INTRODUCTION

The Egyptian uprising has been described as a “Twitter revolution.” It was not. Revolutions do not come out of thin air, or even cyberspace. But the internet provided a tool that helped shape the form of the uprising, and it gave us some of the most riveting real-time coverage ever recorded.

Since the wave of revolts that swept the Arab world starting in December 2010, commentators have struggled to explain a phenomenon none of them saw coming. Searching for a distinctive factor at play, many have settled on Facebook and Twitter, aspects reassuringly familiar to their own lives. In an inevitable backlash, others have pointed out that revolutions happened long before computers were invented.

What has sometimes been missing from the debate is close analysis of what the revolutionaries actually used social networks for. In the case of Twitter it was primarily used as an alternative press. It was a means for those on the ground to report what was happening for the benefit of their fellow Egyptians and the outside world, and a place for emancipating bursts of self-expression.

Of course, the internet was also an organizing tool. Calls for protests and coordination between the different groups that mobilized for the January 25 demonstrations in Egypt, which started the revolution, did happen online. Facebook was
the network most suited to the task, where information could be spread to thousands of people in an instant and then shared between friends. This dissemination was far faster than leaflets, with the added benefit that those receiving the messages were already interested and trusted the source.

Planning discussions also took place on Twitter, using the hashtag #Jan25 to enable anyone to join the conversation, and activists talked to each other directly using the @ reply function. Later on, once the revolution was in full swing, protesters used Twitter to announce new initiatives, like marching on the parliament building, and to boost their collective morale with reports of other developments around the country. But Twitter came into its own as a place to report on events. Initially, Egyptians were avid recipients of such reports coming out of Tunisia. Later their own accounts of the Egyptian revolution would help inspire uprisings across the region.

That Twitter was used in this way, for news, was no coincidence. Many tweeters considered themselves “citizen journalists” and made it their mission to get the word out with (usually) accurate bites of information and a flow of videos and pictures. Professional journalists also used the site (some of them like Ashraf Khalil are included in this book) as did more opinion-orientated bloggers. The result was like a company of artists painting a constantly updated picture of events.

The importance of citizen journalists cannot be overestimated in a country like Egypt with a state-controlled media. One of the features of the uprising was the gradual undermining of state TV and newspapers, to the extent that journalists began to resign as the public saw the ludicrous coverage for what it was. Also instrumental in this process was the contrast provided by transnational satellite TV channels like Al Jazeera, whose
reporting was often influenced by information and footage coming from citizen journalists on the ground.

The activists on Twitter were not only talking to their fellow Egyptians but to the international media and the world. They went to great lengths to get online during the five-day internet blackout, when their tweets could not easily be read by other Egyptians. By telephoning friends abroad to upload their tweets, pooling their resources to get on to the one remaining internet service provider in Egypt (the one used by the stock exchange), or offering interviews to news organizations in return for access to their satellite internet connections, activists managed to ensure that the regime could not cut them off from the world.

The fact that Hosni Mubarak’s regime took the step of blocking the internet, despite the millions of dollars lost to the economy, is a testament to the fear it provoked among the rulers. This is where commentators who seek to downplay the role of social media come up short. Their argument that social upheavals happen periodically, and that a great many have been very successful without Twitter, is obvious. But every revolution is different, shaped in part by the technology available to those who make it and those who try to stop it. Soon after printing presses became widespread in England, the English Civil Wars of 1642–51 happened. There was lots of discussion and hype about the role that popular pamphlets from agitators like “free-born” John Lilburne were playing. The government’s response (both that of Charles I and later Oliver Cromwell) was censorship. The same thing has been repeated ever since. The tactic does not always work, but those in authority would not try it unless they thought it might.
In Egypt it did not work. By the time the regime blocked the internet on January 28 it had already lost control. While the internet was down the most decisive battle occurred between protesters and the state’s security forces on January 28 and a Million Man March was held on February 1. The revolution was already tangible, it was escalating spontaneously. There was no need to organize events online because people were spending every day face to face on the streets. The demands and tactics of the revolution were being determined by the spontaneous chants of the people.

There is a certain arrogance to the lazy Western description of a Twitter revolution. It excuses commentators from seeking to understand the deep-seated causes of the uprising – the brutal economic reality for the majority of the population, the imposition of neoliberal policies reducing job security and suppressing wages, the lack of opportunities for educated young people, the sheer vindictiveness of a Western-backed dictator as expressed through his police gangs.

It ignores the role of the urban poor, many of whom literally placed their bodies between tyranny and freedom on the front line. For the unemployed and those living on two dollars a day, Twitter and Facebook were the last things on their minds. It ignores the role of the organized working class which had been striking since 2006 and whose refusal to go to work in the days before Mubarak resigned finally removed the last plank from under his regime. And it ignores the years of thankless work by the very activists who made such good use of Twitter during the uprising and whose words fill this book. They had been mobilizing, forming groups, and holding small protests in the face of police brutality since at least the year 2000, but the world had hardly noticed. And they are still doing so now, as the revolution continues to unfold.
There is a clip on YouTube of a young Californian woman being asked about events in Egypt in a vox-pop. In her account the protests happened because the Egyptian government blocked the internet. She got the entire causal relationship the wrong way around. But she was not so far away from those who say that Twitter and Facebook are the reason for the revolts.

The Arab uprisings would not have happened at the speed and in the manner in which they did without social media. That we can say. And the way in which the revolution is seen in the West, in the Arab world, and even within Egypt would be very different if we had not been able to hear from protesters and see the action so directly. But the revolution would not have happened at all without the Egyptian people deciding enough was enough and putting their lives on the line for justice, dignity, and the hope of a decent future.
Tuesday, January 25

THE DAY OF REVOLT

...on which the Revolution starts

TravellerW Mo-ha-med
Police throws rocks @ demonstrators while we raised our arms. We’re unarmed, they’re in full gear. We are strong, they’re weak. #25jan #Egypt

Tuesday, January 25, was National Police Day, a public holiday in Egypt, an appropriate date for protests. The call went out on Facebook and through social networks. There would be demonstrations across Egypt, including in Alexandria, Suez, and Cairo.

In the capital a loose strategy had been devised in meetings and online. The plan was for multiple fast-moving demonstrations in twenty locations around the city, designed to try to mobilize the people in poorer areas (who could not afford the luxury of computers and the internet) and avoid the usual police tactic of cordonning off protesters and preventing them from rallying.

The strategy was effective, but it was the sheer numbers who turned out that took the police by surprise. In the early afternoon the demonstrations started, ranging in strength from a few dozen to a few thousand. Protesters marched through the back streets in districts like Shubra and Boulaq, gathering people as they went, all the while tweeting news of their location and progress.

After several violent clashes with police the different marches converged in Midan Al-Tahrir (Liberation Square) in the center of the city. Overwhelming the police through force of numbers and courage, protesters occupied the Square despite tear gas, rock throwing, sticks and water cannon being used against them.
Taken aback by their success, once in Tahrir the activists had to work out what to do next. The social movements had a meeting. The initial idea was to call for the arrest of the Interior Minister, but the people in the Square, most of whom were not part of any political group, were chanting for the removal of the regime. The activists realized they could not call for less than the demonstrators wanted. So the demands of the Revolution were set by the spontaneous chants of the People.

After nightfall the police broke up the demonstration using rubber bullets and tear gas, and skirmishes continued into the early hours.

At one stage in the afternoon the Egyptian government had blocked Twitter. But the barrier of fear that had protected Hosni Mubarak’s regime for thirty years had already been smashed to pieces.
3arabawy: streets r empty. Police r everywhere. #jan25
08:27:57 Jan 25

Gsquare86: great start RT @3arabawy: #jan25
08:28:26 Jan 25

Sandmonkey: Shower, Crago pants, Hoodie, running shoes, phone charged, cash, ID, cigs (for jail) and some mace just in case. Am ready! #jan25
10:04:18 Jan 25

adamakary: #jan25 protesters' demands: increase in minimum wage, dismissal of interior ministry, removal of emergency law, shorten presidential term
10:15:08 Jan 25

adamakary: #jan25 protests will take place all throughout cairo, including shubra, mohendessin, in front of cairo university and on arab league street
10:17:45 Jan 25

adamakary: lets not forget mp's loyal to mubarak have previously said that protesters can be shot at if they pose a threat to national security #jan25
10:23:12 Jan 25

ManarMohsen: Those tweeting about the protest in Egypt, please use the hashtag #Jan25 in order to spread any information.
10:54:41 Jan 25

3arabawy: @shadihamid I'm not expecting a revolution today. I'm expecting protests. So let's not shoot high so as not to disappoint people later.
11:02:28 Jan 25
Sarahngb
Tahrir square looks scary. Cordons, policemen, fire trucks, CS trucks. #Jan25
11:36:28 Jan 25

norashalaby Nera Shalaby
It's really satisfying to c Egyptian police officers working & anxious on their day off #jan25
12:11:05 Jan 25

Gsquare86 Gigi Ibrahim
Don't let the police intimidate us with their presence, they always have been there and always will, it's time to move #Jan25
12:11:58 Jan 25

monasosh monasosh
Heading towards gam3et el dowal st, empowered #jan25 #nahya http://lyfrog.com/gzljqeu

Tarekshalaby Tarek Shalaby
Today's our day as #CitizenJournalists to cover and share the truth freely. Regardless of the outcome we are winners cuz we're a team #jan25
12:45:57 Jan 25

Sandmonkey Mahmoud Salem
Huge demo going to tahrir #jan25 shit just got real
13:21:56 Jan 25
ManarMohsen Manar Mohsen
Security presence in Tahrir is insane, protest from dar elgalaa moved to tahrir square #Jan25
13:32:05 Jan 25

Sandmonkey Mahmoud Salem
Security tried to storm protesters. Failed. Regrouping. #jan25
13:33:36 Jan 25

norashalaby Nora Shalaby
Fuck got kettled almost suffocated till they broke cordon
13:42:54 Jan 25

ManarMohsen Manar Mohsen
Beating up protesters in kaser elnil. Protesters marching, chanting "freedom" #jan25
13:45:05 Jan 25

monasosh monasosh
This is great, we r in nahya street, ppl r walking by our side #jan25
13:56:06 Jan 25

norashalaby Nora Shalaby
Police trying to barricade but can't
14:02:39 Jan 25

Ghonim Wael Ghonim
Everyone come to Dar ElHekma security police allow people to join us and we are few hundreds #Jan25
14:08:55 Jan 25

Jarabawy Hossam Elshimy
Protests have started in Alexandria http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/4773.aspx #Jan25
14:10:14 Jan 25

mosaaberizing Mosa'ab Elshamy
Amazing scene at Mostafa Mahmoud. Thousands marching with Egypt flag. #Jan25
14:22:03 Jan 25
Gsquare86 Gigi Ibrahim
I am looking at shubra’s residents reaction from the balconies and they r chanting with us #Jan25 http://yfrog.com/h29m5hrj
14:20:32 Jan 25

ManarMohsen Manar Mohaen
The main aim of the coordinators is to not get barricaded by security forces. #Jan25
14:29:45 Jan 25

ashrafkhalil ashraf khalil
#Jan25 grandma with maybe 4 teeth chanting along happily in boulaq as marchers pass
14:32:41 Jan 25

ashrafkhalil ashraf khalil
#Jan25 at the very least this is the biggest day of protests Egypt has seen in years
14:45:48 Jan 25

ashrafkhalil ashraf khalil
#Jan25 crowds overwhelming police cordons outside courthouse downtown!
14:50:17 Jan 25

monasosh monasosh
If u r not here, u r missing a lot. Down wt Mobarak. Mohandesin #jan25
14:51:54 Jan 25

norashalaby Nora Shalaby
Trying to break the cordon in front of court #Jan 25
14:52:46 Jan 25

monasosh monasosh
I know this will sound corny, but I have never felt like this is my country more than now #jan25
14:54:48 Jan 25

TravellerW Mo-ha-med
our strength is in our collective action. Egyptians, Believe in Yourselves, BELIEVE IN US. #25jan #egypt
14:57:04 Jan 25
@Jarabawy: The chant in many of the protests is "أرحل" (LEAVE!) Just like #Tunisia. #Jan25
14:58:00 Jan 25

@Ashrafkhalil: Jan25 the central security guys look miserable. Crowd making A major push against them. Happy Police Day guys!
14:58:00 Jan 25

@TarekShalaby: This is happening!!! #Jan25 http://twitpic.com/3tl9m00
15:00:29 Jan 25

@Gsquare86: Thugs all around us marching beside us #jan25 shubra http://yfrog.com/h5ybskj
15:00:46 Jan 25

@Adamakary: Ppl are stomping their feet, imitating sounds from a boot camp, now ppl stop for the call to prayer #jan25
15:06:16 Jan 25

@TarekShalaby: #A7A A7A A7A!!! This is fuckin happening! http://twitpic.com/3t9k03c
15:07:09 Jan 25

@Ghonim: Protests are like watermelons and it seems I opened the wrong one #Frustrated #Jan25
15:08:50 Jan 25
TravellerW Mo-ha-med
#jan25 violence on the galaan bridge. W pushed through - but now we're stick on the bridge.
15:14:16 Jan 25

monasosh monasosh
Heading to kash el nil bridge, massive crowd, there might be violence. Rabena yostor #jan25 http://yfrog.com/hsbnyx
15:14:26 Jan 25

tarekshalaby Tarek Shalaby
Fuck! We're getting hit. Broke through 2 lines. No serious injuries #jan25
15:15:57 Jan 25

TravellerW Mo-ha-med
That was bad. Very vicious soliers and officers with batons
15:18:00 Jan 25

Gsquare86 Gigi Ibrahim
We are taking all the tight streets of shubra with us to Ramses we are heading #jan25 http://yfrog.com/vh56kshg
15:30:06 Jan 25

Salamander Sally Sami
The march from Mohandessin reached Tahrir square and a fire engine passed spraying water on protesters and left #jan25
15:40:41 Jan 25

ashrafkhalil ashraf khalil
#Jan25 crowd chanting 'salmeya' peaceful
15:40:47 Jan 25
3arabawy: Protesters in Shubra are trying to head to Tahrir Square. Protesters in downtown Cairo climb firetruck and destroy water cannon. #Jan25
15:43:34 Jan 25

Ghonim: We got brutally beaten up by police people #Jan25
15:46:20 Jan 25

Sandmonkey: Police officer speaking on cellphone: “elwa ya basha, the gas is on the way”. Teargas is coming. #jan25
15:50:49 Jan 25

15:53:52 Jan 25

ashrafkhalil: #Jan25 amazing! Huge crowd just rushed in from abdeen to join thousands controlling half of tahrir square
15:57:42 Jan 25

norashalaby: Tear gas!!
15:58:37 Jan 25

TravellerW: tear gas #25jan
15:59:10 Jan 25

monasosh: Eyes burning fuck #jan25 http://yfrog.com/gy70kgj
16:00:04 Jan 25

norashalaby: Tear gas is fucking deadly. Cant see!
16:04:42 Jan 25.
norashalaby Nora Shalaby
Ppl throwing us water bottles from Windows
16:08:09 Jan 25.

norashalaby Nora Shalaby
Someone is hurt. Need a doctor

ashrafkhalil ashraf khalil
#Jan25 police and protestors in tahrir all gagging on tear gas
16:14:45 Jan 25.

norashalaby Nora Shalaby
Water being shot at us. Protestors throwing rocks
16:16:54 Jan 25.

ashrafkhalil ashraf khalil
#Jan25 crowd regrouping and now controls most of tahrir square
16:19:59 Jan 25.

monasosh monasosh
Police is throwing rocks at us #jan25 http://yfrog.com/h06ipbj

monasosh monasosh
Someone badly injured in his leg #jan25

TravellerW Me-ha-med
Police throws rocks @ demonstrtrs while we raised our arms.
We’re unarmed, they’re in full gear. We are strong, they’re weak.
#25jan #Egypt

ashrafkhalil ashraf khalil
#Jan25 I will never get used to the sight of the riot police throwing rocks at protestors. Does that happen anywhere else?!
16:35:53 Jan 25.
Ghonim  Wael Ghonim
Everyone come to Tahrir now we need you we are no less than 10,000 and no more police #Jan25
16:42:22 Jan 25

monasosh  monasosh
So far helped clean the wounds of 3. Many are injured minor injuries in their head from rocks #jan25
16:48:32 Jan 25

Ghonim  Wael Ghonim
Come to Tahrir please #Jan25
16:59:14 Jan 25

TWITTER BLOCKED

3arabawy  Hossam hosni
Back on Twitter via Proxy. Fuck you hosni! #Jan25
16:34:18 Jan 25

3arabawy  Hossam hosni
Ya shabab, Tahrir is a war zone now. Tens of thousands are protesting the same chants as the Tunisians. #Jan25
16:34:52 Jan 25

Sarahngb  Sarahngb
We have news of rubber bullets being fired in tahrir sq. and people are not budging. Infact, they are increasing in number #jan25
16:36:37 Jan 25

Sandmonkey  Mahmoud Salem
Charging my phone and getting water and supplies to tahrir peeps. Do the same. Support ur people. #Jan25
16:37:25 Jan 25

3arabawy  Hossam hosni
To break the block on Twitter use this proxy: http://hidemyass.com/ #Jan25
16:40:10 Jan 25
Sarahngb Sarahngb
amazing sight as masses were coming from every direction towards tahrir square. It’s the demo’s meeting point. Amazing #jan25
18:42:47 Jan 25

Jarabawy Hossam jar
Mubarak’s posters in Alexandria destroyed! #Jan25 http://is.gd/1OS8It
18:54:10 Jan 25

Sarahngb Sarahngb
It's almost impossible to tweet or catch network. Come on!
Join us in tahrir sq. #jan25
20:35:41 Jan 25

Monasosh monasosh
All telecommunications are down in tahrir square. We can’t call or update twitter. I went out to update u and get updates #jan25
20:57:25 Jan 25

Jarabawy Hossam jar
What is everyone is almost sure about is that the police will attack at some point, and not let the occupation continue till tomorrow #Jan25
21:35:40 Jan 25

Jarabawy Hossam jar
21:47:02 Jan 25

Gsquare86 Gigi Ibrahim Gigi
OMG Twitter is back!! Thank god! The situation in Tahrir is beyond amazing everyone should head there #jan25
21:58:59 Jan 25

RamyYaacoub Ramy Yaacoub
RT @Sarahngb: Thousands of People still at tahrir square chanting 'al sha3b yoreed esqat el nizam' 'the people want the system down' #jan25
22:37:14 Jan 25
Ghonim Wael Ghonim
Egypt after #Jan25 is no way going to be the same as Egypt before it. Today we proved so many points.
00:45:14 Jan 26

Jarabawy Hossam
Police has started attacking the downtown Cairo occupation. Reports of tear gas fired and arrests. Protestors chased to side roads. #Jan25
00:47:41 Jan 26

Sarahngb Sarahngb
Panic struck in tahrir square. Several ambulance cars #jan25
01:11:49 Jan 26

monasosh monasosh
We need doctors to head to hisham mobarak, 3 badly injured and we need help #jan25
01:18:25 Jan 26

Ghonim Wael Ghonim
Now in Tahrir situation is out of control. Prevented 2 angry guys from throwing a huge metal on police cars from top of the bridge! #Jan25
01:36:48 Jan 26

NevineZaki Nevine
I CAN NOT BELIEVE WHAT IT HAS REACHED TO, THIS IS INSANE! #JAN25
01:40:49 Jan 26

Gsquare86 Gigi Ibrahim
Tahrir got broken up by police using tear gas, rubber bullets, water hoses, & rock-throwing..ppl r still marching in DT #Jan25..I'm home
01:58:09 Jan 26

Salamander Sally Sami
From 6 october bridge security chasing protestors with tear gas and rubber bullets #25jan #jan25 #cairo
02:04:07 Jan 26
norashalaby Nora Shalaby
Just got home after being bombarded with dozen of tear gas canisters! What a day #jan25
02:21:01 Jan 26

norashalaby Nora Shalaby
Those protesters that have remained in the streets despite the lastest police brutality against us are really really brave #jan
02:47:44 Jan 26

monasosh monasosh
One of the injured protesters went to hospital and was beaten up there! #jan25
02:48:36 Jan 26

3arabawy Hossam Ḥassán
New post: #Jan25 Police attack @ 1:20am, downtown Cairo
http://bit.ly/1hSkLwZ.
04:06:32 Jan 26

mosaaberizing Mosa'ab Elshamy
Probably need a blog post on it's own but I'll try noting some unforgettable moments/scenes from this day in the next tweets.. #jan25
04:15:28 Jan 26

mosaaberizing Mosa'ab Elshamy
1. Breaking 1st cordon at Qasr ElNil bridge was HUGE. Seeing the fuckers run away from us and open other cordons. Priceless feeling. #Jan25
04:22:33 Jan 26

mosaaberizing Mosa'ab Elshamy
2. People handshaking, hugging & offering flowers to officers. Same protesters who later refused beating an isolated soldier. Classy. #Jan25
04:32:26 Jan 26

mosaaberizing Mosa'ab Elshamy
3. A family I met - young couple with their 2 yrs old son - came all the way from Alex to Tahrir and wanted to stay all night. #Jan25
04:40:02 Jan 26
mosaaberizing Mosa'ab Elshamy
4. People burning up a CSF car in rage after the last attack on Tahrir. Those inside of it were weeping for mercy. #Jan25
04:44:40 Jan 26

mosaaberizing Mosa'ab Elshamy
5. Crippled guy on chair wheel protesting. A blind one too with stick. Let me hear anyone talking shit ever again about this nation.. #Jan25
04:57:28 Jan 26

mosaaberizing Mosa'ab Elshamy
Everyone cried at some point. If the amazing scenes and emotions weren't touching enough for some, the tear gas took care of that. #Jan25
05:28:01 Jan 26

monasosh monasosh
I know this is silly but my foot really hurts @alaa @manal & @RamyRaoof not here I feel like crying
05:35:13

monasosh monasosh
#Jan25 I was there today, tomorrow YOU SHOULD BE WT US http://lyfrog.com/static/images/logo.gif
05:41:08 Jan 26

monasosh monasosh
All injured protesters who went to hospital were turned in to the police (via @malek) #Jan25
05:43:29 Jan 26

TravellerW Mo-ha-med
Exhausted. Will catch a few hours of sleep. Good morning, Egypt. #25jan
07:17:28 Jan 26

TravellerW Mo-ha-med
Quick update on last night. 1am: attacks by tear gas - a dozen a minute, which is INSANE - followed by armed gov thugs attacks. #25jan
07:23:53 Jan 26