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Why <<More>> is Different

Zeynep Tufekci (@techsoc)

>> Zeynep Tufekci: US Net [phonetic] was social media, right? In some ways and of course then [inaudible] no introduction in [inaudible] being at the high school. You know he's here and I think Ellen [phonetic] is the last organized [inaudible]. So thank you very much in working for hosting this. So the question what did you do during the sort of social media [inaudible]? My answer was I was in Egypt [inaudible] as often as I could be and I thought it was just an amazing year to go and try to do research in this emerging field. And what I want to do in my sort of the talk part of my talk is give a more consensual overview of some of the ways I have decided or I am thinking through in terms of how analyze this field because I think one of the problems we have that we've been talking about the past 3 days and a lot of people here, I'm sure, are very familiar with is that it's so new. That some of the -- and just [inaudible] international web blocking [phonetic] social media, the name is already so outdated and this is a very new constant. Right? I mean they just -- you can't even name a conference without it being outdated and in academia and in scholarship, we tend to kind of move slowly but these things have moved so fast that questions we used to ask, you know, 5 years ago sometimes don't even make sense. But on the other hand, things that have become trivially obvious have not really been incorporated in the depth they deserve for analytical, theoretical and consensual framework. 000139US Net [phonetic] was social media, right? In some ways and of course then [inaudible] no introduction in [inaudible] being at the high school. You know he's here and I think Ellen [phonetic] is the last organized [inaudible]. So thank you very much in working for hosting this. So the question what did you do during the sort of social media [inaudible]? My answer was I was in Egypt [inaudible] as often as I could be and I thought it was just an amazing year to go and try to do research in this emerging field. And what I want to do in my sort of the talk part of my talk is give a more consensual overview of some of the ways I have decided or I am thinking through in terms of how analyze this field because I think one of the problems we have that we've been talking about the past 3 days and a lot of people here, I'm sure, are very familiar with is that it's so new. That some of the -- and just [inaudible] international web blocking [phonetic] social media, the name is already so outdated and this is a very new constant. Right? I mean they just -- you can't even name a conference without it being outdated and in academia and in scholarship, we tend to kind of move slowly but these things have moved so fast that questions we used to ask, you know, 5 years ago sometimes don't even make sense. But on the other hand, things that have become trivially obvious have not really been incorporated in the depth they deserve for analytical, theoretical and consensual framework. So we have these things and we think of as obvious. Everybody has a cell phone. Everybody, you know any protest you go to there's some view from it. We take these as sort of given but they are so reason, 4 or 5 years maybe in some parts of the world, 2 or 3 and on the other hand, how do you think about this? So that's the part I am going to talk more about in terms of what essentially [inaudible] have spurred for me to think about. So the first point I want to make is that -- and I think the network [inaudible] does a great job of this and in terms of sort of the empirical picture of where things are. I think this is a great compilation. So [inaudible] 50 different sources and trying to compile but it's just an amazing synthesis of what we know about how the world works. First thing for me, first lesson for me out of my [inaudible] looking into these things is always look at how base [phonetic] and atoms are integrated. [Inaudible] not thinking about them as separate worlds. Not thinking of them as, you know one as the virtual and one as the real. Like try -- you know sometimes I slip but like the words in real life are so odd. They are just not wrong consensually because when you tweet you're not unreal, they're also a barrier to understanding this space. Nathan Jergen [phonetic] who's a sociology [inaudible] coined the phrase [inaudible] which I think is a wonderful phrase. So explain this for you conceptualize, you know, scion versus

matrix and then you think about one as a real and one as not real. And then you think how do they interact? And it can really work if you think about it that way. And I would argue that that's one of the key lessons of the Arab [inaudible] was that one, they're integrated, two, they're [inaudible] bits and atoms. You have to think about their differences too because there we had regimens that we used to policing bodies and physical things in a particular way. And once the [inaudible] got control of the world of bits where it was much harder to police information, they did not know how to deal with it at the same time especially [inaudible] Egypt. And this is a picture of my [inaudible] press photographer, Patrick Buzz [assumed spelling]. This is concrete square [phonetic] during the uprising and this is -- these young activists. They hacked into the light pole which still remains like there's a hacked light pole that's being held together with duct tape. Kind of funny because in case they have a protest again they want it ready to go but they hacked into the light pole to get their power and they had satellite smuggled in. That they -- the internet was cut and they were already connected. And you guys might remember that the internet was cut at some point and there was one network that remained alive [inaudible] ISP in Egypt and one of the activists had a connection to that ISP. So it was very interesting like 5 or 6 different ways of connecting to the outside world that were not policed as easily as the world of [inaudible] where you could keep the bodies in one place but you could not keep the bits in one place. So what are the -- this is something I think for scholars who think more deeply about bits and atoms differences but not separate worlds. The other thing that I think a very common mistake that comes up is we think of new technology as bringing forth new kinds of people. There's always like -- whenever you see early signs of technology there are these theories of how it's going to be -- now we're going to be different. We're going to be something we weren't before this technology came. Oh obviously it's going to have an impact on how we do things, who we are. It's going to have an impact on many, many things. But what is, for me, so revolutionary about these technologies is not that people are doing revolutionary, unheard of, never heard before, never done before kinds of things but it's that millions of people are doing billions of these [inaudible] things. Things they didn't do but they're doing it in this new old massive world of bits and atoms. An example, I like to take at early studies of cyber societies so to speak including the ones on my [inaudible] circle, the [inaudible] itself. Even the name suggests the internet would create a [inaudible] itself. And I think that finding was partially an artifact of the fact that the earlier people who were on the internet were a different breed of people. They were people who were -- they're technically oriented or there was something they were looking for. You have to be highly technical and it was a subset and they did things that didn't seem like the norm. There was a lot more like identity play in the early internet whereas the current internet [inaudible] I think is more identity constrained because you have all these social networks where you're on some kind of peer surveillance. So people haven't -- any time you see a period that people are very different now. There's something they weren't before. I think we should be suspicious but we should ask how things changed. So this is a photograph I took maybe 10, 12 years ago. I need to look up the exact date. In the [inaudible] when I was there to investigate [inaudible]. There was a lot of talk about the [inaudible] using the internet and I was curious about it. So I spent some time there and if you've been to sort of rural Mexico especially --

[Audio breaks]

-- young girl approached me and said could you please take a picture of my kids. And I said okay. Now this is a place where there's no electricity. They had no cameras at all. They had no cameras, right? And through some clanky [phonetic] translation because my Spanish is so-so, her Turkish zero, her Spanish [inaudible], my [inaudible] my language. So we had to find like, I think 2 kids [inaudible] one translated to the other and it went from there. She explained to me that her kids were growing without her having a single record of her kids. Right? She had no pictures ever of her kids and her kids were growing up. She wanted me to take a picture of her kids and somehow get that photograph. So I had this moment of [inaudible] do I do this? And then I had another moment of what I'm talking about? She's [inaudible] so of course I'm going to do this. It was just weird kind of question of this [inaudible] and it was 12 years ago. So last year, fast forward, last year I was talking to news director of YouTube, Olivia Mock [phonetic], and YouTube has a news director

because YouTube is the largest news site on the planet. Right? They are the largest news site on the planet. She told me that within an hour of anything happening anywhere in the world they have video on the site. So we went in 10 years from a world where I could roam around [inaudible] the world where people had never had a camera to now where you cannot be anywhere in the world without assuming there's a camera somewhere near. It just -- I mean the level -- the speed with which these technologies have diffused is quite striking to me. Now the other thing that I have thought a lot about last year is how there is no [inaudible] media anymore. We keep thinking about new media old media [inaudible]. These are both photographs I took in [inaudible] during a protest and one of them, on your left, is the -- all [inaudible] camera is that little light there. It's the [inaudible] apartment building is the [inaudible] camera where they're broadcasting unless something happens, they're broadcasting around the clock. It's quite funny how they got in there. There's nobody wanted to let them in and [inaudible] reporter was knocking on lots of doors during the protest, the [inaudible]. So on that apartment he just goes up and up and up and talks his way past all the doormen and then some guy opens the door and he's really disheveled and he's wearing this [inaudible] t-shirt. And [inaudible] says well do you want to make this [inaudible]? Okay, sure what are we talk about? You know it's just this funny thing but he didn't really make that difference because that camera there but that camera was not just showing what it was seeing. It was also uploading a lot of social media contact from the ground. So this is the other picture, on your right, is one of the, you know, tens of thousands of people on the ground who are documenting what is going on and uploading it somewhere. So this is this ecology [inaudible] social media and then if you look at the link analysis from the datasets. The first link that, you know, sort of hash tag datasets [inaudible], the first links are all to 0, right? So it's this complete cycle. The social media links are all to 0, [inaudible] social media not the universe ecology. I don't look at that which brings another point that comes up a lot very often. If you think about it this way, you realize what we said which is that the fact that 13 percent of people are tweeting or in Egypt, maybe 1 percent are tweeting does not make it an unimportant because its position in the ecology is what matters not what the penetration rate per [inaudible]. It's not unimportant what percent of the people tweet. That's important but if you don't take the ecology into account, you don't understand that maybe at the right time and the right place that 2 people looked at that camera. One person with that camera phone can be quite crucial because there's ecology like this. So this is how you think about it. So this is a screenshot of Syrians demonstrating watching themselves being covered by the [inaudible] while they're demonstrating and then getting really encouraged by the fact that they're being covered live. So I didn't upload the video but it's just this cycles of sort of reinforcement you see in this. And this is an example of how the era of political scientists [inaudible] ignorance [inaudible]. What's [inaudible] ignorance? [Inaudible] ignorance is if you think of something but you think you're the only one or you're a minority but in fact, what you think is not a minority. To give an example that I should stop giving. Let's say you're really bored out of your mind at this point because you were [inaudible] last week and you've heard talk about all this before. And you're thinking I want to get out of here, it's a nice day. You're quite unlikely to get up and do this because you know, again we're socialized not to do that but I don't know if you guys got your wi-fi working but if there was a wi-fi working and you have a back channel. And everybody's tweeting I heard this before, she's getting really boring. Maybe there would be a [inaudible]. See this is the [inaudible] ignorance and you can see why that is so relevant to a place like Egypt where I have, you know, spent time, talk to people, looked at poles and it seems, you know, [inaudible]. It wasn't quite united either -- their opposition to him. So [inaudible] ignorance in the forms of authority based on [inaudible] ignorance they are quiet on their thread. In places like China where things are more polarized, maybe it leads to more [inaudible]. We shall see. So [inaudible] is another thing that I've been thinking and it was the [inaudible] activists that convinced me that this was a very harmful term. They came away -- this is a discussion I had with two quite common activists. One is [inaudible] who won the [inaudible] Pioneer Award with [inaudible] organization in [inaudible] and the other is [inaudible]. So, you know, sitting around in a café in [inaudible] discussing things. And they were like I hate that word. And I said so tell me more about why you -- I mean I don't like this word either but you tell me. And their point which I agree with and I have sort of conceptualized very similarly, is that all those people collecting like on this sort of [inaudible] famous page were instrumental in

creating a different kind of public sphere in Egypt [inaudible] how many other of their neighbors and networks were also in opposition. And that that kind of sort of online symbolic space helped provide the ground for -- it got -- it's an ecology, right? Mainstream media, people facing [inaudible] all of those combined. So they thought it was really crucial and I think [inaudible] is a concept overlooks the fact that humans are deeply, thoroughly symbolic creatures. So symbolic actions are not automatically unimportant. Now what they led to depends on all sorts of things in context but they tend to [inaudible]. Now if you're into the numbers part of this. I have a paper on April issue of journal and communication, you [inaudible] which show that social media users were fairly key to the early protests in January 25 [phonetic]. We have a survey. Not a perfect example because it was taken during the unrest. There was a little dangerous conditions which show that the people -- 25 percent of the sample of 1,050 learned how to protest first from Facebook which is [inaudible] face to face. So that was quite striking. So with [inaudible] also comes this interesting nature of the current public sphere, for me, is how nothing stays simple, right? My comparison to it, you know, is like the '80s, if you have any memory of it because -- I'm just looking around. Some of you were born in the '80s -- is sort of things like We Are the World Campaign where people sang and we were supposed to help save starving Africa. Now I am all for [inaudible] aid [inaudible] when necessary so I don't want to belittle those efforts but the whole thing was so patronizing in its tone in the sense that there was no person from the [inaudible] that you had [inaudible] or there were no [inaudible]. You just sort of -- who was on it? I don't remember, Michael Jackson, something. These were lot American pop stars. Compare with that with [inaudible] which a lot of people who work in this field were [inaudible] because its representations not necessarily [inaudible]. They -- misleading but within like hours of [inaudible] hitting big, my social media people [inaudible] responding and this is [inaudible] the blogger and an activist from Uganda. And she basically opened up her laptop and started talking, really intelligently and calmly about what was wrong with that video and she had millions of views on YouTube. I still think the idea that [inaudible] complicated world. The people you talk about can now talk about back and anybody who hasn't really gotten that message yet is just running into trouble. We see this with political parties. We see this with PR campaigns. We see this with promoted hash tag. If you're McDonald's, you can't just go promote your hash tag on Twitter. People are going to come and tell you what they think about hash tag, you know, McDonald's. If whatever you are, if you have a portion of the public who is not happy with you, you tend not to step into a social media space as if it were your broadcast media and go blah, blah, blah and expect no talk back. So that area's [inaudible]. I can take positions, right? Now what I don't want to say -- I want to talk about participation. I do want us -- I don't want to give the impression that I think participation is always the rosier thing and it's great. This is a picture that has a great impact on me. This is from -- this is right after Rwandan genocide. This is a photo of [inaudible]'s fleeing the site and they're dropping their machetes in the border. Now the Rwandan genocide is the modern sort of -- the scholars of my generation, when they think of social movements they think of -- well previous generation, they think of the Civil Rights Movement and when they think of [inaudible] they think of World War II, Holocaust, Nazis. And I think those are both not the correct models in terms of the things we face in this world and for me, my horrors, my [inaudible] horror is the Rwandan genocide in some sense because of the participatory nature. We had 100,000 people killed 800,000 people in the space of 1 month using machetes that had just become available because they had [inaudible]. So one they [inaudible] 750,000 machetes, 5 quarter cents a piece from China the year before. That -- you see the mixture of technology and participation and all sorts of --

[Audio breaks]

-- in 2007. Probably nobody remembers. It's kind of striking that no one remembers because it's the second biggest active non-state terrorism since World War II. 9/11 is one. This is number two and it was triggered by a video, a YouTube video. What happened was there is a community called the [inaudible] of the Middle East and they're quite secretive and insular. And they're a pre-Islamic religion and let me just say why they're insular. The god they worship that goes under the name sometimes [inaudible] but also under the same name as Satan in Islam. So you can kind of see being in a group, a religious group in the Middle East

where the god you worship is also Satan. That's going to cause some problems for you. It's not a very open group. They're very insular. They practice very strict [inaudible]. They don't marry outside and this young woman had the misfortune of falling in love with a young boy from the [inaudible] tribe and running away with him. Now this is the classic Middle Eastern melodrama. If you look at like traditionally [phonetic] from the '70s, I think it's a 7 percent [inaudible] falling in love for the wrong person. And in the -- in this case, she was caught and brought back to her village where she was -- the elders or the village decided they were going to stone her to death which is an awful continuing but rare practice. So it's not like it happens every day but it still happens. So and it's awful enough. Now here's the part where this gets really freaky for me is that I watched this video. And I watched this video because somebody took out their cell phone and filmed this and put it on YouTube. And on the video, I counted 3 other people filming this. Now you see this just kind of blows my mind that you are killing, stoning to death this young woman. It's this awful, awful thing. It's the kind of thing, you know, you watch and you have nightmares. And why are people filming this? I mean what is this impulse? What's happening there? And why upload it to YouTube? This is just -- and we see this all the time. Opt to [inaudible]. Egyptian activists were constantly playing videos of torture and bribery and corruption and also some awful things on YouTube which created this weird thing because YouTube used to censor that because they were quite graphic. And there was some, you know, intervention and discussions and they started to let political [inaudible]. But where were they getting these torture videos? The torturers were filming this, right? So the diffusion of mobile phones has this very quirky weird affect that people who were doing these things also filmed them. And I don't think they really saw through what this all means but in this case, shortly after this was uploaded to YouTube. It was unfortunately discovered because it hadn't been discovered and it had, you know, 3 views and no anything that would've been okay. And it was used as a pretext by Al-Qaida to bomb these villages and kill 9,000 people. And I think part of the reason we never hear of this thing is in that community's just kind of [inaudible] back under the ground again. It's completely insular but to me, this is striking. So I don't want to end on the groups of horror part. The other part of that we're underestimating is that the kind of power to coordinate, used to be the monopoly of police, radio, army, sort of that kind of thing. Used to be the monopoly of the state and in fact, radio had sort of a beginning that sounds like the internet. If you read earlier radio studies, everybody likes yes this is going to save the world and we're all going to like connect and [inaudible] from Australia. Isn't that great? It kind of makes you feel a little weary in making predictions. What happened partly was that the military, as the World War I [inaudible] said you know what? This is too important for us. Coordination is key. We'll just fix this key and it became first a military technology and then a corporate technology. So when you turn on a radio nowadays you hear [inaudible]. It's just but nowadays I am seeing increasing use of especially Twitter to coordinate logistics on the ground by protesters. That is so striking. That it's so funny flying under the radar. One of the most striking cases I observed was this group called [inaudible] that sprung up, literally, in a half an hour during the November clashes in Egypt where 33 people were killed and thousands of people were injured. So these are widespread clashes that lots of people got killed. So there were 10 field hospitals near [inaudible] which is the large area of [inaudible] going in. So be it 10 large field hospitals where you're not just talking about people coordinating, you know, a few people with tear gas in their eyes to be washed out. You're talking about coordinating, you know, first level surgery, the dead people, dying people, very serious triage issues, lots of doctors, lots of nurses, lots of taken the wounded here and there, lots of medicine supplies. So this was done by three young activists. One in Dubai. One in Cairo. One in London sleeping around the clock in shifts which is -- I mean three kids coordinated 10 field hospitals. And this is -- my joke is that well this is why [inaudible] don't speak French or Russian because similar in [inaudible]. They needed somebody to tweak it through [inaudible] here and they -- so I'd like to -- let's see I'm going to end on this one. This is [inaudible]. This is her stopping a rogue riot police going into a village in [inaudible] and somebody behind her with a cellphone camera took this picture. After this picture was taken, this is a very striking image, right? Here's this young woman in her [inaudible] just holding up -- it's like the [inaudible] photo for me. So between this photo was taken and the half an hour it took for the [inaudible] police to bring female police to arrest her because this was all men. They couldn't arrest her. The men could not touch her because it's [inaudible]. In that half an hour, I watched. They went

from [inaudible] previous interviewed her to [inaudible] media [inaudible] Washington, D.C. really get into this story. So while she's laying there, you know, just not moving and refusing to cooperate there was such a big international commotion when the female cops arrived, [inaudible] and the people who were with her, heard them say, wait, stop, no, we are not going to arrest her. Because if they arrested her this was the front --