

# The Narrative Nature of Twitter: 'Tweeting' the Arab Spring

CHRIS PEYS  
University of St. Andrews

## INTRODUCTION

As social media thrives, technology reigns supreme, and many of the world's newspapers and booksellers fight to stave off bankruptcy, some people have begun to lament the death of the written word and the narrative arts (Kearney). From this perspective, the rapid rise and growing domination of the Internet, video games, reality television, online communities, and other technological developments have effectively eliminated the art of narration and created a world disinterested in stories. Richard Kearney, the prominent philosopher, writes, "that as we enter the cyber-world of the third millennium where virtual reality and digital communications rule, we find many advocates of the apocalyptic view that we have reached the end not only of history, but the story itself... their message being that we are entering a civilisation of depthless simulation inimical to the art of storytelling." This view may fit well with the pessimism surrounding the sad state of the global economy and continued war on terror, but it falls far from the truth.

Yes, technology is changing how we interact with others and information, but one must recognise that this process is merely an extension of the evolutionary nature of narrative. Narrative and storytelling have been in a state of change since before the existence of writing and undergone a continuous process of evolution "in which different species sometimes combine to produce new hybrids, which can in turn combine with old or new forms" (Kellogg & Scholes 11). This process is characterised by what Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin call 'remediation', or the phenomenon that occurs when a medium or form of media responds to, redeploys, competes with, and reforms other media. For instance, photography remediated painting, film remediated the novel and theatre, television remediated film and

radio, the World Wide Web and computer games remediating film, etc.” (Bolter & Grusin 129). In similar fashion, narrative has evolved and new forms have replaced, reworked, and built upon older forms of story.

In this sense technology, digital networks, and social media are changing the old patterns of narrative and moving beyond the confines of the novel, film, and radio broadcast. Now, “stories are open-ended, branching, hyperlinked, cross-media, participatory, exploratory, and unpredictable. And they are told in new ways” (Alexander & Levine 40). According to Bryan Alexander and Alan Levine, the authors of “Web 2.0 Storytelling: Emergence of a New Genre,” the current status of the Internet, online communities and various forms of content have “drastically lowered the bar for participation and publishing ... as a result, the amount of rich web media and content has grown in quantity and diversity ... out of those manifold ways of writing and showing have emerged new practices for telling stories” (42). Thus one can choose to believe narrative has seen its end but I argue that new technologies, online spaces, and popular culture are breaking new boundaries and contributing to an evolution of storytelling with intensifying political ramifications. Unlike previous remediation of narrative, new media have tremendous implications for political actors and global governance. Storytelling has always been central to politics, but we are witnessing how online narratives are fostering greater global interconnectedness and political change around the world. The consequences of online forms of storytelling are transcending the virtual world and changing the realities of governments in regions across the globe.

I am interested in how the narrative nature of social media is affecting global systems and contributing to political change around the world. I am particularly interested in how Twitter is changing how people communicate, interact and tell stories online. Twitter is a web-based microblogging service that allows registered users to send status update messages, or ‘Tweets’, to others in 140 characters or less. This new social medium has risen to prominence and is playing an increasingly important role in the lives of individuals, businesses, and politics around the globe. According to Katie Stanton, Twitter’s Vice President of International Strategy, Twitter has nearly 360 million users with approximately 460 thousand new sign ups everyday (McMillan). Clearly Twitter has captured a large segment of the world’s population, and it is allowing more people to partake in political discourses via the Internet. As a product of the ‘cyber-world of the third millennium’, Twitter adheres to the basic structures of narration while also expanding upon the traditional forms of storytelling. By evolving storytelling into a highly interactive process in the online space, Twitter has allowed anyone with a connection to the Web to become a

contributor to political discourses from anywhere in the world.

My argument is divided into two sections. First I closely analyse the Twitter application by deconstructing what it means to 'Tweet' and demonstrating that Twitter is a growth of narrative because it retains the basic principles that stories are always a "function of *someone telling something to someone about something*" (Kearney 5). In other words, Twitter is narrative in nature because it allows users to communicate emplotted stories to an audience in the public sphere. It is a forum, platform and communicative tool that brings people together within the storytelling process. As such, Twitter is inherently political and well suited for global discourses about politics, governing systems, civil rights, justice, and much more. Secondly I discuss Twitter's influence in the political arena by examining the Arab Spring Movement of 2011. I argue that the narrative nature of twitter fostered group collaboration, global communication, and political action during the revolutionary events that have taken place in the Middle East and North Africa. In short I demonstrate how Twitter transforms international relations, and discuss how this application became an important element within the political movements that reshaped global governing systems over the course of 2011.

## 'TWEETING' AND THE NARRATIVE NATURE OF TWITTER

In order to demonstrate the narrative nature of Twitter and understand the political implications of this application, we must critically analyse what exactly Twitter is, situate this application in the broader narrative of history and dissect what it means to 'Tweet.' As I mentioned earlier, Twitter is a web-based microblogging service, or "a variation on blogging in which users write short posts that are subsequently distributed to their friends or other observers via text messaging, instant messaging systems, email," and other online applications (Java, Song, Finin & Tseng 118). In accordance with the principles of microblogging, Twitter embraces the use of 'micro-content', which are "small chunks of content, each chunk conveying a primary idea or concept" (Alexander & Levine 42). Micro-content takes many forms, and these small chunks of content can be YouTube comments, wiki edits, images, or in the case of Twitter, 140 character (or less) Tweets. The Twitter website states:

At the heart of Twitter are small bursts of information called Tweets. Each Tweet is 140 characters in length, but don't let the small size fool you—you can share a lot with a little space ... You can tell your story within your Tweet, or you can think of a Tweet as the headline, and use the details pane to tell the rest with photos, videos, and other media content (Twitter, *About*).

In other words, Twitter users tell stories with individual Tweets, through a stream of Tweets, and with embedded media such as pictures, videos, and URLs that link to further content. For example, on 20 November 2011, NBC's Chief Foreign Correspondent, Richard Engel (Twitter username [@richardengelnbc](#)), Tweeted, "#egypt once again Egyptians breaking bricks, pavement for stone battles with police [yfrog.com/nvkerbhj](#)."<sup>1</sup> Using 140 characters and an embedded URL that links to a video ([yfrog.com/nvkerbhj](#)), Engel was able to tell a story about how the Egyptian people were once again preparing to do battle with police forces. This ability to mix and match written and multimedia content allows users to more fully develop their Tweets and add greater meaning, depth and insight within the small space of their microblog. Consequently Twitter is a space for sharing information and ultimately telling stories.

Through the use of both written and multimedia content, a user's Tweets can become a story. However Twitter is insignificant if we do not place it within a greater context. The individual user's Twitter feed and running narrative is merely a story within the infinite, meta-story that is history. From this perspective, the stories told and captured via Twitter are accounts of the short time span, of the 'now', and the explosive *nouvelle sonnante* ('matter of the moment') (Braudel 27). Twitter is a real-time narrative that only encompasses a small segment of history that is "proportionate to daily life, to our illusions, to our hasty awareness – above all the time of the chronicle and the journalist ... the chronicle or the daily papers offers all the mediocre accidents of ordinary life" (Braudel 28). The millions of Tweets that occur every minute, hour and day are only telling the small, explosive and oftentimes insignificant stories within a larger narrative and historical scope. The stories told via Twitter only capture a tiny sliver of that narrative and a mere piece of the broader, longer historical story.

This recognition is important because it not only situates Twitter in the larger frame, but it also highlights the role of the individual user as both a storyteller *and* an actor in the longer narrative of history. Seen through a broader lens of history, our lives are our individual life stories that start at birth and end at death. Each new day and year is the next chapter of a story that is constantly progressing by the events, people, and ideas that fill our lives as we grow old. Our day-to-day activities are the outcomes of our decisions as actors in a continuously unraveling historical narrative that extends beyond our individual lives. Consequently we are narrators

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<sup>1</sup> The '#symbol and following word (egypt) are known as a 'hashtag', or symbol "that is used to mark keywords or topics in a Tweet. People use the hashtag symbol '#' before relevant keywords in their Tweet to categorise those Tweets to show more easily in Twitter search ... clicking a hashtagged word in any message shows you all other Tweets in that category" (Twitter, What are Hashtags).

of many stories, but we are merely actors in the meta-story of history "which has many beginnings but no end, for the end in any strict and final sense of the word could only be the disappearance of man from the Earth" (Arendt, *Understand* 320). Upon entering this world, we begin our individual stories, but we enter into a pre-existing web of stories, relationships, and global circumstances. Thus our lives are a constant process of reconciling our existence and individual stories with the larger, pre-existing story of history.

The dual role of narrating our individual lives and reconciling our existence in the larger scope is a challenging process and one based on our interpretations of the world around us. As actors in the meta-story of life, we are witnesses to and participants in many events and a vast array of cultural, social, political, and economic phenomena. However these events and happenings only become significant when shaped by the interpretations and the stories we create. Nietzsche went so far as to say life is not characterised by the 'facts' of daily life, but rather "facts are precisely what there is not, only interpretations. We cannot establish any fact 'in itself' .... In so far as the word 'knowledge' has any meaning, the world is knowable; but it is *interpretable* otherwise, it has no meaning behind it, but *countless meanings* (my emphasis)– 'Perspectivism'" (Nietzsche 267). Each of us has his or her own perspective, and we must individually analyse, interpret, and tell our personal accounts about the events, ideas and people that surround us. This constant process of interpretation is central to the human condition and is what demarcates us from other species of animals. From Nietzsche's perspective, "the very fact that we interpret the world in interacting with it reveals that interpretation is a human need ... the human being is the only species that exhibits the quirk of trying to understand the world during our confrontations with it" (Holub 118-119). We, as humans, need to tell stories to understand life; thus we are all inherent storytellers, and social media is the latest development in a long chain of narrative remediations to help us interpret and narrate our existence. As one of the more recent forms of narrative, Twitter allows us to access information, see others' perspectives, and connect with people everywhere while also providing a medium to tell our own stories. People can use the Tweet and the Twitter application to connect with the world and to better understand their existence in a meta-narrative characterised by innumerable contingencies and unknown endings.

Twitter is naturally a narrative application because people use it to tell the stories of their lives and understand their place in the larger story. However a more in depth analysis uncovers that the narrative nature of Twitter stems directly from the specific and set structure of the application. By digging more deeply and dissecting

Twitter, one finds that the narrative nature of this social media is built into the application itself. Although users can customise their profiles, choose whom (or whom not) to follow, create lists, and communicate as they see fit, each and every Tweet is posted to a timeline (an example of a timeline is seen to the right – Figure 1). A twitter timeline is a “term used to describe a collected stream of Tweets listed in real-time order... your home timeline is a long stream sharing all Tweets from those you have chosen to follow. Newest messages are on top”

(Twitter, *What is a Timeline?*). By posting and contributing to timelines, users have the ability to create a running (and potentially never ending) stream of communication and narrative.<sup>2</sup> It is the Twitter timeline that directly contributes to the creation of the overall narrative plot, and “by plot I mean the intelligible whole that governs a succession of events in any story” (Ricœur, *On Narrative* 171). The plot strings narrative together and binds the story into a cohesive, flowing entity. In this sense, the Twitter timeline is responsible for the emplotment of the overall narrative, or the “synthesis of heterogeneous elements ... the plot serves to make one story out of the multiple incidents or, if you prefer, transforms the many incidents into one story” (Ricœur, *Life in the quest of narrative* 21). The timeline is the skeletal structure that brings it all together and ‘synthesizes the heterogeneous elements’ of one’s online story. It supports, unifies, and structures one’s Tweets into a readable stream of narrative.

In the sense that the Twitter timeline is responsible for the emplotment of one’s own narrative, it also serves to aggregate the Tweets and stories of *other* users. As an interactive and open application, Twitter allows users to enter and exit conversations, post multimedia, reply to specific topics, and make contributions to other’s timelines. In other words, users are free to add to stories all throughout



Figure 1 @Sultan Al Qassemi’s home timeline.

<sup>2</sup> Not all timelines are narrative in nature, and many streams appear to be a collection of Tweets with no discernable plot. This type of collection is a result of advertising, spam, user error, and many other occurrences. Consequently, it would be wrong to say all Twitter timelines are narratively structured, and it is for this reason that I use the phrase, “users have the ability to create a running stream of communication and narrative.”

Twitter, and their contributions are consequently “folded into the experience of the overall story from the perspective of subsequent users” (Alexander & Levine 47). These contributions bring new perspectives, ideas, developments, and actors into the story, “revealing hidden aspects of the situation and characters and engenders a new predicament ... this predicament advances the story to its conclusion ... there is no story if our attention is not moved by a thousand contingencies” (Ricoeur, *On Narrative* 174). Each addition and added Tweet progresses one’s story, pushing the narrative closer to its conclusion. In this sense, each new development directly contributes to the narrative and serves to develop the plot further. It is through this act of aggregation and process of organisation that we, as readers, can proceed towards an ending and move linearly through a story.

Without the Twitter timeline, emplotment of Tweets, and movement towards an ending, the narrative structure dissolves, and one is left with an assortment of disconnected micro-content. In other words, an isolated Tweet is nothing but raw data until placed within the greater context of the Twitter application, where it has the potential to become a legitimate story; for it is within Twitter that Tweets become the narrative objects of a specific storyteller. For example, the Tweet about the Egyptian protestors is a story because it was a narrative created and promulgated by a specific storyteller, Richard Engel. As the words of a specific narrator, the Tweet fulfils the basic tenet of narrative that “every story shares the common function of *someone telling something to someone about something*. In each case there is a teller, a tale, something told about, and a recipient of the tale” (Kearney 5). The moment a Twitter user Tweets and updates his or her status, they are telling a tale to someone with 140 characters of micro-content (and multimedia) to their followers and other users. Thus Twitter automatically satisfies the premise that “by narrative we mean all those literary works which are distinguished by the presence of a story, a storyteller” and an audience (Kellogg & Scholes 4).

Since the individual Tweet is embedded in the Twitter application, most users naturally understand that these bits of content are communicated from the user to his or her audience. However this deconstruction is useful in highlighting the importance of the storyteller/audience dynamic to the narrative nature of Twitter. Narrative and storytelling are communicative acts, and ones that require an interaction between parties. Although many stories are directed to an implied and oftentimes invisible audience, narrative *must* include a teller, a tale *and* a reader, viewer, or listener. This dynamic is central to storytelling, for the gap between narrative and life is bridged during this process of communication. When both the storyteller and audience come to exist in the common space of the story a ‘fusion of

horizons' takes place. According to Paul Ricœur:

The process of composition, of configuration, is not completed in the text but in the reader, and under this condition, makes possible the reconfiguration of life by narrative. I should say, more precisely: the sense or the significance of narrative stems *from the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the reader* ... To appropriate a work through reading is to unfold the world horizon implicit in it which includes the actions, the characters and the events of the story told. As a result, the reader belongs at once to the work's horizon of experience (Ricœur, *Life in Quest of Narrative* 26).

It is within the text, or in our case the Tweet, where the world of the storyteller and world of the audience meet. In this common space, narrative and life are one, and "we can say that stories are recounted but they are also *lived in the mode of the imaginary*" (Ricœur, *Life in Quest of Narrative* 27). Until a story bridges the gap between the world of the storyteller and their audience, "life [will be] *on the way* to narrative, but it [will] not arrive there until someone hears and tells this life as a story" (Kearney 133). Narrative essentially comes to life when the audience (be it a reader, listener or observer) enters into the world created by the storyteller and their story.

Hannah Arendt describes this fusion of horizons and coming together as an interaction that occurs within a *public* space, or "a common space of disclosure not only for those who act or actively move within it but for everyone who perceives it ... the reality of the world is its 'being common,' its being between, literally its *interest (inter esse)* for all those who, through their common sense, hold it in common" (Kohn 125). The common, public space created by Twitter and within the stories of its users manifests "something which is *inter-est*, that lies between people and therefore can relate and bind them together" (Arendt, *The Human Condition* 182). The binding nature of being *inter esse* has important ramifications because "the political realm rises directly out of acting and speaking together, 'the sharing of words and deeds'" (Arendt, *The Human Condition* 198). Consequently, Twitter is a means of creating the 'in between' where the political realm is born. Although many users use Twitter to gossip and follow their favourite celebrities, this online service also has the power to be a space where political actors, revolutionaries, journalists, governments, and politically aware individuals create legitimate political change through continuous storytelling. In the remainder of the essay, I will discuss the political ramifications of



Twitter by examining the Arab Spring Movement of 2011. Using the Arab Spring as a case study, I will demonstrate that the narratives created via Twitter have played an important role in the uprisings throughout the Middle East and North Africa by creating a space for collaboration, global communication, and *inter-est*.

## TWEETING TO CHANGE THE ARAB WORLD

Over the course of the past year, the world has followed the revolutionary story of the Arab World. This story has come to be known as the Arab Spring, and it is a tale characterised by riots, revolts, and revolutions. In December 2010, "Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation in protest of Tunisian police corruption served as the catalyst of a wave of revolutionary unrest" that eventually engulfed Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Algeria, Lebanon, Jordan, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Iraq, Libya, Kuwait, Morocco and Syria (Arab Spring 2011). Although each of these movements secured different ends (or is *in the process* of securing different ends), they all forcefully challenged the political status quo and changed the governing systems of the region. The major changes occurred in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, where protestors and rebel forces were successful in ousting the longstanding dictatorial regimes of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali (Tunisia), Hosni Mubarak (Egypt), and Muammar Gaddafi (Libya). In light of these movements, the Arab Spring appears to be ushering in a new era for Arab nations, and analysts have described the movement "as a revolutionary shift toward Western-style democratic ideals and cultural trends that has been most apparent in young activists' extensive use of Internet networking services, such as Facebook and Twitter" (Arab Spring 2011). In short, the Arab World is in the process of changing at an accelerated rate, and social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, is playing a central role in this political movement.

As the action took place (and in some areas continues to take place) on the streets, the story of the Arab Spring has also been written and created online. According to the Dubai School of Government's Arab Social Media Report, "Civil Movements: the Impact of Facebook and Twitter," the approximate total twitter population of the Arab region at the end of March 2011 was 6,567,280 with an estimated 252 thousand Tweets per day, or 175 Tweets a minute, or roughly three Tweets a second (16). Although not every Tweet or user was concerned with matters of the Arab Spring, this report goes on to say that "the most popular trending hashtags across the Arab region in the first quarter of 2010 were **#egypt** (with 1.4 million mentions in the Tweets generated during this period), **#jan25** (with 1.2 million mentions), **#libya** (with 990,000 mentions), **#bahrain** (640,000 mentions), and **#protest** (620,000)" (Dubai School of Government 16). Additionally, a recent report that was published

on Twitter's official blog states that the '#egypt' hashtag was the number one most used hashtag in 2011 (Twitter's Top 2011 Hashtags).<sup>3</sup> These numbers and details clearly demonstrate that the Twitter world of the Arab region was inundated with discussions and stories about the revolutionary movements occurring throughout the Middle East and North Africa. This is not to say that television and other forms of media were not major factors (they were most likely even more important than social media) in disseminating stories, but Twitter and social media played a key role in "sending visible shock waves, like a political tsunami, through the Middle East and North Africa and beyond to different national, regional and global shores" (Cottle 649). The online narratives created in spaces like Twitter allowed people to spread their experiences, accounts, ideas, and general stories with the click of a mouse to people everywhere.

With the same click of the mouse, Twitter allows users to easily and efficiently collaborate with one another. Twitter and "new social media helped to bring into being a new space for social inclusivity, group recognition, and pluralised participation as well as different forms of political conversation and engagement" (Cottle 651). The ease with which users can come together permits people from all different backgrounds, ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, socio-economic classes, and religions to interact and collaborate on issues of their interest. Similar to the salons of the Enlightenment era, Twitter provides a space for political discourse where individuals can raise "issues of sexuality, gender, and minority rights. Social media has enabled the masses to establish their own agendas" (Ghannam 6). During the Arab Spring, this ability to freely voice one's opinion and come together over political issues directly enabled unsatisfied citizens and individuals to challenge current governing systems and the oppressive status quo. Twitter permitted these people to tell their stories, unite, and speak out against government corruption, oppression, poverty, tyranny, and a bevy of other issues. In this sense, Twitter and social media are collaboration tools whose "long gain use has been to build up civil society and build the public sphere" (Shirkey, Slaughter and Rose). This is accomplished by contributions to the long running narrative of Twitter and by people continuously bringing their ideas, opinions, and stories into the public space. It is in the space of Twitter that people share stories and create narratives that have the potential to manifest powerful political action.

In addition to serving as a collaboration tool, Twitter also enables activists, political actors, and dissenters to tell their story to the world's reporters, governments,

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<sup>3</sup> Interestingly I was directed to this story on Facebook after one of my friends shared the link on their wall. Although I am not directly discussing Facebook in this essay, this simple example is another example of how social media is fostering the growth and evolution of our narrative processes.

and people. Twitter was “where activists went to get their messages out into the world ... [they saw] Twitter as a broadcast platform, as you would a satellite or cable provider ... in this sense, there weren’t revolutionaries so much as they were reporters, translating their struggle for the rest of us” (Hounshell). By Tweeting, users became reporters, or *storytellers*, for the world’s journalists, governments, human rights groups, and other interested parties. According to Tunisian blogger and Global Voices Advocacy Director, Sami Ben Gharbia, who operates the website Nawaat, an independent blog collective that gives voice to Tunisian dissent, “we are aggregators, putting the story into context, amplifying and then using Twitter as a main broadcast, because Twitter is the platform where journalists are following the story” (Ghannam 16). Twitter’s global reach, transparency and hyper-connectivity allow users to disseminate information and stories to millions of people with tremendous ease. For example, on 30 March 2011 Wael Ghonim (Twitter username @Ghonim) Tweeted, “#Syria Army killed peaceful protestors who are chanting ‘Army and People are united’ [extremely graphic] <http://bit.ly/gNoqyp>.”<sup>4</sup> This short story about the Syrian army killing peaceful protestors and its accompanying video footage (the embedded URL links to a YouTube video) was disseminated to each one of Ghonim’s 255, 589 followers. Furthermore, any one that searches or reads the ‘#Syria’ stream will also see this Tweet. Consequently Ghonim directly and indirectly told his story to hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Twitter users from around the world. Through Twitter, this individual story and storyteller were capable



Figure 2 @Ghonim’s Tweet from March 30, 2011.

of promulgating a narrative that graphically showed the unjust, unreasonable, and criminal acts of the Syrian army against a peaceful group of protestors. Ghonim is merely one example of millions of Twitter users, and his actions demonstrate that Twitter stories have the capacity to cross boundaries, borders, oceans, and to reach anyone with access to the Internet.

As demonstrated by the Arab Spring movement, Twitter has enabled users

<sup>4</sup> Ghonim has been one of the more influential activists throughout the course the Arab Spring Movement, and his online presence has played a central role since the December 2010. Foreign Policy magazine named him one of 2011’s top 100 global thinkers. (Foreign Policy).

from all over the Arab world to band together to topple regimes, and it has also been a powerful means of narrating a revolutionary story to people everywhere. Twitter has brought people together into a narrative space where they have spoken and acted to create political change throughout the Middle East and North Africa. In this sense, I contend that Twitter is a modern, online version of the Greek *polis*, or “the political realm that rises directly of acting together, the sharing of words and deeds” (Arendt, *The Human Condition* 198). As Arendt states, “the polis, properly speaking, is not the city-state in its physical location, it is the organisation of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together ... action and speech create a space between the participants which can find its proper location almost anytime and anywhere” (Arendt, *The Human Condition* 198). Furthermore, the Greeks “held that only constant talk united citizens in a polis, for in discourse the political importance of friendship, and the humanness particular to it, were made manifest” (Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* 24). Twitter was assuredly not what Arendt had in mind, but this online application is similar to the Greek *polis* in that it is a place where men and women come together to communicate, tell stories and create political action. By using Twitter, activists and protestors manifested an online *polis* “where words were not used to veil intentions but to disclose realities, and deeds were not used to violate and destroy, but to establish relations and create new realities” (Arendt, *The Human Condition* 200). In short, by acting, speaking and telling stories together on Twitter, activists and protestors created an *inter esse* for new political realities to be born.

Although Twitter and other social media outlets received a tremendous amount of attention throughout the course of the Arab Spring, it is important to recognise that these applications were not responsible for the uprising and revolutions across the Middle East and North Africa. However Twitter and social media did provide an ‘in between’ space, or *inter esse*, for political actors, protestors and revolutionaries to communicate, collaborate and tell stories. For Clay Shirkey, the distinguished new media and Internet guru from New York University, “this is the step in which the Internet in general, and social media in particular, can make a difference ... it allows people to privately and publically articulate and debate a welter of conflicting views” (Shirkey 6). In this sense, Twitter users were both storytellers communicating with their audiences as well as political actors interacting in a political realm created by their acting and speaking together. As the Arab Spring has proven, the online *polis* of Twitter is a space out of which has come revolutionary and progressive political change.

## CONCLUSION

Since Twitter and other social media has seen so much political success, there is no evidence to prove that these technologies will fade anytime soon.<sup>5</sup> Rather, they will continue to grow and evolve in places like the Arab world where the region's young population and "increasing penetration rates have pushed social media to play a growing role in political, societal, and economic developments" (Dubai School of Government 24). This goes to show that technology and social media like Facebook and Twitter have come to be a part of many lives and are directly influencing the way people live. People are living dual lives in which life takes place both in the physical world and the online space where social media is changing "what we do, how we live, how we organise living together, what we value, and who we are. It mediates our relation to the world: it changes the way we interpret the world and the way we act" (Coeckelbergh 128). In other words, Twitter and social media are changing lives and having an impact on how we tell stories as well as how we narrate own lives.

Consequently I think it would be a tragic mistake to presume that the 'cyber-world of the third millennium' has brought an end to narrative. Instead Twitter has 'remediated' older forms of narrative and fostered the growth of new methods of storytelling. Narrative is merely changing, and "old stories are giving way to new ones, more multi-plotted, multi-vocal, and multi-media" (Kearney 126). The Internet and social media are not bringing an end to the narrative arts, but rather challenging people to adopt new methods of telling stories. It is on sites like Twitter and Facebook that people are telling new stories in new narrative forms. Furthermore, it is by acting, speaking and telling stories together in these new online spaces that people are creating new political, social, and cultural realities.

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<sup>5</sup> Facebook's popularity has only grown stronger since its inception, and last year Mark Zuckerberg's social network grew by 172 million users – where 12.8 million people opened accounts in Africa, 4.5 million in the Middle East, 63 million in Asia, and 43 million in South America (Internet World Stats). Facebook usage and global penetration rates have nowhere to go but up because the worldwide web is also experiencing patterns of exponential growth. The number of people online across the globe grew 528 percent in the period from 2000 to 2011, and it was in non-western regions that the greatest growth has taken place. Non-western Internet use grew by the following percentages in the years from 2000 to 2011: Africa – 2,988 percent; Latin America – 1,205 percent; the Middle East – 2,245 percent; and Asia – 780 percent (Internet World Stats). In short the Internet is rapidly becoming a factor in everyone's lives, and social media will only grow more popular as the worldwide web further extends its reach.

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