Koopmans, “Protest in Time,” 22.

through interactively based interpretive processes.”³³ Sociologist David Snow states that the verb “framing” is used to think about the “politics of signification” in that social movement participants, and especially leaders, regularly tell others “what should matter” in order to mobilize support.³⁴ In the Egyptian digital revolutionary frame, online organizers occasionally portrayed themselves as the architects of the January 25th revolution, or at the very least innovative activists. The agency of the “media darlings” will be explored further in the case study section of this thesis. Analysts continue to debate the exact role these groups and their leaders played in the immediate lead up to and initial days of mass protest. At the very least, it is clear that in the weeks and months leading up to the January 25, 2011 protests, administrators of the “We Are All Khalid Said” and the “April 6 Youth” English-language Facebook pages rallied potential supporters through routine online status updates, sometimes several a day. Many observers, like Sam Gustin for *Wired* magazine, take a balanced perspective of this online activity: no, social media did not *cause* the revolution, but it did accelerate events by “helping to organize the revolutionaries, transmit their message to the world and galvanize international support”.³⁵ *My research generally supports this perspective. I will establish that both the “April 6th Youth” and to a greater extent, the “We Are All Khaled Said” English-language Facebook pages provided attractive frames for American news organizations to adopt, which helped stimulate international support. Two case studies of Egyptian media darlings should support this thesis’s claim.*

Finally, it should be mentioned that the nature of the 2011 Egyptian protests changed from day to day and with hundreds of thousands of people in Tahrir Square, it seems reasonable to expect that news organizations would present a wider variety of voices. A prime example of this disconnect in narrative relates to the circumstances surrounding the nearly countrywide media blackout. On January 28, 2011, four of Egypt’s largest internet service providers shut down all of their international connections to the Internet, effectively leaving a population of 80 million people in the “cyberspace

³³ David A. Snow, "Framing Processes, Ideology, and Discursive Fields," in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, by David A. Snow, et al. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 384-385.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Sam Gustin, “Social Media Sparked, Accelerated Egypt’s Revolutionary Fire”, *Wired*, February 11, 2011, accessed October 7, 2011, <http://www.wired.com/epicenter/2011/02/egypts-revolutionary-fire/>.

dark” at the height of the uprising. While many news organizations continued to focus on the social media narrative and the darlings attached to it, hundreds of thousands of Egyptians continued to pour into the streets- without the aid of Twitter or Facebook. Such collective action in the face of repression again begs the question, “How large of a role did social media play throughout the uprising?” This thesis therefore maintains that by the time the Mubarak government restricted cell phone and Internet use in the country, Egypt’s “protest wave” had already reached its “transformation of contention”.³⁶ In social movement theory, a transformation of contention is defined as “changes in strategies, alliance structures, identities and so forth, which inevitably arise in processes of dynamic interaction and *ensures that no protest wave ends up where it begins.*”³⁷ In other words, the Egyptian uprising had reached a tipping point. By January 28, 2011, the Egyptian pro-democracy movement had transformed to a point of no going back, so it mattered less by which media activists sent their messages.

Journalism/Mass Media Concepts

Perhaps the most intriguing question this thesis begins to explore is *why* the American mainstream media continued to focus on the “digital revolutionary” frame, to the detriment of more balanced and nuanced news coverage. Insight can be found among ethnographic studies of *communicator’s personal and professional orientations*, research into *media routines, craft norms*, and ideological influences on content, outlined in part in Herman and Chomsky’s Propaganda Model. First, it is important to note this thesis avoids the concept of an objective reality and focuses instead on how media representation of reality compares with social reality- “a view of the world that is socially derived; that is, what society knows about itself”.³⁸ This work draws on elements from a variety of theoretical perspectives including a *communicator-centered* approach, an *organizational routines* approach, and the idea that external factors (such as the economy and cultural norms) influence content.

The Communicator-Centered Approach

³⁶ Koopmans, “Protest in Time,” 22.

³⁷ Ibid, 21.

³⁸ Shoemaker and Reese, *Mediating The Message*, 4. See also Mark Fishman, *Manufacturing the News*, (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1980).

The communicator-centered approach examines how media content is shaped (sometimes negligibly) by factors intrinsic to a communicator, including: personal values, attitudes, beliefs, professional ethics, roles, backgrounds, and experiences as well as one's influence within a news organization. In examining the first three factors, a number of conflicting studies³⁹ do not provide a clear consensus as to the influential extent of communicators' personal beliefs, values, and attitudes. As Shoemaker and Reese write in their 1996 book,

It seems clear that some communicators' attitudes, values, and beliefs affect some content at least some of the time, but such a weak assertion is practically worthless. It is possible that when communicators have more power over their messages and work under few constraints, their personal attitudes, values, and beliefs have more opportunity to influence content.⁴⁰

In light of these mixed findings, this thesis chose not to focus on potential *direct* effects of communicators' personal values, beliefs and attitudes; rather this work concentrates more on the indirect affects from these factors. For example, a person's attitudes, beliefs, and values along with their personal experiences and background influence their *professional* experiences and background (e.g. whether a person chooses to attend journalism school or a media arts program), which in turn helps construct a communicator's *professional ethics or roles*.⁴¹ This is relevant to this thesis because several studies show⁴² that a communicator's professional ethics and roles do "have a direct effect on mass media content".⁴³ For example, a 1977 experiment found that journalism students who believed they had a "participant role" provided more interpretations and analysis in their articles than those who viewed their role as "neutral" journalists.⁴⁴ A 1983 study found a relationship between the way newspaper journalists viewed their role in the field and "the emphasis they place on particular journalistic practices"; for example, journalists who favored a more "interpretative" role also favored

³⁹ See Shoemaker (1984), Rainville and McCormick (1977), Pasadeos and Renfro (1988), Flegel and Chaffee (1971), Drew (1975), and Peterson, Albaum, Kozmetsky, and Cunningham (1984).

⁴⁰ Shoemaker and Reese, *Mediating the Message*, 87.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁴² Morten Skovsgaard et. al., "A Reality Check: How Journalists' Role Perceptions Impact Their Implementation of the Objectivity Norm," *Journalism* 1:21 (April 13, 2012). See also Stark and Soloski (1977), Culbertson (1983).

⁴³ Shoemaker and Reese, *Mediating the Message*, 87.

⁴⁴ Arjen van Dalen et al., "Different Roles, Different Content? A Four-country Comparison of the Role Conceptions and Reporting Style of Political Journalists," *Journalism* (December 16, 2011) 3. See also Starck and Soloski (1977).

“investigative reporting over local news”.⁴⁵ More recently, Skovsgaard found that the way journalists’ perceive their roles are “significant contributors in explaining how journalists perceive the objectivity norm” and that “role perceptions provide stronger explanations of the perceived importance of objectivity and the implementation of the norm than the personal background variables and the organizational affiliation”.⁴⁶ This thesis contends U.S. communicators’ professional roles and ethics played a role in their coverage of the 2011 Egyptian revolution and some insight into these roles and ethics can be gleaned from an examination into communicators’ personal background and experiences.

It should be emphasized that a communicator’s beliefs, attitudes, and values can *sometimes*⁴⁷ override professional values and/or organization routines if the individual has enough influence or *symbolic capital* with their respective media organization.⁴⁸ When discussing capital and communicators’ myriad personal experiences and background, it becomes apparent that the communicator-center approach overlaps with elements of Bourdieu’s field theory, which will be discussed at greater length in the next section.

Organizational Routines Approach

Another journalism/mass media theoretical perspective this thesis considers is the *organizational routines* approach. Shoemaker and Reese define routines as “those patterned, routinized, repeated practices and forms that media workers use to do their jobs”.⁴⁹ While craft norms and routines are constraining in that they limit the way a journalist performs his or her job (e.g. time deadlines, editor assignments, story formats, beat systems etc.), these elements also ensure “the media system will respond in predictable ways and cannot be easily violated”.⁵⁰ In other words, media routines and craft norms allow communicators to produce news regularly in the face of limited

⁴⁵ HM Culbertson, “Three Perspectives on American Journalism,” *Journalism Monographs* 83 (1983): 1–33. See also van Dalen et al., “Different Roles, Different Content,” 4.

⁴⁶ Skovsgaard et al., “A reality check,” 11.

⁴⁷ In his 1985 study, Gans states that organizational routines and constraints “may negate the influence of personal attitudes, values, and beliefs”. See Shoemaker and Reese, *Mediating the Message*, 87.

⁴⁸ Shoemaker and Reese, *Mediating the Message*, 87.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 100.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 101.

resources. They are relevant to this study because they influence the way media portray social reality. One common journalism craft norm is the idea of “news judgment”, which is usually distilled into a handful of “values” that journalism students learn in school. These values succinctly explain “what people find interesting and important to know about”.⁵¹ These values address audience routines. Traditional news values include the following: 1. Prominence/importance 2. Human interest 3. Conflict/controversy 4. The unusual 5. Timeliness 6. Proximity.⁵² If a potential news story meets one or more of the above criteria, editors and producers typically perceive it as “newsworthy”. However, that does not explain why communicators’ often underreport or ignore other newsworthy events⁵³ as Shoemaker and Reese state:

It would be a mistake to conclude that news has evolved into its present form because it most perfectly suits the audience- that the public gets what it wants. How could we explain the fact that per capita newspaper subscription is declining, and that only a small percentage of the public keeps up with the news in any serious way?⁵⁴

A 1978 study of journalists’ attitudes towards their audience seems to support the hypothesis that “audience-oriented routines” are given low priority. In this study Philip Schlesinger comes to the conclusion that reporters mainly write for their peers and for themselves, not for their audience.⁵⁵ Perhaps this has shifted somewhat as economic concerns have increasingly blurred the lines between news and advertising departments. However, given these findings and the scope of this work, this thesis focuses on other organizational routines and constraints.

News routines and constraints do not occur randomly; rather they are responses to limited resources and these responses are often linked. For example, most reporters work on strict deadlines in order to meet their airtime or publication time. Journalists are keenly aware of the *time* constraint and typically try to gather information in the most efficient way possible.⁵⁶ From the author’s personal experience as a reporter, it is common television news practice to schedule multiple interviews at the same location to

⁵¹ Ibid, 106.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid, 110-111.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 110.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 112. See also Philip Schlesinger, *Putting “Reality” Together: BBC News*, (London: Constable, 1978), 107-108.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 114.

cut down on travel time. The downside to this strategy is that visuals are often limited and do not always accurately reflect the context of the story. Time also plays a factor in journalists' *reliance on routine sources*⁵⁷; that is, the tendency for reporters to interview or obtain information from the same sources over and over again. Sources that are familiar to a reporter (e.g. the reporter anticipates the source's stance), easily accessible, and authoritative (e.g. he or she represents a larger organization or is perceived as knowledgeable in their field, such as a scientist or professor) often provide a quote or sound bite that journalists find more convenient than other entrepreneurial forms of reporting. Reporters *can* research basic background information instead of interviewing their sources for it or they could select new sources. But digging through records and tracking down fresh interviews are time-consuming activities and there is always the potential that interviewing new sources could potentially discredit a reporter's story angle.⁵⁸ In short, routine sources are *known entities* for journalists who must process a vast amount of information in a short amount of time. Evidence shows this routine is not limited to small news organizations with small budgets; in 1973 Sigal found "a clear tendency for *New York Times* and *Washington Post* reporters, members of organizations that could presumably afford to gather news through whichever channels they chose, to rely on routine channels of information".⁵⁹ The most direct way this tendency affects coverage is that published viewpoints are sometimes limited to a select group of individuals. In turn, media savvy-sources often use the time constraint to their advantage and schedule interviews or news conferences when they know reporters can easily cover them.⁶⁰

Geography is yet another organizational routine directly linked to economic concerns. With limited, and often shrinking budgets, news organizations set up their bureaus in locations that typically generate more newsworthy events. The trend to downsize/consolidate is perhaps most apparent when looking at international news

⁵⁷ Sigal (1973) defined routine sources or channels as (1) official proceedings (2) press releases, (3) press conferences, and (4) nonspontaneous events, such as speeches or ceremonies. Shoemaker and Reese, *Mediating the Message*, 123. See also Leon Sigal, *Reporters and Officials*, (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath, 1973).

⁵⁸ Shoemaker and Reese, *Mediating the Message*, 127.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 125.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 127.

coverage. By 1993, the three major U.S. networks had cut the number of their foreign correspondents to such a degree that one Brookings Institution analyst wrote, “The networks are now basically out of the foreign news business.”⁶¹ As of 2011, an *American Journalism Review (AJR)* census found that 10 U.S. newspapers and one chain have 234 correspondents⁶² who cover world events. That figure is down from 307 full-time correspondents in 2003. Additionally, since the first AJR census in 1998, twenty companies and newspapers have eliminated their foreign bureaus altogether.⁶³ So what factors determine which bureaus stay open and which are shuttered? Shoemaker and Reese succinctly explain news resource allocation in terms of power relations. They write,

News is about the powerful; therefore, news organizations station their bureaus and reporters to be near the powerful. News media reflect these power relations in the selection of sources, by relying on officials and other wealthy, corporate, and bureaucratic elites. These people are covered routinely. Less powerful people, groups, and causes gain news attention when they become extremists, but then they are taken seriously only as a threat to the status quo and are often evaluated through establishment sources.⁶⁴

It is important to note that this thesis focuses significantly on the *New York Times*’ coverage of the 2011 Egyptian uprising. This raises the question of how much influence the *Times*, or elite publications in general, have over other domestic news organizations. While some scholars⁶⁵ contend that elite journalists’ influence over other organizations is minimal, Reese and Danielian (1989) demonstrate “there may be substantial media ‘convergence’ on issues of national concern” and point to how the *Times*’ coverage of cocaine throughout the mid-1980’s helped “set the news agenda”.⁶⁶ Definitively answering to what extent elite media influence other news organizations is beyond the scope of this paper, however it is an important area for further research. What is clear is

⁶¹ M. FitzSimon, ed., *The Media and Foreign Policy in the Post-cold War World*, (New York: Freedom Forum Media Studies Center, 1993), 17.

⁶² Figure includes staffers and contract writers who were not included in the 2003 count.

⁶³ Priya Kumar, “Foreign Correspondents: Who Covers What,” *American Journalism Review* (January 2011), <http://www.ajr.org/article.asp?id=4997>.

⁶⁴ Shoemaker and Reese, *Mediating the Message*, 56.

⁶⁵ David Hugh Weaver and G. Cleveland Wilhoit, *The American Journalist: A Portrait of U.S. News People and Their Work*, 2nd ed., (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 25.

⁶⁶ S.D. Reese and L. H. Danielian, “Intermedia Influence and the Drug Issue: Converging on Cocaine,” in *Communication Campaigns About Drugs: Government, Media, Public*, ed. Pamela J. Shoemaker. (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1989). See also Shoemaker and Reese, *Mediating the Message*, 85.

that several studies⁶⁷ show communicators often look towards their peers' work for ideas; that seeking consensus allows journalists some defense against critique from their editors, managers and even the public.⁶⁸ Nimmo and Combs (1983), say this pack mentality is "most likely when the stories are based on regular beats and highly predictable events or during crisis coverage when reliable information is scarce."⁶⁹ For example, during the volatile events of the 2011 Egyptian uprising, it appears U.S. journalists took cues from each other on whom to interview, particularly among the "revolutionary youth".

The news routines and constraints discussed above are a few of the more relevant factors to consider in this level of analysis. Individual characteristics could explain differences among journalists working for the same organization. Or, if a company's journalists responded the same way to a news story, in spite of their differences, we could attribute their response to organizational routines and constraints inherent within the company. If we take a broader approach, *organizational influences* can also explain differences *between* companies. For example, in a 2005 analysis of television coverage of the Iraq War, researchers found that while no U.S. network in the study dedicated a significant amount of coverage to casualties (whether they were U.S., British, Iraqi, or civilian); stories of casualties were "virtually absent" on the Fox News Channel and the *Lou Dobbs Show*, which aired on CNN.⁷⁰ In the case of Lou Dobbs, it can be argued that individual characteristics (personal habitus) and influence or *symbolic capital* played a role in story selection, since CNN as a whole featured more coverage of this topic. In the case of Fox News, bias against reporting casualties appears to be an organizational-level characteristic, if not an overt editorial policy. Consider the fact that since the September 11 attacks, several Fox News channel journalists and executives have said "to the effect that they do not see any news value in images of civilian casualties..."⁷¹ Do the majority of Fox News journalists share similar ideological perspectives? Certainly, this is one

⁶⁷ See Sigal, *Reporters and officials*, 1973. Hertsgaard (1988), Hansen, Ward, and McLeod (1987), and Crouse (1972).

⁶⁸ Shoemaker and Reese, *Mediating the Message*, 119.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 118. See also D. Nimmo, and J.E. Combs, *Mediated Political Realities*, (New York: Longman, 1983).

⁷⁰ Sean Aday et al., "Truth: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Objectivity and Television Coverage," *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, 10:3 (2005), 12.

⁷¹ Ibid, 12.

avenue to explore. Pierre Bourdieu suggests it is no coincidence journalists gravitate towards papers that appeal to their own sensibilities as readers.⁷² If a journalist's personal habitus influences where they work, this would explain how organizational routines that favor bias (e.g. MSNBC is known as liberal, Fox News is known as conservative) flourish. Journalists produce stories that appeal to their ideal reader/viewer because they themselves are their ideal reader/viewer.⁷³ The same study found the majority of news networks (ABC, NBC, CBS, CNN, and Al Jazeera) were predominantly neutral in their tone, between 89% to 96%; while 62% of the stories aired on Fox News were neutral and 38% conveyed a portrayed a positive tone.⁷⁴ Again, organizational level characteristics (e.g. media ownership, policies, hierarchal structure, and goals), possibly supported by staff personal habitus, can explain these differences. But there are other, more straightforward examples that illustrate how internal structure determines who covers a story and how it is presented. For example, it is not uncommon for some news stations to assign stories primarily based on seniority or a beat system, even if another reporter introduces the topic. Policies such as whether or not to show "body bags" at crime scenes or whether generic suspect descriptions are published/aired also differentiate news organizations. At one local television station the author worked for, the station director and news director gave such priority to the weather department (and the money it generated in advertising), that a small weather report led each newscast. These are but a few organizational-level differences that affect news production. It is important to note that organizational policies are not always stated and should also be considered the "covert and 'consistent orientation' of a paper's news and editorials toward issues and events, revolving primarily around partisan, class, and racial divisions".⁷⁵ Studies show that direct involvement from publishers and "overt conflicts" are rare in newsrooms; therefore journalists largely adapt to their organization's "unwritten" policies simply by

⁷² Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Meridian: Crossing Aesthetics), 1st ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 165.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ W. Breed, "Social Control in the Newsroom: A Functional Analysis," *Social Forces* 33 (1955): 327. Shoemaker and Reese, *Mediating the Message*, 163.

making note of which stories are published or aired.⁷⁶ In Bourdieusian terms, this could be explained as developing journalistic habitus and we will discuss this at greater length later in the paper.

Finally, it is reasonable to conclude that media ownership also influences news production, at least indirectly, in that it sets the company's budget and determines its resources. Resources directly determine the way a story is covered. Does the news organization have money for overtime pay if a story requires more attention? Do reporters have photographers or do they capture images themselves? Are journalists allowed time for in-depth research? For example, after its merger with ABC, one San Francisco television station had its budget cut by 20%, causing one assignment editor to comment:

I have to laugh when I hear executives say the cutbacks haven't affected quality. A producer doesn't have the time he did in the past to carefully consider a story. There's not sufficient planning—not sufficient time to do stories. Too often people aren't getting that time when they say “Hey, I have a great story. I need two days to report it and two days to shoot it.” (Robins, 1989, p. 46)⁷⁷

Economic dictates also raise a number of concerns with regards to maintaining autonomous news departments. It is not uncommon to see marketing or promotions staff attend newsroom meetings, and some publications have resorted to running advertorials, which often have the appearance of regular news editorials.⁷⁸ This thesis takes note of economic dictates, but focuses on how economics might constrain journalists, rather than how they could potentially guide reporters in their coverage. As already noted, research shows journalists *do not* primarily write for their audience, so profit maximization is an unlikely consideration at this level of newsgathering.

Moving to the macro-level of analysis, this thesis also considers ideological influences on content. A basic definition of ideology is: “a systematic body of concepts especially about human life or culture” or “a manner or the content of thinking characteristic of an individual, group, or culture”.⁷⁹ Media use “familiar cultural themes” to elicit an empathic response from the audience and in doing so, transmit ideology found

⁷⁶ Shoemaker and Reese, *Mediating the Message*, 162.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 141.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 149-150.

⁷⁹ “Ideology,” *Merriam-Webster*, Encyclopaedia Britannica Company, n.d. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ideology>.

within the culture.⁸⁰ This work considers common ideologies in the United States, so as to provide context for the stories that U.S. communicators produce. Shoemaker and Reese write about the basis for ideological beliefs in the United States:

Fundamental is a belief in the value of the capitalist economic system, private ownership, pursuit of profit by self-interested entrepreneurs, and free markets. This system is intertwined with the Protestant ethic and the value of individual achievement. The companion political values center around liberal democracy, a system in which all people are presumed to have equal worth and a right to share in their own governance, making decisions based on rational self-interest.⁸¹

At this level of analysis, we ask who do lower-level routines and organizations benefit? We look at who is in power, “not as individuals but as a class, transcending any one organization, industry, or place”.⁸² One of the more interesting theories that attempt to answer this question is the Propaganda Model (PM). Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky originally introduced this theory in 1988, which essentially argues that “structural, political-economic elements influence overall patterns of media performance”.⁸³ The result is that media largely reflect elite interests.⁸⁴ Specifically the PM focuses on how journalists may self-censor because of mass media profit-orientation. Herman and Chomsky argue that elite interests are so ubiquitous that news professionals are “able to convince themselves that they choose and interpret the news ‘objectively’ and on the basis of professional news values”.⁸⁵ At the core of this model is the assertion that news, in its most objective sense, must progress through a set of “filters” determined by “structural, political-economic elements”⁸⁶. These filters include:

(1) the size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation of the dominant mass-media firms; (2) advertising as the primary income source of the mass media; (3) the reliance of the media on information provided by government, business, and “experts” funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power; (4) “flak” as a means of disciplining the media; and (5) “anticommunism” as a national religion and control mechanism. These elements interact with and reinforce one another. The raw material of news must pass through successive filters, leaving only the cleansed residue fit to print”.⁸⁷

⁸⁰ Shoemaker and Reese, *Mediating the Message*, 213.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 213.

⁸² *Ibid*, 215.

⁸³ Andrew Mullen and Jeffery Klaehn, “The Herman-Chomsky Propaganda Model: A Critical Approach to Analysing Mass Media Behavior,” *Sociology Compass* 4 (2010): 215-229. And see generally Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, (Pantheon Books, New York: 1988) 1.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 217. And see generally Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, 2.

⁸⁵ Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, 2.

⁸⁶ Mullen and Klaehn, “The Herman-Chomsky Propaganda Model,” 217. And see generally Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*.

⁸⁷ Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, 2.

This thesis has already discussed some of these filters as they directly relate to news production. For example, the first filter (especially profit orientation of mass-media) typically translates in the newsroom as cost-cutting measures, which force staff to produce content with fewer resources. Additionally, the nature of media ownership (size and concentration) along with a reliance on advertising makes it difficult for start-up or alternative news sources that rely on sales alone to break into a market. As Herman and Chomsky write: “with advertising, the free market does not yield a neutral system in which final buyer choice decides. The advertisers’ choices influence media prosperity and survival.”⁸⁸ A reliance on advertising *may* also skew an organization’s overall news orientation; advertisers’ target audiences with money to spend and will generally, “avoid programs with serious complexities and disturbing controversies that interfere with the ‘buying mood’”.⁸⁹ Herman and Chomsky write of a “natural evolution of a market seeking sponsor dollars” to present less controversial programs, though they offer only anecdotal evidence of this evolution.

As for the third filter, this again relates to the organizational routines of news departments. Because journalists work under professional constraints, namely strict deadlines, they rely on sources that are easily accessible and viewed as credible (“agents of power”). Government agencies, large companies, and universities *typically*, but not always, meet these source requirements more so than independent advocacy groups or small organizations, which may have few full-time staff or rely on volunteers to work with the media. In contrast, large organizations usually have media liaisons who are available after-hours to facilitate interviews or answer questions. Larger organizations may also have more resources to set up news conferences or photo opportunities that can frame stories in a favorable light or push an agenda. Additionally, Herman and Chomsky state that official sources are given more weight because “taking information from sources that may be presumed credible reduces investigative expense, whereas material from sources that are not *prima facie* credible, or that will elicit criticism and threats,

⁸⁸ Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, (Pantheon Books, New York: 1988) Kindle edition.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

requires careful checking and costly research”.⁹⁰ It is no coincidence that “agents of power” appear more often in media. However, it should be emphasized that not all government organizations or large corporations have access to or utilize media resources to the extent they create “agents of power”. For example, in Chapter five, one Cairo-based American correspondent discusses how Egyptian government officials almost never use email and rarely answer their cellphones. Alternatively, an organization may be media savvy but journalists do not view it as “credible”. To be considered an “agent of power”, a source needs to be both credible and available to the media. In Chapter five this research elaborates on how an under-utilization of media resources by Egyptian government officials may have benefitted media-savvy activists during the 2011 revolution.

While this thesis does not focus extensively on the fourth filter in the Propaganda model (“flak”), it is worth mentioning. Herman and Chomsky define flak as the “negative responses to the media” which may take the form of anything from letters to the editors to the withdrawing of advertising or even lawsuits.⁹¹ Herman and Chomsky argue that if flak is forceful enough, it costs money to media organizations and can deter them from running certain programs or articles.⁹² The more powerful a group is, the more it is able to produce significant flak. The authors of the Propaganda Model write, “Serious flak has increased in close parallel with business’s growing resentment of media criticism and the corporate offensive of the 1970s and 1980s”.⁹³ This thesis does not examine these sources in great detail because the interaction between flak and news organizations typically takes place at the level of management and not at the front lines where news is produced. That is not to say flak does not affect news content; the ability to measure the affect of flak is simply beyond the scope of this project. Additionally, as previously stated, studies show “audience-oriented routines” or flak directly from the audience is not given much priority among journalists.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, 19.

⁹¹ Shoemaker and Reese, *Mediating the Message*, 226.

⁹² Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, Kindle edition.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Shoemaker and Reese, *Mediating the Message*, 112. See also Schlesinger (1978).

Finally, with the fall of the Soviet Union, Herman and Chomsky have acknowledged the weakening of their fifth filter, anti-communist ideology. In 2010, Herman wrote that this ideology has been “easily offset by the greater ideological force of the belief in the ‘miracle of the market’”.⁹⁵ Given the current global financial crisis, this point is debatable and it may be more accurate to adjust the model to account for a “religious versus secular” dichotomy, which has arguably increased with rise of neoliberalism. While the fifth filter is not fixed in this research, ideology is still an important point to discuss because it adds history and context to any media research. The questions to ask here include, “what are the ideological trends prevalent within the society in question?” How does a society’s media manifest ideology within the content that it produces? As outlined earlier in this paper, this thesis adopts the perspective that ideology in the United States primarily revolves around capitalism, free markets, entrepreneurialism, private ownership, individualism, and a liberal democracy.⁹⁶ Add to this a “paradoxical combination” of a “sweeping identification with the whole of humanity and an insular preoccupation with its own lofty distinctiveness” and you get the basis for the U.S.’s desire to mold the world into its own image.⁹⁷ Certainly the use of American designed social media tools during the Egyptian revolution is a potential source of national pride for Americans and this will be discussed in further detail in Chapter five. To show how dominant ideology manifests in media content, we take a more *instrumental approach* and examine how similar interests come together and reinforce each other between economic, business and military elites:⁹⁸

Class cohesion, assisted by connections and exchange of personnel between these sectors, strengthens and maintains this power elite. Interconnections are found by scrutinizing the ways in which members of the ruling class come in contact with one another (pre schools, clubs, boards of directors, etc.) and influence policy (stock holding, policy groups, funding of institutes and think tanks, political action committees, etc.). The upper class is regarded as having much greater class cohesion than the lower class and can, thus, focus its power more effectively.⁹⁹

We will examine some of these connections in brief when looking at the journalists and media outlets that covered much of the Egyptian revolution firsthand.

⁹⁵ Edward S. Herman, “The Propaganda Model: a retrospective,” *Journalism Studies* 1 (2000): 108.

⁹⁶ Shoemaker and Reese, *Mediating the Message*, 213.

⁹⁷ Paul T. McCartney, “American Nationalism and U.S. Foreign Policy from September 11 to the Iraq War,” *Political Science Quarterly* 119: 3 (Fall 2004): 400.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 223.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*.

As an analytical framework, the Propaganda Model is most successful in addressing contextual and structural features of journalism. It goes beyond ethnographic newsroom studies, which focus on the organizational level and examines the economic, ideological, and political structures that surround and therefore influence journalism. However, it is lacking in other areas. First, it can be difficult to apply the Propaganda model to empirical studies, “just as there can be inference problems when broad questions such as the influence of capitalism and the degree of propaganda are linked to everyday practices”.¹⁰⁰ Second, the model does not sufficiently explore or even acknowledge the agency of media professionals, who broadcast and publish stories that oppose elite interests. This argument, in another form, criticizes the PM model for being unconcerned with the “facts” in that it “does not inquire into how events become news, preferring to work with the alternate assumption that the information screened out of the system already exists in a transmittable format”.¹⁰¹ Herman and Chomsky responded to this criticism by stating their model addresses process through their description of their five filters, however their “main emphasis” is on the “empirical results of media selection processes”.¹⁰² One quote from them is particularly illuminating:

We believe that our focus on media performance as opposed to journalists’ thoughts and practices is fully justified. If a reporter deals entirely differently with an election supported by his or her government and one opposed by it, we do not feel that is urgent to try to find out what goes on in that reporter’s (or the editor’s) head in following this dichotomous agenda; those facts speak for themselves and the reporter’s explanations and rationalizations are of far lesser interest.¹⁰³

It is reasonable to conclude that media theory should not be about “establishing the true facts”¹⁰⁴, as this work rejects the idea of an objective reality. However, a comprehensive theory should be concerned “with how the available evidence is treated by the media”.¹⁰⁵ By not directing more attention to journalists’ practices in selecting this evidence, the Propaganda Model appears hollow. The PM fails to adequately explain resistance; it fails to explain why journalists publish news that opposes elite interests. For Herman and

¹⁰⁰ Schultz, “Craft and Conservation”, 5.

¹⁰¹ Kurt Lang and Gladys Engel Lang, “Noam Chomsky and the Manufacture of Consent for American Foreign Policy,” *Political Communication* 21 (2004a.): 95.

¹⁰² Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, “Reply to Kurt and Gladys Engel Lang,” *Political Communication*, 21:1, (2004): 105.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

Chomsky, dichotomous reports are the exception. Several scholars¹⁰⁶ have noted that most news production studies fail to sufficiently bridge structure and agency and in this case, so does the Propaganda Model. This thesis argues that tools needed to bridge this divide can be found in the work of Pierre Bourdieu.

Field Theory/Participant Objectivication Concepts

In recent years, research on journalism has revisited Pierre Bourdieu's concepts because they allow scholars to "think relationally, to move from micro to macro, to go beyond binary choices such as structures versus agency".¹⁰⁷ To state it simply, the concepts found in Bourdieu's field theory allow media/journalism researchers to analyze many of the concepts discussed above in a more integrated, coherent fashion. A journalist's personal background, beliefs, or values are not autonomous from the organization and field in which he or she works. They are not even separate from ideology found within the culture surrounding that field. Like a moving puzzle, each element constantly pushes against the others in an ongoing struggle. It is only when each element (agency, structure, context, history) is considered in relation to each other that researchers get a clearer understanding of why communicators produce the news that they do. Bourdieu's field theory provides the historical and contextual framework often lacking in news ethnographies and bridges the agency-structure divide that political-economy theories such as the Propaganda Model overlook.¹⁰⁸ The remaining portion of this chapter introduces the key concepts found within field theory and elaborates briefly on how they are useful research tools.

Habitus

Habitus is a concept that explains how we experience the idea of individual independence while simultaneously responding to our economic, social, and cultural conditions and backgrounds.¹⁰⁹ A basic definition of the term is: "A set of acquired

¹⁰⁶ See Benson (1998), Cottle (2000), Schultz (2007).

¹⁰⁷ Erik Neveu, "Pierre Bourdieu: Sociologist of media, or sociologist for media scholars?" *Journalism Studies*, 8:2 (2007): 336.

¹⁰⁸ See Ida Schultz, "Craft and Conservation: Features of Danish Journalism Culture, Using Field Theory as Framework for a Sociology of Journalism Culture," (paper presented at the International Communication Association conference in San Francisco May 28, 2007) See also, Ida Willig, "Newsroom Ethnography in a Field Perspective," *Journalism* (April 27, 2012): 1-16.

¹⁰⁹ Willig, "Newsroom Ethnography in a Field Perspective," 7.

dispositions of thought, behavior, and taste, which is said by to constitute the link between social structures and social practice (or social action)".¹¹⁰ Bourdieu writes that he conceived the idea when he questioned how behavior is governed "without being the product of obedience to rules".¹¹¹ We are agents with agency but our choices are made within the boundaries set by our habitus. Bourdieu himself called habitus "a structured and structuring structure" (1994d: 170) and this research refers to Karl Maton's articulation of the term:

It is "structured" by one's past and present circumstances, such as family upbringing and education experiences. It is "structuring" in that one's habitus helps to shape one's present and future practices. It is a "structure" in that is systematically ordered rather than random or unpatterned. This "structure" comprises a system of dispositions, which generate perceptions, appreciations and practices (1990c: 53). The term "disposition" is, for Bourdieu, crucial for bringing together these ideas of structure and tendency.¹¹²

Habitus is a useful ethnographic tool because it allows researchers to investigate inconsistent or different practices within a news environment. First, researchers must consider a communicator's personal habitus (e.g. personal values, attitudes, beliefs, backgrounds, and experiences as elaborated in the communicator-centered approach section). Consider this hypothetical example illustrating how a journalist's personal background or habitus could subtly influence news coverage:

- "Journalist A" grew up in the country surrounded by farmers. As "Journalist A" embarked on his career, he was occasionally required to interview people randomly to get their opinion on a variety of topics (otherwise known as "Man-On-The-Street" interviews or MOS's). "Journalist A" felt more comfortable approaching people who looked like they came from a rural environment, just like where he grew up. He tended to choose people who were wearing "work clothes" and drove pick-ups. As a result of this disposition, his interviews tended to reflect the opinion of more rural members of the community in which he lived.¹¹³

In the above example, Journalist A activated part of his habitus (comfortableness with rural life) in the journalism field without any complications from other social agents in the field (e.g. his editor or other journalists). However, if Journalist A worked

¹¹⁰ John Scott and Gordon Marshall, "habitus," *A Dictionary of Sociology*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), accessed May 3, 2012, <http://0-www.oxfordreference.com.lib.aucegypt.edu/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t88.e978>.

¹¹¹ Karl Maton, "Habitus," in *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts*, ed. Michael Grenfell (Durham, GBR: Acumen, 2008), 50. See also, Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, M. Adamson (trans.), (Cambridge: Polity, 1994 (1987), 65. [Originally published as *choses dites* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit).]

¹¹² Maton, "Habitus," in *Pierre Bourdieu*, 50. See also, Bourdieu, *In Other Words*, 65.

¹¹³ Rebecca Fox, "Bridging Gaps in Media Theory: Why Bourdieu's concepts work," Middle East Studies Center Class 570, (Essay Two, The American University in Cairo, 2012).

longer in this profession, his habitus would likely evolve to reflect more of the habitus of the journalism field, that is the dispositions and practices inherent to the “journalism game”. Consider Journalist A’s interview preferences after one year:

- After a few months of working at his television station, Journalist A notices that other reporters’ packages (video with voiceover) involving Man-On-The-Street interviews get replayed more often in the late and early morning newscasts. His colleagues’ packages seem livelier. Rather unconsciously, Journalist A starts to look for outgoing people when he conducts MOS’s. He gravitates toward people who wear bright clothes or funky outfits because they seem more interesting and he hopes they’ll say something outrageous. As a result, his reports come to reflect a different segment of the population.¹¹⁴

As this hypothetical example illustrates, our personal habitus changes with influence from our professional habitus. Journalist A developed an understanding of what constituted successful news packages and adjusted his routine accordingly. He developed a feel for the journalistic game. It should be noted that our habitus is durable but is also able to operate and evolve “within a wide variety of theatres of social action” or *fields*.¹¹⁵

Field

According to Bourdieu, a field is a *social space* or “structured systems of social relations” in which we participate. Not every group or organization in society should be considered or analyzed as a field. Rather, fields are generally understood as the “meso-level of social integration”¹¹⁶ in that they are located between the social level and the organizational level¹¹⁷. Specific rules and a specific system of “exchange and reward” regulate each field, however observers are generally able to make comparisons between “structures and basic internal oppositions”.¹¹⁸ Examples of fields include scientific, economic, literary, and artistic, among others.¹¹⁹ Journalism should be considered a field only “when it defines its own patterns of writing and deciphering the world as different from those of politics and literature, and when journalists have their own skills, myths and values”.¹²⁰ For example, news organizations that adhere (or attempt to adhere) to the

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Maton, “Habitus”, 51. See also, Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, R. Nice (trans.), (Cambridge: Polity, 1990 (1980), 53. [Originally published as *Le sens pratique* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit).]

¹¹⁶ Neveu, “Pierre Bourdieu: Sociologist of media,” 336.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 338.

RTDNA¹²¹ Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct could be considered as part of the journalism field. However, it is important to note, even if a news organization does not subscribe to tenets outlined by a professional association and even if media employees or freelancers were trained in another profession, they are still considered part of the journalism field when they compete for the same type of capital that other journalists uphold.

Researchers should consider field an important tool because it adds context. While we cannot assume fields correspond with national boundaries (for example, there are international journalism fields), this theory also does not assume journalistic fields in all countries are the same. Unique culture, history, and populations shape the social spaces of every nation; just as a country's respective journalism fields are shaped by unique, "press commercialization, media policy or trade union history".¹²² In this regard, the concept of field addresses the macro-level ideology component also found within the Propaganda Model.

Capital

Analogous to a sport game, Bourdieu discusses how social agents within a particular field compete with one other "to maintain or improve their status"¹²³. These agents vie for rewards, otherwise known as *capital*. Capital takes many forms and can be considered: "economic (money and assets); cultural (e.g. forms of knowledge; taste, aesthetic and cultural preferences; language, narrative and voice); social (e.g. affiliations and networks; family, religious and cultural heritage) and symbolic (things which stand for all of the other forms of capital and can be "exchanged" in other fields, e.g. credentials)".¹²⁴ Some social agents have more capital than others when entering a field, so they are better able to improve their status by acquiring even more capital. However, social spaces constantly change as an agents' habitus and

¹²¹ RTDNA stands for The Radio Television Digital News Association and this organization sets uniform standards and best practices for reporting, as well as provides "publications, training, advocacy" for more than three thousand news professionals and students around the world. Visit: <http://www.rtda.org/>

¹²² Willig, "Newsroom Ethnography in a Field Perspective," 5.

¹²³ Patricia Thomson, "Field", in *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts*, ed. Michael Grenfell (Durham,GBR: Acumen, 2008), 69.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

their available capital interact to produce *practice*. Again, the key to understanding *practice* is the interaction of all three factors: habitus, capital, and field.

Participant Objectivation

In addition to applying Bourdieu's field theory this research attempts to include a "participant objectivation" component. By participant objectivation, I again refer to the concept outlined by Pierre Bourdieu, and not 'participant observation'. Bourdieu explains that participant objectivation not only examines a researcher's 'pre-notions', but also "the social conditions of the production of these pre-constructions and of the social agents who produce them"¹²⁵:

Participant objectivation undertakes to explore not the 'lived experience' of the knowing subject by the social conditions of possibility- and therefore the effects and limits- of that experience and, more precisely, of the act of objectivation itself. It aims at objectivizing the subjective relation to the subjective relation to the object which, far from leading to a relativistic and more-or-less anti-scientific subjectivism, is one of the conditions of genuine scientific objectivity (Bourdieu 2001).¹²⁶

In other words, Bourdieu advocates that researchers (e.g. the anthropologist) objectivize "the social world that has made both the anthropologist and the conscious or unconscious anthropology that she (or he) engages in her anthropological practice"¹²⁷. This includes examining such variables as a researcher's background, his or her position with their respective field, age, beliefs, gender, and nationality, among other factors. This research proposes that instead of viewing these variables as *causes of bias*, researchers should consider variables as *predilections towards bias*, a "bias towards bias". Since it is impossible to fully "get inside a journalist's/researcher's head", it is impossible to conclude the exact breakdown bias. Even if you interview every journalist and editor involved in a news cycle, there is no guarantee they are able to correctly identify their motives and biases. For example, in covering the Egyptian Revolution, David D. Kirkpatrick may state that he honestly believed young, tech-savvy Egyptians were guiding most protests. But what is to say that Kirkpatrick's background as an urban tech-savvy reporter did not cause him to unconsciously "see what he wanted to see"? The best media theory can do is to examine a journalists habitus and make reasonable conclusions

¹²⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, "Participant Objectivation" (paper presented at the Huxley Memorial Lecture, Royal Anthropological Institute, December 6, 2000), 282.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 283.

as to whether that habitus reflected a *predilection towards bias*. This slight change in semantics is key because it frees researchers to examine habitus without getting mired in psychoanalytic analysis.

Conclusion

This chapter attempted to provide an overview of some of the more relevant research in the fields of journalism/mass media and sociology. Specifically, it focused on a handful ethnographic studies that cover communicator's personal and professional orientations, as well as research into media routines and craft norms. This thesis argues that ethnographic news studies add invaluable content, but often lack history and context. Political economy theories, such as the Propaganda Model, fill this void yet fail to bridge the agency-structure divide. The research tools that best address agency-structure, history and context are found within Pierre Bourdieu's field theory.

Chapter 3: Historical Context and Social Movement Argument¹²⁸

“What happens when you disconnect a modern economy and 80,000,000 people from the Internet? What will happen tomorrow, on the streets and in the credit markets? This has never happened before, and the unknowns are piling up. We will continue to dig into the event, and will update this story as we learn more. As Friday dawns in Cairo under this unprecedented communications blackout, keep the Egyptian people in your thoughts.” James Cowie, writing for the Renesys Corporation

In the span of 13 minutes on January 28, 2011, four of Egypt’s largest internet service providers shut down all of their international connections to the Internet, effectively leaving a population of 80 million people in the “cyberspace dark” at the height of a mass popular uprising. Analysts called the communications blackout “unprecedented” in Internet history and, coupled with the shutdown of Egyptian cell phone services, it was a move former President Hosni Mubarak’s regime had hoped would quell the growing mass of opposition voices. It didn’t. It failed to stop thousands from pouring into the streets hours later and, after five days in the dark, it failed to stall the January 25th movement. Yet, during the uprising and in its immediate wake, a variety of analysts praised the power and potential of social media, often labeling this event a “Facebook Revolution”. They called its organizers “digital revolutionaries”. The disparity between that narrative and the reality on the ground is important to compare. Considering that the country remained in the digital dark for nearly a third of the 18 days of sustained protest. This thesis asks: how did the population within Egypt work around these cell phone and Internet restrictions? To what extent did they hamper a person’s ability to take part in the uprising? These two questions begin to address the more comprehensive debate surrounding the extent and influence of social media in modern social movements. This chapter provides a more nuanced narrative by examining the communication habits of protest actors during the five-day media blackout, especially when compared to the other 13 days of protests that communication tools were functioning.

This chapter is divided into four parts. Part (A) provides a brief history of the rise of online social media activism in the Middle East. Part (B) briefly details the circumstances surrounding the media blackout that lasted from January 28, 2011 until

¹²⁸ Rebecca Fox, “Facebook Revolution?: Communication habits during Egypt’s 2011 media blackout,” Sociology 575, (Class Final Paper, The American University in Cairo, 2011).

February 2, 2011. Part (C) introduces the methodologies with which this chapter examines the communication habits of protest actors. Through the use of an online and paper survey, this research, conducted in Spring 2011, looks at factors such as: sources people used to receive and communicate information, and whether the blackout affected a person's decision to participate in the protests. Part (D) analyses the survey results. Certainly, the Internet and cell phone restrictions led to innovative work-arounds, such as Speak-to-Tweet. However, I contend that, for as much as the media would like to label the events in Egypt as a "Facebook Revolution", social media was one factor, out of many, that facilitated protest and its role should not be overstated.

III-A: Historical Context of Social Media Activism in Egypt

Though the MENA region, as a whole, is a late adopter of Internet technology, Egypt experienced significant growth in Internet access over the last decade. In 1999, an estimated 300,000 people within the country used the Internet.¹²⁹ By January 2011, Egypt's Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT) placed that figure at 23.51 million users or 30.05% of the population, yet it did not specify the frequency of access.¹³⁰ According to MCIT, Internet use is currently growing at a rate of 39.61% annually. Not surprisingly, President Hosni Mubarak's regime pointed to the ever-expanding Internet access of as a sign that the government was supportive of free speech and the principles of democracy. A 2010 release from the Press and Information Bureau is particularly ironic. It announced the renewal of the Egypt's State of Emergency and then, under the heading "Promoting Freedom of Expression and Political Participation", it stated that Egypt had the most Facebook users among Arab countries and the second largest number of registered YouTube accounts.¹³¹ Yet a 2011 Arab Social Media Report estimated that at that time, only 5.5 percent of the population used

¹²⁹ "Transport, Communications & Information," Egypt State Information Service, *Transport*. 2005, accessed May 12, 2011, <http://www.sis.gov.eg/en/Story.aspx?sid=2332>

¹³⁰ This source does not define how often an "Internet user" uses the Internet. See "ICT Indicators in Brief," Arab Republic of Egypt Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, February 2011, <http://www.slideshare.net/ArabCrunch/egypt-ict-sector-in-brief-feb-2011>.

¹³¹ Karim Haggag, "Egypt's Renewal of the State of Emergency," Washington: Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt, 2010.

Facebook.¹³² The government release also stated that as of 2009, Egyptians had produced more than 160,000 blogs, which “have become an important source of social networking and activity”.¹³³ Setting aside the source of this information, media analysts widely regard Egypt’s blogging scene as vibrant; nearly half of the 160,000 blogs are considered “active”.¹³⁴

Yet, the use of social media as a tool for dissent and opposition was not an overnight phenomenon in Egypt. Media analysts generally point to 2004 as the year of inception for online social activism in the country. This is when a handful of blogs, critical of the government, first appeared.¹³⁵ By 2005, the small band of bloggers had multiplied into hundreds.¹³⁶ There are several reasons why critiques, both online and offline, of the government grew during this time. First, analysts point to the emergence of the “unprecedented” coalition movement “Kifaya” in late 2004, saying that it “broke the taboo against direct opposition to the regime”.¹³⁷ In other words, more Egyptians felt emboldened to criticize the government for its failure to uphold its end of the social contract. Though Kifaya’s political influence waned by 2006, some observers credit the movement for planting “the seeds of protest in Egyptian society that without doubt, inspired the establishment of smaller political initiatives.” However, other scholars argue it is necessary to go back even further in time to locate the origins of a modern social movement *organizational style*, such that was seen during the 2011 Egyptian revolution. Analysts depict this style as “diffuse”, “horizontal”, “diverse”, and “flexible” in nature.¹³⁸ For example, Dina Shehata says the Palestinian Intifada in 2000 stimulated the revival of

¹³² Dubai School of Government, “Facebook Usage: Factors and Analysis,” *Arab Social Media Report* 1:1, (January 2011).

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ B. Etling, et. al, “Mapping the Arabic Blogosphere: Politics and Dissent Online,” *New Media & Society*, 2010, 12(8), <http://nms.sagepub.com>.

¹³⁵ Nagwa Abdel Salam Fahmy, “Revealing the “Agenda-Cutting” through Egyptian Blogs: An Empirical Study,” Mass Communication Department, Ain Shams University, 2010.

¹³⁶ Saba Mahmood, “The Architects of the Egyptian Uprising and the Challenges Ahead,” *The Nation*, February 14, 2011, <http://www.thenation.com/article/158581/architects-egyptian-revolution#>.

¹³⁷ Carnegie Guide to Egypt’s Elections, “The Egyptian Movement for Change (Kifaya)” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, accessed May 13, 2011, <http://egyptelections.carnegieendowment.org/2010/09/22/the-egyptian-movement-for-change-kifaya>.

¹³⁸ Asef Bayat, “The Post-Islamist Revolutions,” *Foreign Affairs*, The Council on Foreign Relations, April 26, 2011, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67812/asef-bayat/the-post-islamist-revolutions>.

a new kind of youth activism.¹³⁹ She describes youth activism in Egypt since 2000 as “unique” from previous waves because of factors such as mobilization, “largely outside existing parties and movements” and platforms that are “non-ideological, inclusive and internally diverse”.¹⁴⁰ Perhaps most importantly, Shehata says the new youth activists utilize technology, such as social networking sites, as a way to attract supporters. One of the most well studied examples, prior to 2011, is the online show of solidarity for the April 6, 2008 textile worker strikes in Al Mahalla Al Kobra. In lead up to this event, twenty-seven year old Esra Abdel Fatah created a group on the social networking site, Facebook, and requested that Egyptians participate in this strike. Within the course of two weeks, her group attracted more than 60,000 members.¹⁴¹ Though the strike itself was considered a failure¹⁴², several journalists noted that Esra’s clicks of a mouse garnered a rapid level of response that few political groups ever achieve. The mainstream media even dubbed her “Facebook Girl”.¹⁴³

For contextual purposes, it is important to consider that online activism coincided with an *overall* rise in activism in Egypt. Part of this can be explained by a “perceived opening in the political system” after the U.S.-led war against Iraq.¹⁴⁴ In a 2008 interview, blogger Issandr El-Amrani said of 2005, “there was so much happening and there was a lot of attention on Egypt because President Bush had decided to highlight Egypt as a place to democratize”.¹⁴⁵ In a 2007 interview, well-known blogger Mahmoud Salem, username “SandMonkey”¹⁴⁶, also described the political atmosphere at that time:

Everyone wanted Bush to lose the 2004 elections. If he had lost 2004 we would not have had our push for democracy in 2005. The moment Bush won again that's when Mubarak said maybe we

¹³⁹ Dina, Shehata, "Youth Activism in Egypt," *Arab Reform Initiative*, October 2008, http://www.arab-reform.net/sites/default/files/ARB.23_Dina_Shehata_ENG.pdf.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Menassat Staff, “Mass protests in Egypt fail to live up to the hype,” *Menassat*, April 8, 2009, <http://www.menassat.com/?q=en/news-articles/6333-mass-protests-egypt-fail-live-hype>.

¹⁴² Jeffrey Fleishman and Noha El-Hennawy, “Egypt: Too Poor to Strike?,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 6, 2008, <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/babylonbeyond/2008/04/egypt-too-poor.html>.

¹⁴³ Sarah J. Robbins, “Esraa Abdel Fattah, “Facebook Girl:: The World-Changer,” *Glamour*, October 31, 2011, <http://www.glamour.com/inspired/women-of-the-year/2011/esraa-abdel-fattah>.

¹⁴⁴ David Faris, “Revolutions without Revolutionaries?” (PhD Diss., Political Science Department, University of Pennsylvania, 2010).

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ “Egyptian Activist Known as ‘Sandmonkey’ Reveals Identity After Police Beating,” *Nightline*, ABC News, February 7, 2011, <http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/egyptian-activist-sandmonkey-reveals-identity-police-beating/story?id=12853101#.ULuCUhx6AwJ>.

should have democracy because Bush didn't go away. And had Bush gone away there wouldn't be democracy right now like there wouldn't be two years of freedom and fresh air that we were able to breathe and that' we've had.¹⁴⁷

That “freedom and fresh air” SandMonkey spoke of manifested itself in the journalism arena, “which meant that opportunities for expression, oversight, and dissent multiplied almost overnight”.¹⁴⁸ Prior to 2004, the government more or less controlled what was printed in the local print press. Even the “opposition” newspapers of the legally recognized political parties were viewed with some distrust, “since their affiliation with the state in the form of acquiescence to its rules made them suspect in the eyes of many”.¹⁴⁹ In his PhD dissertation, David Faris says the rules of the game changed in 2004 with the emergence of the privately owned and independent newspaper *Al-Masri Al-Youm*. He writes:

..the existence and growth of the independent press allowed a kind of nexus to form between activist bloggers and human rights agitators – they fed into one another, in the sense that bloggers link to and talk about the stories printed in the independent press, while the journalists in the independent press often rely on bloggers as sources. *Al-Masri Al-Youm* was a daily newspaper unlike anything that had been seen in Egypt in decades – a privately financed affair that was free to criticize the regime, make money, and publish hard-hitting investigative journalism. It may be that the kind of criticism carried in the pages of the newspaper emboldened bloggers to do the same on their new Web sites.¹⁵⁰

One particularly telling example of the power of blogs comes from 2006. During the annual Eid al-Fitr celebrations, a man named Malek Mostafa published on his blog a first-hand account of alleged assaults of several women in downtown Cairo. According to an article in Arab Media and Society, his blog led to coverage in several media outlets, outlets that initially ignored the story.¹⁵¹

Though the Egyptian government did not try to block or filter websites prior to 2011¹⁵², bloggers and activists still faced a number of hurdles in freely expressing their opinion without reprisal. The OpenNet Initiative, which investigates Internet surveillance

¹⁴⁷ Pamela Geller, “Confessions of a SandMonkey: SandMonkey Talks to Atlas,” *Atlas Shrugs*, April 30, 2007, http://atlasshrugs2000.typepad.com/atlas_shrugs/2007/04/sandmonkey_spea.html.

¹⁴⁸ Faris, “Revolutions without Revolutionaries?”

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Rania Al Malky, “Blogging for Reform: the Case of Egypt,” *Arab Media & Society*, February 2007.

¹⁵² According to the latest OpenNet Initiative report (2009), there was “no evidence of Internet filtering in Egypt, although a small group of politically sensitive Web sites have been blocked in the past. OpenNet Initiative says at some point, the Egyptian government blocked the Web site of the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as the Web site of the Labor Party’s newspaper.

and filtering practices worldwide, reports that governments and authorities in the Middle East North Africa region use a “multilayered” approach in controlling access. These tactics include: “laws and regulations, technical filtering, physical restrictions, surveillance and monitoring, and harassments and arrests”.¹⁵³ For example, in August 2008, Egyptian officials reportedly forced clients at Internet cafes to provide “their names, email and phone numbers, before they use the Internet”.¹⁵⁴ The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information called this move a “censorship procedure”, which it said had become “a widespread reality”.¹⁵⁵ Certainly the Egyptian government utilized the infamous decades-old emergency law to its advantage. Like other countries, Egypt developed the law for times when public security or public order was threatened, such as in wartime or during natural disasters.¹⁵⁶ For example, Article 3 of the law allowed the Egyptian President to confiscate, censor, or close newspapers on basis of national security and public safety. This article also permitted either the President or his deputy to restrict freedom of movement, association, and residence, as well as monitor personal communications. Those people who were considered a threat to national security or public order, which was broadly interpreted, were also subject to long-term custody without criminal charges or the right to a trial. The law actually stated that a person can be held up to 30 days without charge, however they must be told why they were arrested and allowed a phone call.¹⁵⁷ Numerous human rights organizations have noted that this provision was regularly violated, and that the government under Mubarak held detainees for more than a decade.¹⁵⁸ Indeed, by 2007, the “freedom and fresh air” of relatively

¹⁵³ Helmi Noman, "Internet in the Middle East and North Africa," *OpenNet Initiative*, 2008-2009. <http://opennet.net/research/regions/mena>.

¹⁵⁴ AFP, “Egypt demanding data from cyber cafes users: NGO,” *Agence France-Presse*, August 9, 2008, http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5hN_tktRSmeojLOOn65IVULB4lj8A.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Human Right Watch, “Egypt: Cosmetic Changes Can’t Justify Keeping Emergency Law,” Human Rights Watch, May 13, 2010, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2010/05/12/egypt-cosmetic-changes-can-t-justify-keeping-emergency-law>.

¹⁵⁷ International Commission of Jurists, “ICJ Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of Egypt,” United Nations Human Rights Council, August 2009, <http://old.icj.org/IMG/UPRSubmission-Egypt.pdf>.

¹⁵⁸ It is not known how many people were in Egyptian state custody at the time of 2011 uprising. Several 2011 articles cite a 2008 estimate of 5,000 people. **Human Rights Watch, "Monopolizing Power", January 4, 2007.**

uncensored speech had evaporated. Blogger SandMonkey described the repressive political atmosphere in which he and other activists worked at the time:

They're arresting activists. People they don't like. They are threatening to arrest any journalists with the new terrorism law who might voice any opinion that contradicts with the government. They are calling anybody the defends that is deemed a terrorist as a terrorist collaborator and should be thrown in [jail](#). And the thing is there is no definition of "terrorist." Anybody can be a terrorist. They actually stated that trying to pressure the government is a form of terrorism. Anybody that talks bad about the government ...lawsuits left and right for "defaming Egypt's reputations".¹⁵⁹

The OpenNet Initiative reports that in 2008 alone, the Egyptian government detained more than a hundred bloggers.¹⁶⁰ Esra Abdel Fatah, the “Facebook Girl” mentioned above, spent 16 days in jail.¹⁶¹ The Mubarak regime’s repressive media tactics took several other forms including: media bills targeting journalists, raids on homes and businesses, asking phone companies to block service or hand over communication data of specific customers, and phone wiretaps and mail monitoring of those people the government deemed threats to public security.¹⁶² Investigators are still determining the extent of these tactics. Since the uprising, there are still many concerns as to whether Egypt authorities have truly abandoned its repressive past.

Extent of the “Media Blackout”

The Mubarak regime’s attempt to suppress the January 25 demonstrators took an “unprecedented” turn on the evening and early morning hours of January 27-28, 2011. Just after midnight the government ordered almost every one of the country’s Internet service providers to shut down their international connections.¹⁶³ Only the Noor Group, which houses the Egyptian Stock Exchange was allowed to remain active. In total, 93% of Egyptian networks remained unreachable during this time period.¹⁶⁴ The silencing continued with cell phone companies. Between carriers Mobinil and Vodafone, at least 58 million people, out of the country’s total of 74.9 cell phone subscribers, went without

¹⁵⁹ Geller, “Confessions of a SandMonkey.”

¹⁶⁰ Noman, "Internet in the Middle East and North Africa," *OpenNet Initiative*.

¹⁶¹ Robbins, “Esraa Abdel Fattah,” *Glamour*.

¹⁶² Noman, "Internet in the Middle East and North Africa," *OpenNet Initiative*.

¹⁶³ James Cowie, “Egypt Leaves the Internet,” Renesys Corporation, January 27, 2011, <http://www.renesys.com/blog/2011/01/egypt-leaves-the-internet.shtml>.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

service for a period of two days.¹⁶⁵ Both companies reportedly restored service on January 30 though some survey respondents said they did not have connectivity until later. As for the Internet, the Renesys Corporation reported that around 9:30 a.m. Cairo-time on February 2, “ISPs almost uniformly returned to the Internet”. The “media blackout”¹⁶⁶ ended and 2011 Egyptian uprising continued. The Egyptian government failed to suppress the growing clamor of opposition voices.

III-B: Exploratory Research and Social Movement Argument

Through the use of an online and paper survey, this research begins to pick apart the communication habits of people living in Egypt throughout the 2011 Revolution, primarily Cairo metropolitan-area residents. The survey consisted of 24 elements/questions, including demographic information. It focused on 11 types of communication sources and asked participants to rate *each* according to how often he or she used them to send and receive protest information throughout the Revolution. Those information sources are the following:

A) Television B) Internet C) Radio D) Newspaper/Magazine E) Mosque/Church F) Cell Phone Calls from Family /Friends/Neighbors G) Landline Calls from Family/Friends/Neighbors H) Face-to-Face Conversations with Family/Friends I) Flyers that were distributed during protest marches J) Flyers that were distributed in a person’s neighborhood and K) Information from speaking with people at protest marches.

Prior to rating these sources, participants first indicated whether or not they regularly use the Internet and whether they have a cell phone and/or telephone landline. In addition, respondents estimated how often they watch television and whether they prefer either state/local television news, international television news, or watch an equal mix of both types. These questions helped establish a baseline of media use with which to compare answers pertaining to the “media blackout”. At the end of the survey, the final questions addressed the overall impact of restricted cell phone and Internet access. These included:

1. How did the media blackout affect your ability to learn information about the Egyptian uprising?
2. How did the media blackout affect your ability to take to the streets (publicly participate) in the popular Egyptian uprising (e.g march in protest, sit-ins, volunteer)?

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ For the purposes of this thesis, I use the term “media blackout” to refer to the period of time between January 28 and February 2, 2011, when this communication disruption occurred.

3. How did the media blackout affect your motivation to take to the streets (publicly participate) in the popular Egyptian uprising?

This survey was anonymous and respondents had the option of taking either an English or Arabic-language paper version or completing an online English-language version at surveymonkey.com. In total, I collected 90 complete surveys and 19 incomplete surveys, which were not included in the final results. The breakdown of the surveys are as follows:

44 Arabic Paper Surveys

20 English Paper Surveys

26 Online English Surveys

Total: 90 Completed Surveys

In terms of collecting responses, I accomplished this through a combination of emailing links to the online survey, having translators conduct one-on-one interviews (for those who either could not read the survey or preferred not to), and administering surveys to groups of people around Cairo. Survey collection took place in Old Cairo as well as the new campus of American University in Cairo. Finally, colleagues distributed surveys to friends and co-workers, which were returned at a later date.¹⁶⁷ It should be noted that the majority of respondents who filled out the English paper surveys (approximately 15) were Egyptian, but spoke English fluently. While I did not purposely exclude expatriates from the survey; I felt it was important that the plurality of participants should be “native” Egyptians for the simple fact that this would greater reflect the distribution of technology use in the country. From my notes, I estimate approximately 72 Egyptians and 18 expatriates completed surveys. Respondents also circled or wrote down where they lived and more than 20 Cairo neighborhoods are represented in the results. Some of those neighborhoods include: Haram, Giza, Dokki, El Manial, Zamalek, Hada’ek Al Qobba, Downtown, Maadi, Helwan, Shobra, New Cairo, Al Rehab, Nasr City, Heliopolis, 6th of October, and Imbaba.¹⁶⁸ Approximately five respondents reported that they lived outside of the metropolitan area (three from Alexandria). I did not include

¹⁶⁷ Special thanks to Rehab El Deeb, Menna Talaat, Nina Nalalos, Hossam El Naggar, and Catherine O’Brien for their assistance in designing, translating, and helping administer the survey. Without their generous assistance, I could not have collected these results in such a short period of time.

¹⁶⁸ A number of responses still need to be translated or are illegible.

responses from the “incomplete” category.

IV-D: Analysis of Findings

Though a large sample size is always preferable, the 90 completed surveys nonetheless begin to illustrate how people in Egypt, namely in the Cairo metropolitan area, worked around cell phone and Internet restrictions during a roughly five day period from January 28 to February 2, 2011. Not surprisingly, respondents reported that they turned to other “tried and true” sources of information in the technological absence of their regular means of communications. Since the survey responses largely reflect a middle- to upper class demographic, these results cannot be extrapolated to the population at large. However, it is possible to make some concrete observations based on the data.

As anticipated, survey participants said they adapted to the cell phone and Internet restrictions by using other sources of information with greater frequency. For example, 71.% (64 people) answered that they used television “most of the time” to learn about the popular uprising in Egypt. That percentage increased to 83.3% (75 people) between the dates of January 28 to February 2. The rating of “Newspaper/Magazine” also increased slightly; from 13.3% of respondents saying they used this medium “most of the time”, to 15.6% during the “media blackout”. Aside from these media outlets, respondents also reportedly started having more interpersonal interactions. For example, 38.9% of participants said that most of the time, they utilized face-to-face conversations with family and friends to learn about the country’s protests. This percentage increased to 46.7% during the “media blackout”. Likewise, the number of people who received information from speaking with people at protest marches “most of the time” increased from 16.7% to 22.2%.

It should be made clear that for most respondents, it appears media consumption simply *shifted* and did *not* necessarily increase when the government restricted communication lines. For example, when looking at the television viewership another way, 95.5% of participants answered that they used television “some” or “most of the time” to learn about the revolution. During the “media blackout”, 92.2% participants reported using television “some” or “most of the time”. What this survey suggests is that

most people simply used their preferred mediums with higher frequency when faced with limited cell phone and Internet access. For example, the people who used television “some of the time” to learn about the revolution increased their utilization of this media to “most of the time” during the blackout. In fact, the only medium to see an overall increase in new users during the blackout is “Newspaper/Magazine”, however this difference is so small, two respondents, that it does not hold much statistical significance. Again, the survey results suggest that for *most* people, media consumption simply shifted during the “media blackout” and did not prompt them into using mediums that were not already part of their regular routine. Admittedly, a truly random sample and much greater sample size is needed to verify these results; however, if this conclusion is proven true, it would help balance the narrative that social media or innovative work-arounds, such as Speak-to-Tweet¹⁷⁰, were vital to maintaining the momentum of the revolution.

At the very least, this research supports the idea that, by the time the Egyptian government restricted cell phone and Internet use, the “protest wave” had already reached its “transformation of contention”.¹⁷¹ In other words, the Egyptian uprising had reached the “point of no return” and the tools with which to organize the movement mattered less. To elaborate, Sidney Tarrow and Ruud Koopmans define protest cycle as “a phase of heightened conflict and contention across the social system”.¹⁷² In their definition, the first waves are “characterized by strong expansion of contention across social groups and sectors, superseding the narrow boundaries of policy fields, and often transcending national borders”.¹⁷³ This first wave of contention in the Egyptian pro-democracy movement was certainly witnessed in the lead up to January 25, 2011. Weeks and months prior, online groups like the “We Are All Khaled Said” Facebook page and the “April 6th Youth Movement” became hubs of pro-reform activity for both Egyptians and foreign supporters alike. The “We Are All Khalid Said” group was particularly adept at garnering support because it focused on a broad-based human rights campaign that appealed to an

¹⁷⁰ Speak-to-Tweet is a service by which people can dial a number from any phone, such as landlines, and leave a message that is then transcribed in the form of a “Tweet” on the microblogging site “Twitter”. Over the weekend of January 28th, engineers from Google, SayNow, and Twitter, developed the service in response to the Internet shutdown in Egypt.

¹⁷¹ Rudd Koopmans, "Protest in Time and Space" in *The Blackwell Companion*.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

international audience. The co-administrator of this page, and founder of the Arabic language version, Wael Ghonim, later states that specifically targeting an international audience was a controversial decision, however it was needed to attract media attention.¹⁷⁴ This group formed in response to the brutal beating death of 28-year old Egyptian in June 2010. A little more than a month after the young man's death, visitors posted dozens of comments on the English language Facebook site and the Arabic version of the site had more than 130,000 members.¹⁷⁵ By the time the "April 6th Youth" and the "We Are All Khaled Said" groups called for mass protests on January 25, they had hundreds of thousands of online supporters.¹⁷⁶ Four days prior to the first day of mass demonstration, almost 69,000 people had signed up for the Jan. 25 protest on the "We Are All Khaled Said" Facebook page.¹⁷⁷ Certainly it can be argued that the "transformation of contention" began around this date as this is when we start to see alliance building among various opposition groups, changes in strategies, and even new identity formation. For example, a more traditional opposition figure, Mohamed ElBaradei, offered "tacit support" for the demonstrations beforehand.¹⁷⁸ In terms of new strategies, the April 6 group also set up an "operation room" and organized cells of 30-50 activists prior to the protest.¹⁷⁹ Leader Ahmed Maher describes the purpose of this room as:

...to discuss routine details including assessing the reach of our calls to protest with regards to internet websites, looking at the data and information that was being provided to citizens, and studying innovative mechanisms of protesting which aimed to overcome the methods that the state security services always use to pre-empt demonstrations and protests.¹⁸⁰

Then there was the Tunisian example glittering in the horizon. As Ruud Koopmans notes, "most movements, in fact, borrow inventions from other movements,

¹⁷⁴ Wael Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0: The Power of the People Is Greater Than the People in Power*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012).

¹⁷⁵ *Frontline*, "Revolution in Cairo: April 6 Youth Movement," PBS, 2011, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/revolution-in-cairo/inside-april6-movement/>.

¹⁷⁶ Mike Giglio, "Is Egypt Next?" *Newsweek*, January 23, 2011.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ *Frontline*, "Revolution in Cairo: April 6 Youth Movement," PBS, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/revolution-in-cairo/inside-april6-movement/>.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

either within the same polity or from abroad”.¹⁸¹ Having recently ousted longtime President Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali after 23 days of mass demonstrations, analysts pointed to Tunisia as “a standard-bearer and a source of inspiration for people in other regional countries”.¹⁸² Perhaps this explains why more Egyptians who joined activist Facebook groups in 2011 took to the streets as compared with online supporters who joined groups surrounding the April 6, 2008 protest. Indeed, when thousands of people publicly demonstrated on the 25th, many observers noted that they were “unabashedly inspired by Tunisia’s example”.¹⁸³ This sense of “everything is possible” is characteristic of protest waves and includes “both euphoric hopes for revolutionary change, and fears of repressive reaction”.¹⁸⁴ The purpose of stating this point in length is to emphasize that by January 28, 2011, the Egyptian pro-democracy movement had transformed to a point of no-going-back, so it mattered less the mediums by which activists sent their message. Even the creator of the “We Are All Khaled Said” Facebook page, Wael Ghonim, notes in his memoir that after the protests of January 25, the nature of the political activism had moved beyond the Internet. He writes:

I continued to rally support for the revolution through my posts on Facebook. But this was no longer just about a Facebook page or the Internet as a whole. It had gotten much bigger than that. The people on the streets had begun to move at a faster pace than the political activists. The mob was now in charge, whether it was rational or not.¹⁸⁵

The regime’s move was too little too late.

Of course, this is not to say that the government clampdown on Internet and cell phone services had *no* effect on the population’s perceptions or actions, because it did. 43.3% (39 people) said that the media blackout affected their ability to learn information *somewhat* and that they wish they could have heard, read, or watched more coverage. 25.6% (23 people) reported that the media blackout *greatly* affected their ability to learn information. Did a lack of information translate into decreased protest activity? A number of respondents said that it did; 32.6% (29 people) said they did not participate in the

¹⁸¹ Koopmans, "Protest in Time and Space," in *The Blackwell Companion*.

¹⁸² Roula Ali, “Egypt Rising: January 25, Pan-Arabism, & Western Myopia,” January 26, 2011, <http://muftah.org/?p=693>.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Koopmans, "Protest in Time and Space," in *The Blackwell Companion*.

¹⁸⁵ Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0*, 189.

popular Egyptian uprising *sometimes* or *rarely* because of a lack of information. However, it should be noted that 37.8% (34 people) said the media blackout motivated them to publicly participate more and they did participate more as a result. Again, a greater sample size is needed to verify these results. The initial take-away should be that the majority of the survey respondents (67.4%) felt they had enough information to publicly participate in the Egyptian uprising or did not participate for other reasons.

Conclusion

In the immediate wake of the 2011 popular uprisings in the Middle East North Africa region, a wide variety of pundits, scholars, and journalists debated the role of social media throughout these momentous events. At one extreme, analysts claim the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, *could not have happened* without the use of social media; even dubbing the events “Facebook Revolutions”. At the other extreme, media experts such as Malcolm Gladwell, assert that new media was simply a tool in a movement that had reached its tipping point¹⁸⁶. This research would tend to agree with Gladwell in that exploratory survey results suggest that for *most* people, media consumption simply shifted during the nearly five-day “media blackout”. Furthermore, this research supports the idea that, by the time the Egyptian government restricted cell phone and Internet use, the “protest wave” had already reached its “transformation of contention”. In other words, the Egyptian uprising had reached the “point of no return” and the tools with which to organize the movement mattered less. In arguing this point, this chapter attempted to provide a more nuanced narrative of a revolution overrun with social media memes.

¹⁸⁶ Malcolm Gladwell, “Small Change: Why the Revolutions Will Not Be Tweeted,” *New Yorker*, October 4, 2010, www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/10/04/101004fa_fact_gladwell.

Chapter IV: Revolt like an Egyptian

Introduction

Throughout the core 18 days of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, millions of people around the world tuned in, turned on, and Googled their attention to news from this North African country. The question of “who were the demonstrators?” remained central focus. For United States government officials, “protest identity” was perhaps *the* most important question as analysts and policy makers raised fears about an Islamic takeover of Egyptian politics. This chapter begins to address the provocative unknown of “protest identity” through analyzing coverage of *The New York Times*, arguably America’s newspaper of record. Which activists and demonstrators did the *Times* feature throughout the heady and hectic days leading up to the removal of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak? How were these protesters portrayed? The first section of this chapter begins with a qualitative and quantitative review of the *Times* from January 24, 2011 through February 12, 2011. A review of 312 articles/features indicates that *Times* reporters depicted the archetypical Egyptian activist most often, but not always, as young, “tech-savvy” and “westernized”. In a related vein, the narrative of a “social media revolution” gained traction in the absence of clear secular leadership. This does not intend to suggest the *Times* ignored Islamist demonstrators, such as Muslim Brotherhood members; because it did not. However, this research shows that the *Times* reporters placed undo emphasis on a broad-based non-ideological movement, led by young Egyptians. Following this analysis, the remaining sections of Chapter four are then presented as case studies of two Egyptian activists who readily fit the *Times*’ profile bias *and* received significant mainstream American media coverage: Wael Ghonim and Gigi Ibrahim. Primarily, case studies of these individuals contribute to the overall historical record of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. More in-depth profile sketches of these two “media darlings” also provide important clues as to why mainstream U.S. media initially covered the uprising as it did.

IV-A: Demonstrators and Activists featured in The New York Times: Methodology and Major Findings

Using the online database LexisNexis, I limited my review of the *New York Times* to the time period immediately surrounding the 18 days of mass protest in Egypt,

between January 24th 2011 and February 12th 2011. This time frame is often referred to as the “January 25th Revolution” and by focusing on it, I followed the initial, and sometimes unsure narrative of the protests as it unfolded in the *Times*. While the *Times* is not the largest American newspaper by circulation, it is widely regarded as “the newspaper of record in the United States”.¹⁸⁷ This point is debatable, however given the scope of this thesis, I believe a review of the *Times* articles allowed me to confidently establish a quantitative and qualitative baseline from which to direct my inquiry. I began my review with the broad search term “Egypt” and LexisNexis returned 314 articles/features, two of which were repeats. Of the 312 articles I reviewed, I coded every Egyptian name that appeared *at least once* in each piece, which totaled 727 named Egyptians. Obviously, some names appeared more often than others. “Hosni Mubarak” or “Mubarak” appeared in 183 articles/features while then newly appointed Egyptian vice-President “Omar Suleiman” appeared in 50. These were the two most common names to appear. It should be mentioned that of the LexisNexis results, approximately 100 articles centered on *other* topics, and mentioned “Egypt” in passing. I included these “other” articles in my review to better understand how journalists portrayed unrest in the MENA region. For example, at least three of these “non-Egypt” articles¹⁸⁸ centered on world food issues and noted “high food prices have been among the reasons for protests in Egypt and elsewhere in the Arab World”.¹⁸⁹ In light of this assertion, I specifically recorded when Egyptians cited food prices as a reason for protest. To the *Times*’ credit, its journalists often, but not always, attributed a variety of factors in forming the impetus of the uprising. An article from January 26th states,

The reality that emerged from interviews with protesters---many of whom said they were independents---was more complicated and reflected one of the government’s deepest fears: that

¹⁸⁷ “The New York Times,” *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/412546/The-New-York-Times>.

¹⁸⁸ Neil MacFarquhar, “Food Prices Worldwide Hit Record Levels, Fueled by Uncertainty, U.N. Says,” *The New York Times*, February 3, 2011, accessed March 8, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/04/world/04food.html>. See also, Keith Bradsher, “Crops Wither and Prices Rise in Chinese Drought,” *The New York Times*, February 3, 2011, accessed March 8, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/04/world/asia/04china.html>. See also, Keith Bradsher, “U.N. Food Agency Issues Warning on China Drought,” *The New York Times*, February 8, 2011, accessed March 8, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/09/business/global/09food.html?pagewanted=all>.

¹⁸⁹ Bradsher, “Crops Wither and Prices Rise.”

opposition to Mr. Mubarak's rule spreads across ideological lines and includes average people angered by corruption and economic hardship as well as secular and Islamist opponents.¹⁹⁰

However, the nuance reflected in the above statement is not so apparent when analyzing the *Times*' coverage of Egypt over the entire 18 days of mass protest. The paper's journalists and op-ed contributors more often portrayed the Egyptian revolutionaries as 1. young 2. tech-savvy 3. and westernized. By "young", specifically the majority of Egyptian interviewees readily identified as "demonstrators/activists" were under the age of 35. It is a challenge to provide a specific figure as journalists often did not include a subject's age and sometimes quoted a person without obviously placing them at a protest. Additionally, a single person's name may be spelled differently, depending on which journalist wrote the article. For example, in five articles the name of one protest organizer, "Zyad el-Alawi", is spelled three different ways, making it difficult to establish if readers are actually hearing from the same person. Despite these hurdles, I gathered a list of 90 people who were reasonably, if not obviously portrayed as demonstrators/activists *and* whose ages were listed in the article. Of these 90 people, approximately 61 demonstrators/activists were under the age of 35 while 29 demonstrators/activists were listed as aged 35 or older. By a ratio of 2 to 1, the *Times* journalists portrayed the average Egyptian revolutionary as "young". The significant exception to this observation is Nobel laureate and opposition leader, Mohamed ElBaradei, aged 69, who appeared in 48 articles/features- far more than any other protester. Yet, Dr. ElBaradei's prevalence in the media does not automatically discredit the argument that reporters focused on a specific type of protester. For the most part, *Times* staff portrayed young Egyptians as the impetus and leaders of the January 25th Revolution. The following headlines articulate this assertion very clearly:

- "In New Role, Egypt Youths Drive Revolt"-**January 27, 2011**¹⁹¹
- "Protest's Old Guard Falls In Behind the Young"- **January 31, 2011**¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ Kareem Fahim and Mona El-Naggar, "Across Egypt, Protests Direct Fury at Leader," *The New York Times*, January 26, 2011, accessed via LexisNexus on March 5, 2012.

¹⁹¹ David D. Kirkpatrick and Michael Slackman, "Egyptian Youths Drive the Revolt Against Mubarak," *The New York Times*, January 26, 2011, accessed March 3, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/27/world/middleeast/27opposition.html?pagewanted=all>.

- “Wired, Educated and Shrewd, Young Egyptians Guide Revolt”-February 10, 2011¹⁹³

As the final headline above indicates, another idea that pervaded *The New York Times* coverage is the idea that many of the young revolutionaries were “tech-savvy”. By “tech-savvy”, this refers to how young demonstrators/activists were often, but not always, portrayed as competent of and engaged with technology such as social networking sites. The most notable example of this characterization is found in descriptions of Wael Ghonim: a “tech-savvy,” “emotive and handsome,”¹⁹⁴ “Google executive and leader of the young Internet activists who started the revolt.”¹⁹⁵ Ghonim is mentioned in 11 articles/features, one more than opposition leader Ayman Nour. Other activists are sometimes described as a “blogger”, “online activist” or “online organizer”, but interestingly, journalists tended to attribute “tech-savvy” to youth organizers as a collective. Time and time again, *Times* journalists either cited “experts” or made reference to how activists used Facebook and Twitter:

January 27: “The Brotherhood is no longer the most effective player in the political arena,” said Emad Shahin, an Egyptian scholar now at the University of Notre Dame. “If you look at the Tunisian uprising, it’s a youth uprising. It is the youth that knows how to use the media, Internet, Facebook, so there are other players now.”¹⁹⁶

January 29: “The fact that protesters used online social media like Twitter and Facebook to organize demonstrations, and were trying to evade government efforts to cut them off from the Internet, he said, showed that people in the region were well-educated and ready to contribute to social and economic stability”.¹⁹⁷

February 4, “Nine days after a diverse band of protesters mobilized on the Internet and gathered by the thousands in Tahrir Square, shocking both themselves and their country with their numbers, their campaign to oust President Hosni Mubarak seems to have survived, improbably, without a recognized

¹⁹² David D. Kirkpatrick and Mona El-Naggar, “Protest’s Old Guard Falls In Behind the Young,” *The New York Times*, January 30, 2011, accessed March 3, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/31/world/middleeast/31opposition.html?pagewanted=all>.

¹⁹³ David D. Kirkpatrick, “Wired and Shrewd, Young Egyptians Guide Revolt,” *The New York Times*, February 9, 2011, accessed March 3, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/10/world/middleeast/10youth.html?pagewanted=all>.

¹⁹⁴ Kareem Fahim and Mona El-Naggar, “Emotions of a Reluctant Hero Inject New Life Into the Protest Movement,” *The New York Times*, February 9, 2011, accessed via LexisNexus on March 3, 2012.

¹⁹⁵ David D. Kirkpatrick, “Extra-Legal Detentions, and a Mubarak Aide’s Role in Them, Anger Egyptians,” *The New York Times*, February 6, 2011, accessed via LexisNexus on March 3, 2012.

¹⁹⁶ Kirkpatrick and Slackman, “In New Role, Egypt Youths.”

¹⁹⁷ Liz Alderman, “Unrest Worries Credit Raters. So Does Calming it,” *The New York Times*, January 29, 2011, accessed via Lexis Nexus on March 3, 2012.

cadre at the top giving orders...The groups associated with the initial success of the protests, like the April 6 Youth Movement, remain key organizers.”¹⁹⁸

February 6: “The Arab world has 100 million young people today between the ages of 15 and 29, many of them males who do not have the education to get a good job, buy an apartment and get married. That is trouble. Add in rising food prices, and the diffusion of Twitter, Facebook and texting, which finally gives them a voice to talk back to their leaders and directly to each other, and you have a very powerful change engine....”¹⁹⁹

February 9: “Arab officials have raised the specter of the Muslim Brotherhood, which some say has begun to hijack the protests that began among largely secular young people in Egypt adept at using Facebook and Twitter.”²⁰⁰

February 11: “But one aspect of Egyptian society has changed in recent years. Young Egyptians, gazing through the windows of the Internet, have gained a keener sense than many of their elders of the freedoms and opportunities they lack...Now that the youth of Cairo, armed with nothing but Facebook and the power of their convictions, have drawn millions into the street to demand a true Egyptian democracy...”²⁰¹

February 12: “In the uprising's ambition, young protesters, savvy with technology and more organized than their rulers, began to rewrite the formula that has underpinned an American-backed order: the nation in the service of a strongman. Egypt's revolt was by no means spontaneous -- propelled by new media like Facebook and the potency of Al Jazeera's broadcasts -- but the spark of Tunisia's uprising became the flame of Egypt's revolt...”²⁰²

Other examples include specific references to activists working with the April 6th Youth Movement and the “We Are All Khaled Said” Facebook page.²⁰³ The “We Are All Khaled Said” Facebook page in particular became a hub of pro-reform activity in the months and weeks prior to the January 25th Revolution. As these numerous examples show, the *Times*' coverage often focused on technology use of Egyptian revolutionaries. This focus reinforced the popular idea of a “social media revolution”, though not every observer accepted the narrative in its entirety. In his February 6th op-ed, Frank Rich acknowledged, “no one would deny that social media do play a role in organizing, publicizing and empowering participants in political movements in the Middle East and

¹⁹⁸ Jeremy W. Peters and J. David Goodman, “Reporters Beaten and Camera Smashed in Struggles to Control the News From Cairo,” *The New York Times*, February 4, 2011, accessed via Lexis Nexus on March 5, 2012.

¹⁹⁹ Thomas L. Friedman, “China, Twitter and a 20-Year-Olds vs. the Pyramids,” *The New York Times*, February 6, 2011, accessed via Lexis Nexus on March 5, 2012.

²⁰⁰ Mark Landler and Helene Cooper, “Mideast Allies Favor Stability Over Immediate Change in Egypt, Diplomats Tell U.S.,” *The New York Times*, February 9, 2011, accessed via Lexis Nexus on March 5, 2012.

²⁰¹ Mohamed ElBaradei, “The Next Step for Egypt's Opposition,” *The New York Times*, February 11, 2011, accessed via Lexis Nexus on March 5, 2012.

²⁰² Anthony Shadid, “After Tahrir, Uncharted Ground,” *The New York Times*, February 12, 2011, accessed via Lexis Nexus on February 29, 2012.

²⁰³ The “We Are All Khaled Said” Facebook page is an online memorial dedicated to 28-year old Khaled Said, an Alexandrian who was allegedly beat to death by two Egyptian police officers in June 2010.

elsewhere.”²⁰⁴ However he goes on to assert, as did Malcolm Gladwell for the *New Yorker*, that *how* people organize is less important than *why* they organize. In the Egyptian uprising, Rich attributes the media fascination with Twitter and Facebook to “implicit, simplistic Western chauvinism”²⁰⁵. He writes,

How fabulous that two great American digital innovations can rescue the downtrodden, unwashed masses. That is indeed impressive if no one points out that, even in the case of the young and relatively wired populace of Egypt, only some 20 percent of those masses have Internet access.²⁰⁶

Chauvinism may be part of the reason why Egyptian revolutionaries were also often portrayed as “Westernized”. Naturally, “Westernized” is a difficult term to define. If you define it simply as “of, or relating to the noncommunist countries of Europe and America”²⁰⁷, then you begin to see *some* trends emerge in the descriptions of demonstrators/activists. Certainly any time demonstrators/activists, either as a group or as a whole, are quoted as using Facebook or Twitter, they become more “Westernized” as these two companies developed in America. Often Facebook and Twitter were directly linked with the concept of democracy, which by extension, became even more of a western attribute. For example, on January 26, Mark Landler writes,

Instead, the (Obama) administration has worked with pro-democracy groups to advocate for freer media and assembly... And it has encouraged social networks like Twitter and Facebook to spread the word about pro-democracy movements -- the very networks that helped spread word of demonstrations in Tunisia and Egypt.²⁰⁸

Additionally, through the interviews they chose to highlight, *Times* op-ed contributors in particular, seem to emphasize that the type of democracy most Egyptians sought was “Western” or “American” in nature. Consider these excerpts:

February 2, 2011, “I approached the women and told them I was awed by their courage. I jotted down their names and asked why they had risked the mob’s wrath to come to Tahrir Square. “We need democracy in Egypt,” Amal told me, looking quite composed. “*We just want what you have.*”²⁰⁹ (Emphasis added)

²⁰⁴ Frank Rich, “Wallflowers at the Revolution,” *The New York Times*, February 5, 2011, accessed February 29, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/06/opinion/06rich.html>.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ “Western” definition, Merriam-Webster Online, accessed March 10, 2012, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/western>

²⁰⁸ Mark Landler, “A Region’s Unrest Scrambles U.S. Foreign Policy,” *The New York Times*, January 26, 2011, accessed via LexisNexus on March 6, 2012.

²⁰⁹ Nicholas D. Kristof, “Watching Thugs With Razors and Clubs at Tahrir Sq.,” *The New York Times*, February 2, 2011, accessed via LexisNexus on March 6, 2012.

February 4, 2011, “Biery looked at me with his intense green eyes. "I'm here for my children, so they live better." *That's a very American idea.* Another is this: a nation of laws is fundamental.”²¹⁰ (Emphasis added)

February 6, 2011, “I think of Hamdi, a businessman who looked pained when I asked whether Egyptian democracy might lead to oppression or to upheavals with Israel or the price of oil. "The Middle East is not only for oil," he reminded me. "We are human beings, exactly like you people." "We don't hate the American people," he added. "*They are pioneers. We want to be like them. Is that a crime?*"²¹¹ (Emphasis added)

Columnist Nicholas Kristof even offered “a dose of reassurance” to those that wondered if an Egyptian democracy would give rise to Islamic fundamentalism.²¹² He wrote,

I emerge struck by the moderation and tolerance of most protesters...I constantly asked women and Coptic Christians whether a democratic Egypt might end up a more oppressive country. They invariably said no—and looked so reproachfully at me for doubting democracy that I sometimes retreated in embarrassment.²¹³

Post-January 25, 2011, it is easy to review these columns and criticize them or the protesters for being too naïve about the political forces vying for control of the Egyptian political sphere. Especially considering the Freedom and Justice Party (party of the Muslim Brotherhood) and the conservative Al-Nour Party won the majority of seats in the lower house of parliament in the 2011-2012 Egyptian elections. To their credit, *Times* reporters often mentioned the Muslim Brotherhood in their coverage and noted the growing role/presence of the Ikhwan in the demonstrations. Still, the post-revolution parliamentary election results beg the questions: Did the *Times* accurately reflect the wishes of most protestors? If so, was the “revolution” co-opted by Islamic elements later in the process? Or did the *Times* columnists inadvertently project an outcome they wanted to see manifest?

Finally, there are other, more subtle descriptions that could be attributed to class and therefore appealed more to a certain demographic of *New York Times* readers. For example, out of 190 named Egyptians who were reasonably, if not obviously portrayed as demonstrators/activists, approximately 96 appeared with listed occupations. The overwhelmingly majority of these occupations are considered “professional”, such as

²¹⁰ Roger Cohen, “Hosni Mubarak Agonistes,” *The New York Times*, February 4, 2011, accessed March 6, 2012.

²¹¹ Nicholas Kristof, “Militants, Women and Tahrir Sq.,” *The New York Times*, February 6, 2011, accessed via LexisNexus on March 6, 2012.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid.

lawyers, engineers, professors, doctors, or businessmen. This bias towards people of a certain educational and possibly social background is interesting to explore. In fact, only 22 of the named Egyptians were labeled student, vendor, worker, laborer, or similar designations. The remaining 94 named Egyptians were either described by their role in the protests (i.e. “48 year-old, surging the crowd”, “protestor”, “online organizer”) or had no description at all. Admittedly, because not every named Egyptian received a description, it is difficult to determine with certainty if *Times* reporters focused disproportionately on one social class. However based purely on the descriptions given, the case can be made that the *Times* reporters favored interviewing individuals who more likely represented their own socio-economic background (i.e. educated, professional), if not their audiences. It is clear that those interviewed did not reflect the majority of the protesting Egyptian population (i.e. under- or unemployed).

IV-B: Case Study Wael Ghonim

In the absence of a one-on-one interview with media darling Wael Ghonim, this thesis obtained a significant amount of information on the former Google executive from his 2011 post-Revolution memoir, *Revolution 2.0*. As the title implies, Ghonim spends much of the book extolling the virtues of social media and elaborates on how several sites played a role in the 2011 Egyptian uprising. The book also provides a neat, if somewhat filtered account of Ghonim’s life before the uprising. From his high school education to his arrest by Egyptian authorities, *Revolution 2.0* attempts to show the evolution of Ghonim “from passive opposition to the revolutionary vanguard”.²¹⁴ While missing the spontaneity and critical questioning that a personal interview can provide, this memoir nonetheless provides an “official” account of his life and how he perceives himself. To gain a broad understanding of how mainstream American media portrayed Wael Ghonim, this thesis reviewed more than a hundred newspaper and magazine articles. Specifically, I initially searched the online database LexisNexus using the term “Wael Ghonim” between the dates of January 24, 2011, and June 30, 2011. In the category of “major world publications”, LexisNexus returned 350 results for Ghonim. However,

²¹⁴ Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0*, back cover.

approximately 108 of these results were from American publications. I included in this count relevant stories from the *International Herald Tribune*, which is the global edition of *The New York Times* and shares many of the *Times*' correspondents and columnists. This decision led to some overlap in stories as many of the articles that ran in *The New York Times* were also featured, though slightly modified, in the *International Herald Tribune*. Additionally, I reviewed the results of a basic Google search of "Wael Ghonim" between the dates of January 24 2011 and June 30, 2011. The Google search was necessary because it provided several supplementary video clippings and interviews that were not included in the LexusNexus search.

Given the number of times Ghonim's name appeared in American media, it was interesting to discover just how little substantive background material journalists published on him during this six-month period. Beyond his employment with Google and his role as the "We Are All Khaled Said" Facebook administrator, readers get only a glimpse into his motivations and beliefs. Part of this can be explained by the fact that the majority of articles do not actually feature a personal interview with him. Most articles within this six-month time period mention his name only to provide context for how the initial Egyptian protests were organized. Others feature interviews with friends or other young activists who talk briefly about Ghonim. Whether it was because of personal preference²¹⁵ or because other Egyptian activists asked him to limit his appearances²¹⁶, it is clear Wael Ghonim quickly stepped away from the international media spotlight. For this reason, this thesis was unable to directly compare several of the topics Ghonim discusses in his memoir with the various media accounts of this self-proclaimed Internet addict. Regardless, when reviewed together, these sources allowed me to sketch a profile of him that goes beyond the keywords "digital revolutionary". For clarity, his case study is divided into segments that cover particular characteristics or aspects of Ghonim's background, which is then compared, when possible, to media accounts. How these

²¹⁵ "Egypt Uprising: Hosni Mubarak Steps Down; Interview with Wael Ghonim: 'The Egyptian People Are the Leaders and Heroes of This Revolution'; Interview with Mohammed ElBaradei," *CNN Breaking News*, CNN, February 11, 2011, <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1102/11/bn.02.html>.

²¹⁶ William Wan, "Egypt's Facebook Revolution Faces Identity Crisis," *The Washington Post*, March 24, 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/egypts-facebook-revolution-faces-identity-crisis/2011/03/08/ABA0qTLB_story.html.

characteristics played a role in American media coverage are then analyzed in Chapter five.

Childhood narrative and Socio-economic background

The challenge to utilizing Wael Ghonim's memoir for research is not identifying personal milestones, rather it is identifying what goes unsaid. For example, though Ghonim speaks of his childhood briefly, it is clear that a poor Egyptian job market significantly affected his family. Money, or the lack thereof, determined where his family lived and later, how often he saw his father. Ghonim first describes his parents as part of a "slowly eroding middle class".²¹⁷ When Ghonim was one year old, economic conditions prompted his father to relocate the family to Saudi Arabia for better employment. Though his father is a doctor, Ghonim states his salary in Egypt, "could hardly cover our basic needs as a family"²¹⁸. He notes that at that time, many talented Egyptians "were becoming its main export, to the country's detriment."²¹⁹ As a child, when he asked his family why they were not returning to Egypt, his father replied, "How can I provide for a family of five with a salary of a few hundred pounds that runs out by the fifth day of the month?"²²⁰ Furthermore, after the Egyptian government froze Islamic private investment companies in the 1980's, Ghonim's father lost most of his savings.²²¹ What goes unsaid is how this initial view of Egypt affected Ghonim's impression of his homeland. He came from a country that according to his father, could not provide for them and forced them to move. This aspect of Ghonim's background, his childhood, does not receive attention in mainstream American media during the six month review period.²²² As for his socio-economic status, American viewers and readers do not get a sense of any past hardship; if anything, Ghonim comes across as a well-to-do businessman. Out of 96 articles reviewed (108 articles minus repeats in *The International Herald Tribune*), reporters refer to him as an "executive" more than 86 times, which implies he is a professional with a good

²¹⁷ Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0*, 7.

²¹⁸ Ibid, 8.

²¹⁹ Ibid, 8.

²²⁰ Ibid, 9

²²¹ Ibid, 9.

²²² The time he spent in Saudi Arabia as a child is mentioned briefly in at least one independent blog, see AnonymousEGY, "Wael Ghonim," Anarchitext, March 27, 2011. <http://anarchitext.wordpress.com/2011/03/27/wael-ghonim/>.

income. A *Newsweek* article notes that he and his family live in Dubai, in a house “in one of the city’s affluent suburbs”.²²³ In his now famous DreamTV interview, Ghonim even defends his motives and other young activists motives by pointing to their relative affluence:

We are not working with anyone with a set agenda! Some of us are very rich...we live in great homes and drive great cars. I don’t need anything from anyone! And I never wanted anything from anyone.²²⁴

Assuming that most Americans did not view his DreamTV interview and based solely on the way he is portrayed as a tech-savvy executive in American media, news outlets often failed to adequately explain how a man in his position (e.g. good-paying job, living in an affluent suburb in a foreign country) became so invested in the causes of the revolution (e.g. democracy, improving economic conditions, human rights). This is where his memoir helps make the connections. Given his childhood background, it is easier to understand the earliest underpinnings of Ghonim’s frustration with the Egyptian government. Ghonim not only writes about poor economic conditions but also his disgust with the Egyptian educational system. From an early age he claims he was aware of structural problems within Egypt and it is only later as a young adult that this frustration channels into political activism.

Poor economic conditions within Egypt also played a role in the separation of Ghonim’s family. While his mother and all three siblings returned to Egypt when Ghonim was thirteen, his father remained in Saudi Arabia to save more money.²²⁵ Ghonim describes his absence from home life as “not easy” and credits his mother for her devotion to her children.²²⁶ The subtext surrounding this topic is also interesting to explore. While Ghonim’s father expected to return to Egypt full time within two or three years, he never did and Ghonim does not explain the reason behind this. Did the physical distance of his father affect his view of authority? For example, on Ghonim’s widely followed Twitter account, he describes himself as “Egyptian who loves challenging status

²²³ Mike Giglio, “The Facebook Freedom Fighter,” *Newsweek*, February 13, 2011, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2011/02/13/the-facebook-freedom-fighter.html>.

²²⁴ @lissnup, “Wael Ghonim Interview 1-3 with English Transcript,” *Searching for Freedom via Social Media*, WordPress, February 8, 2011, <http://lissnup.wordpress.com/2011/02/08/wael-ghonim-interview-1-3-with-english-transcript/>.

²²⁵ Ghonim. *Revolution 2.0*, 9.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

quo”. How and why did his “challenging” nature develop? When reading his memoir, Ghonim appears to cultivate the idea that he opposed authority and “the norm” from an early age. Consider the following to excerpts:

A famous sheikh whom I met with several times once said to me, “Your problem, Wael, is that you only follow your own logic and you don’t want to have a role model to follow.” It was hard for me to accept conventional wisdom. It was my nature to discuss any matter thoroughly before I could accept a conclusion with both heart and mind.²²⁷

In general, many colleagues found me quite strange. Some saw that I rushed into decisions and actions without fully contemplating the consequences. They were right. It is in my blood. And not just that: I have always wanted to swim against the current.²²⁸

At the university, I mixed with people from many religious groups and ideologies, including the Muslim Brotherhood, and I joined many of their activities at the school. But I always made my own sense out of things.²²⁹

Many families thought I was crazy to seek marriage while I was still at school, despite the fact that I was financially independent and making a decent income. Stubborn and independent-minded as ever, however, I was determined to solve my problems my own way.²³⁰

Ghonim seems to encourage readers to view him as a freethinking individual who does not automatically accept what those in power have to say. This point is easily debatable because independent-mindedness is a relative description. One thing is clear: Ghonim’s opinion did not always align with those of his fellow January 25th protesters. For example, during the revolution, he came under intense criticism when he asked demonstrators in Tahrir square to return home after president Hosni Mubarak relinquished some power, but had still not stepped down from office.²³¹ In this case, Ghonim believed in the promises the president made, while others did not. Soon after, he is quoted as saying he trusted the Egyptian army, while other protesters expressed their doubts.²³² Ghonim may believe he is a free thinking individual, but certainly not all others agree. Several articles note that in Spring 2011, divisions developed among the revolutionary youth activists, including the other media darling, Gigi Ibrahim, who stated Ghonim was not a part of the “real revolutionaries”.²³³ His friend Ahmed Maher is even

²²⁷ Ibid, 7.

²²⁸ Ibid, 20.

²²⁹ Ibid, 7.

²³⁰ Ghonim. *Revolution 2.0*, 15.

²³¹ Charles Levinson, “Splits Emerge Among Egypt’s Young Activists,” *The Wall Street Journal*, February 18, 2011, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703561604576150604132131990.html>.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid. See also: William Wan, “Egypt’s Facebook Revolution Faces Identity Crisis,” *The Washington Post*, March 24, 2011, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/egypts-facebook-revolution-faces-identity->

quoted as saying, “He’s a good man, but I think he keeps saying things that aren’t very politically savvy or strategic.”²³⁴

Arguably, the individualism Ghonim prizes is a very Western, if not American, ideal and it seems at times he wrestles with his admiration of certain values he identifies with “the West” and those he grew up with Egypt and Saudi Arabia. In his memoir, he takes a diplomatic approach when describing one of the differences he notices on a trip to America:

Yet not everything was in favor of the United States in the comparison with Egypt. I sensed an individualism in the air that contrasted greatly with my experience back home. In Egypt, a lot of emphasis is placed on the family and on groups in general, which creates an atmosphere that engenders a sort of emotional warmth in spite of its occasional restrictiveness. On the contrary, in the States I noticed that people were on their own in many situations in which they would have enjoyed much social support if they were in Egypt. My brain was in the United States but my heart was definitely in Egypt.²³⁵

Interestingly, Ghonim mentions almost nothing of his early years in Saudi Arabia. He simply states that because the country is “conservative by nature” and because of his parents encouraged him, he “adhered to the general ethics of religion”.²³⁶ Beyond this mention of conservatism, Saudi Arabia is but a footnote. Rather he focuses his early narrative on his education experiences in Egypt and on his introduction to the World Wide Web. Ghonim attempts to show that his evolution into an activist began with the countless hours he spent on the Internet as a teenager, anonymously interacting with other people from around the world.²³⁷ This is a person who greatly admires technology and cites it as one of his main influencing factors, to be explored in detail in the next section.

Interests and Influences

When Wael Ghonim wanted to launch his career, he turned to the Internet. When he wanted to find a wife, he turned to the Internet. When he got bad grades during his preparatory year at Cairo University, he attributed part of his poor performance to the many hours he spent online.²³⁸ As a self-proclaimed “internet addict”, Ghonim praises the

[crisis/2011/03/08/ABA0qTLB_story.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/08/ABA0qTLB_story.html). See also, David D. Kirkpatrick, “At Protest in Cairo, One Group Is Missing,” *The New York Times*, May 27, 2011.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/28/world/middleeast/28egypt.html>.

²³⁴ Levinson, “Splits Emerge”.

²³⁵ Ghonim. *Revolution 2.0*, 18.

²³⁶ *Ibid*, 7.

²³⁷ *Ibid*, 13.

²³⁸ *Ibid*, 13-14.

Internet numerous times in his memoir and in numerous American media articles. He expressly states, “The Internet has been instrumental in shaping my experiences as well as my character.”²³⁹ Yet there is a dichotomy. His memoir reveals that while Ghonim believes in the equalizing power of the Internet, he used technology to interact with people *on his own terms*. The following excerpt is particularly interesting:

I find virtual life in cyberspace quite appealing. I prefer it to being visible in public life. It is quite convenient to conceal your identity and write whatever you please in whatever way you choose. You can even choose whom to speak to and to end the conversation at any moment you like. I am not a “people person” in the typical sense, meaning that I’d rather communicate with people online than spend a lot of time visiting them or going out to places in a group. I much prefer using e-mail to using the telephone. In short, I am a real-life introvert yet an Internet extrovert.²⁴⁰

The above statement begins to explain why several news organizations called Ghonim a “reluctant revolutionary”; he is simply not interested in public life.²⁴¹ His interaction with the media post revolution will be explored further in this chapter. For now, it is clear that in the build-up to the 2011 Revolution, Ghonim was pragmatic and anonymously courted the attention of foreign, including western, media through administrating the “We Are All Khaled Said” Facebook page. Before creating this page in June 2010, Ghonim first became involved in online activism through administering what was later to become Mohamed ElBaradei’s official Facebook page.²⁴² Yet, even before this, he writes that he had a strong belief that the Internet is a tool for political and social change. For example, when asked in his final job interview in 2008 why he wanted to join Google, Ghonim replied, “I want to be actively engaged in changing our region. I believe that the Internet is going to help make that happen, and working for Google is the best way for me to have a role.”²⁴³ Later, he would argue with other activists about the role of the Internet in enacting change,

He (Dr. Mostafa al-Nagar) believed that the Internet was a virtual world with limited impact on reality, while I found it to be the key vehicle to bringing forth the first spark of change. The Internet is not a virtual world inhabited by avatars. It is a means of communication that offers people in the physical world a method to organize, act, and promote ideas and awareness. The

²³⁹ Ibid, 24.

²⁴⁰ Ghonim. *Revolution 2.0*, 24.

²⁴¹ Kareem Fahim, and Mona El-Naggar, “Emotions of a Reluctant Hero Galvanize Protesters,” *The New York Times*, February 8, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/09/world/middleeast/09ghonim.html>. See also: Ned Parker and Doha Al Zohairy, “Crowds Swell as Protest Seeks a Leader,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 9, 2011, <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/feb/09/world/la-fg-egypt-google-20110209>.

²⁴² Ghonim. *Revolution 2.0*, 42.

²⁴³ Ibid, 26.

Internet was going to change politics in Egypt, I wrote on Facebook and Twitter, and the 2011 elections would not be similar to those in 2005.²⁴⁴

This belief is stated numerous times in his appearances in American media. Consider some of the following more notable examples:

If there was no social networks, it would have never been sparked. Because the whole thing before the revolution was the most critical thing. Without Facebook, without Twitter, without Google, without YouTube, this would have never happened.²⁴⁵ - *Ghonim speaking with Harry Smith in an Interview for "60 Minutes"*

In an interview with Wolf Blitzer on CNN- BLITZER: The other question, Wael, I had is first Tunisia, now Egypt. What's next? GHONIM: Ask Facebook. BLITZER: Ask what? GHONIM: Facebook. COOPER: Facebook. BLITZER: Facebook. You're giving Facebook a lot of credit for this? GHONIM: Yes, for sure. I want to meet Mark Zuckerberg one day and thank him, actually. BLITZER: Tell us why you think Facebook and Mark Zuckerberg helped get people in Egypt and Tunisia and presumably other countries in the not-too-distant future. GHONIM: Well, I can't talk about Tunisia. I'm talking on behalf of Egypt, because -- BLITZER: All right. So tell us about Egypt. GHONIM: Yes, Tunisia was a bit of a different case. This revolution started online. This revolution started on Facebook. This revolution started in June, 2010, when hundreds of thousands of Egyptians started corroborating content. You know, like, we would post a video on Facebook, it would be shared by 50,000 people on their walls within a few hours. We -- you know, I always said that if you want to liberate us, society in Egypt, give them the Internet. If you want to have a free society, just give them the Internet.²⁴⁶

Ghonim's gushing about Facebook in his CNN interview could be a source of U.S. national pride since an American product, Facebook, is being used to promote an idea that is arguably still very much a source of American national identity: liberal democracy. In other words, promoting Facebook plays upon both "Americans' belief in their nation's universal significance/exemplarism" and the country's "urge to change the world to make it look and act more like the United States."²⁴⁷ This will be discussed in further detail in Chapter five.

If the Internet is Ghonim's primary influencing interest, then the Google Corporation appears as a close second. Ghonim spends approximately four pages praising Google and talking about his hiring process. He even writes that the company, "embodied

²⁴⁴ Ibid, 51.

²⁴⁵ "Wael Ghonim and Egypt's New Age Revolution," *60 Minutes*, CBS News, February 16, 2011, http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-18560_162-20031701/wael-ghonim-and-egypts-new-age-revolution/.

²⁴⁶ "Egypt Uprising: Hosni Mubarak Steps Down; Interview with Wael Ghonim: 'The Egyptian People Are the Leaders and Heroes of This Revolution'; Interview with Mohammed ElBaradei," *CNN Breaking News*, CNN, February 11, 2011, <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/110211/bn.02.html>.

²⁴⁷ Paul T. McCartney, "American Nationalism and U.S. Foreign Policy from September 11 to the Iraq War," *Political Science Quarterly* 119: 3 (Fall 2004).

who I was as a person”.²⁴⁸ In this statement, Ghonim strongly identifies with an American company that is often touted in media outlets as innovative and a prime example of American entrepreneurship and exceptionalism. Because of this, it is reasonable to conclude his employment through Google, like his promotion of Facebook, proved an attractive feature for American media to highlight during and after the revolution. Out of 96 American articles reviewed (108 total minus 12 that were repeated in *The International Herald Tribune*), journalists introduced Ghonim as a Google executive²⁴⁹ in 86 news stories. In two editorials journalists simply refer to him as “the Google guy”.²⁵⁰ Yet, he had other ties to America that largely go unmentioned. This thesis argues that U.S.-based journalists often marginalized particular American ties because they did not support their concept of what it means to be “Westernized”. For example, Ghonim is married to an American woman who converted to Islam. Also, early in his career he created a religious website called IslamWay, which he later donated to a U.S. based charity.²⁵¹ Arguably, if American journalists initially highlighted these facts about Ghonim or even if he worked for a non-U.S. company, he would have received far less attention in the media, despite his role as the “We Are All Khaled Said” administrator. However, because Google is a source of pride for many people in the United States, that pride and attachment seems to transfer to Ghonim. To state it simply, Google sells to an American audience or, at the very least, the American journalists covering the revolution. Creating a website for Muslims does not. One point is evident, his employment through Google prompted the first mentions of him in the media, even before he was linked to the “We Are All Khaled Said” page. Egyptian police arrested and imprisoned dozens of activists and protesters in the first few days of the revolution; why

²⁴⁸ Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0*, 25.

²⁴⁹ This includes the terms: senior Google official, Google VP, or head of Google’s marketing in the MENA region.

²⁵⁰ Stephen Prothero, “In Changing Egypt, Where Will Faith Fall?; The Revolutionary Fervor Sweeping the Middle East Might Be Ushering in a ‘Civil Religion,’ with Islam at Its Core--just as the Judeo-Christian Tradition Is Rooted in the United States. Even so, as Theologian Reinhold Niebuhr Wisely Noted, History Unfolds,” *USA Today*, February 21, 2011, http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/printedition/news/20110221/column21_st.art.htm. See also, Michael Gerson, “Liberty for All, Not Just Elites,” *The Washington Post*, March 1, 2011, accessed via LexisNexis.

²⁵¹ Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0*, 16.

was Ghonim listed as “the most notable example”?²⁵² Because the Google corporation began publicly searching for Ghonim and this constitutes a more interesting news angle than missing Egyptians with no ties to the U.S. Bourdieu’s field theory does a comprehensive job of explaining the rationale behind this coverage choice, as I will elaborate further in the next chapter.

Religious Beliefs

Perhaps one of the more significant characteristics of Ghonim, the fact that he is a pious Muslim, largely goes unmentioned in American media. In this work, I use the term “religious” to refer to someone who believes in an ultimate reality and practices basic tenets of his or her faith; for example, praying. The purpose in examining this topic is to merely question the role of religion in American media coverage of the Egyptian revolution. Foreign correspondents readily asked whether, or to what extent, the Muslim Brotherhood was involved in the protests. Yet, when it came to identifying the faith of individual young protesters, reporters largely ignored religion. Part of this coverage distinction can be explained by the fact that religion, when separated from politics is often considered a “red herring” in the journalism field. If a journalist mentions a person’s religion without an immediate connection to the story, editors sometimes find this reference a detractor and the journalist potentially exposes himself or herself to calls of bias.²⁵³ There should be an obvious reason why faith is mentioned. For example, reporters identified members of the Muslim Brotherhood because it is questioned or assumed that religion is tied to their politics and why or why not they are participating in protests. Many of the individual young protesters who appeared in American media called for secular demands and did not mention religion, Wael Ghonim included. But in answering the academic question, “Who were the American media darlings of the Egyptian Revolution?”, it seems negligent to leave out this characteristic. It seems negligent because it suggests that many of the young protesters were atheist or non-practicing. In the case of Wael Ghonim, that is not true. In his memoir, Ghonim talks openly about discovering his faith and readers get a sense that he is more religious than

²⁵² David. D. Kirkpatrick, “Extra-Legal Detentions, and a Mubarak Aide’s Role in Them, Anger Egyptians,” *The New York Times*, February 6, 2011, accessed via LexisNexis.

²⁵³ This observation comes from my own personal experience in the journalism field.

American media suggested. Ghonim writes that he first explored Islam in high school, after the death of a dear cousin in a car accident:²⁵⁴

I listened to sermons, attended religious lessons, and read books. I felt that life was a brief test that ended at death. I started praying five times a days, on time, and often at the mosque.²⁵⁵

Later, Ghonim's faith interacts with his other interest, the Internet. As mentioned earlier, the first website Ghonim created, IslamWay.com, was built to help Muslims connect with one another online. He describes it as "a simple version of YouTube" that featured "more than 20,000 hours of audio recordings of religious sermons, lectures, and recitals of the Holy Qur'an".²⁵⁶ Ghonim himself digitized more than 3,000 hours of these recordings.²⁵⁷ Given the amount of effort that went into the project, it is difficult to view Ghonim as anything but religious, at least at that time. Furthermore, instead of selling the website, for which he claims to have received a large offer, he donated it to a Muslim-American non-profit organization. As for why he chose an American organization, Ghonim expresses his admiration for the protection of citizen's rights within that country,

The thing that impressed me the most was the freedom of religious practice- the respect for religions and every human being's right to practice his or her faith. There were many organizations that defended Muslims and their rights. They were free to criticize the American government's policies without fear of any secret police.²⁵⁸

Interestingly, when it came to finding a wife, his admiration for certain American qualities also interacts with his religion and appreciation of the Internet:

I decided that what I really needed was to marry a non-Egyptian who would convert to Islam. I admired the openness of American culture and the practical way in which Americans faced life's problems- not just any Muslim convert, an American Muslim convert... There was only one difficulty: I did not know a single woman who fit this description. But I did know how I could find one: the Internet.²⁵⁹

Ghonim and International Media

As mentioned earlier, Ghonim sometimes appeared reluctant to speak with international media during the uprising, being particularly careful about how he was portrayed. In a live CNN interview on February 11, he thanked the news organization for

²⁵⁴ Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0.*, 7.

²⁵⁵ Ibid, 7.

²⁵⁶ Ibid, 15.

²⁵⁷ Ibid, 24.

²⁵⁸ Ibid, 17.

²⁵⁹ Ibid, 16-17.

its coverage of the revolution, saying that it saved Egyptian lives. At the same time, he said that he had been hesitant to talk with international media:

And I wanted to clarify when I said I didn't want to talk to international media. It was only because I don't want the regime to start doing media -- I have nothing against the American people, of course. My wife is American. And I also have nothing against international media. It's just the fact that the regime had been, you know, misleading all the Egyptians and telling them the wrong messages.²⁶⁰

Again, in his memoir, he writes that deciding factor in talking with Western media was when he saw ABC news interview Vice President Omar Soliman.²⁶¹ He believed Soliman was sending veiled statements to Western governments who were supporting the protesters and needed to counteract these messages.²⁶² As for why he was reluctant to speak with Western media in the first place, Ghonim publicly stated a number of times that he did not want his name associated with the movement and had no desire to lead it²⁶³:

At the end of the day, my role was accomplished. I really wanted this to be an anonymous movement until I was arrested and, you know, they found out. And then a lot of -- you know, a lot of speculation, and some news agencies announced that I was the admin of the page. I really didn't want to be known for this moment. I don't want all the attention to come to me. My mission is over. I want to go back to see my kids. I want to go back to start working, you know, do some work. I want to be a normal person.²⁶⁴

The above statement could explain why he gave so few interviews to international media and became less visible as an activist after the revolution. Also, as discussed earlier, Ghonim publicly stated his belief in the guiding power of the Egyptian military and encouraged demonstrators to return home after a certain number of days. His stated goal as an activist had ended. Yet other reporters view his reluctance to appear in media as a distrust for Western institutions. One journalist for a UAE publication writes:

He went on CNN, but said it was only to counter the viewpoint of a general who had been on earlier. He spoke to Newsweek, yet insisted that he was not a leader, because the revolution had none. The disdain for Western media and leaders was evident in his exclaiming they had stayed silent for 30 years: there was now no need for them to become involved.²⁶⁵

²⁶⁰ "Egypt Uprising," *CNN Breaking News*.

²⁶¹ Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0.*, 268.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 268.

²⁶³ "Egypt Uprising," *CNN Breaking News*. See also "Wael Ghonim," *60 Minutes*.

²⁶⁴ "Egypt Uprising," *CNN Breaking News*.

²⁶⁵ Hisham Wyne, "Wael Ghonim: The Reluctant Revolutionary," *Amen*, March 15, 2011, <http://gulfnews.com/news/region/egypt/wael-ghonim-the-reluctant-revolutionary-1.773738>.

Ghonim did state that he did not want Western governments to become involved, but it does not appear that he was opposed to Western news coverage of the revolution, just their coverage of him.²⁶⁶ In his memoir he seems acutely aware of why his story drew so much attention,

My interview with Mona al-Shazly spread quickly, thanks to the Internet and social networking sites. Many international media sources, including CNN and the *Guardian*, translated it as well. Numerous journalists tried to portray me as the revolution's champion- my story fit the image... While the media may have found in my emotional interview just the right dramatic scene for a big story, I continued to remind myself that I was not a hero.²⁶⁷

Or, others did not want him to be the hero. Once his identity was exposed, other youth activists pressured Ghonim to restrict his media appearances so as not to distract from the revolution itself:

They noticed that media coverage had begun to identify him as the face of the revolution. Since then, he has largely faded from the spotlight, granting few interviews and restricting his public comments in recent weeks to Twitter and Facebook. "Our reasoning is this," said Muhammad Adal, 23, a core member of April 6. "A leader can be arrested, slandered, dragged down into the mud. But if your leader is an idea, this is something no one can kill."²⁶⁸

Whatever his reasons for bowing out of the spotlight, it was not for lack of media attention. The reasons behind this media frenzy will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter five.

IV-C: Case Study Gigi Ibrahim

Of all the young, tech-savvy, and urban revolutionaries that U.S. journalists featured in their publications and on their networks²⁶⁹, "media darling" Wael Ghonim appeared in the most news outlets. The same cannot be said of 25-year old Gihan "Gigi" Ibrahim. Protesters like Ahmed Maher, Walid Rachid, Shady el-Ghazaly Harb, Mona Seif, and Hossam el-Hamalawy can each claim a handful more media credits than this self-described "revolutionary socialist activist". Yet, the photogenic Ibrahim appeared in some of the U.S.'s most *prominent* news outlets and more *prominently*. PBS' *Frontline* report titled, "Gigi's Revolution", devoted nearly twelve minutes to Ibrahim, her citizen journalism efforts, and "her attempts to convince her family of the righteousness of her

²⁶⁶ "Wael Ghonim," *60 Minutes*.

²⁶⁷ Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0.*, 262.

²⁶⁸ William Wan, "Egypt's Facebook Revolution Faces Identity Crisis," *The Washington Post*, March 24, 2011. http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/egypts-facebook-revolution-faces-identity-crisis/2011/03/08/ABA0qTLB_story.html.

²⁶⁹ This assessment applies to six month media review period of January 24, 2011 to June 30, 2011.

cause”.²⁷⁰ Soon after TIME magazine featured Ibrahim, along with six other young activists on a cover that read, “The Generation Changing the World”.²⁷¹ Then there was her interview on the widely viewed *The Daily Show*, which airs on the Comedy Central Network. But of all the other activists listed above, Ibrahim had the least amount of political activism experience when the 2011 Egyptian revolution began. What made Ibrahim’s story so appealing to such high-profile U.S. news outlets? Unfortunately, Ibrahim, like Ghonim, did not respond to a number of interview requests. Also, Ibrahim has not published a memoir like Ghonim, so there is less publicly available information regarding her background and beliefs. Given this research challenge, she is still a more informative case study than other potential activists because she is a unique example of the young, tech-savvy revolutionaries. Though her appearances in the media are fewer than others, overall she receives more media attention. Other young revolutionaries, such as the ones listed above, are typically only quoted perhaps once an article. Ibrahim is simply featured more prominently in the news outlets in which she appears. This thesis was therefore able to put together a brief profile sketch of Ibrahim through reviewing her media interviews/profiles and her personal blog.

Gigi as a Conduit Between Two Worlds

Armed with her MacBookPro, her smartphone, and her ever-present keffiyeh, Gigi Ibrahim is perhaps the stereotypical Williamsburg, Brooklyn ideal of what it means to “look like a digital revolutionary”. This is not intended as a derisive observation; rather it is to highlight the fact Ibrahim wears clothes, uses products, and more importantly promotes certain ideals that American media associate with a particular subculture (often found within Williamsburg): the hipster.²⁷² Far from being a superficial designation, modern definitions of “hipster” are rooted in the concerns of Pierre Bourdieu’s seminal work, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* and as professor Mark Greif points out, “subculture had not been his area, precisely, but neither would hipsters

²⁷⁰ “Gigi’s Revolution,” *Frontline*, PBS, February 21, 2011. http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/world/jan-june11/frontline_02-21.html.

²⁷¹ “The Generation Changing The World,” *Time*, Cover, February 28, 2011, <http://www.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,20110228,00.html>.

²⁷² Mark Greif, “The Hipster in the Mirror,” *The New York Times*, November 12, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/14/books/review/Greif-t.html?pagewanted=1>.

have been beneath his notice”.²⁷³ This term is interesting to apply to Ibrahim because her media portrayals often focus on tensions. There is tension between her and her elite family members, between the revolutionary socialists (the group she identifies with) and the dominant Egyptian government, even between her and other activists. At a fundamental level, the description of “hipster” is also very much about tension, as Greif writes:

The hipster is that person, overlapping with the intentional dropout or the unintentionally declassed individual—the neo-bohemian, the vegan or bicyclist or skatepunk, the would-be blue-collar or postracial twentysomething, the starving artist or graduate student—who in fact aligns himself both with rebel subculture and with the dominant class, and thus opens up a poisonous conduit between the two.²⁷⁴

Ibrahim herself is a unique example of a conduit between two worlds: she is a liberal woman from a more conservative culture and family. She is a member of the Egyptian elite, yet also “wants to destroy the old system that made her father”.²⁷⁵ She is Westernized, but rejects many Western institutions- even more so than Ghonim. To elaborate, Ibrahim has Egyptian parents, but was born in Long Beach, California. Perhaps this is why she claims she has a bipolar identity, “part free-spirit American and part just simply angry Egyptian.”²⁷⁶ Though she was raised in Egypt between the ages of two and fourteen, her family then returned to California where she attended high school and most of college, majoring in sociology and political science.²⁷⁷ Ibrahim has not spoken to the media about her years in southern California, but she states on her Facebook profile that this is where she began becoming politically active:

In California, I demonstrated for immigration rights with the *Collectivo Tonanzine* and fought against the U.S. invasion of Iraq. I also took part in pro-Palestinian stands while in college.²⁷⁸

Interestingly, her political activism prior to the 2011 Egyptian Revolution is not mentioned in media accounts; on the contrary, readers and viewers get the impression

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Mark Greif, “What Was the Hipster?” *The New York Times*, October 24, 2010, sec. Features, <http://nymag.com/news/features/69129/>.

²⁷⁵ May Abdalla, “Children of the Revolution,” BBC, February 3, 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/tv/2012/02/egypt-children-revolution-filming-tahrir-square.shtml>.

See following link for full video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8mhQH4Y3-6g>

²⁷⁶ Gigi Ibrahim, “Gigi Ibrahim Facebook Profile,” Facebook, n.d.

<http://www.facebook.com/gigi.ibrahim.39>.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

that Ibrahim “cut her teeth as a political activist on Tahrir Square”.²⁷⁹ For example, in her interview on the widely viewed *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, she states she was not active in the Egyptian political scene prior to 2011, having been unaware there was an opposition movement at all.²⁸⁰ She then attributes the start of her activism in Egypt to a class she took at American University in Cairo, where she finished her undergraduate degree. This again could be viewed as a potential source of pride for Americans: an Egyptian claims she learned about political dissent and advocating for a liberal democracy (an American ideal) through an American institution. The host of the show, Jon Stewart, jokingly makes the connection:

Jon Stewart: “Oh, it was a private American (University)? *So we were there in many respects, fomenting revolu- we are...*” (Emphasis added)
Gigi Ibrahim interjects: “Igniting.”
Stewart: “Igniting, igniting.”²⁸¹

That “igniting” of the revolutionary spirit within Ibrahim was certainly not welcome among all members of her family. In several interviews, she notes that her family was apolitical, and not supportive of her efforts during the 2011 uprising. The *Frontline* piece, “Gigi’s Revolution” is particularly interesting to watch because it pointedly shows the conflict between her and her more conservative Egyptian family members. In one scene her aunt chastises her as a rebellious youth. “You’re an Egyptian, not an American,” she says. “So why are you against your country, against your homeland?” This argument again goes back to the idea that Ibrahim is caught between two worlds. In Arabic, she replies,

I’m not against my homeland. I’m with my homeland. I’m with the nation. I’m with the people. I’m against the worthless regime, dictatorship and the tyrant.²⁸²

For Ibrahim, the argument she raises against her unsupportive family members is that they do not know the truth, that they are being brainwashed by the media. This again is a very hipster idea- having privileged knowledge. Knowing something before others

²⁷⁹ Neil MacFarquhar, “Mubarak May Be Gone, but Many Egyptians Say They See Too Much of Him,” *The New York Times*, March 26, 2011, accessed via LexisNexus.

²⁸⁰ “Gigi Ibrahim Interview,” *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, Comedy Central, April 25, 2011. <http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/mon-april-25-2011/gigi-ibrahim>.

²⁸¹ “Gigi Ibrahim,” *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*.

²⁸² “Gigi’s Revolution,” *Frontline*.

and acting on it is a form of cultural capital among the hipster subculture as Grief writes,

In larger manifestations, in private as well as on the street, contemporary hipsterism has been defined by an obsessive interest in the conflict between knowingness and naïveté, guilty self-awareness and absolved self-absorption.²⁸³

Ibrahim also seems to display that “guilty self-awareness” that comes from being a part of the dominant class while also participating in a diametrically opposed rebel subculture. In a separate documentary with BBC, she notes that her father (described by the reporter as a wealthy industrialist), benefitted from the Mubarak regime:

This is the disagreement I had with my dad is like, he wanted to engage in the system, the corrupted system to make his life and his family’s life better. Why am I okay with this?²⁸⁴

The above rhetorical question encapsulates the essential conflict she faces. She also has benefitted from the very system she wishes to destroy. In the same BBC documentary, Ibrahim’s father talks about how he cannot visit the clothing factory he owns on the outskirts of Cairo. He says since the revolution, his workers are demanding more rights and better pay, in part due to his daughter’s encouragement:

Gigi went to my factory and she turned the people against me, my workers, turned against me... I think she’s a Communist.²⁸⁵

In fact, Ibrahim identifies herself with the Revolutionary Socialist organization in Egypt and after the revolution, has spoken at several Socialist meetings. On her blog, titled *Tahrir & Beyond*, she routinely advocates for worker’s rights, sometimes calling her fellow activists comrades. In this regards, she *rejects* a very western institution-capitalism. Consider the following excerpts from her blog:

- July 14, 2011- The amount of corruption that goes into this so called “privatization” process is unacceptable. Privatization here literally means the stealing of the hard-working Egyptian workers’ money. What “privatization” good will it do to the people who don’t have jobs and those who are being deliberately exploited for the money-hungry businessmen & politicians? A7aaaa!²⁸⁶
- October 28, 2011- My brief talk with them gave me the final conclusion that low-rank police officers are the bottom of the police business pyramid, so they are exploited the most and now they are speaking, organizing, and acting as workers not as policemen who harass us everyday.

²⁸³ Greif, “What Was the Hipster?”.

²⁸⁴ Abdalla, “Children of the Revolution,” BBC.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Gigi Ibrahim, “EgyWorkers Against Privatization,” WordPress, *Tahrir & Beyond*, July 14, 2011, <http://theangryegyptian.wordpress.com/2011/07/>.

Our solidarity is needed because any striking worker is the backbone of this revolution.²⁸⁷

- June 17, 2012- As a revolutionary socialist, I believe that the only group of society that has the power to topple this dictatorship is the workers. We must organize the working class. For this revolution, it is a matter of success or defeat. When I am talking about the working class, I am not only referring to the traditional blue collar worker at a factory, but I am referencing anyone who sells his or her hours to earn a wage. This includes doctors, teachers, public and private employees, those who have the power to put the country at a halt like the last 3 days of the 18 days in the revolution. The workers were the final bullet in Mubarak's chest, and are the only ones who can finish off SCAF.²⁸⁸

As she writes in the last two entries, Ibrahim believes that the revolution against the Egyptian government is ongoing. She has actively participated in strikes and demonstrations after the core 18 days of mass protest in January/February 2011. This activism is a marked contrast to Wael Ghonim, who largely retreated from protest events and public life in general²⁸⁹. As mentioned earlier, Ibrahim was critical of Ghonim for calling on protesters to go back to their homes prior to the removal of former President Hosni Mubarak. In a 2012 interview with ABC News, she again criticizes him for stepping out of the public spotlight:

Another of the young, loud voices from the revolution believes Ghonim's take on politics is "s**t." "He could have done so much," said activist Gigi Ibrahim, a member of the Revolutionary Socialists who was a mainstay on Tahrir last winter and since. She called Ghonim "completely absent" but also said his role and profile have been overblown by the media, echoed here by many. He was just one of the Facebook page's administrators, she said, and it was a people's revolution, not a Facebook revolution, as it has been called in the press.²⁹⁰

Ibrahim's own portrayal in the press has also caused her frustration. Perhaps her rejection of capitalism made her less appealing to American news organizations and that is why she appeared in a *fewer* number of publications than other young revolutionaries. Certainly she believes she faces a Western news bias due to her beliefs. For example, she appeared on BBC NewsNight on December 15, 2011 along with Henry Kissinger,

²⁸⁷ Gigi Ibrahim, "Police Corporals Take Tahrir to MOI," WordPress, *Tahrir & Beyond*, October 28, 2011, <http://theangryegyptian.wordpress.com/2011/10/>.

²⁸⁸ Gigi Ibrahim, "Elections Under Play," WordPress, *Tahrir & Beyond*, June 17, 2012. <http://theangryegyptian.wordpress.com/2012/06/>.

²⁸⁹ In April 2011 Ghonim announced via Twitter he was taking a sabbatical from Google to launch an Egyptian-based NGO to fight poverty and improve education. See Sam Gustin, "Wael Ghonim Leaving Google to Launch Tech NGO in Egypt," *Wired*, April 25, 2011, <http://www.wired.com/business/2011/04/ghonim-leaves-google/>.

²⁹⁰ "Egyptian Revolution's Biggest Name Shuns Politics, Spotlight," ABC News, January 25, 2012, <http://abcnews.go.com/International/egyptian-revolutions-biggest-shuns-politics-spotlight/story?id=15436544#.UKIINBxF8wI>.

Tawakul Karman, Simon Schama, and Jeremy Greenstock. Ibrahim, upset with the time and attention the host gave her on the show, angrily wrote a blog entry about the experience and posted an email exchange between her and BBC News producer. She writes:

When I got on the show, which will hopefully be uploaded to youtube so I can posted here, I was faced with the most western-centric, orientalist, and racist point of view on the Arab Spring. Comments about the Arab spring ranged from “a cry for western democracy,” calling the Middle East “the Muslim world,” “Islamist threat to democracy and prosecution of minorities,” to posing “western technology as what made these revolutions possible.” It was impossible enough to bare Henry Kissinger’s deep voice on the other end of the line being asked as an “expert” on the Middle East let alone the Arab spring & “Islamist scare” they portrayed. Henry Kissinger?! The one whose exact polices ruined our country and many others to the ground?! unbelievably stupid. I was going to explode out of frustration for not getting ANY chance to address these comments (insults in my opinion). I hardly had a minute all together to express my point of view or have any questions directed to me except 2 compared to the other guests, who dominated the already dominated western/oriental point of view on the Arab spring. The least any professional media outlet would have done especially speaking on the topic of “democracy” was to give an equal time to all the different speakers or the different point of views. I was able to get in 2 sentences about the western (US in particular) aid to SCAF, who is leading counter-revolution and acting on the “prosecution of minorities” that other speakers wanted to label it as the “Islamist threat,” but I linked it that it is SCAF who is prosecuting minorities alluring to the Maspero massacre. I also added that the west has NO positive impact what so ever on these revolutions in fact we are going exactly against it.²⁹¹

Stating that the West has “NO positive impact” on revolutions in the Middle East is a strong assessment. It is unclear the extent American news organizations knew about her political views during the spring 2011 as this could be a potential reason to exclude her from their coverage. Like Ghonim’s case study, the argument can be made that *if* American-based journalists knew about Ibrahim’s socialist leanings, this was minimized because it did not support US mainstream media’s concept of the West, which includes capitalism. Still, Ibrahim displayed enough American-friendly attributes in the time period surrounding the revolution that it is reasonable to conclude these were factors into why she was featured more prominently in the news outlets in which she appeared. Ibrahim, for all her hipster tensions, made an interesting character.

²⁹¹ Gigi Ibrahim, “@BBCNewsNight Hypocrisy & Insults,” WordPress, *Tahrir & Beyond*, December 16, 2011. <http://theangryegyptian.wordpress.com/2011/12/>.

Chapter Five: Report Like an American: A Discussion

Until now, this thesis has argued that mainstream American media focused on an exclusive demographic of the Egyptian population during the 2011 uprising, to the detriment of more balanced news coverage. Aside from a quantitative measure of *The New York Times*' coverage of 18 days of mass protests, we have also examined certain features and characteristics of two specific media darlings: Wael Ghonim and Gigi Ibrahim. Journalists from American media often mentioned Ghonim's name in the time period surrounding the revolution, while Ibrahim's few media appearances were far more in-depth than many other activists. As this thesis attempted to show, both displayed qualities that many members of American media would find desirable. They had ties to the U.S.: Ghonim through his employment at Google and Ibrahim through her protest education at American University in Cairo. Both used products that could potentially be viewed as a source of pride for Americans: namely Facebook and Twitter. They are also articulate and photogenic. Perhaps most importantly they both advocated an idea that is arguably very American: democracy. Yet, there is something missing from this explanation, namely the journalists who reported the story. By focusing simply on the activists and their characteristics, it implies that the reporters are interchangeable, that any American journalist covering the revolution would have naturally gravitated to Ibrahim and Ghonim. In short, it does not account for the agency of media professionals. This chapter therefore attempts to explain coverage choices by not only news organizational routines/constraints, but also through journalists' personal and professional habitus. As the word habitus suggests, this chapter primarily engages with Pierre Bourdieu's field theory, as outlined in Chapter Two. But it also includes elements the Propaganda model that specifically addresses several news organizational routines/constraints.

V-A: Field Theory and American Media Coverage of the Egyptian Revolution

At the risk of duplicating the definitions and explanations found in Chapter two, it is important to understand that when Pierre Bourdieu wrote about fields, he was discussing a system of social relations that is structured around specific rules and a

specific system of “exchange and reward”.²⁹² By definition, fields can be very broad, such as the political field, or very narrow, such as the astronautics field. Additionally, researchers can identify smaller fields within a larger field. For example, when discussing the “journalism field” in this thesis, specifically I refer to the *international* journalism field, which can be quite different from a local or domestic journalism field. The American news correspondents who cover Egypt are competing for capital (e.g. “reward”) against journalists from a variety of different countries and backgrounds. As a result, the very idea of capital has likely evolved into somewhat different forms than the capital for which local or domestic reporters compete. At a minimum, many of the journalism awards for foreign correspondents are different from their domestic counterparts. But there are other, less obvious examples of how capital varies. From personal experience, local or domestic reporters often value being moved from a general assignment designation to a specific area of interest or expertise (e.g. “a beat”), because this allows for more in-depth (and therefore more potentially award-worthy) reporting. The same cannot be assumed for a foreign correspondent, who often boast as a badge of honor how many countries they have reported from and filed stories.²⁹³ Along the same vein, foreign correspondents are more likely than domestic reporters to vie for the symbolic capital that comes with reporting in dangerous situations. Or, as former foreign correspondent Eric Weiner states,

And maybe you have other friends who are also foreign correspondents...and you talk to them on the phone about how, you know, back in '84 you nearly got your ass shot off in East Timor and what a great time you had.²⁹⁴

These are just a few examples of how capital varies in such a broad field like journalism. The purpose in elaborating this point is to explain that actors in a field adjust their behaviors, routines, and practices to best achieve the capital specific to their field. If rewards are different, then methods to achieve it will also likely be different. Another way to consider it is this: our personal habitus evolves to reflect more of the professional

²⁹² Neveu, “Pierre Bourdieu: Sociologist of media,” 336.

²⁹³ Thomas Crampton, “10 Career Options for Foreign Correspondents,” *Thomas Crampton: Social Media in China and Across Asia*, September 30, 2009, <http://www.thomascrampton.com/newspapers/eric-weiner-npr-foreign-correspondents-geography-bliss/>.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

habitus within our field. Foreign reporters may not use the same techniques or practices that a local reporter uses. To illustrate, a local television reporter (and their television station) often values the symbolic capital that comes with name recognition within the community. As a result, *as part of their jobs*, local TV reporters sometimes participate in community parades, autograph signings, and charity events. On the other hand, foreign correspondents, particularly those in dangerous areas, often value relative anonymity for safety reasons.²⁹⁵ Additionally, a foreign correspondent's work may not be viewed or read in that area so there is less emphasis on cultivating *local* name recognition. So if a correspondent is not covering an event, they may be less likely to simply attend an event to "be a part of the community". This example begins to illustrate how a foreign correspondents' professional habitus can differ, sometimes subtly, from other journalists within the same larger field. Where the study of journalism habitus gets interesting is in how it affects news coverage. Admittedly, comparing coverage choices based on differences in journalism professional habitus is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, through examining common news constraints and routines, we can make some reasonable observations about foreign correspondents' professional habitus and how it affects coverage. This is an area that requires a great deal of further research and the primary goal of this chapter is simply to make the argument that Bourdieu's field theory can be useful in explaining news coverage choices.

In discussing common news constraints/routines and the linked idea of professional habitus, I turned to a variety of sources to buttress my conclusions. First, I reviewed a number of news ethnographic studies, some of which are mentioned in Chapter Two. Second, in the absence of a tailored methodological study, I conducted interviews with two American correspondents working within Egypt: Scott MacLeod, a veteran correspondent for *TIME* magazine who now teaches at the American University in Cairo and Matt Bradley, the Cairo correspondent for the *Wall Street Journal*. Bradley in particular was able to provide insight into common constraints and routines that can and sometimes do affect his work. Additionally, both men discuss their opinion of the

²⁹⁵ Sherry Ricchiardi, "Preparing for Battle," *American Journalism Review* (August 2002), <http://www.ajr.org/article.asp?id=2566>.

role and coverage of the Egyptian revolutionary youth. Finally, I drew upon my own experiences with constraints and routines from my years working as a domestic television reporter.²⁹⁶ While not all of the routines/constraints/journalistic habitus I developed are applicable to foreign news correspondents, it is reasonable to conclude that *some* limiting elements, such as money, time, and geography, are universally found within the field of journalism. As such, no matter where a journalist is, they must develop strategies to work around these factors.

Common News Constraints and Routines/Journalistic Professional Habitus

Perhaps the most obvious news constraint that affects journalistic routine/habitus is *time* or *deadlines*. Journalists working for daily newspapers or news programs are well aware that they have a limited number of hours in the day to put together their story. Arguably, deadlines have become even more pervasive and constricting in the age of online news and 24-hour cable news networks. It is often not enough for reporters to prepare their story for the next day's edition or the 6 p.m. newscast; now editors and producers sometimes request updates for online readers.²⁹⁷ This requirement can cut into newsgathering time. Foreign correspondents must contend with yet another factor: different time zones. For example, the *Wall Street Journal's* Cairo correspondent, Matt Bradley, describes how his foreign edit desk is in New York, while his direct editor is in Dubai.

I normally try to get, get going by nine or ten. But my boss is in Dubai, so he'll often call me sometimes in the morning at around 9 am. So things go- it can easily be a fifteen hour day and then on weekends too. So, but we don't have a paper on Sunday, so on many Saturdays I'm not at work, but often I do. Most Saturdays I do because there's interviews that need to be done. And often there's court decisions and breaking news that happen on Saturdays. So it's basically every day, probably 14 hours a day, most weekends. But not 14 hours a day on weekends. But it's, it's taxing.²⁹⁸

The real challenge, he says, is reporting in an environment when news often breaks around 8 p.m. and it is not uncommon for officials to hold meetings late into the night.

²⁹⁶ Two years reporting for NBC affiliate in Columbia, Missouri; three years at ABC affiliate in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina; two years at ABC affiliate in Birmingham, Alabama. Additional two years reporting and editing at start-up social media website.

²⁹⁷ From my own experiences and observations, this is a common news practice in many organizations, especially in "breaking news" situations. See online editions of *The New York Times* and CNN.com for examples.

²⁹⁸ Rebecca Suzanne Fox Pasnoori, "Matt Bradley Interview," Digital Recorder, May 30, 2011, Cairo.

This often means Bradley has one or two hours to gather information before deadline. To avoid wasting time in Cairo's notoriously congested traffic, he tries to communicate with sources remotely whenever possible:

Bradley: Like I said, I try to do as much of it by phone as possible because it's very difficult to get out there. It just takes a lot of time to go from one place to another. I go to a lot of meetings when I can. Normally when I meet someone for the first time, I try to set a meeting with them. But after that, you know if I need to speak with them again I do it by phone.

Interviewer: Really?

Bradley: Because it's difficult to do meetings. It's very, very time consuming. So if you can call somebody and get the same information, you might as well.²⁹⁹

Bradley's use of the telephone to do his job is interesting to explore. Do he and other foreign correspondents use technology such as the telephone and/or Internet more frequently than a domestic reporter? Does frequent use of the telephone and/or Internet bias news coverage towards a certain type of source? Hypothetically, if Bradley does not attend a meeting in person, is he still exposed to dissident voices at that meeting? Probably not. While there is not research to answer these questions specifically for foreign correspondents, Bradley's use of technology generally supports Herman and Chomsky's third filter in the Propaganda Model; that media rely on information "provided by government, business, and "experts" funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power".³⁰⁰ As outlined in Chapter two, agents of power often have access to technology like telephones and the Internet, which means they are *potentially* more accessible to journalists. In other words, when journalists like Bradley work under professional constraints like strict deadlines, their professional habitus is such that they rely on sources that are easily reachable and viewed as credible ("agents of power"). However, it should be emphasized that just because a source has access to technology does not mean they will use it to further their agenda and it does not mean they are automatically an agent of power. Bradley notes that most of his government contacts do not use voicemail and "nobody uses their emails, especially in the government".³⁰¹

I mean often, you know you call the government ministry and there's just no one there to pick up the phone. So I show up in person. Often times I'll get someone's phone number, mobile phone number and I'll call them and they won't pick up for days and days and days. And I'll send them text messages in Arabic and in English and they just won't answer. So often I just show up in

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, 19.

³⁰¹ Fox Pasnoori, "Matt Bradley Interview".

person and say, you know, I'm the guy whose been calling you, you asshole. I mean, this is what I have to do, cause nobody, it's very, very difficult to get people on the phone. It's a huge pain. And it's very, very difficult to arrange meetings. The whole thing is very frustrating.³⁰²

Assuming other foreign correspondents have similar issues regarding accessibility, how might this news constraint have affected American media coverage during the revolution? For Bradley, accessibility was, and still is, a key factor in the selection of sources:

One of the reasons why the revolutionary youth are covered so much is because they speak English. They answer their phones. They answer their emails. They're accessible on Facebook. They're accessible on Twitter. You can send them messages. Find out who they are, find out what they're doing at any given time. Whereas everybody else, everybody above thirty-five, they're almost completely inaccessible, so it's like, of course we're going to concentrate on the revolutionary youth because they have a modern understanding of outreach and being able to speak to the media. And they also aren't intimidated or afraid or suspicious of the western media like a lot of other people are.³⁰³

Scott MacLeod offers a similar assessment:

You know, I mean definitely, these, these tech-savvy kids who are in many cases, if they're not westernized at least they're very engaged or comfortable with the west and with westerners. Definitely you know they were a good quote. They were, you know, maybe easier to access. You can follow them on Facebook and Twitter if you didn't even meet them. And they were, more often than not, doing that in English so that was very helpful. Maybe a little bit easier to cover them than covering what was happening in the Muslim Brotherhood.³⁰⁴

Note that in both of the above statements, Bradley and MacLeod mention the use of the English language as attractive reason why to interview a person. Bradley has lived in the Middle East region and studied the Arabic language intermittently for years. Yet, he admits that he cannot speak Arabic well enough to quote someone directly from a conversation without a translator present. Language should be considered another constraint that potentially biases foreign reporters towards a certain type of source. Even with a translator, journalists only receive the information that the translator gives. But, assuming that an interview is not one-on-one, how do you include other people around the interview? For example, from personal experience, interviewing one person in Tahrir Square often means five or ten other people interject with their own comments. It is difficult, if not impossible for a foreign-language journalist to assess all of this incoming

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Rebecca Suzanne Fox Pasnoori, "Scott MacLeod Interview," Digital Recorder, June 5, 2011, New Cairo.

stimuli as well as native-language speaker. Given this challenge, it is reasonable to conclude that most foreign journalists (except for those fluent in the language) have a professional habitus that biases them towards subjects who speak their mother-tongue. Wael Ghonim and Gigi Ibrahim are both fluent in English, so they fit this criteria for American journalists.

Another constraint to consider is resources, such as the number of journalists covering a story. As discussed in Chapter two, major American news agencies have downsized their foreign news staff over the past few decades.³⁰⁵ Because of this, journalists must focus their limited resources on the events their news organizations deem most newsworthy:

Whether a story is covered often depends on whether it has "sizzle"—disasters and other events that "stir the emotions" (FitzSimon, 1993, p. 25). For example, the media are more likely to cover the more emotional issues of global warming and water pollution than garbage and sludge stories (Gersh, August 1992). This idea is supported by Shoemaker, Danielian, and Brendlinger (1991), who show that world events that are somehow "deviant" are more likely to be covered by the U.S. media and are more likely to get prominent coverage than nondeviant events, even if the nondeviant event has high social significance.³⁰⁶

Certainly the demonstrations and violence that took place in Egypt during the 18 days of the revolution can be considered a deviant event. The challenge with limited resources is to put such events into perspective and context. In his interview, Bradley discusses how during the events of 2011, there was a "massive ideological reservoir" of Egyptians who opposed the revolutionary youth, but because they were often not involved in deviant events, the media marginalized them. As he states, "nobody knew who these people were"; that is, until they took to the voting polls. He calls this a "structural problem" with journalism:

When you're talking about covering violence, you need to have people speak for that violence. And even if that violence only takes up two square blocks of one city in the country of 80 million. It's going to make, it's an inherent problem in journalism in that it's going to make everything look much bigger than it actually is. It has too. Cause you could be having a coffee two blocks away from Tahrir Square during the Mohamed Mahmoud incident of violence and you probably wouldn't even have an inkling that it was going on. But yet, I get emails from people in the states who are planning on visiting Egypt, asking if it's safe.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁵ Priya Kumar, "Foreign Correspondents: Who Covers What," *American Journalism Review* (January 2011), <http://www.ajr.org/article.asp?id=4997>. See also: M. FitzSimon, ed., *The Media and Foreign Policy in the Post-cold War World*, (New York: Freedom Forum Media Studies Center, 1993), 17.

³⁰⁶ Shoemaker and Reese, *Mediating the Message*, 48.

³⁰⁷ Fox Pasnoori, "Matt Bradley Interview".

MacLeod offers a slightly different perspective. He agrees that organizations are spending less money on reporting foreign events, so context suffers. But he also points to a conscious shift in the *type* of journalism being produced:

There is a tendency for more sensational journalism and journalism that will be more in the mode of entertainment journalism than more in-depth reporting and this is so, we have less international reporting from the field. We have lots people in Washington talking and talking and talking about what's happening in Egypt or what's happening everywhere. But in terms of boots, journalistic boots on the ground covering the society and sending reports back uh, in general there are fewer boots on the ground, there are fewer in-depth reports to be read and those reports that do come out of the world tend to be focused on very sensationalistic headline-grabbing kind of events.... I call it sensationalism not in that, you know they're talking about two-headed babies and things like that. I'm talking about sensationalism that you know, whatever the sort of story the moment seems to be, it gets really hyped and the hype itself is very narrow on something. And so there's a lack of depth in it all.³⁰⁸

If American journalism has indeed become more sensational than in the past, and this is debatable, it would support part of Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda model. They argue that the filters of "profit orientation of dominant mass-media" and "advertising as a primary income source" skew overall news orientation to attract more viewers and in turn, more money.³⁰⁹ In this case, young, tech-savvy, and westernized Egyptians appear more relatable, more sellable, to the majority of the American population, and probably attract more attention than bearded Salafis who only speak Arabic. The problem in using this theory is that it can be difficult to empirically test. This research had no access to American news editors who made coverage decisions during the revolution. In hindsight analysis of published articles and broadcasts, it can only be assumed that journalists and editors who focused on the revolutionary youth believed that these were newsworthy stories. But for whom were they newsworthy? Did journalists consider the interests and demographics of their audience? Given the scope of this thesis, it is impossible to definitively answer. If we look at past research, at least one study³¹⁰ shows journalists write primarily for their peers and for themselves, not for their audience.³¹¹ But we do not know if editors and/or publishers exerted influence over coverage choices during the revolutionary time period. The safe assumption is this: when American journalists

³⁰⁸ Fox Pasnoori, "Scott MacLeod Interview".

³⁰⁹ Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, Kindle Edition.

³¹⁰ This study is previously mentioned in Chapter two.

³¹¹ Shoemaker and Reese, *Mediating the Message*, 112. See also Philip Schlesinger, *Putting "Reality" Together: BBC News*, (London: Constable, 1978), 107-108.

focused on the digital revolutionary narrative they did so *in part* because it appealed because it to their *own* ideas of newsworthiness. We assume they were writing stories of their own volition and were not forced to write something that they believed untrue. With this expressly stated, it is now helpful to engage with Bourdieu's concept of habitus because it includes the element of agency.

V-B: Habitus and Bridging the Agency-Structure Gap

If we were to conclude this discussion right now, it is plausible to believe that news routines/constraints were influential enough to bias many foreign reporters towards young, urban, tech-savvy activists during the 2011 Egyptian revolution. Many reporters were pressed for time, perhaps could not speak Arabic fluently or had difficulty accessing several key figures during the revolt. Assuming this was the case for the majority of media professionals, then interviewing engaged, English-speaking young revolutionaries was a logical work-around. Yet, perhaps because individualism is such an American ideal, and I am an American, I find this explanation hollow on its own, primarily because it does not account for variations of coverage within the same news organization. That is why it is important to consider the individual agency of media professionals. Bourdieu's idea of habitus allows researchers to bridge the agency-structure divide.

Looking at the constraints discussed in the previous section, it is easy to see how a journalist with more time and more resources (in Bourdieusian terms this is known as capital; e.g. mastery of a foreign language) might have a different professional habitus than those who perhaps "parachuted" in to cover the big story. For example, media professionals who produce documentaries and monthly magazine articles often have a different agenda than daily news reporters; they must concentrate more on the overall outcome or direction of a series of events in order to keep their story relevant. The difference in scope and context is readily observed by comparing longer-format pieces with daily news stories.³¹² Yet, at a daily newsgathering level, variations in professional habitus can also sometimes be seen, especially when you compare op-ed or editorial pieces with straight news pieces. An op-ed author's goal is to introduce readers to their

³¹² For a good example see: Abdalla, "Children of the Revolution," BBC.

opinion or perspective and hopefully, convince them of its merit.³¹³ It is persuasive. It is often personal. In this regard, op-ed columnists have a different professional habitus than straight news journalists, at least in theory. This difference can be used to explain why op-eds or editorials sometimes do not reflect the view presented in straight news pieces published by the very same news organization. Consider a *New York Times* op-ed column Frank Rich wrote during the height of the revolution. In this piece he skewers American media fascination with the digital revolutionary narrative, even as many of his colleagues continued their praise. He writes:

Perhaps the most revealing window into America's media-fed isolation from this crisis — small an example as it may seem — is the default assumption that the Egyptian uprising, like every other paroxysm in the region since the Green Revolution in Iran 18 months ago, must be powered by the twin American-born phenomena of Twitter and Facebook. Television news — at once threatened by the power of the Internet and fearful of appearing unhip — can't get enough of this cliché.³¹⁴

Rich's professional habitus as an op-ed contributor could be part of the reason why his view differed from other media professionals. An op-ed's purpose is often to be “provocative”³¹⁵ and in this case, provocative meant questioning the digital revolutionary narrative. Yet, professional habitus alone fails to explain the differences between Rich's article and those of two other *New York Times* columnists who were more enthusiastic about the role of social media in the Egyptian revolution: Thomas Friedman and Nicholas Kristof. It is assumed all three men shared similar professional habitus since they wrote for the same news organization and were op-ed contributors, not daily news reporters. It is assumed they faced the same type of deadlines and had the same amount of capital (autonomy) to freely share their opinion. To better explain variation in coverage, professional habitus is not enough, it necessary look at personal habitus. We will use these three journalists in an exploratory example.

Personal habitus example: Three New York Times Columnists

³¹³ See the following links for recommendations on how to write op-ed pieces:

http://newsoffice.duke.edu/duke_resources/oped and
www.earth.columbia.edu/sitefiles/file/pressroom/.../OpEdGuide.doc

³¹⁴ Rich, “Wallflowers at the Revolution.”

³¹⁵ The Earth Institute at Columbia University, “Writing and Submitting an Opinion Piece: A Guide,” Google Docs. *N/A*, February 2010.

In the absence of personal interviews, we are able to make a few general observations about the personal habitus of Rich, Friedman, and Kristof by comparing their public biographical information. Generally speaking, Rich shares several characteristics (well-educated, urban, professionally recognized) with Friedman and Kristof.³¹⁶ However, there are some obvious distinctions between them, which could potentially show the influence of personal habitus in their work. For example, Rich's background is in covering arts and leisure topics, though he has also written about politics and culture.³¹⁷ In contrast, Kristof and Friedman are known to write extensively about social media/globalization issues. For them, a digital revolutionary narrative was likely very appealing because it played into their interests. Kristof was the first blogger for the *Times's* website and is actively engaged on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube.³¹⁸ Friedman has been the *Times's* longstanding foreign affairs columnist and often focuses on the intersection of technology issues and international relations. In his official biography he writes about the framework through which he looks at the world:

It was a framework that basically said if you want to understand the world today, you have to see it as a constant tension between what was very old in shaping international relations (the passions of nationalism, ethnicity, religion, geography, and culture) and what was very new (technology, the Internet, and the globalization of markets and finance). If you try to see the world from just one of those angles, it won't make sense. It is all about the intersection of the two.³¹⁹

In Friedman's case in particular, it is easy to see how his "world framework" shows in his coverage of the Egyptian revolution. He writes about how the youth of Egypt were enabled by Facebook and Twitter to rise up against the old regime.³²⁰ He characterizes

³¹⁶ "Frank Rich Biography," *The New York Times*, n.d., sec. The Opinion Pages, <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/opinion/editorialsandoped/oped/columnists/frankrich/index.html>. and Thomas L. Friedman, "Thomas L. Friedman Official Biography," Official Website, *Thomas L. Friedman*, n.d. <http://www.thomasfriedman.com/about-the-author>. and "Nicholas D. Kristof Biography," *The New York Times*, n.d., sec. The Opinion Pages, <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/opinion/editorialsandoped/oped/columnists/nicholasdkristof/index.html>.

³¹⁷ "Frank Rich Biography," *The New York Times*.

³¹⁸ "Nicholas D. Kristof Biography," *The New York Times*.

³¹⁹ Friedman, "Thomas L. Friedman Official Biography," Official Website.

³²⁰ Thomas L. Friedman, "Postcard From a Free Egypt," *The New York Times*, February 11, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/11/opinion/11-web-friedman.html?_r=0.

Hosni Mubarak as “Rip Van Winkle meets Facebook.”³²¹ Kristof also praises new technologies:

New technologies have lubricated the mechanisms of revolt. Facebook and Twitter make it easier for dissidents to network. Mobile phones mean that government brutality is more likely to end up on YouTube, raising the costs of repression.³²²

Again, Kristof and Friedman seem to focus on aspects of the revolution that support their own beliefs and interests. Another personal habitus aspect to consider is that both Friedman and Kristof spent time in the Middle East region (Cairo in particular), studying Arabic, while Rich did not. This means Friedman and Kristof have at least *some* personal ties to the region; for example, Kristof mentions his old neighborhood of Bab El-Luq and how he met up with an old Cairo friend, “a woman with Western tastes”.³²³ Friedman does not write about his past personal ties as much, but we have to assume he has some connections because he spent so many years living and reporting in the region.³²⁴ This factor could at least partly explain why they wrote so admiringly and optimistically about Egypt’s secular revolutionaries: they want to see Egypt succeed. They lived there, they had/have friends there, so in Egypt’s moment of transition, they are likely predisposed to support the narrative they believe will help it flourish. In this case, it is democracy.

Consider the following passages and quotes from Friedman and Kristof:

This is not a religious event here, and the Muslim Brotherhood is not running the show. This is an Egyptian event. That is its strength and its weakness — no one is in charge and everyone in the society is here....What unites all of them is a fierce desire to gain control of their future.³²⁵-Friedman

In truth, the Tahrir movement is one of the most authentic, most human, quests for dignity and freedom that I have ever seen.³²⁶-Friedman

Egypt’s youthful and resourceful democrats are just getting started...If, and it remains a big if, Egypt can now make the transition to democracy, led by its own youth and under the protection of

³²¹ Thomas L. Friedman, “Out of Touch, Out of Time.” *The New York Times*, February 10, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/11/opinion/11friedman.html>.

³²² Nicholas D. Kristof, “What Egypt Can Teach America,” *The New York Times*, February 12, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/13/opinion/13kristof.html>.

³²³ Nicholas D. Kristof. “Militants, Women and Tahrir Sq.” *The New York Times*, February 5, 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/06/opinion/06kristof.html>.

³²⁴ Friedman, “Thomas L. Friedman Official Biography,” Official Website.

³²⁵ Thomas L. Friedman, “Speakers’ Corner on The Nile,” *The New York Times*, February 7, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/08/opinion/08friedman.html>.

³²⁶ Friedman, “Out of Touch, Out of Time.”

its own armed forces, watch out. The message coming out of Cairo will be: We tried Nasserism; we tried Islamism; and now we're trying democracy.³²⁷ -Friedman

As I stand in Tahrir Square on Monday trying to interview protesters, dozens of people surging around me and pleading for the United States to back their call for democracy, the yearning and hopefulness of these Egyptians taking huge risks is intoxicating.³²⁸ - Kristof

The lion-hearted Egyptians I met on Tahrir Square are risking their lives to stand up for democracy and liberty, and they deserve our strongest support — and, frankly, they should inspire us as well. A quick lesson in colloquial Egyptian Arabic: *Innaharda, ehna kullina Misryeen!* Today, we are all Egyptians!³²⁹ - Kristof

Maybe I'm too caught up in the giddiness of Tahrir Square, but I think the protesters have a point. Our equivocation isn't working. It's increasingly clear that stability will come to Egypt only after Mr. Mubarak steps down. It's in our interest, as well as Egypt's, that he resign and leave the country. And we also owe it to the brave men and women of Tahrir Square — and to our own history and values — to make one thing very clear: We stand with the peaceful throngs pleading for democracy, not with those who menace them.³³⁰ -Kristof

In the above excerpts, Kristof and Friedman talk a lot about democracy, one of the quintessential American ideals. They were not alone. As outlined in Chapter four, a number of journalists wrote about how Egyptians sought a “Western” or “American-style democracy”. Did these media professionals focus on what they wanted to see, to the detriment of more balanced coverage? In hindsight assessment, *Wall Street Journal* correspondent Matt Bradley says a Western paradigm did influence American media coverage, but it was not without basis:

It wasn't that they were bereft of duty. The revolutionary youth were the ones who were doing things. They were the ones who were protesting-and they protested all last year. They were the ones who were causing violence in the square. They were the ones who were- speaking English. They were the ones who were um, fighting for causes that we in our western paradigm find very defensible. Woman's rights, like in the case of the virginity tests, uh, the right to fair, due process in the case of the new military trials, the rights of religious minorities in the case of the Constitution first episode. And in the case of the, you know, with the Salafis. And in the Maspero incident. Uh, the right to civilian rule, which they very much defended. All of these things were triumphant, noble causes that resonated with the Western journalists community who were here, but for the vast majority of the public, these were not the primary issues.³³¹

³²⁷ Thomas L. Friedman, “They Did It,” *The New York Times*, February 12, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/13/opinion/13friedman.html>.

³²⁸ Nicholas D. Kristof, “Exhilarated by Hope in Cairo,” *The New York Times*, January 31, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/01/opinion/01kristof.html>.

³²⁹ Nicholas D. Kristof, “We Are All Egyptians,” *The New York Times*, February 3, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/04/opinion/04kristof.html>.

³³⁰ Kristof, “Exhilarated by Hope in Cairo”.

³³¹ Fox Pasnoori, “Matt Bradley Interview”.

Again, it goes back to providing context. As journalists with ties to the region and more resources (time, language, contacts), Friedman and Kristof theoretically should have been more *professionally* equipped to provide context, namely dissenting opinions about what was happening on the ground. In theory, Egyptian-born journalists and native Arabic speakers who worked for the *Times* should also have been able to provide more comprehensive coverage than reporters who “parachuted in”. But that does not necessarily mean that these journalists were more personally equipped to do so. Instead, what appears to have happened in the case of Friedman and Kristof is they got caught up in the “giddiness of Tahrir Square” because it played into their own habitus. American ideology focused on democracy, and technology, seems to have influenced their work. This observation also supports the ideology component of the Propaganda Model, which argues that news must pass through a series of filters determined by “structural, political-economic elements”³³². Certainly it can be argued that because American journalists are steeped in American ideology, that ideology is reflected in their work. But that is where the usefulness of the model ends and Bourdieu’s concept of habitus picks up to cover the idea of individual agency. Habitus explains why there are variations in coverage. Returning now to Frank Rich, he does not seem to buy into the “implicit, simplistic Western chauvinism” he associates with the media emphasis on Twitter and Facebook. Instead, he writes about how Americans do not know much about the people in the region. While his professional habitus is similar to colleagues Kristof and Friedman, his personal habitus appears different. There is enough evidence to suggest that Kristof and Friedman were more personally predisposed to favor the digitally revolutionary narrative because that is where their interests lie.

What is needed now is a systematic study that investigates the personal and professional habitus of a greater number of American journalists and foreign-born journalists who work for American media companies. Further research into this subject can help determine the extent professional and personal habitus interact and/or subsume aspects of the other. In this thesis, the personal habitus of op-ed contributors was easier to

³³² Andrew Mullen and Jeffery Klaehn, “The Herman-Chomsky Propaganda Model: A Critical Approach to Analysing Mass Media Behavior,” *Sociology Compass* 4 (2010): 215-229. And see generally Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*.

assess than that of straight-news reporters because an op-ed contributor's professional role allows more of their personality to reveal itself in their work. However that is not to suggest personal habitus is a negligible factor for straight-news reporters. Whenever there is a difference in coverage within the same news organization, habitus- both personal and professional- needs to be investigated. As the above example attempted to illustrate, *professional* habitus can explain the difference in coverage between journalists in different roles (e.g. op-ed versus daily news) but personal habitus, combined with capital, is the deciding factor among journalists with the same or similar roles.

Conclusion

In assessing news coverage decisions, it is not enough to examine either journalism constraints and routines *or* the individual agency of a media professional. Researchers must include components of both in their assessment. Using the 2011 Egyptian revolution as a backdrop, this thesis primarily explored the characteristics of media darlings who were featured, either often or prominently, in American news outlets. The quantitative and qualitative assessment of *New York Times* articles in Chapter Four allowed us to identify criteria that American news journalists found appealing, namely young, tech-savvy, and Westernized revolutionaries. As discussed in Chapter Five, the reasons for focusing on the digital revolutionary narrative included both news constraints/routines *and* the personal and professional habitus of reporters. Because of limited time, access issues, and language constraints it is reasonable to assume many American journalists covering the revolution were predisposed to focus on activists that were easy to access and spoke English fluently. However, not every American journalist bought into the digital revolutionary narrative. To account for variation in coverage, the application of Bourdieu's field theory is needed. The exploratory example in Chapter Five argues that personal and professional habitus are important factors that determine coverage differences. Field theory allows researchers to bridge the agency-structure divide and should be considered a useful tool in future media studies. In making the above arguments, this work highlights potential American media biases and also provides valuable context for the revolution itself.

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