

New Media and the Arab Spring of 2011

This paper examines the impact and interplay of news media and social media network sites on the contemporary political revolutions and crises that have been unfolding in North Africa and the Middle East. Known as the "Arab Spring"™, these began in Tunisia, in February 2011, and spread to Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Libya and Syria. In spite of concerns expressed by professional journalists drawn from the conventional media at the rise of citizen journalism since the 1990s, the middle-class citizens and the intellectual groups that pioneered the crusade for governmental change in the region resorted to social media networks, in collaboration with the traditional media, to "legitimise"™ the people's protests and civic resistance by citizens against their governments. The citizen journalists, who were part of the mass protest, used both old and new media to reveal incidences of human rights abuses and crimes against humanity committed by respective governments during the revolutions. Having reviewed the media reports on the revolutions, together with the opinions of experts on Middle East studies, it is clear that: the abuse of human rights; corruption among public officials; and, the high rate of unemployment in the region were the three main factors that ignited civil disobedience across the Arab World in 2011. Nevertheless, the citizen journalism that facilitated these revolutions remains a novelty in many developing nations, including Nigeria.