ABSTRACT

The Role of Digital Media in the Arab Spring: How Online Technologies advance

Democratic Movements for Regime Change.

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This Research Paper aims to investigate the role of digital media in political movements pursuing regime change, specifically the uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East that have come to be known as the "Arab Spring". Academic discourse and mass media have focused on the role of online media in these uprisings in great abundance since the Tunisian revolution unfolded in December 2010 and sparked a wave of demonstrations. While a lot of the media coverage focused on the Internet as a catalyst or even a cause of the revolutions, this paper puts forward a more accurate discussion and depiction of the role online media played: as a tool in the process of campaigning for regime change. This paper discusses the Iranian revolution as a potential predecessor to the Arab Spring, the insight provided aims to provide further context. The democratising potential of the Internet is examined within the framework of the Habermasian definition of the Public Sphere to provide a foundation to the discussions on how to define the role of online media with regard to the civic public in subsequent chapters. The different characteristics of mobilisation and community that digital media contributes to are discussed, with the views of the Internet's detractors and champions both taken into account. The dangers faced by the opponents of authoritarian regimes are analysed, and the setbacks the regimes themselves face when retaliating are discussed. Finally the paper considers the relationship between more traditional forms of mass media and digital media in terms of news and information sources. They are found to be reliant on one another in a variety of ways.