ASIS&T 2014 PANEL

Theme: Connecting Collections, Cultures, and Communities
Title: The Role of Social and other Media in the Unrests in Egypt, Turkey and Ukraine

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Panel Participants:

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Panel Abstract
Over the last few years, the world has witnessed a number of revolutionary demonstrations and protests in support of social and political changes. From the protests in Iran and Tunisia to the more recent Occupy movement to the current events in Ukraine, these movements are crashing in waves onto the world stage. What many of these protests have in common is the prominent use of social media by the protesters to help organize and inform supporters and garner the attention of the international community. Some believe that social media was the catalyst for the protests; others are more skeptical. This panel will critically evaluate the role and effectiveness of social media as a tool for a social and political change using the three recent case studies: the crisis in Egypt in 2011, Turkey in 2013 and Ukraine in 2014.

Individual Abstracts

The Role of Social Media during the Protests in Egypt in 2011
By Nouf Khashman
The elaborate social change in the Arab world has come through several factors, including the adoption of information and communication technologies, especially the use of social networking sites such as Facebook. The impact of social networking sites was evident during the political unrest that started in Tunisia and spread across the Arab world since December 2010, to the extent that this unrest has been sometimes dubbed “The Facebook Revolution”.

1
The Egyptian protests that led to the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak were organized through a complex network that combined heavy Twitter and Facebook use with other forms of interpersonal communication. The objective of this presentation is to: a) provide an understanding how Facebook has been employed in turning events in Egypt during the political unrest; and b) provide a snapshot on the Egyptian users’ reaction and engagement.

Building on the previous work in this area (e.g., Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011; Hamdy & Gomaa, 2012; Tufekci & Wilson, 2012), this presentation will critically examine the use of social media during the Arab Spring by focusing on the distinct characteristics of the movement in Egypt through the case study of “We are all Khaled Said” page on Facebook. The case study approach offers a more nuanced analysis of the events in Egypt and will review the creation and use of various Facebook pages over the course of the protest, as the milieu swings between peaceable and violent, anti-regime and representational.

The Role of Social Media during the Gezi Park Protests in 2013: #occupygezi
By Selenay Aytac

Gezi Park protests began in May 2013 as civil protests against the government’s urban planning project for the Gezi Park, which is located near Taksim Square, Istanbul. The peaceful protest, mostly by young environmentalists, which was started to prevent the demolition of trees in the park, quickly spread across Turkey. During these protests, activists camped in the park in order to keep the bulldozers out of this small green area (Farro and Demirhisar, 2014). Environmentalist undergraduate and graduate students joined by the thousands (MetroPoll, 2013). A recent qualitative field study (Tastan, 2013:32) found that, “the majority of Gezi Park protestors cite restrictions on liberties, government interference in their daily lives, and the Prime Minister's authoritarian rule as their reasons for joining the protests.”

Social media tools (such as blogs, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube) have become major communication channels for the protesters to disseminate information among the activists as well as attract international attention to this crisis. This presentation seeks to explore the effectiveness of social media use during the Gezi Park protests. In particular, it will outline the implications of social media tools and their potential to transform a small scale environmentalist protest to a 21st century collective movement.

The Role of Social Media During the 2014 crisis in Ukraine
By Anatoliy Gruzd
This work is examining the use of social media during the recent protests in Ukraine. The protests started in the Fall of 2013, largely triggered by the suspension of the Ukraine-European
Union Association Agreement by the ousted President Victor Yunokovych and the growing dissatisfaction with the government and legal system in Ukraine.

Unlike prior protests in other countries where a single social media platform played an outsized role (Facebook revolution in Tunisia or Twitter revolution in Iran), in Ukraine social media use was not focused on a single platform. Instead, many different social media platforms were used to share different types of information and to reach different audiences. For example, major activist groups in Ukraine (both pro-Russian and pro-Western) used Vkontakte (VK) and Facebook to mobilize their supporters and organize a collective action, Twitter to share latest news, and Youtube to post videos from live rallies across the country. Another interesting trend in social media use in Ukraine is that it is being used not just by media and activists (Szostek, 2014), but also by members of the establishment including governments, elective officials and politicians inside and outside of Ukraine. This is a significant change from the 2004 Orange revolution in Ukraine when the Internet penetration in Ukraine was still under 10% (Lysenko & Desouza, 2010) and social networking sites like Youtube, Twitter and Instagram did not even exist.

The presentation will evaluate various social media platforms used during the crisis in Ukraine, with a particular focus on the use of Twitter and Vkontakte, a Facebook-like social networking site, popular in Ukraine and Russia.

**Panel Structure**
The panel will be moderated by Anatoliy Gruzd. Each speaker will have 20 minutes to present with time for questions at the end of the session.

**Panelists’ Bios:**
Dr. Anatoliy Gruzd is an Associate Professor at the Ted Rogers School of Management at Ryerson University, Canada and Director of the Social Media Lab. He is also a co-editor of a new, multidisciplinary journal on Big Data and Society published by Sage and a member of the Institute for Big Data Analytics at Dalhousie University. His research initiatives explore how the advent of social media and the growing availability of user-generated big data are changing the ways in which people communicate, collaborate and disseminate information and how these changes impact the social, economic and political norms and structures of modern society.

Dr. Selenay Aytac is an Associate Professor at Long Island University and an adjunct faculty at Pratt Institute, NY and St. Johns University, NY. She taught summer seminars at the Polytechnic University of Valencia, Spain and presented numerous lectures at the Turkish Universities.

Dr. Nouf Khashman is a recent PhD graduate from McGill’s School of Information Studies (SIS), expected to graduate in May 2014. Her research interests focus on cross-cultural interface
design, design and user experience, and use of social media across cultures. During her doctoral studies she was a lecturer in the MLIS program at SIS and a research assistant on several projects related to cross-language information retrieval and information visualization.

References


