The revolution continues: Mapping the Egyptian Twittersphere a decade after the 2011 Revolution
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Abstract
Ten years after the onset of the Arab revolutions, Facebook and Twitter have turned into powerful enablers of vast disinformation campaigns, harassment, censorship, and incitement of violence against activists, journalists, and human rights defenders. This, however, does not mean that the Egyptian online experience is over. A new generation of digital activists has started to emerge, bringing together disparate individuals and groups educating citizens how to exploit social media tools to support a common cause: democracy. Commemorating the tenth anniversary of the Egyptian Revolution, social media activists remembered the 18–day Revolution, revisiting the besieged networked public sphere and examining the future of activism in Egypt. This study aims to map the Egyptian Twittersphere in its celebration of a decade of the Revolution, exploring the actors present, their voice and interactivity, and the main themes that evolved.

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Introduction

The Egyptian Revolution was the event in the Arab Spring with the most media exposure in terms of citizens using different forms of social media to express their stand to the world. Even with the Egyptian government shutting Internet lines, cutting off mobile communications, blocking Web sites, and scrambling satellite signals to limit coverage of the protests, Egyptian activists curbed government pressure and voiced their cause online (Stork, 2012; El Gody, 2020).

Within a few months, millions of Egyptians joined the social media hype. Citizens started to become cyber-activists, providing detailed descriptions of post-revolution street politics, posting multimedia material, generating public interest, and reinforcing citizen power in creating an ideal society (Melnor and Ayish, 2015; Reed, 2016). Egyptian online society started to multiply as citizens clustered in networks that expanded and developed over time, operating across all areas of everyday life. Over the following three years, social media accounts tripled. Citizens became motivated by the belief that they had the capacity to
change their reality through collective online action (Cole, 2013; El Gody, 2020).

Social media platforms became the post-revolution activism ‘operation room’; a playground for political parties — old and new — non-governmental organisations and movements to recruit protestors, plan and coordinate protests, and give live updates about protest logistics (Clarke and Kocak, 2020). Social media also operated as an alternative media space for Egyptians to obtain their news and information. Between 2011 and 2013, over 80 news platforms — each with its own political ideology — started to operate. The fragmentation of political activism and news networks contributed to the state of political and economic chaos, creating an online rumble between different political players (Allam and El Gody, 2021). Several studies (cf., Kingston and Stam, 2013; Wehrey, 2018; Baumann, 2019; Bünte, 2021) have discussed the role of social media in deepening political and economic instability and sectarianism. Fighting for clicks and shares, social media platforms became an arena for negative propaganda; instead of empowering citizens with information, social media was controlled by political and commercial forces that left citizens misinformed and disengaged, thereby contributing to the rise of rumours and fake news.

The Supreme Council of Armed Forces, and later the Muslim Brotherhood administrations, seized the opportunity to control Internet freedom and online discussions (El Khalili, 2013; Eneflo, 2018). Different governments started using state-of-the-art technologies to tap dissident online activities. Furthermore, different administrations used automated bots, electronic flies (real people with fake digital identities or robots/software that are designed to appear as real people on social media), and digital armies to control discussions and manipulate public opinion.

When President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi came to power following the 2013 Revolution, he issued laws and regulations to tighten his grip on social media activism. On several occasions, he criticised how terrorists and the Muslim Brotherhood occupied online spaces to propagate fake news and manipulate audiences, accusing social media platforms of being a threat to the new democratic process and the new republic (Karoui, et al., 2017; Ali, et al., 2019; Allam and El Gody, 2021). The new administration imposed new laws and regulations to limit internet freedom and punish any opposing voice (Karoui, et al., 2017; Ali, et al., 2019).

This, however, did not stop cyber activists from continuing to use social media (Hassib and Shires, 2021). A new generation of cyber activists — from 2017 — started to emerge, educating citizens about their rights, monitoring government performance, and highlighting the new regime’s shortcomings. This created an agenda for development that could be implemented again off-line (El Gody, 2022).

To mark 10 years since the Revolution in Egypt, there were numerous celebrations on 25 January 2021. Social media provided an active forum for celebrations of the event, used as a tool to create online discussions about lessons to be learnt from the Revolution, as well as to analyse the current situation and where to go. Between 20 January and 18 February 2021, the hashtags ‘#25_January,’ ‘#I_participated_in_the_January_Revolution,’ and ‘#the_Revolution_continues’ were among the top Twitter trends.

The purpose of this study is to map the Egyptian Twittersphere in its celebration of a decade of the Revolution (between 23 January and 11 February 2021). The study consists of two main methodological components: A quantitative content analysis to map the data and a qualitative thematic analysis to examine the themes emerged.

Specifically, it sets out to explore the following questions:

1. What were the main hashtags in the Egyptian Twittersphere during the ten-year celebrations of the Egyptian Revolution?
2. Did the tweets generate interactivity among Twitter users in Egypt?
3. Who were main actors in the Egyptian Twittersphere?
4. What are the main topics/themes present during the period of study?
Social media, networked public sphere, and political participation

In post-revolutionary societies moving towards democracy, social media acts as a networked space to foster knowledge and to create platforms for citizens to deliberate issues of common concern (Jenkins, 2003; El Gody, 2012). Egypt’s networked sphere can hence be seen as a set of interconnected nodes of audience, political entities and groups, bloggers, and activists, among others. These networks are dynamic, innovative, open structures that are infinitely expandable and integrate new nodes as long as they share the same communication codes (Castells, 2015; El Gody, 2022). Online discussions can encourage people to participate in public issues and talk to their peers; their voices are then heard by the authorities and policymakers. According to El Gody (2022), these interactive discussions are considered to be more truthful, reliable, and revealing than mainstream government media.

Since 2011, new forms of interactive social media platforms, especially on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, have compensated for the inability of the weak, rigid political system to establish and mobilise links with Egyptian society. Between 2011 and 2015, several political parties and interest groups were formed. Three main network groups benefitted most from social media after the Egyptian Revolution. The first group was formed by political networks, especially Islamists, the military, liberals, and civil society and human rights groups that had been deprived of their freedom of expression and coerced into silence for decades. The second was social reform groups that challenged social norms and traditions; they used social media to create pressure groups to make their voices heard. Finally, religious groups, especially the Salafis, found in social media a venue where they could express their ideologies and reach wider audiences inside and outside Egypt. As a result, clashes between new governments and online dissidents intensified. Both the Supreme Council of Armed Forces and the Muslim Brotherhood, understanding the power of social media, imposed several measures to control social media platforms — from monitoring activists to hunting down online activists and harassing or imprisoning them (Karoui, et al., 2017). Some fled the country to save their lives, while others decided to stop interacting, fearing for their lives and those of their families. Telecommunication companies were forced to provide the government with lists, data, and recordings of users, while governments’ electronic flies highjacked the cyberspace to assure that their voice was the only voice heard (Reuters, 2014; Ali, et al., 2019).

During this period, social media played a significant role — as a tool — in building anti-Muslim Brotherhood sentiments. Tamarrod (which means disobedience), a group that organised a nationwide petition against President Morsi, coordinated the demonstrations that led to the 30 June 2013 Revolution (El Khalili, 2013; Iskandar, 2013). Other liberal groups continued to use social media, especially Twitter, to emphasise Brotherhood shortcomings. Online campaigns were intensified, and social media started to undertake the role of echoing mainstream media’s discourses of ‘brotherhood-izing society,’ which ultimately led millions to occupy the streets calling for former President Morsi to step down and the military to intervene (Ghanem, 2016).

After the 2013 Revolution, social media played a critical role in deepening sectarianism in Egyptian society, with Egyptians clustered in three groups: revolutionaries, pro-Muslim Brotherhood, and pro-military. The online rumble between the different fractions gave the new government the ultimate opportunity to control social media discussions. The new administration claimed that social media deviated from being a tool of democracy to a dangerous medium that could fragment society. The newly established Supreme Council for Media Regulation repeatedly called for action against activists and social media-based organisations. New laws and regulations were, thus, imposed to tighten freedom of expression and control internet freedom (Callamard, 2021; Farid, 2021).

The new administration cracked down on Islamists, secular opponents, journalists, lawyers, artists, and intellectuals. Human rights organisations claimed that there were around 60,000 political and activist dissidents behind bars: ‘The Arab Spring in Egypt was short lived ... (as) the regime has learned the worst
lesson — to nip any hint of freedom in the bud’ [1]. Egyptian online communications started being monitored by specialised cybersecurity firms, giving the Egyptian government the ability to comb user data from social and communication media platforms. Specifically, the government looked at:

any conversation, any interaction, between Islamists, or those who discuss Islamism, searching for Blasphemy and scepticism in religions; regional, religious, racial, and class divisions; spreading of rumours and intentional twisting of facts; throwing accusations; libel; sarcasm; using inappropriate words; calling for the departure of societal pillars; encouraging extremism, violence and dissent; inviting demonstrations, sit-ins and illegal strikes; pornography, looseness, and lack of morality; educating methods of making explosives and assault, chaos and riot tactics; calling for normalising relations with enemies and circumventing the state’s strategy in this regard; fishing for honest mistakes, hunting flesh; taking statements out of context; and spreading hoaxes and claims of miracles.

This, however, did not mean that Egypt’s online experience ended, as a new generation evolved. Neo-activists understood that social media was a space for expression outside government parameters of control, but at the same time, they saw it become a space that the government predominantly controlled, meaning that players needed to abide by the rules (Anderson and Rainie, 2020; Schleffer and Miller, 2021).

Ten years after the onset of the Arab revolutions, Facebook and Twitter have become powerful enablers of vast disinformation campaigns, harassment, censorship, and incitement of violence against activists, journalists, human rights defenders, and any dissent. Nonetheless, the Egyptian online experience is by no means over, a new generation has started to emerge, bringing together disparate groups and individuals to support a common cause: democracy. Digital activists have started to teach citizens how to exploit new social media platforms and tools. One must be careful, however, not to overstate the role of social media as it is only a tool (Trappel, 2019; Anderson and Rainie, 2020).

25 January 2021 marked the ten-year anniversary of the Egyptian Revolution. Social media, consequently, turned into a platform where Egyptians remembered the 18-day revolution. To gain a better understanding of how social media can be used in the context of cyber activism and networked communication, it is important to study the Egyptian Twittersphere, examining the actors present, their voice and interactivity, and the main themes that evolved a decade after, the purpose of the current study.

Method

This study is based on two levels of analysis. The first maps the Egyptian Twittersphere, identifying the main hashtags/topics and interactivity, while the second identifies themes and main actors. Inspired by similar studies (cf., Anstead and O’Loughlin, 2015; Bogen, et al., 2021, 2018; Shaw and Karami, 2019; Zompetti, 2019; Alshalan and Al-Khalifa, 2020), this study used a mixed-method approach of quantitative content analysis and qualitative thematic analysis. This design allows the identification of patterns and trends across the data. Quantitative content analysis was used to map data in order to understand the nature of hashtags, while qualitative thematic analysis was employed to provide a closer look at hashtags. Specifically, I investigated the main themes and lexical choices used in tweets, as well as implicit and explicit ideas — an approach used in the study of social media (Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan, 2013; Anstead and O’Loughlin, 2015; Juutinen, 2016; Bogen, et al., 2021).

Sample and data collection process
The data was collected over the period from 23 January 2021 (two days before the memorial day of 25 January) to 11 February 2021 (commemorating the day former president Mubarak stepped down from office) in order to capture the general mood of the tweets and track the building of discussions. Tweets were collected through Twitter API using R, an open-source data analytics engine that enables the downloading of all original tweets. The data was also archived using Ncapture, an NVivo toolbar that facilitates the collection of publicly accessible Twitter data. The hashtags gathered were ‘#25January’ and its variants ‘#25Jan’ and ‘#25Janrevolution’, as well as ‘#I_participated_in_25_January’ on Twitter’s public API stream in both Arabic and English. The database was refined, generating a total of 483,761 tweets over the 20 days of study. Data was collected every day at 23.30 PM to ensure that it was captured during hours of similar online traffic. In addition to the original tweet, the downloaded data included several metrics, such as: Tweet ID, username, tweet text, time tweeted, tweet type (i.e., retweet or original content tweet), retweeted by, number of retweets, hashtags used, online mentions, name, location, Web URL, user bio, number of user tweets, number of followers, number of users following, additional hashtags generated, and conversations generated. I scrambled/removed profile identifiers, including username and profile image, to maintain ethical standards of online data collection and protect user anonymity. Descriptive analysis hinged upon measures of frequency (counts, percentages, and proportion of overall dataset) to establish which themes constituted normative responses (Driscoll, et al., 2007). Word counts were generated by NVivo coding software, which compiled all tweets coded beneath a specific theme heading and provided the most commonly used words per theme. Tweets were then clustered according to the themes. A random sample of 498 tweet were then selected across the themes for the qualitative study. Braun and Clarke (2006) outlined six steps towards a deductive thematic analysis that I followed when conducting the thematic analysis: becoming familiar with data, assigning preliminary codes to describe the content, searching for patterns across participants, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and compiling a report.

Results

Following is the quantitative analysis of the study mapping the data, interactivity, examining the main hashtags, actors present, and topics/themes discussed.

Mapping tweets

Figure 1 indicates that commemorating the Revolution started several days before 25 January, with several political parties and activists (both ‘new’ and ‘traditional’) posting messages and images reminding followers of the event. The Memorial Day — 25 January — showed the largest number of tweets, with 29.4 percent or 142,462 tweets generated during this day. Some of the hashtags, such as #25January, #I_participated_in_the_25_January_Revolution, #decade_of_revolution, and #the_Revolution_Continues, were among the top global trends of the day.
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Figure 1: Mapping the Egyptian Twittersphere between 23 January 2021 and 11 February 2021.

Figure 1 also illustrates a spike in the number of tweets commemorating key incidences, such as the ‘Fridays of Rage’ (28 January and 4 February), the Battle of the Camel (2 February), and the Ousting of Mubarak (11 February). During these days, most of the hashtags and tweets documented events of the Revolution, reminding citizens of the brutality of the Mubarak regime, police violence, and Tahrir Square activities.

Figure 1 also depicts the presence of anti-revolution voices, representing 9.1 percent of the total number of tweets. Anti-Revolution hashtags primarily revolved around ‘#25_January_is_police_day’ and ‘#25_January_brought_disaster_to_Egypt.’ These hashtags were in support of the current political system as they were coupled with such hashtags as ‘#AlSisi_saved_Egypt’ or ‘#the_army_saved_Egypt_twice,’ thereby highlighting the role played by the military in saving Egypt twice (during the 2011 Revolution as well as in 2013) from the heavy hand of the Mubarak and Muslim Brotherhood regimes. It is worth mentioning that the pro-government tweets in terms of average tweets per day, date, and time of publishing suggest the presence of automated bot accounts as several included identical content. Previous studies (Darwich, 2017; Veale and Cook, 2018; El Gody, 2022) have shown that it is common, especially in the Middle East, for regimes to use digital armies to tweet the same message several times during the day in an attempt to steer public opinion, win online sympathy, and demonstrate their presence in the Twittersphere.

Interactivity among Twitter users

Interactivity is the central idea of Twitter, which acts as a social network service. However, the results showed that, during the period of study, moderate ‘practices of sociability’ were produced in terms of reactions, retweeting, conversations, and discussions (see Figures 2 and 3). From 23 January to 11 February, tweets generated a massive 2,879,411 reactions, demonstrating high visibility and audience interest. On the other hand, retweets (see Figure 2) were not visible, with only 14 percent of the tweets retweeted. To retweet a tweet is a more social act than simply reading it; it is a way to actively connect with others or to make a call for interaction (Cardoso and Di Fátima, 2013).

The vast majority of the tweets (86 percent) were asocial, producing no retweets. On one level, the majority of the tweets were original. On another level, it could be inferred that audiences were not interested in
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One reason implied by the literature was the fear of governmental surveillance; in the previous months before the anniversary, several dissidents had been jailed and fined for posting messages that were against the ‘norms’ of society or called for public disorder (Callamard, 2021).

An additional way of examining the social dimension of Twitter as a social and interactive practice is to highlight the number of tweets that generated conversations. The results illustrated a ‘semi-social’ practice, with 27 percent of the tweets (see Figure 3) generating conversations between two or more viewers. One needs to identify that both camps in favour of commemorating the Revolution and anti-Revolution/pro-government were equally active in creating conversations. One important observation was that the pro-
government accounts were ‘more active’ in terms of copying and pasting the same tweet across several messages, which points to the presence of an electronic digital army supporting the current political establishment (Darwich, 2017). Examining the text of the conversations showed that several aimed at toning down the intensity of the new round of revolution conversations and stopping the audience from clinging to the ‘old days of the Revolution’ or ‘being sympathetic to the Muslim Brotherhood.’ The discrepancy between the number of conversations (27 percent) and retweeting (14 percent) also indicated that citizens were more active in commenting on other user accounts and walls rather than ‘reposting’ information on their own ‘accounts/wall’, where they could be held legally responsible.

Figure 3: Discussions and conversations generated.
Topics, hashtags, and actors in the Egyptian Twittersphere

Four overarching topics/themes emerged from the hashtags and Twitter data: (1) Remembering the revolution; (2) Calls for activism; (3) Pride; and, (4) Anti-revolution (see Figures 4, 5, and 6). Under each main topic/theme, there were emergent subtopics/themes. Statistics and percentages indicate the proportion of tweets in the overall dataset characterised by a given theme.

Remembering the revolution was the main topic identified. Results showed over half of the Twitter sample, 55 percent, involved tweets ‘remembering’ incidences, personal memories, and stories about martyrs or jailed dissidents/activists. This topic included hashtags of ‘#25_January_Revolution’ and its variations, such as ‘#January_Revolution’ and ‘#a_decade_of_revolution.’ Almost all the tweets in the ‘remembering’ category shared memories about the power of the people who were able to change reality. It was also an opportunity to remember the young men and women who died during the Revolution. Almost 100,000 tweets were devoted to retelling stories of the martyrs and how they lost their lives during clashes. Similarly, over 89,000 tweets dealt with remembering activists/revolutionary figures who were jailed (such as Ahmed Doma and Alaa Abdel Fattah), missing (such as Mostafa El Naggard), or forced into exile (such as Amr Waked). The anniversary of the Revolution was an opportunity to call for their freedom, reviving hashtags such as ‘#free_doma,’ ‘#free_alaa’, and ‘#free_sanaa’ to keep their cause/stories alive.

The second topic/theme featured calls for activism. Hashtags like ’#Revolution_continues,’ ‘#still_January did not end,’ ‘#we_are_continuing,’ and ‘#the_Revolution_is_coming’ reached out to audiences, calling for a revival of the revolution and asking for support of the Revolution’s cause and aims. This category was an opportunity for silenced political parties/interest groups, such as ‘Al Karama Party’ and the ‘6 April Movement’, to share stories about their roles during and after the Revolution as a reminder that ‘#the_Revolution_is_continuing.’ Both traditional activists from ‘#the Revolution democratic front’ and new activists of ‘#the_Revolution_continues’ were among the popular actors during the study, generating just under 70,000 tweets. Both groups highlighted that the quest for democracy was not over; the implication was that the Revolution is a process; Egypt is witnessing a setback but soon it will continue. This category also included individuals who were not happy with the current socio-political situation, reviving hashtags like ‘#the_people_want.’ This hashtag borrowed the Revolution’s primary slogan ‘the people want,’ generating 37,409 tweets that highlighted the demands for the Revolution in terms of ending military rule, developing the economy, and ensuring freedoms. Opposition voices to the current political establishment were also part of calls for activism, with hashtags against President Al-Sisi or military rule, such as ‘#leave,’ ‘#down_with_Al_Sisi,’ and ‘#Alsisi_is_the_enemy.’ Combined, they generated 22,102 tweets, while ‘#down_with_the_military_rule’ spawned 21,009 tweets. Members or followers of the banned Muslim Brotherhood group remembered former president Mohamed Morsi with hashtags like ‘#Mohamed_Morsi_is_the_lawful_president,’ and ‘#Morsi_accomplishments,’ which generated 16,744 and 15,225 tweets, respectively.

The third topic/theme was pride for being part of a Revolution that made a change to Egyptian socio-political life. This hashtag was mainly used by individuals not necessarily associated with a political party or interest groups who participated in the Revolution, highlighting the gains of the Revolution with hashtags such as ‘#I_participated_in_the_Revolution,’ ‘#proud_of_the_revolution,’ and ‘#my_testimony.’ One key actor in this topic/theme were females: the hashtag ‘#women_and_the_Revolution’ generated 24,438 tweets, mainly highlighting the pivotal role of women during the Revolution and beyond. They also told stories of brave women standing in the frontlines of the Revolution or who were killed, such as Shaymaa Al Sabbagh, an activist and member of the Socialist Popular Alliance Party, who died in Tahrir Square in January 2015 and became a symbol against Egypt’s military.

The final theme was anti-revolution. 154,604 tweets, or 15 percent of the total, were against celebrating the memory of the Revolution. This topic/theme was comprised mainly of hashtags describing the revolution as a #big_lie, a #conspiracy_against_Egypt, or #25_January_is_the_Police_day. Just over 30,000 tweets saw
the event as remembering a disastrous experience. Similarly, a little over 17,000 tweets refused to call 25 January a revolution but rather a conspiracy against Egypt or against the rule of the former president Mubarak. In a number of tweets (14,098), 25 January meant the memory of police day, remembering their sacrifices in the line of duty and denying the revolutionaries accusations about the brutality of the police. Several tweets told the stories of policemen and women who died in the line of duty. This category also included hashtags in support of the current administration and President Al- Sisi, with hashtags like #Al- Sisi accomplished the impossible and #AlSisi_saved_Egypt. This group of hashtags generated 81,128 tweets, highlighting the role played by President Al-Sisi in saving the Egyptian Revolution from the Muslim Brotherhood and getting the Revolution back on track after the 30 June Revolution. Other hashtags were in support of former President Mubarak, with hashtags like #we_are_Sorry and #President_Mubarak_is_a_hero. Over 12,000 tweets were former pro-Mubarak admirers, celebrating him as a hero who did not allow the Revolution to become an armed clash between different sects of the society by stepping down from office.

Figure 4: Hashtags.
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Figure 5: Topics covered.
Thematic analysis

In this section, I present an in-depth analysis of the main themes of the tweets that commemorated the Egyptian Revolution based on the main hashtags, topics, and actors discussed earlier.

Remembering ... The memory of the Revolution

Remembering can be defined as documenting the memory so it is not forgotten. Remembering the 25 January 2011 Revolution does not mean living in the past or ‘remembering the Tahrir square days’ or ‘the best days of my life,’ as stated in several tweets (for example, see image 1 in Figure 7). Remembering the Revolution is, rather, a celebration of the young men and women of Egypt who revolted to change reality. This specific notion helps concretise the idea that the Revolution is not over (for example, see image 2 in Figure 7). Setting the political tone that the Revolution is continuing started early before the Memorial Day of 25 January. The hashtags ‘#25January’ and ‘#AlSisi_is_a_traitor’ made their way to the top of social
media trends in Egypt (for example, see images 3a, 3b and 4 in Figure 7) on 23 and 24 January. Several of the tweets were inflammatory, reminding audiences of the ‘days where Egyptians broke their fear’ and ‘revolted against the injustice.’ With ‘can Egyptians make it again?’ these ideas were tweeted and retweeted multiple times.

Another cluster of tweets reminded audiences that the Revolution ‘enemies’ were still the same: the military, current political establishment, and police brutality (for example, see images 5, 6a, 6b, 7a, 7b, and 7c in Figure 8). Several tweets assured that the memory of the Revolution had not stopped since 2011 (for example, see image 5, 6a, and 6b in Figure 8) as more Egyptians were joining to ‘expose the corruption in the regime.’ Tweets highlighted that citizens after 25 January were ‘not naïve’ or ‘fooled’ and that they understood the government’s plan to wipe out or ‘memoricide’ the Revolution by rebranding the revolution as ‘Police Day’ (for example, see image 7a in Figure 8). Tweets of President Al-Sisi’s speech mentioning the January Revolution — in a short 50-word statement in his 500-word speech celebrating Revolution/Police Day — were mocked and memed in several tweets, with images of different clashes between police and protestors highlighting the brutality of the police (for example, see images 7a, 7b, and 7c in Figure 8). This was further developed with images of 2011 civilian casualities. Videos of police brutality were also common, especially that of police snipers aiming specifically at the eyes of demonstrators. These images and videos, as discussed, attempted to remind citizens about why the Revolution took place originally and that their common enemy was still extant.

Figure 7: Remembering the Revolution [Images 1, 2, 3a, 3b, and 4].
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Figure 8: Reminding audiences that the Revolution ‘enemies’ are still the same [Images 5, 6a, 6b, 7a, 7b, and 7c].

Reminding the audience of the slogans that protestors vocalised during the Revolution was a common strategy to stress that the Revolution was continuing. Statements such as ‘the people want to topple the regime,’ ‘leave,’ and ‘bread, freedom and social justice’ were tweeted hundreds of times (for example, see images 8a and 8b in Figure 9) to keep the ‘revolutionary spirit alive.’

Traditional activism pages such as RASD (Monitor) created a series of tweets to document the memory of the daily activities of the Revolution, highlighting the ‘twists’ in the Revolution narrative created by Egyptian government mainstream media (for example, see image 10d in Figure 9). Similarly, the new activist platform Matsadash (Don’t believe) highlighted fake information and fake memories created mainly by government and Muslim Brotherhood media, retelling events from their point of view and reposting fake memories with corrections, including cited references (for example, see images 9a and 9b in Figure 9) to keep the ‘facts of the Revolution and purify rumours,’ as seen in image 9ain Figure 9.

The purpose of the revolution was further documented by retweeting global reception of the Revolution (for
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example, see images 10a and 10b in Figure 9), retweeting statements from world leaders stating how Egyptians were ‘changing history,’ ‘schooling the world about democracy,’ and ‘Revolution being and a model for the world to adopt.’ Other tweets documented clips from global media’s reception of the Revolution (for example see image 10c in Figure 9), reminding citizens about how the Revolution forced the world to ‘respect the Egyptian will.’ This was compared to tweets from local media that turned against the Revolution, portraying them as ‘traitors’ or ‘government agents’ (for example, see image 10d in Figure 9).

Figure 9: Remembering the Revolution Slogans and World Support [Images 8, 9a, 9b, 10a, 10b, 10c, and 10d].
‘Remembering the key moments’ and ‘key participants and revolutionary figures’ were also a frequent part of documenting the Revolution. Such moments included the first crowd of the morning of 25 January (image 11a in Figure 10), the first martyr (image 11b in Figure 10), triumphant moments over the police during the Battle of the Camel, the Fridays of Rage, protecting the Square (image 11c in Figure 10), and Mubarak stepping down (image 11d in Figure 10). The Revolution was also a time to remember figures and allow traditional activists and members of the revolutionary body to re-emerge like Mona El Tahawy, Wael Abbas. Several of them had not been active on Twitter or in Egyptian political life for some time (image 11e in Figure 10). Another key figure that was strongly present during the first days of the revolution was Dr. Mohamed El Baradei (seen as the godfather of the 2011 Revolution) who returned to tweeting, stating that ‘people’s path towards freedom is long and Egyptians have sacrificed a lot to reach their goal ... revolution is a learning process and we learned not to let the Revolution die’ (image 11f in Figure 10). This specific tweet was among the top retweeted during the period of study. This specific tweet aligns itself with the general mood that commemorated a decade of the revolution, not to celebrate the memory of protests, but to ‘prepare’ and ‘recharge audiences for a new revolution cycle,’ as stated in a number of tweets.

**Figure 10:** Remembering the key Revolution moments [Images 11a, 11b, 11c, 11d, 11e, and 11f].

Commemorating a decade of the Egyptian Revolution was also an opportunity to remember the young men
and women who lost their lives during the Revolution. Several accounts were created by their friends and family members to keep their ‘memory alive.’ Documenting their names and pictures was important to remind people that they are ‘gone but not forgotten’ and that their ‘sacrifice is appreciated.’ The majority of remembering martyr tweets were accompanied with statements of sorrow and grief, reminding audiences that the Revolution has not fulfilled its aims ‘yet’ and asking them to return to the streets until the goals of the Revolution were fulfilled (for example, see images 12a, 12b, 12c, 12d, 12e, and 12f in Figure 11). Analysis also highlighted the sacrifice of citizens outside Tahrir Square, such as that of the first martyr who died in the demonstrations of Suez City (image 11b in Figure 11), the young revolutionist who died at the age of 12, and the young/marginalised street vendor who died during clashes with the police. Martyr women were also highlighted, especially Shaimaa El Sabbagh or the flower lady, who died commemorating the January revolutions in 2015 (image 12e in Figure 11).

Similarly, the Revolution was an opportunity to remind citizens of the online dissidents who were jailed, abducted, under restrictive order, or in exile (for example, see images 13a, 13b, 13c in Figure 12). Several tweets reminded audiences of their stories and updated them about their current status. Remembering ‘prisoners of thought’ served as a reminder of the ‘government crushing online dissidents.’ Several tweets
exposed the falsity of government claims that there are ‘no political or activist’ prisoners. It was also a way to remind audiences that the government does not want ‘future revolution attempts’ to ‘assure the stability of the regime.’ Reviving their hardship and posting their tweets was, again, a reminder of ‘the injustice of the current regime.’ For example, the account ‘my brother is apprehended’ was active in telling the stories of apprehended online dissidents. Another page was designed to call for freedom for Ahmed Douma (for example, see images 14a, 14b, and 14c in Figure 12), publishing a letter from him smuggled from prison. Several posts recorded calls from public figures and reports from human rights organisations to apply pressure on the Egyptian government to release him (image 14c in Figure 12). Other activists, who are under pressure from the government (such as blogger Wael Abbas and creator and moderator of ‘We Are All Khaled Said’ and Wael Ghoneim who is in exile), were also present (images 15a and 15b in Figure 12). Wael Abbas shared several personal reflections and images documenting the Revolution. Wael Ghoneim, on the other hand, who is living in exile in the U.S., attacked the government for previously harassing his family members and shared mock tweets, such as image 15b (in Figure 12) published on 25 January, where he stated that he was having ‘koshary’ for lunch, a typical Egyptian food popular during the demonstrations.

Figure 12: Remembering the detained citizens [Images 13a, 13b, 13c, 13d, 14a, 14b, 14c 15a, and 15b].
‘Remembering the Revolution performance art’ was the final cluster of the ‘remembering the revolution’ theme. Art was a main component of the Egyptian version of the Arab Spring. Tahrir Square was a culture gathering, as well as a place for citizens to protest. There were times where demonstrators engaged in artwork: singing, poetry recital, theatrical performance, and graffiti drawing, to name but a few examples. Commemorating the artwork was a reminder about the civility of the Revolution: ‘a revolution where mobs and art were in harmony,’ as stated in one of the tweets. Several of the tweets republished some of the iconic photographs and images (for example, see images 16a, 16b, and 16c in Figure 13). Tweets also reminded audiences of some of the graffiti work and cartoons (for example, image 16d, 16e, and 16f in Figure 13), while others published reproductions of popular images with testimonials of photographed citizens (for example, image 16c and 16g in Figure 13). Tweets included a redesign of images to provide a contemporary feel, with copies of graffiti and paintings (for example, image 16h, 16i, 16j, and 16k in Figure 13). Unlike previous sections, where the language was inflammatory, this section treated audience emotions. Several tweets were image-based with little or no text; sometimes tweets were accompanied by poetry verses, slogans, or lines from songs. Original Revolution music, songs, and video clips were shared — few were reproduced — again, as a reminder of the ‘tempo’ of the Revolution (for example, image 16l in Figure 13). Similarly, poetry by famous poets, such as Ahmed Fouad Negm and Tamim El Barghouti (see images 16m and 16n in Figure 13), were reposted and retweeted on a large scale, reminding the revolutionaries of their power.
In short, remembering the Revolution documented not only the 18 days of demonstrations, but also the events of 25 January, the decade of activism after the revolution, the current regime’s shortcomings, and the activists and organisations who paved the road to the 25 January Revolution. The primary reason was to keep the memory of the Revolution alive. Several tweets were calls to prepare audiences ‘to unite and be organised’ for a new round as ‘the reasons for 25 Jan revolution’ were still the same.

The following section expands the memory to include activism, developing an understanding of the different actors who were active.

**Activism ... The Revolution continues**

In spite of government efforts to contain social media, social media was still regarded as the primary platform for different forms of activism for opposition parties, non-governmental organisations, and other political activists to reflect their ideologies. A new generation of political actors, in their quest to rebuild their credibility, started refining their strategies on social media platforms. Celebrating the Revolution was
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Liberal opposition political parties that emerged after the Revolution, such as *Al Karama* (‘Dignity’) and *Al Wasat* (‘Middle’), were among the active political parties that celebrated ‘a decade of revolution calling for more diverse political participation’ (see, for example, images 17a and 17b in Figure 14). They used the opportunity to attack the current political system, tweeting government faults and relating them to goals of the Revolution.

![Image 17a](image17a.png)

![Image 17b](image17b.png)

*Figure 14: Political parties celebrating the a decade of the Revolution [Images 17a and 17b].*

The Muslim Brotherhood and their supporters were also active during the event. In an attempt to rebuild their credibility, the Muslim Brotherhood presented themselves as part of the ‘original’ Tahrir Square revolutionaries (see images 18a, 18b, and 18c in Figure 15). The banned party and religious group focused their tweets against the current political system, as well as against the opposition political and religious establishments — especially Salafi political parties and their leaders — for not ‘supporting their cause,’ describing them as traitors and ‘those who betrayed the Revolution and the will of God and the people.’ Images of late president Mohamed Morsi and jailed Muslim Brotherhood leaders were presented as a form of activism and the ‘price they are paying’ for their ‘political and ideological’ stands (image 18a, 18b, and 18c in Figure 15). Examining the language of the Muslim Brotherhood posts, several of their tweets could be described as inflammatory, loud, and full of ‘blame on the other.’ Several tweets were reposts of earlier ‘warnings’ by high-profile Muslim Brotherhood leaders, advising citizens about ‘the counter-revolution,’ the ‘forces of the dark,’ and the ‘supporters of the old regime’ who ‘want to steal the Revolution,’ thereby framing the 30 June Revolution as a mutiny against the 25 January ‘legitimate’ Revolution and its values (image 18c, 18d, 18e, and 18f in Figure 15).

The behaviour of the Muslim Brotherhood in their tweets was atypical of a right-wing activist political party, attacking the political establishment and prejudiced against government administratives, opposition parties, the media, and the judicial system, and promoting its own alternative parallel system and ideology (Melzer and Serafin, 2013 NEED CITATION). Mainly, the Muslim Brotherhood’s rhetorical strategy was to appeal to the religious ethos and pathos of the audience without providing evidence or support. Several
of their tweets were highly attacked by citizens and members of the revolutionary body, making their tweets a vocal battle between supporters and opposers of the Muslim Brotherhood. Several tweets were a call for support for their cause, an invitation for Egyptians to revolt ‘to bring back legitimacy’ (image 18f in Figure 15). They used long video and audio material as tools to call audiences to revolt. In many cases, they could be described as trolls, especially when responding to tweets against the Muslim Brotherhood establishment.

RASD, the social media arm of the Muslim Brotherhood that started during the 25 January Revolution and quickly became one of the main alternative media sources for people, was also actively present to document the memory of the Revolution, but with a Muslim Brotherhood twist (for example, see images 18i and 18j in Figure 15). It highlighted quotations and messages from members of the Brotherhood. The RASD Brotherhood agenda was present, relating the Revolution’s success to what was a democratic transformation of the Brotherhood obtaining power, as well as the role of the counter-revolution, which led to the uprising during the 30 June Revolution. It is worth mentioning that part of the Muslim Brotherhood’s strategy was to attack mainstream media, as well as attack media profile personnel, calling them ‘traitors to legitimacy’ and asking readers to follow alternative media, especially RASD.

Similarly, Muslim Brotherhood supporters, such as Ayman Nour, head of the Al Ghad party (image 18c in Figure 15) living in exile, tweeted his support for the Muslim Brotherhood’s cause, calling 30 June a counter-revolution against justice. He also used tweets as a public relations tool to document his history of political activism against ‘repressive regimes in Egypt.’ Part of the Muslim Brotherhood’s strategy to win back the support of society was to appeal to religion, presenting tweets from religious figures with quotations from the Quran to give legitimacy to their cause (for example, see images 18g, 18h, 18i, 18j, 18k, and 18l in Figure 15).

Analysing tweets also revealed that the Muslim Brotherhood had their own digital army attempting to hijack Twitterspace: several tweets were replicas and sent from different accounts at different points in time during the ten-year celebration of the Revolution (see image 18g and 18h in Figure 15).
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Figure 15: The Muslim Brotherhood and their supporters were also active in the Twittersphere [Images 18a, 18b, 18c, 18d, 18e, 18f, 18g, 18h, 18i, 18j, 18k, and 18l].

Political groups and movements that were active during the Mubarak era were also present. For several of them, the anniversary was a public relations opportunity to rebrand themselves to fit into the new political scene. The 6 April Youth Movement, for example, presented itself as a ‘vibrant’ online movement. The tenth anniversary was a PR opportunity to remind audiences of their activism before 25 January Revolution, seeing the revolution as a celebration of the movement’s struggle against the Mubarak regime from 2008 (for example, see image 19a in Figure 16). In doing so, the group demonstrated its awareness of changes in activism dynamics. Although they could not organise protests on the ground following new demonstration laws, they aimed to create an online opposition platform for the like-minded to discuss issues of common concern and educate audiences about their political rights. The anniversary was also a time for the
movement to document ‘tales from the Revolution,’ producing a series under the title ‘The story of the 18 days’ and releasing video clips and images about the movement’s daily activities in Tahrir Square.

Similarly, political activists and bloggers, such as Wael Abbas and Big Pharaoh (among others), highlighted the notion that revolutions were cycles ‘that started in 2003–2004’ and peaked in 2011. Egyptians were witnessing a ‘slump of a cycle’ that would eventually change again in the future (image 19b and 19c in Figure 16). Several traditional activists were optimistic in regard to the Revolution, defending its position. Their activism was seen clearly in attacking hashtags and tweets from those who saw ‘the Revolution is over’ or who were pessimistic about the future of ‘activism and resistance.’ In several cases, they reposted hashtags about the ‘sad memory of the Revolution’ and were ‘sorry for failing the martyrs,’ claiming that the Revolution was far from over (images 19d, 19e, 19f, 19g, 19h, and 19i in Figure 16) and stating that ‘revolutions are not done overnight’ and it was ‘not a time event.’

Several activists created tweets to highlight the government’s fear of ‘power of the people,’ stating that ‘government actions to control commemorating the revolution is a pointer of its fear.’ Writer Mona El Tahawy and activist Gamal Sultan (for example, see images 19f and 19m in Figure 16) tweeted that this occasion was not an ‘obituary of the 25 January Revolution,’ but rather an ‘opportunity to learn from the mistakes’ and prepare for a future round. Other activists were against the political establishments that emerged after the Revolution, holding them responsible for the ‘fragmentation of the cause,’ especially the Muslim Brotherhood, accused of ‘hijacking the Revolution’ (image 19e in Figure 16) and ‘the military body that brought political life back to square one’ (image 19j in Figure 16) and the ‘deterioration of political life in Egypt.’

The arrest of cartoonist Ashraf Hamdi for his caricature commemorating the Revolution (image 19q in Figure 16) was an opportunity for local and global non-governmental organisations to intensify discussions against the ‘tyranny of the regime’ and its ‘fear of future demonstrations.’ Local and international non-governmental organisations — which produced tweets based on statistics and reports that highlighted the deterioration of political and human rights in Egypt — accused the government of imprisoning activists. Local non-governmental organisations picked up this line in their activism against the government, highlighting current laws and regulations that were ‘against the principles of human rights’ and ‘citizen’s right to demonstrate,’ seeing these as ‘a failed attempt by the government to stop a new revolution’ (for example, see images 19k, 19l, 19m, 19n, 19o, 19p, and 19q in Figure 16).
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Figure 16: Activists and Bloggers were Active Actors in the Egyptian Twittersphere [Images 19a, 19b, 19c, 19d, 19e, 19f, 19g, 19h, 19i, 19j, 19k, 19l, 19m, 19n, 19o, 19p, and 19q].

The activism section testified to the current status of defragmentation of political activism in post-2011 Egypt. Several tweets turned into a crossfire of accusations between different groups. Although their cause was the ‘Revolution is continuing’ and ‘January spirit is not dead,’ their aim to ‘build a society that is based on the 25 January demands’ was shared, despite the fact that ideological differences were visible in tweets. Accusations between political factions and figures were underlined in several tweets. On several occasions, the tweets were seen as propaganda or public relations for political stands of different activists.
Pride ... I participated in the Revolution

This theme was mainly produced by the young men and women who did not have political affiliations but who participated in the Revolution. This theme asserted that the revolution was mainly a people’s revolution, not initiated by political parties. Generally, this theme was associated with ‘pride in being part of’ or having ‘witnessed the’ Revolution. Several tweets from this category provided images of people ‘demonstrating in Tahrir Square,’ ‘occupying the streets,’ ‘bringing citizens’ rights’ and, ultimately, ‘toppling the regime,’ and were described in detail. Images associated with this theme reflected memories from the Square, challenging police violence; there were also selfies in Tahrir Square (for example, see images 20a, 20b, 20c, 21a, and 21b in Figure 17), usually associated with the hashtag ‘#I participated in the January Revolution.’ Several of these tweets expressed feelings of people through some of the slogans used during the 18 days, such as ‘lift your head high ... you are Egyptian’ and ‘proud to be Egyptian.’ It is important to highlight that several of the tweets in this category were produced by women who participated in the Revolution. Several stories testified how the Revolution broke the barrier of fear for women so that they could be part of the ‘political mobilisation’ and ‘participation’ (for example, see images 21a, 21b, and 21c in Figure 17), labelling participation by women as part of the Egyptian feminist ‘revolution’ (image 21a in Figure 17).

Pride was also seen among the Egyptian diaspora, who organised sit-ins or demonstrations, reminding the world about the ‘continuation of the January Revolution’ or their feeling of pride in being part of a ‘culture that created a clean revolution’ that was successful ‘in changing reality’ (image 22 in Figure 17).

Pride was also seen among non-Egyptians who visited Tahrir Square during or after the Revolution or wished to witness the Revolution. Several of the tweets were from foreign correspondents and international media workers who reflected their ‘pride in witnessing history in the making’ during the 2011 Revolution (image 23a and 23b in Figure 17).
This theme highlighted the pride of Egyptians who participated in the revolution, that is to say, common audiences participating without a political agenda. Thus, Twitter became a space for audiences to express their emotions of pride in being part of history, as well as their frustration that the goals of the revolution were not met. This theme was also an opportunity to show that commemorating the revolution not only attracted the attention of local Egyptians, but Egyptians living in diaspora and foreigners who had lived in...
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Egypt during 2011.

The Anti-Revolution ... The Revolution that brought misery

The anti-Revolution was the final main group identified during the period of study. This group could be further clustered into audiences who did not support the Revolution in 2011, those in favour of former president Mubarak, turned against the Revolution, and support the current Egyptian government, favouring the current president, Al-Sisi.

During the January events, there were counter-revolution demonstrations. A number of the ‘anti-Revolution’ supporters reinforced their position with tweets stating their view that the Revolution brought ‘instability’ and ‘disasters.’ This group mainly argued that the Revolution brought political and economic instability, deepened sectarianism, and encouraged terrorism (for example, see images 24a, 24b, and 24c in Figure 18). Other tweets highlighted that the ‘Revolution was doomed to failure’ because ‘Egyptians are not ready yet for practicing democracy’ (image 24c in Figure 18), a statement coined by Ahmed Nazif, the last prime minister during Mubarak’s era. In a number of posts, the Revolution was described as a ‘foreign scheme that was designed in the US and lured youngsters to follow.’ This argument was supported with documents from WikiLeaks and other sources. Several people revived the hashtag ‘#we are sorry president,’ offering their support to former president Mubarak. Several tweets highlighted Mubarak’s warning against the Muslim Brotherhood and how his forecasts of the Muslim Brotherhood’s misuse of power had been proven correct. Other tweets highlighted Mubarak’s insight in ‘deciding to withdraw from the political scene to prevent disorder,’ ‘stepping down to avoid civil war as in Libya, Yemen and Syria,’ and ‘handing power to the army to support the nation’s stability’ (image 24d in Figure 18).

As a form of anti-Revolution protest, several tweets highlighted that 25 January ‘was and will always be police day,’ emphasising the role of the police and the military in stabilising the system (image 24d, 24e, 24f, 24g, and 24h in Figure 18). They reminded audiences of the ‘chaotic days’ following the 2011 Revolution, marked by an increase in looting and harassment on Egyptian streets. Several images of police martyrs who lost their lives in police stations during the Revolution were also used to demonstrate support for the police. For example, in a number of tweets by anti-Revolution supporters, they designed ‘symbolic marches’ to police stations offering flowers in order to show ‘respect to the men and women in uniform in the police day.’

There were also groups of individuals who turned against the Revolution. They believed that they were ‘naïve’ in thinking that Egypt could throw off millennia of despotism in 18 days, emphasising that ‘the 25 January uprising failed to put Egypt on the path to democratic transformation because it was doomed to fail.’ They attacked the post-Revolution political bodies for the ‘absence of a strong and well-organised democratic movement,’ highlighting that the ‘number of 25 January supporters is dwindling’ and ‘they are fragmented and lack solid platforms.’ A number of celebrity public figures and media personnel were part of this group. Their tweets — and statements if they were not Twitter active — were highlighted to provide reasons why they turned against the Revolution, highlighting deviation from revolutionary goals and power competition (image 25a in Figure 18).

Tweets in favour of the current system presented themselves as ‘anti-revolutionists’ on the grounds that the ‘current system saved the Revolution,’ ‘stopped the Muslim Brotherhood from hijacking the Revolution,’ and ‘brought stability and order back to society.’ For a number of tweeters, ‘there is too much hype celebrating 25 January and that the real revolution is 30 June 2013,’ when ‘Al-Sisi saved Egypt.’ Several hashtags in support of President Al-Sisi were visible, including ‘#Al-Sisi is my president’ and ‘#Al-Sisi did the impossible.’ Several tweets praised Al-Sisi’s achievements, sharing images of ‘mega projects,’ such as the new administrative capital and the new Suez Canal, among others. It was also an opportunity to remind audiences that the Muslim Brotherhood highjacked the revolution and brought chaos to Egypt (image 25b in Figure 18).

Businesses were also among the groups who supported the current system. They used their official accounts
as PR platforms to congratulate the ‘Egyptian leadership and government’ on the ‘memory of the Revolution that coincided with police day,’ offering promotions and discounts on their products and highlighting economic development that resulted from ‘wise economic plans.’

The current government was also active. A number of ‘protocol tweets’ were published, highlighting the role of the current political establishment in the success of the Revolution. In almost all of these tweets, messages of support for the president were vividly present. Similarly, a number of parliament members used their accounts to tweet messages ‘congratulating the noble youth who revolted for a noble cause’ on the ‘memory of the movement’ and, at the same time, ‘saluting the police body’ on the memory of their day (for example, see images 26a, 26b, 26c, 26d, 26e, 26f, and 26g in Figure 18).

Several tweets were repetitive (see images 26c and 26d, and images 26e, 26f, and 26g in Figure 18). These tweets suggest that the government was using a digital army and automated bots in order to increase their presence in the Twittersphere.
Figure 18: The Anti-Revolution Actors [Images 24a, 24b, 24c, 24d, 24e, 24f, 24g, 24h, 25a, 25b, 26a, 26b,
In short, this theme was active in deconstructing the Revolution. Tweets highlighted negative aspects of the Revolution, seeing it as a source of ‘shame’ that brought distress and chaos to the ‘system.’ Several members saw the current political establishment as the saviours of the nation. It is worth mentioning that several messages were obviously copied and pasted repeatedly. Other messages were present at the same points throughout the day throughout the study period, suggesting the presence of automated bots or a digital army whose role was to highlight the presence of the current political establishment in the Twittersphere.

Conclusion

Over a decade has passed since daring young Egyptians organised demonstrations in Tahrir Square and across Egypt on 25 January 2011. They were certainly revolutionary in spirit and, when their demand that Mubarak should go was granted, they could not help thinking that what they had achieved was a revolution. At times during 2011, social media provided platforms for organisation and protest that traditional methods could not. This made the term ‘Arab Spring’ interchangeable with ‘Twitter uprising’ or ‘Facebook revolution,’ as global media tried to make sense of the events (Ezz El Din, 2014). In Egypt’s post-2011 political settlement, feelings of revolutionary success were short-lived as Mubarak’s government was replaced by the equally repressive Muslim Brotherhood, before it was ousted in July 2013. Eventually, it was replaced by Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, under whom state repression, intimidation, and attacks on press freedom have continued.

Social media quickly became a battlefield of misinformation, fake news, and trolls. The same tool that united revolutionaries to topple Mubarak eventually fragmented and tore Egyptians apart (Ghoneim, 2016). In the following years, remembering 25 January Revolution on social media became an arena of conflict between supporters of the Revolution, those who opposed it, and the government. Today, Twitter is still a tool that can be used, but not as a substitute for the physical expression of freedom and media plurality in the public space.

In celebrating 10 years of the Egyptian Revolution, social media is still seen as a space for expression beyond the government’s parameters of control. For many of Egypt’s activists, the fight for the Revolution lives on. The reasons behind 25 January uprising have not gone away. If anything, they have become even more pressing with the dramatic increase in repression and stifling of public space. The economic dire straits that affect a vast majority of Egyptians is also another issue. Both the qualitative and quantitative results of this study have shown that remembering the Revolution was not about 2011, but about the future of revolution. Quantitatively, the study demonstrated a number of reactions, but modest interaction in terms of retweets and conversations. On the other hand, the number of tweets were rich in terms of their content and themes. Hashtags that celebrated the memory (e.g., ‘#25 January Revolution’ and its variations), as well as activism (e.g., ‘#I participated in the January Revolution’ and ‘#the Revolution continues’) surpassed three quarters of the total number of tweets. They spoke to the ethos and pathos of the audience, reminding them that the ‘#the Revolution is coming.’ Fragmentation of the activists, ideological struggles, and inner conflicts were also present in the tweets. Remembering the Revolution was also an opportunity for opposition parties, groups, and activists to make their voices heard. However, they have not been as visible in the post-2011 era because they fear government retribution. Anti-revolution hashtags highlighted that the Revolution was doomed to failure, praising President Al-Sisi for stepping in and ‘#saving Egypt’ from other Arab states’ revolutionary failures. The study also showed the use of technological warfare between pro-government and President Al-Sisi’s supporters and opposition — mainly from the Muslim Brotherhood, utilizing automated bots and digital armies.
Results also showed the different strategies and tactics used by different political actors to win the Twittersphere. However, recognising the processualism of subversive tactics online, without an overemphasis of the political, opens ways of seeing a subtle transformation. Despite the current patterns of authoritarianism and a growing sense of despair among dissident voices, Egyptian online activism and dynamics never fail to surprise.

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Note


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