

# Study analyzes Twitter as news source during Arab Spring

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(PhysOrg.com) -- A new University of Illinois at Chicago study explores the uses of Twitter as a news reporting mechanism during last year's Mideast uprisings known as Arab Spring.

During the weeks of protests, Egyptian citizens relied on [Twitter](#) for disseminating [news](#) and information, since the [Egyptian government](#) restricted access to mainstream media and eventually cut Internet access.

"Through Twitter, stories were told about this event that played a part in how [Egyptians](#) viewed themselves and the potential for political change. These stories also played their own part in how publics watching reacted and responded," said lead author Zizi Papacharissi, UIC professor and head of communication. "Once told, the impact of these stories remained and resonated, and turning the Internet on or off did little to curtail the effect."

Papacharissi, a scholar of the social and political consequences of new media technologies, said Twitter use during these events reflected some traditional news values, but also "pushed forward a new form of news."

"It combined news, fact, drama, opinion, and emotion all into one, to the point where distinguishing one from the other was difficult, and doing so missed the point."

Using an online archive service and computerized content analysis, Papacharissi and co-author Maria de Fatima Oliveira of Prime Research

examined 1.5 million [tweets](#) that featured the #Egypt hash tag from Jan. 25 to Feb. 25, 2011.

The study highlights some key features of social media in uprisings:

-Drama of instantaneity: Events being recorded and reported instantly adds to the desire to convey and read the news as it surfaces. "This affords journalists neither the time to process what is happening nor the privilege of being the first to report it," Papacharissi said.

-Crowd-sourcing of elites: Influential tweeters who dominated the Twitter stream included both [mainstream media](#) and independent activists; those driving the movement within Egypt as well as sympathizers from abroad. The latter are "crowdsourced to prominence through practices of retweeting and replying to posts, and present a group of people who are collectively designated as movement leaders online," Papacharissi said.

-Solidarity: Online expressions of encouragement were delivered from people in Egypt and a diaspora of supporters able to connect via Twitter.

-Never-ending news: The Twitter stream, Papacharissi said, functioned as "an ambient, always-on news environment with a pulse of its own that was organic and collective."

**More information:** The study, "Affective News and Networked Publics: The Rhythms of News Storytelling on #Egypt, " appears in the April issue of the *Journal of Communication*. The full study is available online at: [onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10 ... 012.01630.x/abstract](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1468-5957.2012.01630.x/abstract)

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