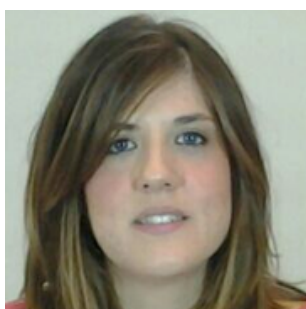


Social movements and network analysis in Tunisia before the Arab Spring

Movimientos sociales y análisis de redes en Túnez antes de la Primavera Árabe

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Abstract: In recent years, there has been a great deal of interest on the role of social media in the so-called Arab Spring revolt, but the uprising was not the result of a sudden event. Before it began in late 2010, protests have been staged in some Arab countries that paved the way to this major event (Al-Rawi, 2014, p. 916; Cassara, 2013, p.191). As Gilad Lotan et al. noted (2011, p. 1376) each country has its own context; hence this article focusses on Tunisia. Tunisia was the first Arab country where the Arab Spring began, on December 17, 2010, when Mohammed Bouazizi, a fruit vendor from Sidi Bouzid, set himself on fire in front of a public building. As it is necessary to understand what led to the growing interest on the role of social media, this article examines the digital activism, specifically on Twitter, which took place during the months that preceded the uprising in Tunisia. Thus, this article focusses on the latency phase of the Arab Spring in Tunisia, following the framework proposed by Alberto Melucci in his seminal work *Nomads of the present* (1989).

As Alberto Melucci (1989) explained, in complex societies, social movements develop only in limited areas and for limited period of times. Therefore, the hidden network become visible whenever collective actors confront or come into conflict with a public

policy, and this feature of social movements Melucci calls the hidden efficacy of social movements (1989, p. 70-73). The identification of this type of action requires an analysis that recognizes the multiple factors (opportunities, limits, response) and does not simply assume that the movement is a given identity.

Thus, the latency and the visible phases of a collective action are the two interrelated poles. In that sense, latency does not mean inactivity; rather, the potential for resistance or opposition is sewn into the everyday life (Melucci, 1989, p. 71).

Following to this idea, the analysis has been carried out in two stages. In Stage 1 we mapped the network of the digital activism in pre-revolutionary Tunisia. Activism in Tunisia has been at work for many years, first offline and then online. Because our study focuses on the Arab Spring in Tunisia, however, this study analyses the digital activism in Tunisia during the year 2010. As we have noted already, we have identified it, according to Melucci's proposal, as the latency phase of the movement. The second stage focuses on the qualitative content of the content analysis and semi-structured interviews.

Palabras clave: movimientos sociales, análisis de redes sociales, Primavera Árabe, activismo.

Resumen: En los últimos años ha aumentado el interés por el papel de las redes sociales en la denominada revuelta de la Primavera Árabe. Este movimiento de gran importancia se inició a finales de 2010, pero las protestas organizadas en algunos países árabes allanaron el terreno para su formación (Al-Rawi, 2014, p. 916; Cassara, 2013, p.191). Como señalaron Gilad Lotan et al. (2011, p. 1376), cada país parte de su propio contexto. Así, este artículo se centra en Túnez, el primer país árabe donde surgió el movimiento el 17 de diciembre de 2010, cuando Mohammed Bouazizi, un frutero de Sidi Bouzid, se prendió fuego ante un edificio público. Como es necesario entender qué motivó el interés creciente por el papel de las redes sociales, este artículo examina el activismo digital que tuvo lugar, particularmente en Twitter, durante los meses anteriores al alzamiento tunecino.

Así, este artículo se centra en el periodo de latencia de la Primavera Árabe en Túnez, según el marco propuesto por Alberto Melucci en su obra seminal *Nomads of the present* (1989).

Como explicó este autor, en las sociedades complejas estos movimientos solo se desarrollan en zonas limitadas y durante periodos temporales limitados. Por lo tanto, la red oculta se hace visible cuando los actores colectivos se enfrentan a o entran en conflicto con una política pública; este rasgo de los movimientos recibe el nombre de eficacia oculta, según Melucci (1989, p. 70-73). La identificación de esta clase de acción requiere un análisis que reconozca múltiples factores (oportunidades, límites, respuesta) y no se limite a asumir que el movimiento posee una actividad dada.

Así, la latencia y las fases visibles de una acción colectiva constituyen dos polos interrelacionados. En este sentido, latencia no implica inactividad, sino más bien potencial de resistencia u oposición inscrito en la vida cotidiana (Melucci, 1989, p. 71). Siguiendo esta idea, el análisis ha constado de dos fases. En la primera, trazamos el mapa de la red del activismo digital en la Túnez pre-revolucionaria. Este país posee un largo recorrido activista, primero fuera de línea y luego en línea. Pero como nuestro

estudio se centra en la Primavera Árabe de Túnez, se analiza el activismo digital del país durante el año 2010. Como ya hemos señalado, según la propuesta de Melucci se trata de la fase de latencia del movimiento. La segunda fase se centra en el enfoque cualitativo basado en análisis de contenido y en entrevistas semiestructuradas.

1. Social movements and network analysis

As John Krinsky and Nick Crossley have pointed out (2014, p. 3), the study of social movements and that of social networks have a long relationship in sociology. According to McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, actors have generally established previous relations, contentious or not, to other collective actors; those relations have shaped internal structures of the actors and helped to generate their stories (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 2004, p.132). Thus, actors consist of networks deploying partially shared histories, cultures and collective connections with other actors.

Social network analysis (SNA) enables us to conduct systematic investigations of network processes within social movement from two main perspectives (Diani, 2002, p.174). First, it helps us to analyse how collective action is affected by the actors' embeddedness in pre-existing networks and, second, network analysis can be used to illustrate how social movement actors create new linkages that, in turn, constrain the subsequent development of protests (ibidem, p.175). As Passy (2003, p.41) notes, social networks perform various functions in the process of individual participation; specifically they intervene in at least three different ways. First, they intervene in the socialisation and construction of identities. In this function, networks generate structures of meaning that enable individuals to create identities with specific political contentions. Second, networks connect potentially participants to a social movement organisation. For this function, in particular, the structure of meanings arising from the relations between recruiters and recruits effects the intensity of participation. In this respect, close friends and participants who are already involved in a movement at the highest level of participation are better able to provide prospective members with trust than other types of ties. Finally, networks intervene when people decide to join a movement. In sum up, networks are important not only because they provide individuals with an environment that facilitates recruitment to social movements but also because they are able to create a structure of meanings (Passy, 2003, p.43).

These issues include questions about the diffusion of social movement performances or action, about the frames used by the movement and about the collective identities shared for the movement's members. The concept of diffusion refers to the spread of some innovation through direct or indirect channels across members of a social system (Rogers, 1995). One cannot understand social movements without understanding the dynamics of diffusion (Kolins, Roberts and Soule, 2010, p.1). In classic diffusion models, there is a transmission of some innovation between people, and it is impossible to have any diffusion without some kind of contact or network tie between individuals (Oliver and Myers, 2003, p.175). In this respect, networks 'provide the channels whereby movement frames, repertoires, and sometimes even triggers are diffused

beyond instigators to a wider population of potential participants' (Krinsky and Crossley, 2014, p.4).

The concept of diffusion refers to the spread of some innovation through direct or indirect channels across members of a social system (Rogers, 1995). One cannot understand social movements without understanding the dynamics of diffusion (Kolins, Roberts and Soule, 2010, p.1). As Kolins, Roberts and Soule (2010, p.4) have suggested the content of diffusion, that is, the innovation that is diffused, can occur across two primary dimensions of social movements: behavioural and ideational. The behavioural dimension involves the diffusion of movement tactics or collective action repertoires. The different forms of contentious actions (such as strikes, riots, and so on) may occur in waves, spreading from their original site of contention to others.

Ideational diffusion occurs through the spread of collective action frames that define issues, goals, and targets (Kolins, Roberts and Soule, 2010, p.4). As some scholars (Benford and Snow, 1992, pp.135-136; McAdam, 1982; McCarthy and Zald, 1977) have noted, social movements do not arise naturally from shared interests or grievances. To mobilise participation, social movements engage in a process of 'production of ideas and meaning' (Snow and Benford, 1992, p.136).

One question that has been raised involves the dynamics of diffusion online. Earlier studies focus on the diffusion of information through the channels of interpersonal acquaintance networks (Krinsky and Crossley, 2014, p.5), which usually involves physical spaces. ICT's, like Facebook as well as Twitter, combine aspects of interpersonal networks and mass-communication broadcast (Marlow, 2005, p.37) and can quickly join users from around the world, disseminating information through multiple channels quickly and across space and time. Paul Virilio (1977/2006) suggests that 'space is no longer in geography- it is electronics'. As Anne Kaun (2015, p.90) argues, in that context, politics become less about physical space, but about the time regimes of technology, producing a shift from geo- to chrono- politics.

2. Research questions, objectivities and methodologies.

The aim of this section is to illustrate the objectives of this study and explain the methods adopted in this research. The research questions are initially explained. Secondly, we define the research's general approach and, finally, the mixed approach, which combines quantitative and qualitative methods.

The research questions are closely linked with the objectives of this study and have guided all the investigation process. The following research questions guided the inquiry:

RQ1: How the information was diffused in Twitter before the Arab Spring in Tunisia?

RQ2: How was the activist network built on Twitter before the Arab Spring in Tunisia?

RQ3: How were the frames and ideas presented in Twitter before the Arab Spring in Tunisia?

Related to these research questions, the main objective of this study is to explore the use of digital networks, specifically Twitter, after and during the 2010-2011 uprising in Tunisia. To be specific, this study focusses on the following sub-objectives:

1. giving an account of the diffusion process on Twitter before the 2010-11 uprising in Tunisia,
2. identifying the information flow and the central nodes that controlled the information in Twitter,
3. discerning the moments, leading figures and ideas presented, and
4. understanding who was using which symbols and frames of interpretation recurrently.

The methodology of this research is based on a case study and a triangulation of both quantitative and qualitative methods, namely social network analysis (RQ1 and RQ2), content analysis (RQ3) and in-depth semi-structured interviews (RQ1, RQ2 and RQ3). According to John W. Creswell (2009, p. 13) 'case studies are a strategy of inquiry in which the research explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or more individuals [...] researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time'. The case study in this research, the digital activism in Tunisia before the 2010-2011 uprising, aims to provide empirical evidence concerning the use of digital networks by protesters and to contribute to help bridge social movement studies and media and communication studies (Cammaerts, 2012, p. 117). Following to David A. Snow and Danny Tom (2002, p. 161) this research presents a single case that are not based on studies of one or more subcases. The case is the movement as a whole, and the objective is to situate it in time and place, in history that is, and to say something about its beliefs, its appeal and diffusion, and its operations.

Related to movement networks, according to Ann Mische (2003, p. 258), 'it is not just networks or membership that matter, but also how these relationships are represented, activated or suppressed in social settings'. The obvious implication, given that the 'doing' and 'representing' of networks is not captured in sociometric graphs and matrices, is that network must supplement its procedures for mapping and measuring networks with more qualitative sensitive forms of analysis (Edwards & Crossley, 2009, p. 40). In addition, as Nick Crossley has pointed out 'network structure is not the whole story, even for "network effects" and mechanisms, and for that reason we need to supplement methods of formal network analysis with qualitative observations about what is "going on" within a network' (Crossley, 2010, p. 18). Quantitative tools are important, firstly, because relational data are difficult to store, retrieve and analyse by conventional qualitative means. Graphs and adjacency matrices provided relatively simple means of recording, storing and analysing relational data (Crossley, 2010, p. 4). Secondly, matrix and graphs are tools which take abstract form, and thereby they simplify the hurly burly of everyday interactions and relations.

However, the limitations of quantitative methods can be summarised in two points. The abstraction and simplification involved in an adjacency matrix, invaluable though it is, can for certain important purposes amount to over-abstraction and oversimplification (ibidem, p.6).

4. Data collected and analysis

According to John W. Creswell, in mixed methods 'the qualitative and quantitative data are actually merged on one end of the continuum, kept separate on the other end of the continuum, or combined in some way between these two extremes' (2009, p. 208). In this study, the mix consists of integrating the two databases (quantitative and qualitative) by actually merging the quantitative data with the qualitative data (ibidem). In a first phase of the research, we analyse the quantitative data (through SNA), and, in the second phase, we will apply qualitative content analysis. The unit of analysis of each phase comes from the same database: the tweets collected before the 2010-11 uprising in Tunisia. The main source of data about Twitter came from two sources: *Topsy Pro* and *Twitter Advanced Search*. Data were retrieved in two stages. First, data were gathered in the period from December, 2009- December 2010 from three hashtags: *#ammar404*, *#manif22mai* and *#Tunileaks*. As Anne Kaun has pointed out (2016, p. 52), the use of hashtag for mobilization 'is a powerful illustration of how the movement has been described and how it describe itself'. We decided inductively to collect the data from these hashtags after a previous exploratory period.

Online censorship in Tunisia was known as Ammar 404 referring to the '404 not found error' that appeared when a website was censored. Initially Ammar404 was formed by a small group of bloggers who broke with the tradition of anonymity by posting their pictures on social media, like Facebook or Twitter. The goal of the hashtag was provide to the users the opportunity to denounce the websites that were blocked and censored. Thanks to it, the activist developed a list of censored blogs, and, in this way, they had the control of the blogs that were censored (Pérez-Altable, 2015, p. 25). The aim of the *#manif22mai* hashtag was to organize a great demonstration in different places, like Tunis, Paris or Montréal on May 22nd for the defence of freedom of expression in Tunisia. In this case the role of Twitter was to disseminate all the information about the demonstration. This was the first attempt to establish the online-offline linkage. Until that moment, as the digital activist Ben Gharbia (2010) says "it was mainly limited to a hard core of digital activists and bloggers who are pushing for a political and social change". As Lim (2013, p.4) noted, Tunisian digital activist are predominantly affluent, highly educated urbanities and they are more closely connected to global activism than to local struggles. Actually on the May 22th protest, hundreds participated in the rallies held in front of Tunisian embassies in Paris, Bonn and New York, but in Tunis only a few dozen showed up to protest (Ben Gharbia, 2010). The last hashtag of this analysed is *#Tunileaks*, whichn refers to the Wikileaks cables regarding to Tunisia. The *#Tunileaks* was launched by Nawaat, a Tunisian collective blog which was censored in Tunisia until 14 January 2011 (Pérez-Altable, 2015, p. 26).

The sample comprises 4,624 tweets, and the aim is to establish the network of digital activism in Tunisia during the time that preceded the uprising. This first stage corresponds with what Alberto Melucci called latency phase. The latency phase of a

social movement refers to the day to day movement activities, such as preparing protest, fundraising or decision-making processes and develops new cultural codes, reciprocal identification, solidarity ties and emotional investments (Flesher Fominaya, 2010a, p. 384; 2010b, p.298). These actions can serve as catalyst for latent demands (Melucci, 1996, p.296).

Data analysis involved formal network measures, descriptive statistics and qualitative accounts and was conducted in two steps. The first step of the analysis focusses on the features of dyadic exchanges by looking at the information flow and how the information was disseminated on Twitter, the focus on the centrality of the net, in order to establish who the nodes were which controlled the information flow and how the information was spread. The second step involved qualitative analysis of the data, that is, a qualitative content analysis. This stage focus not on the way the messages were disseminated but in what said these messages and what frames were used. The qualitative analysis also involves the analysis of the interviews carried out with Tunisian activists.

After the data collection, we divided our analysis into three related stages. In the first stage, we applied social network analysis. Data processing was done by a semi-automatic process. After collecting the data, we generated a .txt document, where each line contained the user, the real name of the user, the data, and the content of the tweet. Due to the high amount of data of our collection, we processed this file in an automatic way and, thus, we obtain a CSV file with six columns: column A provides the user, column B, the hahstags present in the tweet, column C the user retweeted or mentioned, column D the links present in the tweet and, finally, column E the type of tweet (RT: retweet, TW: original tweet). Figures 1 and 2 show an example of our data collection before and after of processing.

```

Haythem El Mekki @ByLasKo 30 Apr 2010 Complet RT @Selim_: #Tunisie : massacre sur
la toile http://bit.ly/bWCRn3 #censure #free404 0 s 0
Jouxstone @letweetiphone 30 Apr 2010 #Tunisie : massacre sur la toile
http://bit.ly/bWCRn3 #censure #free404 0 s 0
Farah @Farahmi 30 Apr 2010 RT @Selim_: #Tunisie : massacre sur la toile
http://bit.ly/bWCRn3 #censure #free404 0 s 0
Selim @Selim_ 30 Apr 2010 #Tunisie : massacre sur la toile http://bit.ly/bWCRn3
#censure #free404 0 s 0
Haythem El Mekki @ByLasKo 30 Apr 2010 That Yes we can shit will get us all killed
RT @escalier7: @ByLasKo vas y fais nous un #free404 en live de MFM :) 0 s 0
Riadh @riadheh 30 Apr 2010 106 photos and counting en 2 jours sur ammar404, + d'l
cinquantaine ont été refusées, c pas mal non on continue ou on abandonne #free404
0 s 0
Tarek Kahlaoui @t_kahlaoui 30 Apr 2010 Sur Tunishebdo : ce contrôle ne résistera
pas longtemps http://bit.ly/bsbc3q #Free404 1 0
Souihli™ @Souihli 30 Apr 2010 Tame3 fel 3sal min 3and il ferzazou :)RT:@hama90 if
the strike is over, are they gonna all the sites #free404 #censure #sayebsala7 0 s
0
Inés @MessyMisss 30 Apr 2010 #free404 RT:@agharass L'envie ronge les envieux comme
la rouille ronge le fer. [Antisthène] http://bit.ly/crNOz3 0 s 0
Hama Charieg @hama90 30 Apr 2010 if the strike is over, are they gonna all the
sites #free404 #censure #sayebsala7 0 s 0

```

Figure 1. Data before processing

	A	B	C	D	E	F
84	@Selim_	#free404	@Souihli:@barbach	http://bit.ly/9YcwNn		RT
85	@hamdanih	#censure:#sayebsala7:#free404		http://ow.ly/1ju9		TW
86	@manixs	#sayebsala7:#censure:#tunisie:#free404		http://bit.ly/d0pV2v		TW
87	@Souihli	#free404	@_z_			RT
88	@Aymekki	#sayebsala7.#ATl:#c	@Souihli			RT
89	@RadMejri	#sayebsala7.#ATl:#c	@Souihli			RT
90	@Souihli	#France:#free404	@Tunivisions:@hama90			RT
91	@hama90	#free404	@Souihli			TW
92	@hamdanih	#sayebsala7.#ATl:#c	@Souihli			RT
93	@Souihli	#sayebsala7.#ATl:#censure:#tunisie:#free404				TW
94	@hama90	#sayebsala7.#censur	@Souihli:@Tunivisi	http://bit.ly/d0pV2v		RT
95	@Souihli	#sayebsala7.#censur	@Tunivisions	http://bit.ly/d0pV2v		TW
96	@SAFOne	#SayebSala7.#cens	@tuniscopie_@Teki	http://bit.ly/9FFlBb		TW
97	@Souihli	#free404	@barbach	http://bit.ly/9YcwNn		RT

Figure 2. Data before processing

With this file we generated a node list. In a nodelist, the first name in each row gives the node that is 'sending' a tie – the ego. The names that follow in the same row are the nodes receiving a tie – the alters (Borgatti et al., 2013, p. 66). The software used to process the generated the node list was UCINET. Figure 3 shows a screenshot of the UCINET DL Editor spreadsheet with an example of node list of our data collection. When we our edgelist, we analysed the data using UCINET. the program allows us to measure the properties of the network on the whole and on the element level.

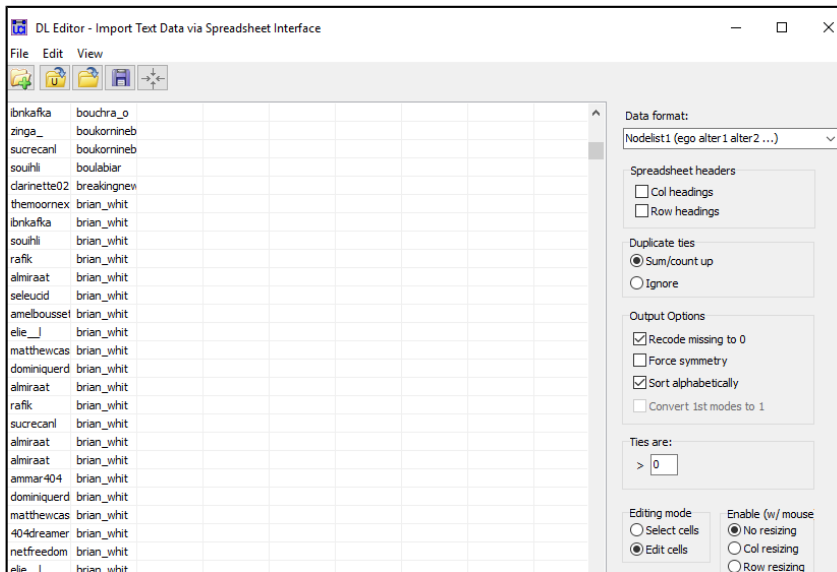


Figure 3. Example of node list

For the visualization of the network we used NetDraw, a free software developed by Steve Borgatti. Analysing our data with UCINET, we obtained the centrality measures. Thus, we can identify who the most central nodes were in the networks.

The second stage consisted in the qualitative content analysis. We carried out the analysis manually. First, we read the sample and then, with the help of the previous literature (Lotan et al., 2011, Poell, 2014), we establish some codes. We compared our data with the codes that we had and, in a second lecture of our sample, we reduce the number of codes in order to be the most accurate possible with our research questions and our objectives. The qualitative content analysis allows us to detect topics and themes present on the network.

Finally, in the next stage we carried out the interviews with activists. Because we had already identified the most prominent nodes, we knew who the Tunisian activists were who appeared in the networks. Moreover, with the results of the content analysis, we could formulate questions related to the themes present on the network. We travelled to Tunisia for the fieldwork in June 2015, and we conducted face-to-face two interviews. We had planned another interview in Tunisia but unfortunately we could not meet with the interviewee face-to-face and we conducted the interview by Internet (voice call services). Interviewee number 2 was based in the United States; so we carried out the interview by Internet, with a voice call services.

5. Digital activism in Tunisia before the Arab Spring

The structure of digital network in Tunisia before the Arab Spring provides some clues as to the way that digital activist organised themselves on Twitter. One way of conceptualising networks mathematically is as graph (Borgatti et al., 2013, p. 11). In addition, graph theory gives us a representation of a social network as a model; is an elemental way to represent actors and relations. In a graph, nodes are represented as points in a two-dimensional space and arcs are represented by directed arrows between these points (Wasserman and Faust, 1994, p. 73).

The data collection contains much data. In order to gain a clearer picture of the activist network of digital activism in Tunisia before the Arab Spring, we thus mapped the network in two stages (Edwards & Crossley, 2009, p. 44). In a first stage (see Figure 4), we mapped the whole network, and, in a second stage (see Figure 5), we focussed on the core of the network, according to the in-degree centrality measure. The sizes of the nodes depend on their in-degree value.

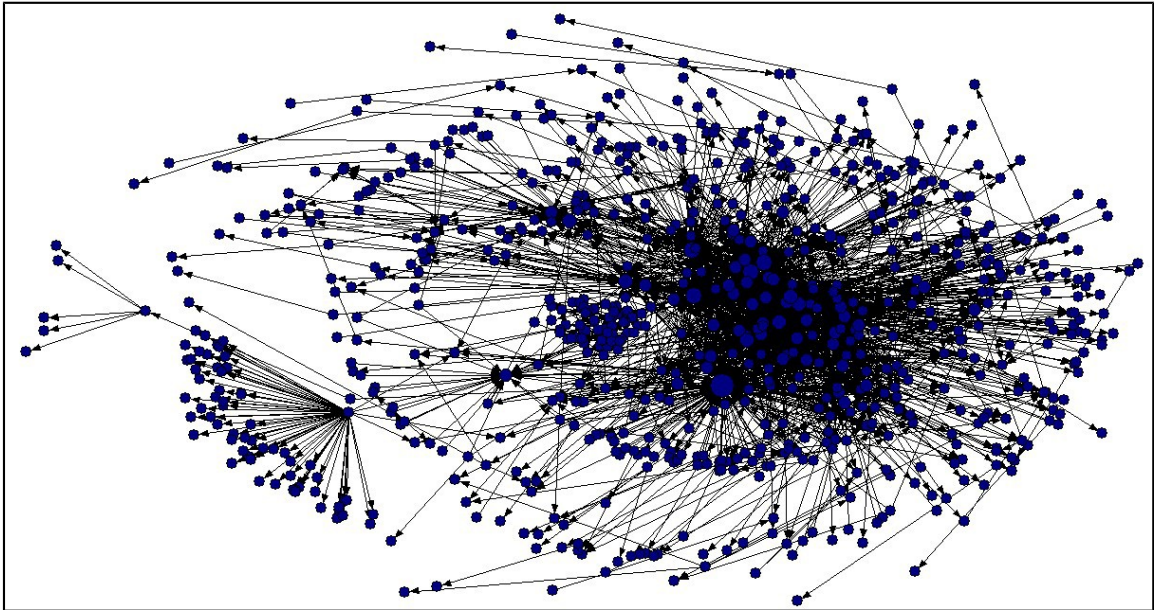


Figure 4. The tunisian digital activism network before the Arab Spring

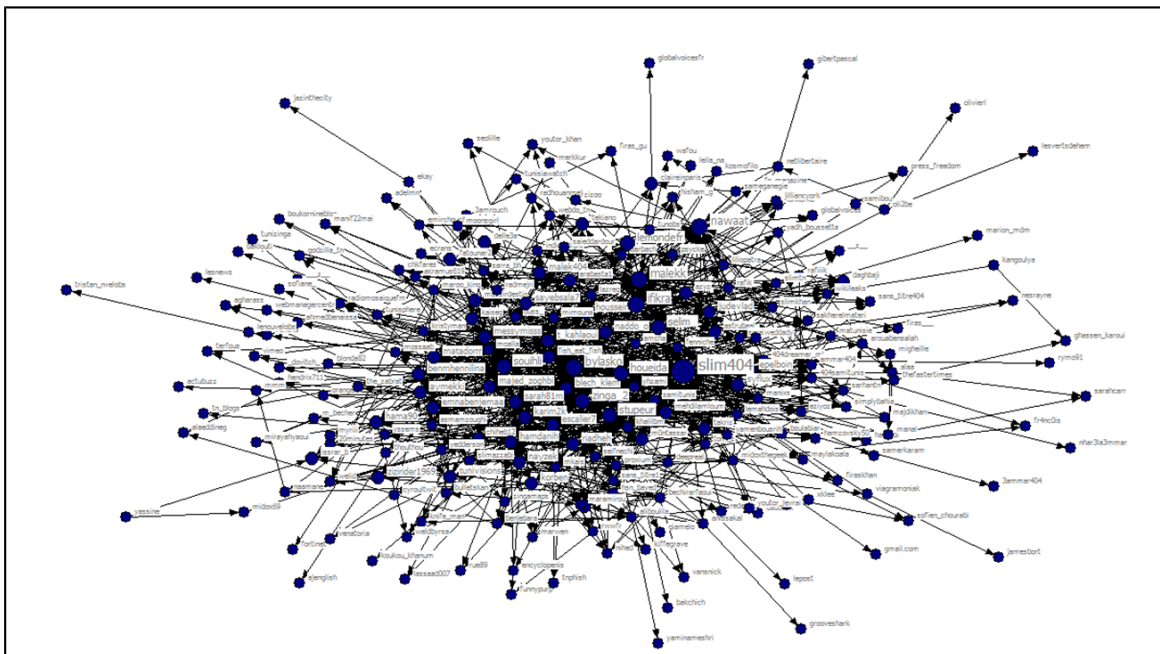


Figure 5. The core of the Tunisian digital activism before the Arab Spring

5.1 The anticensorship movement in Tunisia before the Arab Spring

In April 2010, following a massive wave of online censorship, the anti-censorship movement began a virtual protest, especially on social media sites like Twitter,

Facebook, blogs, and even popular multimedia-sharing websites, as YouTube or Flickr (Ferjani, 2011, p.18).

As interviewee 2 notes:

One of the major tasks that became more and more difficult Tunisian government was to manage the new sites of social interactions in social media sites like Facebook, blogging communities, especially. When some civil voices became too loud they would be noticed by federal censorship and monitoring agencies. Then these individual bloggers and online voices would be censored by offline pressure through arrests and intimidation or through online measures by turning off their websites, censoring their activities through algorithmic measures, or blocking of IP addresses. It was really 2010 and onwards that we see a very explicit coordination of discussing the political utility and the risks of web-based strategies and tools (Interviewee 2).

Online censorship was personified in an imaginary person, known as *Ammar404*, referring to the 404 not found error that appeared when a website was censored. Initially, Ammar404 was formed by a small group of bloggers who broke with the tradition of anonymity by posting their pictures on social media, like Facebook or Twitter. The goal of the hashtag *#free404* was provide to the users the opportunity to denounce blocking and censoring of websites, as we can see in the follow tweets:

[@escalier7 20 Apr 2010] <http://ammar404.tumblr.com/> est censuré #free404 #ammar404 #censure

[RadMejri 30 Apr 2010] censure du blog Kissa OnLine <http://kissa-online.blogspot.com/> #free404

[@Souihli 30 Apr 2010] RT:@Selim_ RT:@barbach censure du blog Pour Gafsa (6eme edition) <http://pourgafsa5.blogspot.com/> #free404

[@kristyman 30 Apr 2010] meme la pgae qui parle de censure en #Tunisie sur #wikipedia a ete censure: <http://bit.ly/dspVaA> #free404

[@Selim_ 30 Apr 2010] RT:@barbach mon blog tkharbich <http://bit.ly/9YcwNn> est censuré aujourd'hui #free404

[@RamyRaouf 20 May 2010] Why #skype is not working properly in #Tunisia, since may 3rd, 2010 is skype the next target of TN censorship machine #free404 #manif22mai

[@ByLasKo 11 May 2010] <http://twitter.com/samiTunis> est censuré en Tunisie, j'attends mon tour via @Souihli #Free404 #sayebsala7

These anti-censorship efforts were involved in a wide range of initiatives. For example, activists developed a list of censored blogs, and, in this way, they had the control of the websites that were censored. Figure 6 shows a document where the activist reported the censored websites.

Time stamp	https://3eyshemaharsa.blogspot.com/	Author and theme	Date	Le blog a été censuré 5 fois en l'espace d'un mois
2	best007.blogspot.com			
3	http://ahfahartirja.blogspot.com/	Les Amis d'Atbarq	le 23 avril 2010	
4	http://tamraenlucia.blogspot.com/	arabica	avril 2010	
5	http://l'agencearabebloggersdu7ezember.blogspot.com			
6	http://agenceca.blogspot.com	Le poite de l'enfer	9 mai 2010	
7	http://ararchie-hamezsky.blogspot.com/		8 mai 2010	
8	http://arffile-besshou.blogspot.com/	Massei	8 mai 2010	
9	http://arrested-blog-arab.blogspot.com/	Sofene CHOURABI	8 mai 2010	
10	http://arrestedoutlet.blogspot.com/		8 mai 2010	
11	http://arrestedoutlet.blogspot.com/		8 mai 2010	
12	http://arrested-outlet.blogspot.com/		8 mai 2010	18h00 après sa création
13	http://arrestedoutlet.blogspot.com/		8 mai 2010	
14	http://arrestedoutlet.blogspot.com/	Un Dèl sur la Planète	8 mai 2010	
15	http://arrestedoutlet-over.blogspot.com/		8 mai 2010	
16	http://arrestedoutlet.blogspot.com/	Nocturnal Thoughts / أفكار ليلا	15 Janvier 2010	
17	http://arrestedoutlet.blogspot.com/		8 mai 2010	
18	http://theMemorySpace.wordpress.com	Sim Amamou blog	30 mai 2010	
19	http://ammar404.tumblr.com/	404 NOT FOUND!	30 avril 2010	
20	http://ammar404.blogspot.com	Un homme dans la foule	30 avril 2010	
21	http://arrestedoutlet.blogspot.com	Tunisian Observer	30 avril 2010	
22	8/00/2010 1:20:49	ARTSoular	29/08/2010	
23	http://arrestedoutlet.blogspot.com/	Les Amis d'Atbarq	29 mai 2010	Same adresse censuree du blog des Amis d'Atbarq
24	http://arrestedoutlet.blogspot.com/	أخبار تونس	29 avril 2010	
25	http://arrestedoutlet.blogspot.com/	Bilal Tunisiana	29 avril 2010	
26	http://arrestedoutlet.blogspot.com	Carpe Diem	29 avril 2010	
27	http://arrestedoutlet.blogspot.com/	Nadia from Tunis	29 avril 2010	

Figure 6. Document with censored blogs in Tunisia before the Arab Spring

As we have noted, social media as Twitter, provides an infrastructure which determines the patterns of communication, and understanding these patterns is basic for understanding the logic of connective action in the new wave of protests and social movements. In these platforms, collective identity is constructed. To build this collective identity is necessary, at least, to identify of *the other* and the construction of *the we*. In the case of pre-revolutionary Tunisia, the construction of *the other* is personalised in the figure of Ammar404, opposite to *the we*, the activists who fight against the censorship in Tunisia. Moreover, as the use of Twitter and social media platforms shows, persistent ways of coordination between activists are necessary for achieving their goals.

Due to the wave of censorship that took place in Tunisia in early 2010, activists decided to organise a demonstration against that censorship and for the defense of freedom of expression in Tunisia. Interviewee 1 explains that

We decided to organise this demonstration in April 2010 and we chose the date May 22. Well, we decided we are going to organise the demonstration simultaneously in Tunis, the capital of Tunisia, and then in Canada, Montreal, Paris, and New York [...] We were because all the time censorship started to target even blogs of photography and other as Daily Motion. People couldn't see, for example, football matches anymore on Youtube or music or whatever. We tried to attract people to support us. (Interviewee 1)

As interviewee 3 explains, the initiative for the demonstration came from Amira Yahyaoui. Amira is a Tunisian human rights activist who was exiled in France, but she kept in touch with activists in Tunisia. Her father, Mukhtar Yahyaoui, was a judge. In 2001, when Mukhtar was the President of the First Instance Court in Tunisia, he sent a letter to Ben Ali denouncing for first time the Tunisian judiciary's lack of independence. He was dismissed and forced to exile to France. Moreover, Zouhair Yahyaoui, the Amira's cousin, founded the satirical website *TUNeZINE* and was the first cyber-dissident to be pursued and condemned in Tunisia. He was arrested for first time in 2002 and he was being tortured in prison. After leaving prison, he died at 37 of a heart attack on 13 March 2005. According to interviewee 3:

[the demonstration] started with Amira Yayahoui. Amira Yayahoui is a human rights activist and she was in France. She couldn't come to Tunisia. [...] She decided to do a demonstration in France against censorship. I contacted her, I was in Tunisia told her that it's not that to do it in France, we should do it in Tunisia [...] I asked how to do demonstration in Tunisia because no one know how to do a demonstration. [She] told me you have to go to the law of January 69 and you find all the rules how to do demonstration. To do a demonstration you need 2 people, 2 or more until 40 people to sign [the declaration]. I wrote the main things to write in this declaration and I put on my Facebook, "Who want to sign the declaration for demonstration?" One guy, Yassine Ayari, he's an activist, global activist contacted me and he said, "If you do it I'll do it." He didn't know me. He just see that I'm activist, I'm on the internet, on Facebook mainly [...] I put him in contact with Amira Yayahoui. (Interviewee 3)

However, following with the interviewee 3, during the organisation of the demonstration there was a problem concerning to the declaration. The aim of the demonstration was against the censorship and for the freedom of speech, so if the signers belonged a political party, it could be a problem:

She said I will sign it and see the few and to her too. I spoke with Amira I said, "No, we don't need political people. We want people like apolitical, people like to say it's peaceful thing, not think about politics. We just want freedom of expression and that's it." After this we contacted [...], he's one of the main and the best blogger and activist that you can think like he's very brave guy. He was in a party. He said, "Yes. I want to sign it, to sign the declaration." Amira said, "No, you are in party." [...] Finally Yassine Ayari, the guy who contacted me and Slim Amamou another guy, they signed the declaration and continued working. That's it (Interviewee 3).

Yassine Ayari is a Tunisian computer engineer and activist, and Slim Amamou is a blogger and anti-censorship activist. Slim played an important role before the revolution, organising protests and initiatives against the censorship in Tunisia. After the revolution, he took part in the Transitional Government and he became Secretary of State for Sport and Youth. He resigned from the role on May 25, 2011 in protest of the censorship of several websites carried out by the Transitional Government. He was arrested on 21 May 2010, and then on Jan. 6, 2011, during the uprising. Figure 7 shows screenshots of a video titled "How to organise a demonstration in Tunisia", released on Vimeo in May 2010. Among four different videos, Slim Amamou and Yassine Yassayari, the two guys who, according to interviewee 3, signed the declaration, explain the process.



Figure 7. Screenshot of 'How to organise a demonstration in Tunisia' video

Slim Amamou and Yassine Ayari were arrested on May 21 2010, the day before to the demonstration, and they were detained for more than 12 hours. Finally, Slim and Yassine were forced to make an announcement in order to call off the rally and urge to protestors to stay at home:

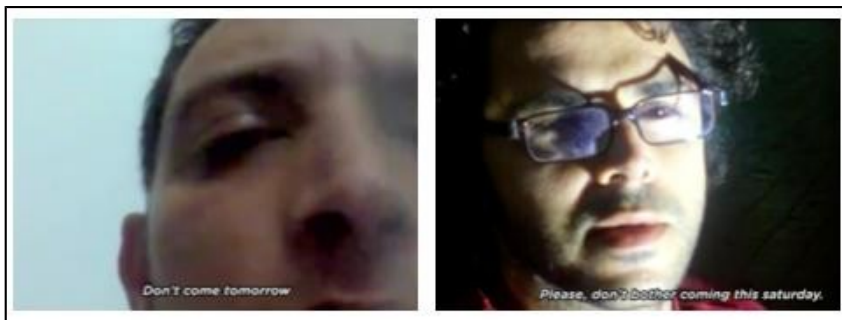


Figure 8. Screenshots of Yassine and Slim announcement video

Although the demonstration was forbidden, activists decided to raise a flashmob in the coffees of Tunisia's main avenue, Habib Bourguiba. The requirement for the participants in the flash-mob was to wear a white t-shirt:

[@malekk 18 May 2010] *Action T-shirt Blanc ! le 22 mai à 15h Nhar 3la 3ammar...*
<http://tinyurl.com/2up5wax> #manif22mai

[@nhar33 19 May 2010] Pour soutenir la #manif22mai tu peux: participer a la manif de Tunis, manifester devant nos consulats, mettre un T-shirt blanc, en parler...

[@SayebSala7 19 May 2010] RT:@ByLasKo Action T-shirt Blanc ! le 22 mai à 15h Nhar 3la 3ammar.. <http://tinyurl.com/2up5wax> #manif22mai via @malekk

[@cdutheil 6 Aug 2010] #Tunisie : Des internautes en T-shirts blancs interdits de flash mob contre la censure #free404 <http://bit.ly/9F5Ixxw> (via @ifikra)

Finally, in spite of the fact that demonstration was forbidden, Tunisian activists took the main street in Tunis, Habib Bourguiba Avenue, and wore their white t-shirts in order to protests against the censorship:



Figure 9. Protests against censorship (Tunisia, 22 May 2010)

Twitter was chosen as one of the most common forms to disseminate information about the demonstration. Social media platforms, such as Twitter, allow for a great deal of participation in protest. Figure 10 shows one example of how activist used social media to mobilise:



Figure 10. Neo's message to Ammar404 video

According to interviewees, the initiative of 22 May 2010 was an important for the cyber-activists because, as interviewee 1 saidt, they for the first time left their screen and started with protests on the ground:

I think that May the 22nd was an important day. Well the day of course May 22nd but the whole campaign that started before May 22nd. It was the first time that bloggers cyberactivist decided to leave their screens and online campaigns and to come on the ground, protest on the ground against censorship and for freedom of speech. (Interviewee 1)

Interviewee 4 agreed that the day marked a change in the way of how Tunisian activist were working against the censorship:

May 2010 was a memorable month of my whole life, I still have archives of the hundreds of exchanged emails in order to set up the strike that day (that never really happened) and of course our Tunisians around the world did stick with us for this new twist. (Interviewee 4)

5.1 #Tunileaks: the Wikileaks cables about Tunisia

The word 'Tunileaks' refers to the Wikileaks cables about Tunisia. It was launched by Nawaat which is an independent collective blog founded in 2004 by Sami Ben Gharbia, Sufian Guerfali and Riyadh Guerfali. Then, in 2006, Malek Khadraoui joined the blog. The main goal of Nawaat's founders was to provide a public platform for Tunisian dissident voices and debates. About one month before the start of the Arab Spring in Tunisia, on Nov. 28, 2010, Nawaat launched 'Tunileaks', only one hour after Wikileaks released the documents. tunileaks.org was a website dedicated to publishing the revelations related to Tunisia. Those revelations (17 in total) focussed mainly on the neglect of human rights in Tunisia, the freedom of expression restrictions and the widespread corruption of the Ben Ali's Government. Access to Tunileaks was rapidly blocked in Tunisia. It is important to reflect that in the West Wikileaks were published in the mainstream media (e.g., The New York Times, The Guardian, El País or Le Monde, among others) whereas in a country without freedom of expression, like Tunisia, a collective blog (i.e., Nawaat) served this purpose.

Nawaat announced the publication of the cables on Twitter and the hashtag #tunileaks was created on Twitter in order to provide a space where people within and outside Tunisia shared information about the revelations:

[@__lmen 28 Nov 2010] les #wikileaks concernant la Tunisie sont là #TuniLeaks
<http://bit.ly/hSvxxb> relayés en exclu par @nawaat

[@Nawaat 28 Nov 2010] Nawaat relayera ce soir, en exclusivité, des documents concernant la #Tunisie révélés par #Wikileaks... Restez connectés sur @nawaat

[@Nawaat 28 Nov 2010] Dans quelques minutes @nawaat diffusera en exclusivité certains des documents concernant la Tunisie révélés par #Wikileaks Restez connectés!

[@Nawaat 28 Nov 2010] les #Tunileaks sont aussi disponibles sur google docs
<http://is.gd/hVGpi> (utiliser seulement le https) #wikileaks #Cablegate

[@ifikra 16 Dec 2010] #TuniLeaks on FP. Ben Ali'll fire the Washington Media Group which was hired to burnish his Cosa Nostar for 420,000\$/y <http://is.gd/iQLx6>

[@ifikra 15 Dec 2010] Leilatrabelsi.com vient d'être enregistré il y a deux jours !!!
<http://whois.domaintools.com/leilatrabelsi.com> #tunileaks effect !!

However, an authoritarian regime, such as Ben Ali Regime was, enforced a limited public sphere for socio-political reasons. The particularity of the revelations, however, was such that the Tunileaks gave the proof, the real documents about what was happened in Tunisia under the Ben Ali's Regime. According to Interviewee 1:

[Tunileaks] was really important. Actually we already knew all the stories released by Tunileaks. What was important was to have the proof, to have real documents. We used to hear these stories and we didn't have evidence, but these leaks give us the evidences. (Interviewee 1)

The publicising of internal corruption and wide censorship that was happening, posed a real threat to governments of all sort by exposing the internal activities of state leaders. Concerning to the importance of the revelations, and in harmony with Interviewee 1, Interviewee 4 says "I remember them like they were released yesterday, the impact was immense and for the first time, people were sharing pieces of Tunileaks freely as they were pissed of that rumours about corruption turned out to be true" (Interviewee 4).

From this statement, and given the timing of the release of the documents - just one month before the uprising started- it could be supposed out that the publications of the leaks could have connection with the start of the revolution which took place just one month before the revelations. However, as Interviewee 3 the relation between the publication of the Tunileaks and the Tunisian uprising in not clear:

Perhaps some diplomacy because it was putting the diplomacy of the government in bad situation [...] The most important thing was the immolation of people, people who are burning themselves. This thing was very important. The effect of this thing. In many towns find people burning themselves. They didn't write anything about Wikileaks they didn't write anything but it was big fear and big fear a system. Of course social media was working on this thing like spreading the information. (Interviewee 3)

6. Conclusion

Digitally networked action has emerged in recent years among young people who have discovered in the Internet, and specifically, in social media, a powerful tool to mobilise against social injustice and regimes which have exerted oppression on citizens. The aim of this article is to link social movement studies and media and communication studies in order to achieve a better understanding of the digitally networked action.

As we have noted in the introduction of this article, this study explores the digital activism in Tunisia before the Arab Spring, thus, according to Melucci's (1989) proposal the latency phase of the movement that took place during the months that preceded the so-called Arab Spring.

Relating to the network in this latency phase, the main idea was the fight against censorship. We can identify this period as 'the movement against the censorship'. in that sense, although Tunisia had some conomic and social problems in that time, we have not found many references to it. The conversation was primarily about the censorship.

Our findings show that social media infrastructure was used by the Tunisian cyberactivists in many ways: in the case of Twitter to build a network to articulate their grievances and for engaging in a variety of collective actions in the offline world (e.g. the case of the demonstration on May 22). It is important that online and offline world

work together for achieving the goal, because the public space is where dissent becomes visible in order to reach more people. Twitter also was a central tool, above all used to organize and disseminate information. The graph of Tunisia's social network indicates that there were central nodes and peripheral groups of nodes. The results may be interpreted as follows: it is reasonable to conclude that there were nodes with strong weight in the network and these tweets were retweeted by the users many times, so these nodes could be identified as opinion leaders. However, peripheral nodes also appear with weight in the network. This constitutes an online space where members of society can change their opinions. According to this, the Tunisia's network public sphere was composed of digital elite and peripheral clusters of nodes. But the graph shows other peripheral cluster of nodes, away from the central nodes and underweight within the network. Hence, the overall conclusion is that Tunisia's digital public sphere was a hybrid model based on the existence of digital elite and peripheral clusters of nodes.

In that phase, the latent phase of the movement, we can identify the construction of a collective identity in that movement. There is an identification of *we*, the activists, against *the other*, in that case Ben Ali's regime as represented in the imaginary figure of *Ammar404*. Tunileaks also was an important event. Although the website of Tunileaks was blocked in Tunisia, the most important thing related to it was that for first time there was evidence of the corruption of Ben Ali's regime. However, due to the fact that Tunileaks were not available in Tunisia, we must be careful not to overstate the relation between the Tunileaks and the uprising that started in December, 2010, one month after. In conclusion, we can identify the movement of anti-censorship as the latent phase of the uprising because the pre-existence of the long-established online activism was decisive for the development of the uprising, although it is not the only reason that explains the uprising and its aftermath.

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