The Use of Social Media In Promoting Human Rights Among Speakers of English In Morocco: The Case of Facebook

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Abstact

The paper examines the use of social media among speakers of English in Morocco and the extent to which it has empowered them in various struggles against political and social injustices. More specifically, it explores whether these media have transformed human rights actors and activists' repertoire and enhanced their capacity to challenge and speak out against human rights abuses. In so doing, the thesis addresses some key polemical issues and questions germane to the topic, mainly the dialectic between technological and social determinism, the role of social media, mainly Facebook, in shaping democratic change during the Arab uprisings. The thesis uses a combination of methodological approaches to explore the structural, textual and contextual dimensions of social media's implications and impact on the promotion and protection of human rights in Morocco.

 Through a focus group interview analysis, the research draws on rich data derived from in-depth interviews conducted with Moroccan human rights activists and NGOs'actors. It offers insights into the embeddedness of social media as a technological medium and also into the interplay between activists, and users' practices and their political participation. Moreover, the study examines the complex and multi-layered interconnections between Facebook in particular and the various social, political and cultural processes shaping its appropriation and its potential, and enhancing democracy. The study concludes that social media play a significant role in enhancing Moroccan social and collective action capabilities by favouring different forms of mobilization, and facilitating linkages between dispersed constituencies and national public spheres with a view to promoting human rights practices. The paper argues, however, that the medium does not affect in any radical way the dominant political and social orders inasmuch as its implications and potential remain considerably limited by the various digital divides, and are mediated through the power relations characterizing society in terms of the degree of literacy and political involvement.

1.0 Introduction

Advances in technological capacity have played an increasing role in helping human rights educators and political activists promote the dignity of people worldwide. Digital Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are being deployed to foster and optimize informal rights education with a view to securing rights for citizens who might be subject to abuse and torture. If it

is certainly true that the actual decision-making processes in a political system may relate to a few individuals, the complexity of information is of equal importance and is similarly subject to influence by the changing nature of communication.

Since electronic media enable citizens to directly and instantaneously convey their wishes to their representatives with decreasing cost, the nature of political interaction is likely to change. In 2011, we witnessed how the internet and social media applications gave voice to those around the world, helping promote democratic change, raising awareness of human rights issues and enabling citizens to access and exercise their basic freedoms and rights. We assume that the internet can positively influence free expression and a wide range of other human rights. However, many people still face huge battles in simply claiming these rights, and repressive governments can use these same technologies to suppress and undermine them on the other hand.

Social networks, including Facebook, twitter and Myspace, to mention but a few have marked a new phase in communication and recent media history in general. In this respect, we are faced with ordinary people who have become very strong agencies and have succeeded in broadcasting their own convictions and opinions regarding human rights issues and speaking out against human rights violations and abuses such as arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life, disappearance, torture and denial of fair public trial and others. Morocco, in this respect, is no exception. The opportunity costs of participation are reduced and electronic access has potentially erased disparities of distance and geography, minimizing the rural-urban distinction that had significant political implications in the past. Social media's greatest strength, however, lies in its ability to support simultaneous, interactive communications among large numbers of people.

Unlike the telephone, which primarily supports one-to-one communications, or radio and television, where information flows in only one way from a single source to a potential audience that can only listen passively, Facebook and social media in general allow information to flow back and forth among millions of sources at the same time. This implies that a large number of `people can be exposed to a medium in which they may have an active role to play in the promotion and protection of human rights. The internet has, thus, become a major tool in Morocco by which governmental organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in the field of human rights, namely National Council for Human Rights (*Conseil National des Droits de l'Homme* - CNDH), Moroccan Association of Human Rights (*Association Marocaine des Droits de l'Homme* - AMDH), Moroccan Organization of Human Rights (*Organisation Marocaine des Droits de l'Homme* - OMDH) and others, exercise political influence and activism. They (NGOs) all assume that the internet has a great potential to impact the formation and maintenance of promoting and protecting human rights in our country in order to meet the need of its global users.

2.0 Statement of the research problem
The present study is actually intended to trigger a large number of questions and debates about the use of social media, namely Facebook, in the promotion and protection of human rights among speakers of English in Morocco. Indeed, democracy and human rights can surely prosper in a climate of new age information. The incompetence of misinformation and the wilful deceit of disinformation cannot provide the conditions most fundamentally required to permit a situation in which individual members of society can exercise their full rights. It is of paramount importance to highlight that the prospering of human rights also requires a type of media that follows neither the agendas of its political or corporate masters nor the prejudices, assumptions or stereotypes propagated by its own industry. More importantly, the [new] media function more democratically when they are free of market liberalism and political influence from the government. Simply put,

these media, according to Keane (1991) should be "for public use and enjoyment for all citizens and not for use for the private gain or profit of political rulers or business" (p. 29). Along with this, a new media system would ultimately be more democratic if it included constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression, which aim to serve the public and, thus, help them preserve their rights and speak out against any instance of human rights abuse.

There has, recently, been a shift towards social media being used not just as a platform to connect with friends and family or to break news stories but to open up a new public sphere involving a large number of people with a view to exchanging views for the promotion and protection of human rights.

3.0 Research Questions
The present study aims at exploring the use of social media in the promotion and protection of human rights among speakers of English in Morocco and tries to seek possible answers to the following basic question, which are used to articulate the research study:

Research question: What are human rights activists' attitudes and perceptions towards the use of Facebook to promote human rights and democracy in Morocco?

The research outcomes would hopefully provide meaningful findings and results that would contribute to the heated debate among Facebook users over the utility and usefulness of social network site (SNSs) in the promotion and protection of human rights in Morocco.

4.0 Significance and purpose of the study
The main goal of this study is to understand the role and effects that Facebook as a social network may have in the promotion and protection of human rights in Morocco, and examine the impact that Facebook's attributed features may have on the issue of human rights and its effectiveness with respect to freedom of speech indicators. As media systems dependency theory suggests, information resources lead to changes in individuals' cognition, emotion and behaviour (BallRokeach, 1985,1998). It is obvious that media-initiated perceptions drive issues such as human rights instances in which blatant violations and abuses that concern the public are observed and denounced (BallRokeach & DeFleur, 1976). Viewed from this angle, media use, including social media and social networking sites (SNSs), can be considered to have an effect on individuals' attitudes towards human rights promotion and protection through contributing to globalized and local movements and conveying messages to a large audience. This transnational communication mode improves social capacity to mobilize people across the world with a view to denouncing human rights violations and abuses (Wright.C. , 2004).

Equally important, in this paper, it is strongly believed that social media can serve as an enabling tool in deepening democratic principles and promoting human rights. Without of course neglecting to address the limitations, unintended consequences, and ethical implications in the use of social media. The aim of this research is to explore the following points:

      1-   To investigate the impact and role of social media use on the promotion and protection of human rights with a particular focus on the factors and attitudes that determine the frequency of use among speakers of English in Morocco.

      2-   To see if there is any research evidence on how social media, namely Facebook, can promote human rights and political activism in Morocco.

      3-   To see if there is research evidence on how social media, namely Facebook, can energize democracy and initiate social and political change.

4-   To see if there is research evidence on how social media tools can have an effective role in social and political movements during the Arab spring and the accompanying uprisings.

5-   To see if there is research evidence on how Facebook activists belonging to both governmental and non-governmental organizations perceive the role and impact of new technologies on the promotion and protection of human rights in Morocco.

6-   To see if there is research evidence on how students with a good performance in English perceive the role of Facebook in the promotion and protection of human rights in Morocco. The present study is, then, expected to produce enlightening results and reliable findings to back up arguments for both the use and the widespread proliferation of social media, namely Facebook, in the promotion and protection of human rights. The current research might call for the reconsideration of the use of these digital tools among speakers of English and Facebook users in Morocco with regard to the promotion and protection of human rights.

The objective is not to provide technical and methodological assistance on how to use these digital tools. The scope of the study allows us only to provide research evidence on the factors that determine the frequency of social media use, and the potential role of such use in the promotion and protection of human rights among speakers of English in Morocco. Finally, the study offers conclusions as well as recommendations for future research.

5.0 Literature Review
5.1 Social media and Communication: This section will explore the communicative aspect of social networking sites (SNSs). Social media build interactive platforms on which media users create, share, discuss and modify user-generated content (UGC) (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011) These media are currently most often used for the purpose of socialization, organization and mobilization (Correa, 2010). People who use social media connect, communicate and interact with their peers as well as other users (Ellison, Vitak, Steinfield, Gray, & Lampe, 2011). Social media, including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn or Google+, to name but a few, promote interpersonal contact , facilitate interaction among people, and connote a social value (Dijck, 2013).

It should be highlighted, in this regard, that social media differ from traditional media. The distinction between social media and conventional media will be given much importance in the next section. Messages are generally delivered by unidirectional communication on traditional media; whereas, social media involve interactive and cooperative communication based on Web 2.0 where information can be easily generated and shared. Social media are regarded as a kind of internet-based communication platforms, with the provision of end-to-end communication on one's social network where users can be identified (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011). Owing to the personalized media platform, using social media differs from using the Internet to search for or subscribe to online content. Social media users are connected bi-directionally by viewing each other's profiles and posts (Vitak, et al., 2011).

Communication technologies and social networking sites (SNSs) are used not only as means to maintain social connectivity, as it has been stated earlier, but also as mobilizing tools to express social and political demands and promote human rights and democracy. In many countries, of which Morocco is no exception, social media have contributed to a more active, critical and politicized citizenry, where citizens are no longer passive receivers of state-oriented media. Differently put, politically oriented and mediated connections do not merely express people's political ideologies but also generate, establish, and proliferate their political ideologies and social intent in public spheres.

The proliferating growth of online and cyber-communication has profoundly influenced the practices of both users and political leaders. Politicians, seeking to be effective and influential, aspiringly endeavour to develop skills and assets in different domains. The most important skill, in this regard, is the ability to communicate. Successful political leaders are those who are able to achieve their objectives and settle social problems through dialogue, effective communication, and compromise. With this thought in mind, it should be stressed that social media represents a substantial change from traditional bureaucratic ways of running affairs to more innovative, creative, and representative forms of government (Dadashzadeh, 2010). This has greatly been observed in the Moroccan context; almost all-political leaders and ministers resort to social media especially Facebook to share their views, defend their political agendas and support their fellow ministers in cases of crisis. Today's media enable individuals to share private opinions, experiences and insights. In this regard, discourses in a society can be generated and spread through these new interactive media, which promotes sharing common interest and provides the public with a free space to discuss and debate the issues within communities and interest groups (Hampton & Wellman, 2003 ; Gil De Zúñiga, Puig-I-Abril, & Rojas, 2009).

Social media affect the social norms and behaviours of users and support their civic, political and social engagement in the promotion and protection of human rights through creating connections with others (Bolton et al, 2003). With new communication technologies, such as open media platforms and social networking sites (SNSs), which allow users to generate social capital and change in public engagement with human rights organizations, the question is about the opportunity gap of participation rooted in a communication gap in terms of social media use. Although social media are effective and efficient tools for mobilizing people and speaking out against human rights violations and abuses, these effects are only limited to social media users.

Equally important, the opportunity for participation in human rights activities expand for social media users, whereas non-users have limited exposure to such opportunities. There is an abundance of cases whereby only social media users are informed and actively involved in different issues. This is not to suggest that SNSs like Facebook have no role to play in the process of political engagement, but rather that their contribution is dependent on the specific types of use and users (Holbert & Heydt, 2001).Interestingly, it is likely that the impact of social networking sites is stronger and more noticeable during times of significant upheavals when they are used for message amplification, political mobilization, and organization than other purposes. Moreover, activities related to human rights promotion and protection are being transferred from onsite to online activities associated with social media. Therefore, it is valuable to investigate the relationship between social media and human rights promotion.

5.2 Social media and human rights

Although the Internet has been a key factor in promoting civic participation in political demonstrations, the Egyptian uprisings, for instance, which began online through social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, were subject to government block outs, which mainly aimed at silencing the huge masses of online activists. This, according to the digital activism theory, has resulted in mobilizing those who were previously apathetic and causing people to become politicized. Even though, social media sites facilitate interaction among users and provide a participatory media environment based on the interactive Web 2.0 platform, content is mediated by private companies and, thus, can be censored both by local governments and social media companies themselves. The concept of web neutrality states that the Internet should be free of censorship by governments and companies. This takes us back to the principle outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which includes the right to free speech, free

associations, and the right to privacy. More importantly, the right to privacy has become a concern with respect to different social media sites. These sites collect users' personal information that might be used in personalized Internet searches. Facebook has been criticized for altering its interface and platform in ways that undermine user privacy. While social media and social networking sites have affected democratic states to a great extent, they have played an even more important and profound role in autocratic states. Thanks to social media and social networking sites, citizens in countries where governments and authorities prohibit public assemblies and control the media are, for the first time, able to freely express their views and denounce instances of human rights abuse. Citizens in some countries have even used social media to promote political reform and protect democratic principles. Facebook groups and online activists use social media to generate discussions among large groups of people to organize protests throughout the country. Facebook's "Groups" function has been linked to increased civic and political engagement among users. This will be deeply explored in the following sections, where much more focus will be put on the political role and potential of social media. Social media impact on human rights promotion in Morocco

This section explores the extent to which the future of democracy and human rights in Morocco is healthier with social media as the primary means by which users create a public sphere where they can communicate and form public opinion about human rights violations so they can act accordingly. As social network sites (SNSs) have become a mass and a global medium by the mid-nineties, their political potential have been recognized as one of their strongest and most important characteristics. This potential has since been exploited by various political and social actors; from governments and political NGOs to individual users. Commentators have suggested that existing literature on the democratic and political role of social media is marked by a sharp polarization. According to Saco, (2002), for instance, scholars are divided between what she calls "the technological utopian position" and the "technological dystopian position" (p. xv). The first and more optimistic one puts greater hopes on the ability of social media to bolster a faltering democratic system marked by decreasing public interest and participation. The other position claims that the Internet and social media cannot make a difference within existing political spheres and further reinforces existing power relations. Abundant literature seems to address the key issue of "whether these communication practices merely reduce the costs or increase the efficiencies of political action, or whether they change the political game itself" (Bennett L. , 2003; Norris, 2001). Equally important, Vedel (2003) states four political functions characterizing the Internet and social networking platforms, namely that these tools can "enhance the information of citizens," promote "the strategies of communication by political factors;" "facilitate the process of political mobilization;" and "improve communication within political organizations" (pp. 42-44).

The story of social media and human rights in Morocco raises important questions on the notion of "Internet exceptionalism" and the current conflict for power in the public sphere (Goldsmith & Wu, 2006). It is a common thought that a democratic transition started in Morocco in 1997, when the socialist party standing at the opposition front came to power and led the government. The new government aimed at enacting political reforms through promoting human rights and civil rights and the media, both print and digital, thus, benefitted a great deal from this political opening. However, the new openness has strict limits and challenges, as there have been setbacks in both media freedom and human rights.

5.3 Freedom of speech online in Morocco

It is no wonder that compared to other media types, access to and use of social media in Morocco has benefitted largely from a considerable amount of freedom, although the Internet has been under the state control in the last few years. Many observers have, actually, highlighted that Internet users enjoy a high level of freedom, which is relatively unmatched in most Arab countries. A case in point, the Initiative for an Open Arab Internet (2009), in its report on Morocco affirms that "Though in Morocco the Internet is largely free of filtering, bloggers and forum participants generally avoid 'red line' topics such as the Western Sahara, defamation of the royal authority, and defamation of Islam. Still bloggers in the kingdom state that they are free to discuss almost anything" (p. 3).

It is no doubt that the country's relative tendency towards online freedom of expression springs from a policy of free speech tolerance and the abundance of websites that confirm this. Issues that led some time ago to prosecution are widely debated among social media users today. Goldsmith and Wu (2006) contend that "governments can indeed control the Internet at three levels, the level of users or recipients, the level of websites, and the level of intermediaries or transmitters" (p.49). The Moroccan government has tried to place control over the Internet by selectively blocking undesirable sites, but this was a failure due to the abundance of websites providing the same content. Furthermore, setting up an intelligent filtering system, as it is the case in many other countries like China, requires many resources that the Moroccan government cannot afford.

In a similar vein, with regard to the potential of social media for free speech and the practice of online censorship in Arab countries Sadiki (2004), contends that "the capacity to monopolize loyalty is being enfeebled by the deluge of multipolar flow of information made possible by the new information and communication technologies, such as the Internet, that either defy official censorship or cannot be surveilled without imposing an unaffordable burden on the public purse" (p.75). Alternatively, the Moroccan government has resorted recently to prosecuting bloggers and social media users deemed to have transgressed the "red lines" mentioned earlier in this study. It is no wonder that the strategy adopted by the state in this respect seems to be a bid not to silence all criticism online, but to increase self-censorship. In September 2008, Moroccan blogger and journalist Mohamed Erraji was convicted of "disrespect for the king" in one of his articles for the Moroccan news website Hespress.com and was sentenced to serve two years in prison (Reporters Without Borders, 2008) In a similar vein, another blogger, Elbachir Hazzam, was sentenced to a four-month in prison for posting "false" information online about human rights abuse in Morocco (Committee to Protect Bloggers, 2010). Equally important, the arrest of Ali Anouzla and the blocking of his site triggered an atmosphere of fear and self-censorship among online journalists and activists. He was charged with 'advocacy of acts of terrorism offenses' and 'providing assistance to perpetrators or accomplices of acts of terrorism' although his positions vis-à-vis terrorism were known to the public. This shows the extent to which the state can go to silence dissenting voices.

6.0 Research methodology
In this study, we aim at exploring the role of social media in shifting the balance of a digital conflict if in favour of dependent or independent NGOs. The reason for choosing social media, namely Facebook, as the basis of this study lies in its ability to reach large numbers of digitally literate audiences. In addition to that, the role of Facebook has become very significant in altering the balances of power to one side or another. A swift visit to some human rights NGOs websites (both

dependent and independent) would help us in recognizing the huge amount of information disseminated through social networking sites (SNSs) and the fierce virtual war launched for the purpose of mastering the digital conflict either approving or disapproving the use of social media in the promotion and protection of human rights.

The study adopts a qualitative research design to meet the requirements and pre-requisites of the research. The focus group interview is conducted as s qualitative tool to provide a broad, yet in-depth picture of respondents' reported answers. Participants' responses are analyzed to identify common themes or ideas expressed by different individuals. The main objective of this study has been to examine the attitudes of human rights activists towards the use of Facebook for the protection and promotion of human rights in Morocco and the extent to which they (social media) have empowered them (activists) to engage in contentious action against multiple forms of social and political injustice. However, it may seem easy to overstate the impact of social media on the promotion of human rights in a country where a large number of people still do not have access to them. Given the grandiloquent claims made about the galvanizing power of social media as used in Moroccan uprisings, and before them in places such as Tunisia, Egypt and Bahrain, to cite but a few, such analytical caution is appropriate. Similarly, being skeptical about the political influence and transformative potential of social media renders them no more than instrumentalities and thus mere adjuncts to usual politics rather than the carriers of new kind of activism, and facilitators of practical citizenship (Anderson L. , 2011).

Non-profit human rights organizations contribute to a democratic society by allowing those with diverse opinions to assemble and voice these ideas. Social media have provided the public sphere with extensive new networking platforms in which such organizations can give voice to their ideas with respect to human rights promotion and protection. The results of this study indicate that non-profit organizations are using social media to ethically persuade people on the importance of a human rights culture. Moreover, NGOs are using different social media for different purposes, providing their thoughts and soliciting feedback. Although data have been found to be inconsistent and sometimes even contradictory, there is strong evidence that the hypothesis has been refuted since all participants hold a positive attitude towards the use of social media for the promotion and protection of human rights.

The focus group interview is another research tool I intend to adopt to analyze and deeply understand the impact of social media on the promotion and protection of human rights. For this purpose, human rights activists in Morocco who are at the same time speakers of English and Facebook users to meet the requirements and the pre-requisites of the study were another source of information in this study. This research technique will undoubtedly help collect data from a reduced number of participants mainly between six and twelve (Cameron, 2005), or four and eight (Cronin, 2001) monitored by an investigator. Focus group interviews, according to Lunt and Livingstone (1996), are used, "when researchers seek to discover participants' meanings and ways of understanding" (p.3). When using this type of research method, the researcher's main role is to moderate and facilitate the discussion and probe the respondents to express their thoughts freely about a specific topic or topics in a comfortable way. The moderator stimulates discussion with comments or subjects. The fundamental data produced by this technique are the transcripts of the group discussions and the moderator's reflections and annotations. A test to verify the adequacy of focus groups consists of asking how active and easily the participants would discuss the topic of interest in the research (Morgan D. L., 1988).

The focus group interview remains an efficient technique that can guarantee a deep understanding of the respondents' perceptions and views about the role of social media in promoting human rights in Morocco, and will similarly "help gain access to private thoughts and feelings" (Morgan, 1988). In this type of research, respondents are required to, spontaneously, verbalize and report their thoughts about the topic under investigation in a comfortable setting in which they can express themselves freely, laugh, tell a personal story, disagree with others. Importantly, participants in focus group interviews create an atmosphere in which they share their views with others, which helps generate unanticipated ideas during the discussion. Focus group interactions also allow participants to react to and build upon the responses of other group members creating a synergistic effect.

The current study intends to collect information from participants of various demographic characteristics, like gender, age, educational level, and political affiliation. The focus group under investigation is composed of 10 individuals. The purpose of using a focus group interview as a research instrument is to conduct evaluative research to determine human rights activists' attitudes towards the use of social media in the promotion and protection of human rights in Morocco. The following table (Table 1) illustrates the focus group demographic characteristics:

TABLE 1: FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS' DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS.

Participants	Gender	Age	Education	Political Affiliation
S1	M	46	PhD	Moroccan Organization of Human Rights
S2	F	25	B.A	National Union of Students of Morocco
S3	F	26	B.A	National Union of Students of Morocco
S4	F	46	B.A	National Council for Human Rights
S5	F	29	B.A	Moroccan Organization of Human Rights
S6	M	48	PhD	Moroccan Organization of Human Rights
S7	M	53	B.A	Moroccan Association of Human Rights
S8	M	52	M.A	Moroccan Organization of Human Rights
S9	M	46	B.A	Dignity Forum for Human Rights protection
S10	M	55	PhD	National Union of Higher Education

Note. M= male, F= female, S= speaker

Source: Author's fieldwork.

The purpose of using a focus group interview as a research instrument is to conduct evaluative research to determine the impact of social media on human rights promotion and protection

according to human rights activists. The focus group interview includes 7 questions whose objective is to seek relevance to whether social media, mainly Facebook in particular, help in the promotion and protection of human rights in Morocco. Interview questions have been adapted to fit some participants' level of English and meet the research requirements and assumptions. The objective is to make participants feel comfortable and make sure the language is not a barrier to activists' participation in the focus group interview. In this type of research, the main role of the researcher is to moderate and facilitate the discussion and encourage the participants to express their views about a specific issue or issues in a freeway. The following are the questions that were addressed for this purpose:

Q1. What are the pros and cons of social media?
Q2. To what extent can social media help in the promotion and protection of human rights?
Q3. Have you ever used social media to denounce human rights abuse?
Q4. What role or impact do you believe Facebook had during the Arab Spring?
Q5. Do you think Facebook had a significant role in the February 20th movement?
Q6. Do you actually know any instances or examples in which Facebook played a significant role in the promotion and protection of human rights and democracy in Morocco?
Q7. Do you think there is still something we should have discussed, but we did not?

Appropriate qualitative content analysis of human rights activists' answers and reactions to interview questions is used. The main reason for conducting content analysis is to be able to investigate activists' attitudes towards the use of social media in the promotion of human rights in Morocco. For the present research case, the objective is to investigate and establish links between participants' attitudes and use regarding social media, mainly Facebook in the promotion and protection of human rights and democratic principles in Morocco. This will be addressed in the following way:

a. Presentation of raw data
Presentation of raw data includes a listing of participants' answers to interview questions.

b. Data reduction
Data reduction is reconsidering collected data into meaningful units and categories. An optimal analysis and discussion of data requires the generalization of findings to a broader context (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

c. Drawing conclusions
This step involves assessment and making sense of the identified themes and categories, and their relevance and significance related to the objectives and questions of the research study. Inferences should be made and reconstructions of meanings should be presented based on research collected data.

Analyzing the focus group interview is "an - ongoing process ... [that] requires researchers to begin analyzing data as it is being collected, and these initial analyses may provoke changes in the study." (Blee & Taylor, 2002, p. 110). This holds true for this research, as the preliminary interpretation of the interview at the piloting phase helped reconsider and refine the questions and focus more on the issues discussed with volunteer respondents. Interviews were in English to meet the requirements of the research. Afterwards, open coding was used to analyze the data. In open coding, interactions are compared with others for similarities and differences. They are also given conceptual labels.

7.0 Results and discussion

The examination of answers of human rights activists shows that the use of social media and Facebook in particular provide a platform that users widely resort to denounce instances of human rights violations and abuse in the country. However, it should be highlighted that there exists a discrepancy between human rights activists' perception and their involvement in true activism. They all believe in the importance of these tools in the promotion of human rights but only two of our respondents have actually used these tools to denounce human rights violations in the country.

The observed patterns from participants' answers in the interview reveal then that the use of social media and particularly Facebook help in the promotion of human rights but the rate of illiteracy remains a persisting challenge and an endless worry for human rights activists. Respondents agree that Facebook is considered an important tool with a high potential in the protection of human rights but only within a limited public sphere that includes the literate and the politically involved. Both participants' attitudes and use show the great importance played by these new media in the dissemination of information, organization, and street protests. The instances of human rights abuse, according to participants, were clear data that show the success of Facebook despite the high rate of illiteracy in Morocco. This type of media seems for all participants the one that has the most impact on influencing public opinion, as they all believe that they have difficulties with, or simply do not work with official or state-owned media.

All these aspects suggest that a public sphere is important to establish and protect democracy and human rights and to ensure a solid public voice for those who have been voiceless. However, creating a strong public sphere is not the only component in strengthening democracy and human rights culture in Morocco given the rate of literate citizenry. Interestingly, the public sphere is an important part of empowering people to be heard, which maintains the fact that the prospects for a democracy are contingent on the strengthening of a public sphere free from both state and market influences. It is not the time spent in using Facebook, which matters but the specific content that influences citizens' civic and political participation.

Communication with others galvanizes political activity and involvement because citizens acquire information about human rights issues from their face-to-face interaction. Through online discussions, individuals learn about specific opportunities and ways to participate. This does not hold true for the Moroccan context in which a large number of people are still struggling against illiteracy. Although social media and Facebook in particular sometimes serve as a catalyst for building civic communities and as a networking tool to denounce human rights abuse, in essence, their effect on civic participation is contingent upon how individuals use them.

Compared to other media, access to, and use of social media in Morocco, has benefitted from a considerable margin of freedom despite the state's attempt to control access to the Internet. All respondents agree that social media enjoy a level of freedom that is relatively unmatched among users. Although Moroccan officials have tried repeatedly to control expression and information on the Internet, they have failed since users can usually access the same account on other websites. Most often, self-censorship remains widespread among human rights activists, which corroborates with the assumptions reached in part one. This section confirms many of the findings of the review of literature and provides deeper insights into the articulations between participants' attitudes towards social media and Facebook and their uses of these tools for the promotion and protection of human rights in Morocco. In spite of sharing a similar positive attitude towards the use of social media in the promotion of human rights, many activists still believe that human rights activism is best-exercised offline as only a very small number of them confirm using social media and

Facebook for this purpose. Social media, according to respondents and regardless of their political affiliation, have undoubtedly contributed to the enhancement and promotion of human rights at various levels.

The main objective of this study has been to examine the attitudes of human rights activists towards the use of Facebook for the protection and promotion of human rights in Morocco and the extent to which they (social media) have empowered them (activists) to engage in contentious action against multiple forms of social and political injustice. However, it may seem easy to overstate the impact of social media on the promotion of human rights in a country where a large number of people still do not have access to them. Given the grandiloquent claims made about the galvanizing power of social media as used in Moroccan uprisings, and before them in places such as Tunisia, Egypt and Bahrain, to cite but a few, such analytical caution is appropriate. Similarly, being skeptical about the political influence and transformative potential of social media renders them no more than instrumentalities and thus mere adjuncts to usual politics rather than the carriers of new kind of activism, and facilitators of practical citizenship (Anderson L. , 2011).

Non-profit human rights organizations contribute to a democratic society by allowing those with diverse opinions to assemble and voice these ideas. Social media have provided the public sphere with extensive new networking platforms in which such organizations can give voice to their ideas with respect to human rights promotion and protection. The results of this study indicate that non-profit organizations are using social media to ethically persuade people on the importance of a human rights culture. Moreover, NGOs are using different social media for different purposes, providing their thoughts and soliciting feedback. Although data have been found to be inconsistent and sometimes even contradictory, there is strong evidence that the hypothesis has been refuted since all participants hold a positive attitude towards the use of social media for the promotion and protection of human rights.

8.0 Conclusion

The use of social media in the promotion and protection of human rights has recently triggered considerable controversy. Certainly, there is no clear cut research evidence that backs up the benefits of social media in promoting democracy and human rights or warns against its potential pitfalls and limitations. Neither there is a sound theory that relates the potentials of these new media tools to the requirements, objectives and aspirations of human rights activists in Morocco. Simply claiming that the use of social media will bring about positive social and political changes does not really help. However, enthusiastic proponents of the use of social media have continued to inform users in the public sphere about the positive role these media have in seeking political change and fostering democracy.

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