Online Mobilization in Times of Conflict: A Framing-Analysis Perspective

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Abstract

The pro-democracy popular uprisings gripping the Arab world have ended or are seriously threatening long-entrenched dictatorships and repressive regimes. The uprisings have also been dubbed Facebook and Twitter revolutions, highlighting the role of the Internetin political advocacy and change. The use of the Internet in collective action in the Arab regionis not a recent phenomenon, since the technology has marked mediated politics in the region during the last decade. However, scholarly research on the subject remains insufficient and more important, largely under-theorized. To address these lacunas, this article analyzes the role of the Internet in political advocacy in a Muslim-majority society(the Moroccan one) through social movement theory and framing analysis.This article differentiates between various levels of mobilization to which the Internet contributes, and sheds light on its potential as a technology and political medium for collective action framing. Focusing on the case of Moroccan social movements and their framing of the 2009 Gaza war, thepieceaims to analyze how the Internet contributes to the capacity of oppositional civil society groups to challenge political, social and cultural injustices at the local, regional and international levels. This article argues that as the Internet becomes the central medium of political advocacy in the region, it increasingly shapes the organizational structure, boundaries and tactics of oppositional social movements and thus contributes to determining the outcome of their struggles.

Introduction

Since December of 2010, the Arab Spring has led to transformations of historic proportions in North Africa and the Middle East, ending an era of political status quo that dominated the region for many decades. From Tunisia and Egypt to Syria and Yemen, the pro-democracy popular uprisings have ended or are seriously threatening long-entrenched dictatorships and repressive regimes. The uprisings have also been dubbed Facebook and Twitter revolutions, highlighting the role of the Internet, and particularly social media, in political advocacy and change.

The use of the Internet in collective action in the region and Muslim-majority societies is not a recentphenomenon,for the technology has marked mediated politics in the region during the last decade. However, scholarly research on the subject remains insufficient and more important, largely under-theorized. While many studies have tackled the role of

the Internet in politicswithin Muslim societies, the vast majority have done so mainly from a perspective of the Habermasian notion of the public sphere. These studies havefailed in the process to engage seriously withother theoretical paradigms, particularly social movement theory. In fact, the notion of the public sphere is often invoked to explain therole of the Internet in expanding freedom of expression andin disseminating discourses of dissent. However, such aperspective does not transcend the instrumentalist interpretation of media as vehicles or transmitters of "content," often coded as "information."

To address these lacunas, the present article analyzes the role of the Internet in political advocacy in a Muslim-majority society through social movement theory andframing analysis. Williams argues that the most important contribution of framing studies to the field is their focus on the "symbolic" dimensions in the action of social movements, as frames "articulate grievances, generate consensus on the importance and forms of collective action to be pursued, and present rationales for their actions and proposed solutions to adherents, bystanders, and antagonists" (2004,93). Commentators have maintained that social movements' framing efforts are the foundation of collective action as a whole, because recognizing particular situations as unjust precedes the collective action that strives to address these injustices (McAdam1982, 51).

Accordingly, social movements' framing is not just an anterior process to action; the two processes are interdependent insofar as both the attribution of meanings and the action determine the process of collective action and its results (404). Framing analysis has one other key contribution—namely, its capacity to demonstrate how individuals become involved in collective action, thus highlighting the interplay between agency and structure in the development and action of social movements (Della Porta and Diani 2006; Williams 2004).

This article focuses on the case of Moroccan social movements and their use of the Internet to frame the Israeli war in Gaza in 2009. The war was part of the long Palestinian/Israeli conflict, one of the most mediated and symbolically laden political disputes in many decades. Indeed, since 2009, tension continues to escalate over the blockade of Gaza and repeated attempts by international collations of NGOs and activists to challenge it.More important, the conflict always involves national and international actors that provide an ideal context for analyzing the role of the Internet in today's hyper-connected societies. Drawing on social movement theory and framing analysis, the current article seeks to answer the following key questions:

(1) How did the studied social movements (SMs)/social movement organizations (SMOs) frame the Gaza war?

(2) How can we understand the contribution of this framing process to overall social movement mobilization?

(3) To what extent has the Internet's potential as a medium and technology been appropriated in framing?

(4) What do framing processes in the websites communicate about the studied SMs/SMOs and their ability to engage in oppositional collective action?

This article differentiates between various levels of mobilization to which the Internet contributes, and sheds light on its potential as a technology and political medium for collective action framing.

Social movements andthe Internet

Providing one of the most detailed existing reviews of the literature in the field, Garrett identifies three key types of "mechanisms" linking the technology to social movements, namely "reduction of participation costs, promotion of collective identity, and creation of community" (2006, 204). Despite the development of important literature on the use of the Internet in advocacy and collective action within the last decade, research addressing the issue from the perspective of social movement theory itself remains scarce (Stein 2009). This lacuna is even more serious in the sub-field dealing with collective action in Muslim-majority societies.The bulk of the literature in this domain addresses the use of the Internet by religious groups and for religion-oriented discourse (Anderson 2003; Bunt2005; Echaibi 2011; Ibahrine 2007; El-Nawawy and Khamis 2009; Hoff 2005; Kort 2006; Sands 2010; Varisco 2010).What's more, existing literature subscribes to the dominant discourse on collective action in Islamic countries that is strongly marked by a descriptive approach. As Wiktorowicz astutely remarks, "the study of Islamic activism has, for the most part, remained isolated from the plethora of theoretical and conceptual developments that have emerged from research on social movements' contentious politics"(2004, 3).Indeed, until recently public opinion and the public sphere in the region have often been framed in terms of the "Arab street," an epithet that connotes "passivity, unruliness, or propensity to easy manipulation" (Eickelman and Anderson 2003, 62).

Collective action frames and framing analysis

More important, a majority of studies within the existing literature have examined the textual content of websites under the category of "information" (see Stein 2009). Analyzing web content production as information is a reductive perspective that fails to recognize the complex processes involved in social movements' collective efforts for action. By appreciating the link between social movements' frames and mobilization,

framing analysis provides a basis for bridging the gap between the ideational and symbolic dimensions of collective action and direct forms of mobilization. Moreover, framing analysis provides a suitable framework with which to link online communication with offline action, and allows us to better analyze how the Internet's potential and specific technological characteristics contribute to social movements' mobilization efforts.

Methodology

For the purpose of this article, Benford and Snow's seminal work on framing is employed, namely their breakdown of the core tasks of framing into three categories: "diagnostic framing," "prognostic framing," and "motivational framing" (2000, 615–617). Diagnostic framing deals primarily with "problem identification and attributions," wherein "injustice frames" (i.e., identifying victims and amplifying victimhood) constitute the main part of the framing process (615). Diagnostic framing also pinpoints the "sources of causality, blame and culpable agents" (616). Prognostic framing involves the "articulation of a proposed solution to the problem or at least a plan of attack and the strategies for carrying out the plan" (617). As for motivational framing, it is a "call to arms" of sorts—a "rationale for engaging in ameliorative collective action, including the construction of appropriate vocabularies of motive" (617).

Furthermore, this study draws on the concept of "frame resonance" that "describes the relationship between a collective action frame, the aggrieved community that is the target of mobilizing efforts, and the broader culture" (Noakes and Johnston 2005, 11). Thus, Noakes and Johnston identify three variables that affect a frame's resonance: the makers of frames or "entrepreneurs," the receivers of a frame or targeted audience, and the frame qualities—i.e., their cultural compatibility, consistency, and relevance. Both quantitative and qualitative methods are used as a part of the framing analysis. Despite the widespread use of quantitative methods within framing analysis, especially in media studies, Hertog and McLeod point out that

> one shortcoming of quantitative text analysis methods, however, is that many very powerful concepts, central to frames, need not be repeated often to have a great impact. *One or two references may be enough to set the frame for a large amount of content* [italics added]. (2008,154)

In the same vein, Kitzinger notes that frames are often condensed in powerful symbols or images, and that "the whole frame does not have to be spelt out in every detail in order to invite readers/viewers to recognize and place the issue within the frame" (2007,141).

Thisarticle combines representative and purposive sampling at various levels in the process of selecting websites for analysis. According to Patton, "the logic and power of

purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth…Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research" (1990,169). Two levels of sampling were used to conduct this study. The first level dealt with identifying social movements that were to be the subject of study. Applying the above criteria to the plethora of groups and organizations active within Moroccan civil society and extensively discussed in existing literature on the topic, eight social movements were identified:

1) the Islamic-oriented movement;

2) the alter-globalization movement;

3) the human rights movement;

4) the feminist movement;

5) the Amazigh cultural movement;

6) theunemployed graduates movement;

7) the radical left movement;

8) the trade union movement.

These movements represent the major ideological paradigms and collective action-oriented groups constituting Moroccan civil society (see Kausch 2008; Sater 2007; Sidi Hida 2007). Many of these movements follow oppositional agendas, and aim at achieving social and political change in the country.

The next step in sampling was to identify the social movement organizations and groups within the identified social movements whose websites would be studied. Two main criteria were employed at this stage—nationalprominence and Internet penetration.The studied groups were first chosen from among groups and social movement organizations that are considered to be the major groups in a movement and operate at the national level. These groups were selected to examine the impact of the Internet on the capacity of SMOs to coordinate action and enhance organizational structure and collective identity formation at the trans-local level. The other criterion concerned whether a SMO has a website, and whether these websites reflect a sufficient degree of usage and activity. A preliminary survey of political websites in the country revealed that a limited number of SMOs have been able to set up websites, and these groups tended to be the biggest SMOs and operate at the national level. In total, 18 collective blogs, wikis and conventional websites were selected for the study.

Table 1: List of websites and SMOs[1]

Movement	Organization	Website URL
Islamic-oriented	1) Justice and Charity 2) Unity and Reconstruction 3) Justice and Development	http://www.aljamaa.net/ar/index.asp http://www.alislah.org/ http://www.pjd.ma/
Human rights	4) AMDH–Rabat 5) AMDH–Essaouira	http://www.amdh.org.ma/ar http://essaouira-amdh.blogspot.com/
Feminist	6) Democratic Association of Moroccan Women 7) Sisters of Afterlife	http://www.adfm.ma/index.php?lang=ar http://www.mouminate.net/ar/index/index.shtml
Alt-globalization	8) ATTAC–Morocco 9) Forum des alternatives Maroc	http://www.maroc.attac.org/attacmaroc/index.php http://www.e-joussour.net/ar
Amazigh cultural movement	10) Amazigh blog–Ageddim 11) Amazigh–Ameghnass 12) Amazigh Network for Citizenship	http://ageddim.jeeran.com/ http://ameghnas.blogspot.com/ http://www.forumalternatives.org/rac/?lang=fr
Unemployed graduates	13) The Youth Group 14) Forum Group	http://alfatiya.maktoobblog.com/ http://marocchomeurss.blogspot.com/
Radical left	15) Democratic Path 16) Unified Socialist party	http://www.annahjaddimocrati.org/ http://psu.apinc.org/index.php
Trade union	17) Democratic Labour Confederation 18) Employees' Syndical Union	http://www.cdt.ma/ http://www.umt-usf.com

The case of the Gaza War

The studied websites were downloaded within a one-month period during January 2009. The choice of this period was initially motivated by the fact that in previous months, most of the studied social movement groups were actively involved in mobilizing support to demand the release of activists and citizens who were incarcerated in the wake of various social protests that galvanized many regions of the country. Many of these groups were also active during this period to demand the lifting of the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip. In fact, major political crises and upheavals constitute an ideal framework for the

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[1] Some of these links have changed recently because websites ceased to exist or were replaced by new ones.

study of social movements in action. This explains why "much of the recent work on social movement tactics comes out of what is referred to as 'protest event' research" (Taylor and Dyke 2004, 267). Thus, while this article deals with the role of the websites in political mobilization generally, it also focuses on framing and mobilization strategies and tactics used by social movements during the Gaza war, especially those that can help shed light on the appropriation of the Internet's potential for collective action.

As stated above, social movements' collective action typically alternates between long periods of latency and short intervals of high visibility. The bulk of literature on social movements' use of media deals with the latter periods because they provide rich environments in which to examine social movements' communication strategies. The shortness of the visibility periods also permits researchers to concentrate on a limited body of data and thus allows them to determine the impact of media on social movements' action and causes. In this sense, the Gaza war offers an "ideal" context in which to analyze and compare online framing strategies and tactics used by the studied SM/SMOs. It is an issue that has immense mobilization potential because it draws on deeply ingrained symbolic values, beliefs, and ideologies for all involved parties. The Israeli/Palestinian conflict is also of unique significance within the Arab and Islamic worlds. It is also one of the most mediated conflicts internationally, particularly during times of war and tension.Finally, it involves political actors at the local, regional and international levels from a wide spectrum of fields, from NGOs and governments to international agencies and transnational social movements. These characteristics provide an "ideal" context within which to analyze the use of the Internet in building transnational networks of solidarity and discourses.

Analysis

The first level of any type of mediated framing concerns the level of attention given to an issue, its "salience." Entman defines framing as the process of selecting "some aspects of a perceived reality and mak[ing] them more salient … to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/ or treatment recommendation for the item described" (1993, 52). The salience of the Gaza war was thus examined through a thematic analysis in which an inductive coding was applied. The unit of coding was the article or single post as defined by a number of markers that include a distinct hyperlink, a title and an author or source when available. Results indicated there were important variations in the degree of salience of this issue on the websites covered by the study (see Table 2). Islamic-oriented SMO's websites are at the top of the chart with 57 percent of all posts allocated to this issue; human rights groups and alter-globalization movements' websites(namely those belonging to the Amazigh and unemployed graduates movements) also paid significant attention to the issue with 48.4 percent and 40.78 percentof posts respectively. The scarcity of attention in these websites can be explained by various

reasons. As will be discussed below, many Amazigh cultural movement groups and activists consider the Palestinian/Israeli conflict as primarily an "Arab" issue that should not overshadow the Amazigh cause. In the case of other groups, this low attention is linked to the collective action strategyadopted by them. For instance, the unemployed graduates movement concentrates primarily on a single issue—lobbying the state to provide jobs.

Table 2: Salience of Gaza issue

Social movements	Per. of content
Islamic	57%
Human rights	48.4%
Radical left	18.18%
Alter-globalization	40.7%
Amazigh	8.6%
Feminist/Women	37.5%
Unemployed graduates	8%

Collective action framing deals with more than the issue of salience. To this end, Benford and Snow's (2000)three main tasks of framing are analyzed—diagnostic, prognostic, and mobilization framing. In addition to these main tasks, the study explored other framing strategies used to increase "frame resonance" that "describes the relationship between the collective action frame, the aggrieved community that is the target of mobilizing efforts, and the broader culture" (Noakes and Johnston 2005, 11). Though a large number of frame resonance strategies have been discussed in literature, this article focuses on those that can shed light on the use of the Internet as a medium in the case of Gaza: "frame amplification," "frame articulation" or "bridging," and the "credibility of the 'frame's promoters'" (11).
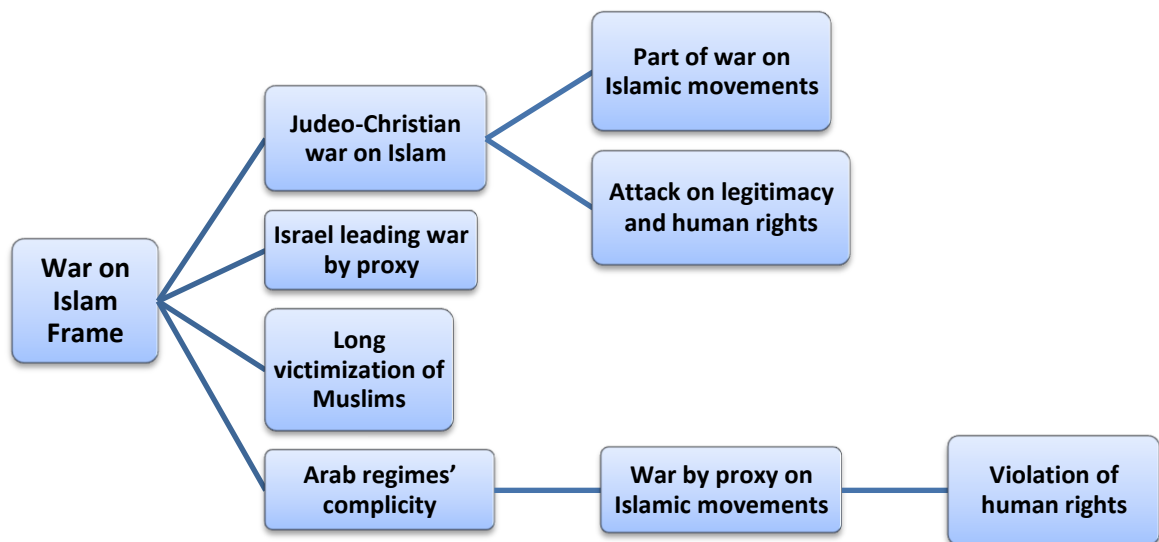
Diagnostic framing

As mentioned earlier, diagnostic framing defines the boundaries of a problem or injustice, "telling what is wrong and why" (Noakes and Johnston 2005, 5); it also identifies the victims and the parties to blame for this injustice. Analysis of diagnostic framing was done by going through the data to identify "master frames"—i.e., those frames that are specific to the movement and play an organizational role (Benford and Snow

2000,219)—and the sub-frames derived from the master or primary ones. Various interpretations about the war on each website were organized in a chart to establish similarities and identify the primary frame from which other interpretations were derived.

Information about victims and parties to blame for the problem was also noted. Although the data shows that all groups share the belief that the Gaza war was part of a continuing injustice against the Palestinian people perpetrated by the state of Israel, it also reveals important variations in the way these groups interpreted the attack and the causes behind it. Two master or primary frames have emerged from the data: the "war on Islam" frame and the "imperialist war" frame (see Figures 1 and 2).

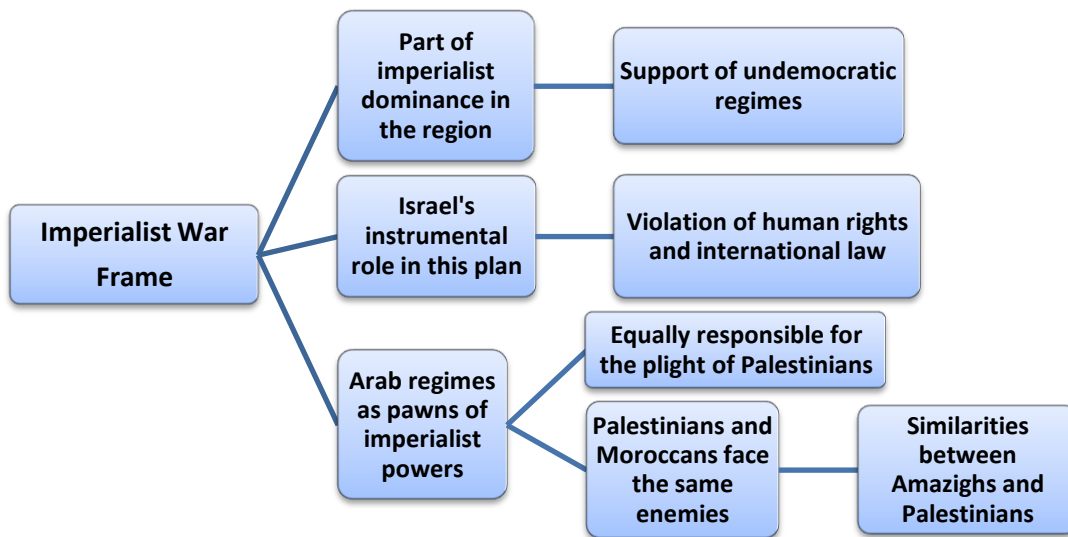**Figure 1:** The "war on Islam" frame

Islamic-oriented websites largely subscribed to "the war on Islam" frame. Thus, the Gaza war was interpreted mainly as a war on Islam launched by a Judeo-Christian coalition and abetted by collaborative Arab/Muslim undemocratic governments. The attack was in fact considered just the latest chapter in a hundred-year-long victimization of Muslims at the hands of Christians, now in a coalition with the Zionist "enemy." While this worldview has existed since the early days of the conflict, it has gained unprecedented support in the last decade with the "war on terror." More important, the 2009 war in Gaza is specifically viewed as a war not only against the Palestinian people in general, but also and especially against Hamas, an Islamic movement that was democratically elected in Gaza.

The "global imperialism" frame was dominant on leftist-oriented websites that include alter-globalization and human rights SMOs, as well as on sites of the Amazigh cultural movement and radical left parties. According to this frame, the Gaza war and the Palestinian/Israeli conflict in general are perceived to be an integral part of global imperialist wars and dominance felt especially in the Middle East. Equally, Arab regimes

are blamed for being "lackeys" that impose imperialism against the will of the people of the region. The "imperialist" and "war on Islam" frames share many features, particularly in their focus on the international character of the Gaza war and Israel's link to the West or imperial powers. Both frames also expose the role of undemocratic local regimes in supporting the war, either overtly and covertly, and in oppressing the region's people. However, while Islamic-oriented SMOs view that religious and cultural "differences" are the main factors behind the war, leftist-oriented movements considerthe wara product of the relentless expansionism of capitalism and neo-imperialism.

Figure 2: The "imperialist war" frame

Frame articulation

Frame articulation involves "the connection and alignment of events and experiences so that they can hang together in a relatively unified and compelling fashion" (Benford and Snow 2000, 622). This is achieved by assembling, collating and packaging different perspectives on various events and experiences, which result in the creation of new frames and interpretations. Analysis of the two main frames used to describe the Gaza attack shows that they both articulate distinct components, as all groups try to produce frames that can mobilize actual and potential constituencies. However, identity-oriented movements (such as the Islamic and Amazigh cultural movements) were more able to draw on local cultural context to frame the issue. As Tarrow argues, "it is the combination of new frames embedded within a cultural matrix that produces explosive collective action frames" (1998, 122). A telling example is provided by the framing of the issue on websites belonging to the Amazigh cultural movement. Because these blogs are collective and used by diverse Amazigh groups, a multitude of interpretations and opinions added up to form a complex frame that ran through a large number of posts.

While the Gaza conflict was generally perceived in the Muslim/Arab world as an act of aggression perpetrated by Israel and the US against the Palestinians, a large number of posts about the war ascribed responsibility for the suffering and victimhood of Palestinians almost equally to "Arab" treason and collaboration. The title of one post on the Ageddim blog, for instance, reads "Gaza is dying and the collaborators are silent," while another one reads "death for traitors, both Arab and Zionist." A number of other posts questioned the broadsolidarity with Gaza of Moroccans, especially in Amazigh-majority regions, arguing that it smacks of pan-Arab nationalism, which the ACM militates against. While they expressed solidarity with Gaza, these sites explained they were doing it "only from a human rights perspective" and not out of ethnic or religious sympathies. These framing tactics served to define not only the boundaries of the conflict, but also the type of solidarity to express and the possibilities or limits of action that could have been taken to address the injustice.

Frame articulation can also be done through the use of non-textual tools, especially hyperlinks. This function provides an easy and efficient way to link ideas and texts on multiple and different websites, offering users more control over the construction of frames by allowing them to choose to follow the provided links or not. Hyperlinking also creates a non-linear relationship between various sets of frames. Analysis of this function was carried out by paying particular attention to the use of hyperlinks within textual data and has demonstrated that the use of in-text hyperlinks remained very limited.Only four websites, namely the Arabic and French E-Joussour websites and the ACM–Ameghnas and Ageddim blogs, use hyperlinks. The majority of these links, however, are not embedded within texts themselves, but are provided at the end of texts as references to the sources of texts and their authors.

Frame amplification

Frame amplification involves "accenting and highlighting some issues, events, or beliefs as being more salient than others" (Benford and Snow 2000, 623). Analysis has demonstrated that amplification of the Gaza injustice frames was achieved primarily through the tremendous attention paid to the issue by the majority of social movements. Amplification of the issue was also accomplished via the large number of multimedia tools permitted by the Internet. Compared to frame articulation, the majority of websites drew extensively on non-linguistic tools (especially graphics) for the purpose of frame amplification.

The use of graphics on the studied websites was analyzed by observing and measuring the extent to which textual items on the homepage and second page were reinforced with visual items such as pictures, slideshow photos, flashing images, caricatures, and other types of illustrations. Thus, separate paragraphs or titles on the homepage that function

as hyperlinks to larger texts or articles are here considered as the basic units for analysis. Moreover, a differentiation was made between two levels of graphics: those used on the homepage, and those used on the second-level linked pages. The results obtained were then coded in a scale between 0 and 3 to provide a synthesis of the use of graphics on both the first- and second-level pages (see Table 3).

Table 3: Use of multimedia on websites

SM/SMO	Graphics % Homepage	Graphics % Second-level page	Code
Islamic-oriented	60.3	50.6	3
Human rights	73.2	0	2
Alter-globalization	18.7	1.5	1
Amazigh	67	40.3	3
Feminist/women	36.6	55.2	2
Unemployed graduates	0	61.3	2
Radical left parties	11.4	5.6	1
Trade union	21	1.33	1
Median	**36.02**	**26.97**	

N.B.: 0 (absent); 1 (low 1 > 25); 2 (medium 36 > 50); 3 (high 50% >)

Analysis has shown that with the exception of trade unions and radical leftist sites, the majority of activist websites drew heavily on graphics—mainly photos and pictures, and to a lesser extent caricatures and slideshows. Islamic-oriented SMOs' websites, followed by the Amazigh cultural movement's blogs, are the richest in terms of the use of graphic material on homepages and second-level pages. Justice and Charity's website featured a Flash photo slideshow with pictures of victims, specifically children, labeled with the phrases such as"Gaza: from siege to extermination" or "a new Zionist holocaust" rendered in a largered font mimicking streamsof blood. Drawing parallels between the Holocaust and Israel's attack on Gaza is used by the majority of websites as a tactic to magnify the suffering of Palestinians, but occurs more frequently on Islamic-oriented sites.

Moreover, the Justice and Charity website made use of Flash slideshows to display marches and protests in solidarity with Gaza and a scrolling news bar that provided news and updates about the event. It also used flashing ad banners inviting users to participate in an instantaneous discussion with the movement's leader on the theme of "how we can support Gaza." Likewise, the Unity and Reconstruction website drew heavily on web

tools such as Flash photo slideshows of Gaza victims and solidarity statements. On the main top banner of the website, which normally only features the logo of the movement and its leader's picture, Flash slideshows appeared. These slideshows urged users to send their suggestions to the site about how to help Gaza, and presented pictures of Palestinian children crying.

The majority of websites featured pictures and illustrations borrowed from other websites or that were circulated widely by e-mail. In addition to pictures of victims, many websites featured caricatures, such as a caricature on the Amazigh blog "Ageddim" that made fun of Islamic countries' armies and their inability to help Palestinians.

Prognostic and motivational framing

In theory, diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing describe distinct processes—namely, identifying injustice, proposing a solution, and motivating constituencies to take action. In practice however, the frames are most of the time interconnected through multiple framing and discursive tactics. While the "war on Islam" frame was used on Islamic-oriented SMOs' websites to provide a diagnosis or interpretation of the Gaza war, it also served to mobilize constituencies into action by tapping into collective memory, religious beliefs, and shared culture. Diagnostic framing also linked the victimization of the Palestinians to that of the people in the region—and at the same time, equated the responsibility of the West and Israel with that of the authoritarian Arab regimes.Through this, diagnostic framing served to identify not only the roots of the injustice, but also what could be done to address it, particularly by establishing democracy in these countries. Gamson's study, for instance, highlighted many levels of agency that range from pro-action discourse in activists' conversations to the media's focus on social movements' protests (1992, 61–68).

Similarly, on the studied websites multiple solutions and strategies of action were proposed by various social movements.These solutions varied from forming Islamic alliances against "new crusades" to the need to establish democracy in Arab societies, thereby allowing people to participate more actively in supporting the Palestinians. For the purposes of this study, prognostic and motivational framing were analyzed by examining the use of the Internet's characteristics as a technology and medium in collective action. Accordingly, three mobilization aspects were identified in the data on Gaza: a) news and reports about action taken; b) an action calendar and call for participation in upcoming offline action, such as protests, sit-ins, information on how to donate money; and c) online-based action.

Results (see Table 4) show that the bulk of motivational framing on the studied websites focused on reporting past actions such as news of protests and sit-ins. Only half of the

websites (those belonging to Islamic, human rights, Amazigh, and alter-globalization movements) provided an action calendar or other types of calls for future action. Finally, online-based action was found only on one website, namely that of Unity and Reconstruction.

Table 4: Prognostic and motivational framing

Social movements	Action news & reports %	Action calendar & call for offline-action %	Online action %
Islamic-oriented	42	9.8	3
Human rights	87.5	25	0
Alter-globalization	53.25	35.3	0
Amazigh	61.2	7.2	0
Feminist/women	20	0	0
Unemployed graduates	100	0	0
Radical left	70	0	0
Trade union	17	6	0

A significant portion of the data on the Gaza war issue was limited to solidarity statements and action reports in the form of text, photo, and video files documenting protests, marches, and various other solidarity activities. Highlighting the action taken by a group has a direct mobilization effect in that it provides actual and potential constituents with clear and tangible examples of "what to do" and encourages them to join in future street protests. Gamson also argues that mobilizing people to take direct action is a daunting task because of a "structural impediment to collective action" that can be reinforced by "a political culture that operates to produce quiescence and passivity" (1992, 60). Street protests and demonstrations were the first level of a "visually affirmative action" used by civil right movements in the United States, while thereporting of these activities by the media, especially television, is another level of this visualized action (60–61). Further, explaining the role of communication about action in expanding collective action opportunities, Tarrow asserts that

> by communicating information about what they do, once formed, movements create opportunities—for their own supporters, for others, for parties, and elites. They do this by diffusing collective action and displaying the possibility of coalitions, by creating political space for kindred movements and counter movements, and by producing incentives for elites and third parties to respond to. (1998, 88)

Thus, highlighting action taken by state-harassed groups such as the Justice and Charity and ATTAC SMOs provides these groups with a rare opportunity to showcase their mobilization and organizational abilities, sending information to potential members and adversaries alike.

Technical and bandwidth limitations imposed restrictions on the number of photos and other multimedia files that can be posted on the websites. As a solution, a number of groups posted links to additional photo and video files that can be accessed and viewed on social networking sites such as Flickrand video sharing platforms (mainly YouTube). This use testifies to the convergence between multiple media platforms, and to the many possibilities offered by the Internet to bypass resource, technical, and political barriers in order to achieve better results.

Whereas a large number of groups posted video clips about demonstrations and other types of action, Islamic-oriented SMOs used video files more extensively. An example is the case of Justice and Charity, which has many channels on YouTube and hundreds of video clips on display. As a hugely popular[2] and mainly visual platform, YouTube and other online video sharing tools are used by these movements to foil state censorship and to reach different and larger audiences beyond the limited circles of constituencies and sympathizers.

Equally important, while nearly half of the studied websites provide information about future (offline) action, only the Islamic movements' websites used multimedia features to call for action and more important, allowed users to take action online. On the Justice and Charity website, horizontal menu bars invited users to participate in the movement's online forums to express their solidarity, announce future marches and encourage people to stage public protests. Likewise, Flash slides called on users to participate in instantaneous discussions with the movement's leaders about how to support Gaza. The slides also instructed users to download files containing a large number of pictures of the sit-ins and marches that movement members participated in around the country.

Similarly, as soon as the war started, Unity and Reconstruction's website invited users to send their suggestions on how to help Gaza. Justice and Development's website was the only one to use a video call by the party's secretary general, Abdelilah Benkiran, in which he urged members to participate massively in protests and to support Palestinians. Referring to the biggest rally that took place in Casablanca in support of Gazaon 18 January 2009, one Flash image on the top menu bar read: "After the one-million march: Al-Islah (Reconstruction) website welcomes your suggestions." This example shows how online action enhanced and promoted offline action to keep constituencies alert and ready for further activities.

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[2] According to Alexa.com, YouTube is the second most visited site by Internet users in Morocco after Facebook.

Apart from the extensive use of video and photo sharing platforms (such as YouTube, DailyMotion and Flickr), social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter were not employed by all the groups for mobilization. Such an absence reflects how these media became popular only after the eruption of the Arab Spring with the Tunisian revolution in December 2010.Another reason for the low level of online-based mobilization was the lack of technical, human, and hardware resources needed to set up and follow up on such online functions as petitions and fund raising. These limitations in fact encouraged some groups to resort to a kind of bricolage approach by using handwritten petitions calling for demonstrations and posting them online.

Frame entrepreneurs and credibility

Social movement theorists agree that within SM collective action, the credibility of a frame depends largely on the credibility of the makers of the frame, their authority and their professional credentials and status (Benford and Snow 2000; Gamson1992; Noakes and Johnston 2005; Wathen and Burkell 2002). Identifying frame entrepreneurs is an integral part of frame analysis because "diagnosing a problem always entails identifying the actors who are entitled to have [an] opinion on it…. It is through symbolic conflict that certain actors succeed in being recognized as entitled to speak in the name of certain interests and tendencies" (Della Porta and Diani 2006, 75). In the same vein, Benford and Snow claim that "it is a well-established fact in the social psychology of communication that speakers who are regarded as more credible are generally more persuasive" (2000, 621). Similarly, Wathen and Burkell (2002) maintain that the factors influencing credibility at the level of the source are the authors' and sources' expertise and knowledge, in addition to their trustworthiness, credentials, attractiveness and homogeneity with the receiver's beliefs and context.

An assessment of the credibility of frame makers, however, must take into consideration the specificity of the medium and the way users interact with it. The Internet is often described as challenging established authorship conventions constructed around the notion of an individual author or writer. The Internet is "largely composed of texts produced through corporate authorship, constantly revised, often borrowed, and frequently parasitic on other texts to which they are linked" and thus "the Web text is more like an organism than like a work" (Warnick2004, 258). A number of studies have concluded that in the absence of filtering and gate-keeping systems guaranteeing credibility, as in other media, Web users tend to resort to other markers. These include factors such as website design, the website's domain, and the author's credentials and institutional affiliations (Rieh and Belkin 1998; Rieh 2002; Taraborelli 2008). Equally important, in his study of how users evaluate credibility on the web, Rieh posits that determining authority on the Internet can be based on "whether two parties belong to the

same, or different reference groups" (2002, 155–156). In other words, credibility is based not only on characteristics of information and sources, but also on users' expectations.

To study frame entrepreneurs, ten categories were coded and the authors of the textual items in the data wereobserved accordingly:

> (1) The organization: text units that are signed either by a collective title/name of a group or by the group's leader(s); or, in the case of a collective website, by the webmaster;

> (2) Activists: individual authors wereconsidered to be "activists" of the group itself unless information is provided otherwise;

> (3) Affiliated groups (aff.): SMOs that belong to the social movement of the group under study;

> (4) Mainstream media (MSM);

> (5) Alternative media (AM);

> (6) National civil society (nat.);

> (7) Regional civil society (reg.): NGOs and social movements in the Middle East and North Africa;

> (8) International civil society (int.);

> (9) Anonymous (ano.);

> (10) Official (off.): includes governmental and semi-governmental institutions and agencies, as well as international financial institutions, such as the IMF.

Analysis was performed by identifying and counting the authors in each category. The results were then turned into percentage values that were afterwards coded using a scale from 0 (absent) to 3 (high). Results (see Table 5) reflect distinct communication patterns that run along ideological, organizational and collective action strategy variations.

Table 5: Frame entrepreneurs

Type of authors	Org.	Act.	Aff.	Ano.	MSM	AM	Nat.	Reg.	Int.	Gov.
Islamic	32.6	31.2	3.14	13	8.5	21.5	0	0	0	1
Radical left	55.1	22.4	0	22	0	0	0	0	0	0
Human rights	66.6	27.27	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Alt-globalization	29.1	4	12.5	0	4	0	27.6	25.6	6	0
Amazigh	0	7.98	63.1	0	1.14	1.14	14.4	1.52	7.22	0
Feminist	6.45	32.2	0	3.48	3.22	5	16.1	0	3.22	0
Unemployed graduates	44	0	0	0	36	12	0	0	0	4.34
Trade union	80	0	0	0	0	0	13.7	6.3	0	0

Notes: Org.: Organization; Act.: Activists; Aff.: Affiliated; MSM: Mainstream media; AM: Alternative media; Nat.: National civil society; Reg.: Regional civil society; Int.: International civil society; Gov.: Government and official institutions.

First, communication flow on websites belonging to leftist SMOs is the most hierarchically constructed, with the majority of posts authored by central committees or SMO leaders. The vertical flow of communication on these websites is mitigated only by a significant number of anonymous posts that "suggests an aversion to the professionalization of intellectual activity based on personality and reputation" (Atton 2001, 120). In comparison, Islamic-oriented sites are among the least hierarchically oriented, with a significant number of posts either signed by individual activists or derived from alternative media websites. While the results show that women-oriented websites feature a high number of articles also signed by individual activists, this characteristic appeared mainly on the website of Justice and Charity's women's section, rather than on that of secular ADFM.

Unity and Reconstruction's website draws heavily on alternative sources that belong to Islamic-oriented websites, such as the very popular "Islam online," "Islam today," "Ikhwan online" and the personal website of Yusuf Qaradawi, a charismatic and popular religious scholar. In addition to Islamic-oriented websites, Unity and Reconstruction's website also uses content from alternative news websites, such as Al Jazeera online and other online Arabic newspapers. Thus, Unity and Reconstruction's site demonstrates how the Internet is used to create networks of meanings and fields of discourse through heavy borrowing, cutting and pasting and exchanging. At the same time, the site keeps discourse and authorship under control by not using direct links to external sources and

limits borrowing to those sources with which the movement shares the same ideology or worldview. This demonstrates an effort on movement's part to enhance the credibility of its discourse on the Gaza issue by drawing on highly popular and influential figures and organizations.

The overwhelming majority of authors on the Amazigh cultural movement blogs belong to groups and SMOs that are members of the movement itself at the national, regional and international levels. Among the 152 posts on the Ageddim blog, almost 70 percent are authored by local Amazigh groups while 10 percent are authored by Amazigh groups in the diaspora. Many of those who post on the blog are also affiliated with other movements, particularly the unemployed graduates movement. All of them, however, are located in Amazigh-majority regions in the north and south of the country. Given the geographic dispersion of the movement and its lack of resources, sharing "symbolic resources" through participatory structures helps various groups address these disadvantages. Likewise, the distribution of authorship on the Amazigh blogs confirms Weitzman's remark about the important role the Internet now plays in constructing collective identity among activists in the Amazigh cultural movement:

> [The Internet] has become an additional important tool in the construction of a "landscape of group identity," i.e., the building of an "imagined" Amazigh community worldwide ... making possible the dissemination of information and images, often in real time, as well as stimulating discussion and contacts between activists worldwide. (2006, 72)

Finally, articles taken directly from mainstream media are a source of content for these sites, constituting more than a third of the content found on the blog belonging to the unemployed graduates movement. With a limited agenda that focuses on getting jobs for members, the collective action strategy of this movement concentrates on attractingmedia and policy makers' attention totheir demands. Staging protests in front of highly symbolic sites, such as Parliament, serves to galvanize the attention of MSM both nationally and internationally. Collective action can thus be seen as involving public "performance" tactics (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001; Tarrow 1998), in which both online and offline tactics complement one another.

Conclusions

The political and social upheavals that have shaken the Arab world to its roots recently andover the last two yearshave generated a plethora of interpretations as to the role of the Internet and social media.Most analysts were quick to point out that social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, have played a key role in boosting the capacity of youth groups and social movements to coordinate and mobilizestreet protests in an unprecedentedly

efficient way.What is missing from thesenarratives, however, is a grounded empirical analysis thatsituates this role within wider media practices and processes and other factors that contributedto the build-upleading to the Arab Spring. The use of social media in street protests and contestation is integral to the highly visible albeit transientphase of a revolution.However, more latent and durable forms of online mobilization have over the last few years empowered oppositional groups while contributing to the erosion of Arab governments' legitimacy and grip on power.

In fact, before staging street protests and sit-ins, social movements must mobilize existing members, recruit new ones and seek outside support for their groups and communities.Movements also need to construct a coherent identity for themselves in relation to that of their opponents who compete for legitimacy and power.To do so, social movements have to produce frames that can convey their story since "the story of movements is … the story of their members' ability to impose certain images of themselves, and counter attempts by dominant groups to denigrate their aspirations to be recognized as different," (Della Porta and Diani 2006, 106). Had activists in Tunisia and Egypt failed to exploit the victimization of Mohamed Bouazizi and Khaled Said and other grievances, they might not have been able to mobilize adequate support to stage successful revolutions.

This framing is even more critical in the case of conflicts with international character and dimensions like the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. As this article has demonstrated, Moroccan social movement groupsframed the conflict in such a way as to build solidarity with Palestinians and define the boundaries of the issue. These frames also served to mobilize actual and potential adherents over local political issues and causes:mainly human rights, democracy and social and cultural justice.The Internet has become in this sense one medium (among many others) that has enhanced the capacity of Moroccan social movements to tell the stories of their struggles and causes in pursuit for justice, equality and dignity.

An analysis of the framing of the Gaza conflict has identified five levels of mobilization linked to several framing purposes:

(1) Providing relevant information about a conflict or social struggle, namely by distinguishing between victims and adversaries/villains and pinpointing the problem/conflict;

(2) Supporting offline collective action by conveying information on strikes and meetings, and by coordinating various collective action efforts;

(3) Highlighting past actions to expand the repertoire of collective action by encouraging constituencies to join, defining tactics and inspiring other groups to continue the struggle;

(4) Building collective identity and consciousness, both a precondition for the development of the social movement and a collective action objective;

(5) Serving as platforms for online-based action, such as online campaigns.

Analysis has also shown that the majority of online platforms contribute in differing degrees to the last four forms of mobilization and only minimally to online-based action. Direct action, however, is only one type of mobilization conveyed by collective action frames. However, a central role of frames communicated online is not only to encourage actual and potential constituents to participate in street demonstrations and protests.Online framesalso provide users with interpretations, symbols and meanings that help them connect to a common cause, a group and an identity, all of which form the basis of social movements. Without a shared identity and a vision of society and the world, collective action cannot become a socially embedded movement capable of sustaining oppositional action over time. It is true that social movements draw on diverse forms of communication, including interpersonal communication, to build collective consciousness and identity. However, for many social movements that are geographically dispersed, politically persecuted and/or socially and economically disadvantaged, the Internet is increasingly playing a central role. By constructing necessary bonds and affiliations at the local and trans-local levels, the Internet thus contributes to the survival and ability of social movements to affect dominant orders in society.

Finally, this article has sought toopen new horizons for scholarly studies that analyzeonline mobilization in general and the role of the Internet in collective actionin the context of Muslim-majority countries in particular. From the vantage point of social movement theory and framing analysis, this article has highlighted the central role of the symbolic and discursive dimension in collective action that often determines the fate of many struggles. Revolutions continue to intensify throughout the region and have taken on sectarian and violent aspects. Thus, the Internet is becoming more crucial than ever in mediating and staging these events, and there is an urgent need for further research to probe the role of new media in shaping this symbolic war for the future of the region.

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