



# Nomos & Khaos

*The 2011 Nomisma report  
on economic-strategic horizons*

Observatory on Strategic and Security Scenarios

**Nomos & Khaos**

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## 2.1

## Evolution of the infosphere. New sources for news stories – networked journalism and social networks

Francesco Vitali

On 2 February Rupert Murdoch took the stage at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, an emblematic venue, to launch *The Daily*, the first daily news product conceived solely for the iPad. The man who for years has dominated television media – with Fox and Sky, and newspapers with the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Times* amongst others – decided to take a giant step forward, entering into an alliance with Steve Jobs, the king of Apple.

Though *The Daily* was presented as a “daily”, in reality it is a constantly updated multimedia news tool. Aesthetically it is very attractive, whilst the price is in line with other new media: subscribers pay just 14 cents a day.

When the first bloggers analysed the images of the presentation, they speculated that Murdoch held in his hands a prototype of the latest version of the iPad which was not yet for sale. On the screen in the background during the presentation there was an explanatory title published by the new daily on the revolt in Egypt and the “The Falling Pharaoh”.

The way in which the event was marketed had been carefully studied, and in fact the product offers plenty of keywords and ideas for analysing the way in which language and news media are evolving. It was a brief presentation relating how the world of media is undergoing a great transformation. Media may now be accessed anywhere and at any time, whilst readers are increasingly becoming producers of news, almost as if they were freelance journalists.

## EVOLUTION OF THE INFOSPHERE

These new tools for accessing information are gaining ground not only in the United States, where 61% of the population seek information online on a daily basis, but also in Europe and in the developing countries. In order to measure and compare the online news consumer situation in Italy with the American situation, a group of researchers from Urbino Carlo Bo University<sup>1</sup> took an extensive study by Pew Research Centre<sup>2</sup> and adapted it to Italy. The research shows that 51.1% of the population also obtain information through Internet news aggregator portals such as Google News, MSN and Libero Notizie.

The figure is lower than in the United States, but nevertheless highly significant for a nation where hitherto the public has remained attached to a single medium: television. This figure soars to 93.8% in the 18-29-year-old bracket. 14.4% of the sample (even though still less than half the American figure), access information through their cell phones. Furthermore, one specific piece of data concerning the users of social networks is highly significant: 36.4% have contributed to the creation of news, posting comments or broadcasting news through e-mails and social network sites such as Facebook and Twitter. These users are thus classified as “participatory news consumers”. This survey becomes all the more significant if we associate with it the fact that one in two Internet users access this sort of virtual “town square” on a daily basis<sup>3</sup>.

In America, as Sergio Maistrello relates in a fascinating book<sup>4</sup>, the story of Janis Krums has become an interesting case study. This 24-year-old was on one of the ferry boats connecting New York to New Jersey, when a plane afloat on the sea was spotted. It was Us Airways flight 1549 which had taken off from La Guardia and had had to make an emergency landing on the sea after hitting a flock of birds. Without hesitating a second, Krums pulled out his cell-phone and took a photo. Afterwards, touching the screen, he uploaded the image to TwitPic and immediately posted it to Twitter, the social network which distils its users’ messages into just 140 characters, little more than an SMS. In a second the photo was online.

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<sup>1</sup> L. Mazzoli, F. Giglietto, A. Bellafiore, M. Orefice, “L’informazione: da rito a puzzle. Le news e gli italiani: dalla carta stampata, alla rete al mobile” [News and information: from a rite to a puzzle. News and the Italians: from the press to mobile networks], *Università degli Studi di Urbino Carlo Bo. Communications Science Department, LaRiCA (Advanced Communications Research Laboratory)*, 10/2/2011.

<sup>2</sup> K. Purcell, L. Rainie, A. Mitchell, T. Rosenstiel, K. Olmstead, “Understanding the Participatory News Consumer”, *Pew Research Center for the People & the Press*, Wikileaks, 1/3/2010.

<sup>3</sup> Data presented by TNS-Digital Life Italia at the Digital Communication Forum, Milan 16/2/2011.

<sup>4</sup> S. Maistrello, *Giornalismo e nuovi media. L’informazione al tempo del citizen journalism [Journalism and new media. News in the era of citizen journalism]*, Apogeo, Milan, 2010.

And this is the great difference between his shot and those of all the other passengers on the ferry: it was he who provided an image and the news story, without even realising it.

In just a few minutes that photo had been taken and shared on the personal pages of all the social networks until it landed on the desks of “traditional” journalists. In Italy, a similar episode occurred on 29 June 2009 in Viareggio, where Alberto Macaluso, a 30-year-old web designer, equipped with a cell phone and camera, was the first person to post the images and “provide a live account” of the derailling of a goods train which destroyed part of the city in a ball of fire. Even the images of the uprisings in the Middle East, in Maghreb, from Tunisia to Libya, are almost always taken by simple “citizens”. Blurry, out of focus images, but it is precisely their poor quality which gives these images their impact. They portray – very effectively – the immense excitement and drama of the moment.

The press agencies, Tvs and newspapers acquire videos uploaded to Youtube, as well as stories posted to the social networks, and immediately republish them through the traditional media channels, turning them into events. Sometimes these players are merely information free-riders, and with the fig-leaf of the right to information, acquire a document and publish it as if it were theirs. Other times, more properly, they ask permission from the person creating the information to use it, possibly paying a fee as if they were dealing with a news agency. Both cases underscore the incredible innovation wrought by Internet and by all the devices, including cell phones, which allow one to go online and immediately interact with the networked public: these uploaded documents can be recognized as a “news source”.

This transformation makes it necessary to perform a constant cost benefit analysis to weigh up the use of unverified<sup>5</sup> material and the speed with which it can be posted to a particular channel to ensure that it beats the competition. Any verification of reliability is made after the event, sometimes also by bloggers. The consequence is that publication of information is not necessarily synonymous with quality; all that matters is the speed with which news is posted to a particular channel.

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<sup>5</sup> There are plenty of examples of hoaxes being uploaded and then immediately disseminated by press agencies and newspapers. The most dangerous are those which are presented scientifically, one piece of information at a time, thereby reducing the possibility for internet users to act as filters and reveal their fictitious origin. Of particular interest is the example of possible manipulation of entries in Wikipedia, an instrument which is frequently used by journalists. Even if false, once the story has been shared socially, it is unlikely that it can be refuted or deleted from internet.

News communication has always been based on three logical steps: sources-journalists-public<sup>6</sup>: an unassailable straight line in which the journalist acts as a filter and analyst in respect of the verified source from which he receives the news. Nowadays this straight line has turned into a triangle: sources, journalists and the public are in reality very closely intertwined in a one-to-one relationship with a mutual, constant *quid pro quo*.

The journalist is no longer a gatekeeper, the person who decides whether to publish or not. In Italy too, editorial staff are adapting to the new world where increasingly it is the “readers” who decide which are the most important news stories to publish in the traditional media. Thus the web editors constantly update the newspaper’s online page, also taking into account information originating from Internet. A new position has thus been created, that of the journalist who monitors which stories are most “clicked” on the site of his own newspaper in order to analyse them in greater detail in a later meeting with the editor-in-chief.

It is as if the advent of new media played a role in inverting the “agenda setting”<sup>7</sup> trend. Thus it is no longer the journalists who establish some of the key issues in the debate taking place across the country, but the networked public.

It is time journalists returned to their roots, performing total news mediation in which the journalist is the first person to verify whether the news is accurate. This is a task which not all web users can perform, due to a lack of professionalism, resources and time. A blog too, when done professionally, can become an interactive, updated archive, capable of entering into alliances and competing with the 21<sup>st</sup> century media system<sup>8</sup>.

Confirmation of this can be seen in the acquisition, in February 2011, for \$315 million, by ICT AOL, of the Huffington Post news site. Huffpo, as it is commonly referred to online, was the brainchild of Arianna Huffington, Kenneth Lerer and Jonah Poretti. It was set up as a simple liberal/progressive information blog; before long its contributors included Barack Obama, Robert Redford and Michael Moore. It expanded rapidly, with a particular focus on investigative journalism, until it

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<sup>6</sup> Jeff Jarvis offers some interesting thoughts on the lengthening life cycle (and evolution) of news stories in the digital media era in: J. Jarvis, “The Press Becomes the Press-sphere”, *Buzzmachine*, 14/4/2008, [www.buzzmachine.com](http://www.buzzmachine.com) (14/4/2008, 5:37).

<sup>7</sup> The scientific basis, which has long been the object of study of agenda setting communication theory, is still essentially valid. The new ways for media and readers to interact generate complex phenomena which deserve further quantitative and qualitative analysis. See C. Formenti, “Ma il cinguettio non nasce in Rete” [But twittering was not born on internet], *Corriere Economia*, 28/2/2011.

<sup>8</sup> V. Maccari, “Tutti alla ricerca dei contenuti: le notizie diventano merce pregiata” [Everyone in search of content, news stories become valuable items], *Repubblica – supplement to Affari e Finanza*, 14/2/2011.

became one of the most read, influential blogs in the world<sup>9</sup>.

Its success was made all the easier by perfect interaction with such social media as Facebook, Twitter, Yahoo and Google. Alongside the Huffpo, particular mention should be made of ProPublica, a non-profit making New York company funded with €10 million a year for at least three years by Herbert and Marion Sandler. These two billionaires decided that America needed more investigative and real journalism of the type that, as Maistrello<sup>10</sup> writes, the economic crisis and the various epoch-making technological transformations have almost done away with; at the very least these latter factors have caused a general fall in the quality of articles.

The aim of the editors is not so much to produce articles for their site, rather to bring to the attention of the public those facts which would otherwise remain in the shadows: journalism and investigation, news and analysis. These are examples which show how Internet is not necessarily synonymous with speed and superficiality.

In May 2009 the *New York Times* established a new profession within the editorial staff: that of “social media editor”. The position was first held by Jennifer Preston, a war reporter, a professor at Columbia University and a long-standing journalist for the American daily. This is only the official demonstration that even the most prestigious, time-honoured newspapers, if they wish to survive, must no longer delay integration and constant contact with the “new world”: the world of social media. American ICT is infatuated with emphatic definitions: in fact, over time, and as marketing evolves, the social editors have already become “social evangelists”.

#### THE VIRTUAL WORLD BECOMES REAL

Most studies on social networks have concentrated on the exponential user growth rates or, at most, on relationship flow dynamics. Statistics from a recent piece of research by Pew Research Centre<sup>11</sup> finally allow us to reflect on the impact of social networks on society and on the ways in which groups organize themselves through these new technologies. The research is based on a sample of adult American citizens and this fact allows us to assume that the trends pinpointed in

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<sup>9</sup> According to Technorati statistics, Huffpo is considered the most influential blog in the world. See <http://technorati.com>.

<sup>10</sup> S. Maistrello, 2010, *op. cit.* p. 169.

<sup>11</sup> L. Rainie, A. Smith, K. Purcell, “The social side of the Internet”, *Pew Internet & American Life Project*, Pew Research Center Publications, Washington, 18/1/2011.

the survey would be even more marked in the case of schoolchildren or adolescents who are truly web natives.

Analysis of the responses shows that Internet plays a highly significant role as a facilitator of social relations, amplifying, or at least simplifying citizens' ability to coalesce on single issues or complex campaigns. Whilst only the 56% of the population who do not use the network take part in organized group activities, this percentage rises to 80% amongst users of Internet. The figure soars to 82% amongst social network users in general, and is as high as 85% for users of Twitter. Also of great interest are the figures on the type of impact which these new technologies are having on group dynamics. 68% of Americans (75% if we consider only Internet users) maintain that Internet plays a key role in facilitating communication between the members of their group. 62% – 68% amongst users of Internet – believe that Internet boosts a group's ability to capture and focus attention on a specific issue.

The role of facilitator in the social organization of groups emerges from three other statistics: 53% of online Americans who play an active role within groups believe that Internet is essential for keeping up-to-date on matters of interest and on the activities of one's group. This capability surely impacts the speed with which a technologically savvy group can react to unexpected change, whether these be new phenomena in the socio-political sphere, draft bills or economic and other problems. Internet also has a significant impact on the group's ability to affect real communities. 35% believe that Internet increases one's ability to invite friends to join one and to involve them in the group's activities, thus triggering a multiplier effect on the number of members and on their potential impact on the "real world". Most friends are still involved in offline rather than online life. Aggregations of individuals who have come together on Internet however are more active locally and so can directly impact local events.

In articles written by journalists on Internet phenomena, the aim is always to give a face to a group. It is hard to relate an event without characterizing it with the name of the leader. In this manner "personalities" who are not necessarily representative are often identified and brought to the attention of readers<sup>12</sup>. And yet Internet also plays a role in determining who new leaders will be. And one out of three citizens believes that Internet has a key impact on a group's ability to de-

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<sup>12</sup> A good example of this was the race by the media to interview the various bloggers who supposedly led the uprisings in the Maghreb over the last few months. Although the mentioned cited bloggers have become the symbol of a movement, not for this have been the leaders. Each case must be assessed individually.

termine its own leader. This fact is anything but insignificant bearing in mind the highly polycentric, not to say anarchic, nature of the web.

Internet plays a very real role in the achievement of objectives. In fact 53% of the members of groups who have succeeded in having a candidate elected to a public position consider that Internet is essential for such success. The use of Internet also seems to cater to the multidimensional nature of the modern citizen. 46% of people who are socially active are of the opinion that the web helps them to be active in a number of groups in which they would not otherwise take part. Individuals on Internet thus seem to have retrieved that social dimension which had been lost in the solitary surfing by the first geeks at the beginning of the Internet era. It is the most active users who largely use the new communication technologies, ranging from straightforward, yet potent text messages, to blogs and social media.

The trends amongst Internet users we have highlighted become ever more significant in those groups within society which use social networks. Those who are most active in groups use social networks more intensively. Conversely, those who are registered with a social network are more likely to play an active role within the group, publishing news on Facebook or Twitter and inviting new people to join their initiatives. There is also a greater likelihood of their signing up for new proposals and social campaigns.

A final piece of highly significant information emerges from the survey: members of a group who are active on Internet feel pride in their achievements and are more inclined to declare that they have achieved their objectives. This effect, pertaining more to an individual's psychological sphere, affecting his or her sense of accomplishment, self-esteem and gratification, may also have a social impact when taken up on a large scale. It almost seems that there is some sort of pressure favouring social innovation.

If we compare this data with the analysis of the role played by social networks in Tunisia and Egypt, it immediately becomes clear that the analytical and predictive extent of the results obtained cannot be limited solely to the American social structure<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> In order to discover how this type of result can be disseminated in differently organised social structures, such as in the Middle East or the Far East, social scientists cannot afford to leave this matter unexplored.

## SOCIAL MEDIA, DEMOCRACY AND SOFT POWER

On 21 January 2010, Hillary Clinton, the American Secretary of State, unveiled a new item on the American foreign policy agenda. The title of her speech was “Internet Freedom”<sup>14</sup>.

The 2010 speech represented the political and philosophical manifesto dictating a change of tack in the manner in which America wields its “soft power”. Her speech was not innovative in terms of the issues addressed, which have been dear to the hearts of American politicians since the Bill Clinton and George W. Bush administrations, but clearly revealed to what extent Obama and his staff have decided to invest in Internet. Internet is an exceptional, modern tool for bringing “soft power” to bear, in order to project “democratic influence” over semi-democracies and dictatorships throughout the world. Taking stock of the strategy defined by the President, who was, in part, elected thanks to an outstanding electoral campaign using social media, we can see both light and shade.

Probably the most accurate analysis of this period has been made by Clay Shirky in his essay “The Political Power of Social Media”<sup>15</sup>. The American researcher can be defined as a techno-realist, and in his analysis of social media, he stresses both the successes chalked up by new communication technologies, such as cell phones and internet, in promoting social activities, and the risks for those who employ such technologies inside totalitarian states. These technological harbingers of freedom can turn into a terribly pervasive “Big Brother”, able not only to monitor social movements, but also to accurately pinpoint dissidents<sup>16</sup>.

In the author’s opinion the United States has focused too much on technology, speculating that the use of internet and the development of software allowing dissidents to access information would have automatically contributed to the advancement of democracy in dictatorships. Shirky however maintains that the greatest efforts must be directed at encouraging unimpeded dialogue within society. Because it is only through conversation that a nation’s political awareness can

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<sup>14</sup> It is interesting to note that the speech published on the site of the Department of State (<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2010/01/135519.htm>) can be read not only in English, like most similar documentation, but also in Arabic, Chinese, French, Persian, Russian, Spanish and Urdu. All these languages are certainly indicative of the target of this “proclamation”.

<sup>15</sup> C. Shirky, “The Political Power of Social Media”, *Foreign Affairs*, January- February 2011, vol. 90, n. 1, pp. 28-41.

<sup>16</sup> An example of this is the failed Green Revolution in Iran. In 2009 the Iranian rebels managed to coordinate protests and become famous throughout the world thanks to the combined use of cell phones and, especially, the social network Twitter. But it was these technological tools which then allowed the regime to identify and punish dissidents.

increase. Shirky, for example, emphasizes that any attempt by a totalitarian government to prevent any large-scale “non-political” group from exchanging photos of, say, cats – “*the Cute Cat Theory of Digital Activism*” by Ethan Zuckerman<sup>17</sup> – has in fact a political cost in terms of greater internal dissent, as well as a technological cost which is much greater than the cost of identifying and censoring a single dissident. And it is for this reason that more resources should be invested in internal freedom of expression, even if the topics are seemingly futile.

All states, not only totalitarian states, have to decide between two options<sup>18</sup>: on the one hand they can encourage the free use of new media in order to boost development and the country’s economy, whilst on the other hand they can limit new media access as far as possible and ban internet and the use of cell phones to avoid losing control over society: a trade-off which involves both democracies and dictatorial regimes, and whose significant economic and social costs are difficult to manage.

China is well aware that when it uses the “Great Technological Wall<sup>19</sup>” to block secure access to Internet through VPN (virtual private networks) it is also harming an instrument which is essential for the prosperity of its businesses. Shirky maintains that the USA, in its freedom campaign, has overestimated the power of technology and conversely underestimated the role played by society. He also emphasizes, *inter alia*, that excessive focus on the use of Internet<sup>20</sup> prompts dictatorial regimes to resort to even more control and censorship tools as they consider Internet to be an American policy tool rather than the universal instrument that it really is. The events taking place at the end of 2010 and the first half of 2011 largely confirmed Shirky’s analysis, but at the same time showed that his timing forecasts were completely misjudged as certain social evolutions can unfold faster than the timeframe needed by an author to analyse the situation and write his article.

#### FROM THE WIKILEAKS CASE TO THE ARAB SPRING

Wikileaks<sup>21</sup> represents an exceptional example of how contemporary communication has been reshaped in the era of Internet and social media. It can clearly be

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<sup>17</sup> C. Shirky, *op.cit.*, p 37.

<sup>18</sup> Shirky cites what is known as the “dictator’s dilemma”, then adapted and taken up in the “conservative dilemma” by the English historian, Asa Briggs.

<sup>19</sup> Known also as “The Golden Shield Project”.

<sup>20</sup> See also E. Morozov, “L’autogol di Internet Agenda” [The internet agenda own goal], *Il Sole 24 Ore*, n. 10, 11/1/2011.

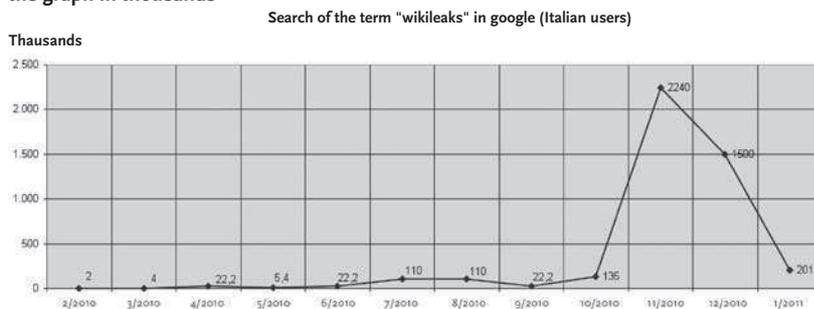
<sup>21</sup> The Cablegate case, which we will refer to below, broke out on 28 November 2010, the date on which the first confidential dispatches sent by American diplomats were made public.

seen that Juliane Assange employed a very carefully implemented strategy – with varying degrees of success – to use tools which until recently were totally unknown. Only few examples will provide food for thought.

For example, he created a system based on the Wiki concept which envisaged collaborative management and dissemination of the service. These sites and documents were made accessible by using free, widely available cloud-computing services such as those offered by Google and Yahoo. In order to assist users and without causing distribution systems to collapse, peer-to-peer exchange procedures were employed. As a consummate Internet artist, and indeed precisely because he has always been perfectly aware of the limits of Internet in disseminating information, Assange decided to enter into an alliance with traditional media in order to reach as wide a public as possible and to generate as much feedback as possible on online blogs and information sites. He created competition between newspapers with targeted “exclusives”, and he sought to curb the “information overload” effect by publishing dispatches according to precise timeframes and organized by topic and country, without overloading one particular national information channel.

An indicator of the success of his communication strategy can be seen in the trend, for example in Italy (see figure n. 2.1.1), relating to the number of times that the word Wikileaks was sought on the Google search engine. This word was searched for very frequently in a very short space of time.

**Figure 2.1.1. – Searches performed on Google in Italy (period: February 2010 – January 2011) regarding the term “wikileaks”. The figures are expressed in absolute terms and are indicated in the graph in thousands**

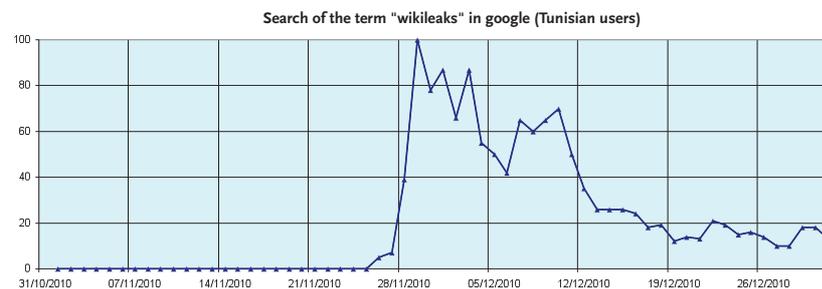


Source: processing by F. Vitali on Google Adwords data.

The curve naturally varies from country to country, in part according to the date on which news stories concerning local domestic politics were published. If we take Tunisia as an example, it can be noted that after reaching a worldwide peak on 29 November 2010, there were sharp spikes of interest between 8 and 11 December 2010. The trend is similar both for searches carried out on Google’s generic

search engine (see figure n. 2.1.2) and on the search engine dedicated solely to online news (see figure n. 2.1.3). It was precisely at this time that very critical opinions made by American diplomats were published on the issue of corruption in the Tunisian government, and specifically regarding the family of the then President Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali.

**Figure 2.1.2 – Survey of searches carried out over a period of time (1/11/2010-31/12/2010) on Google Search for the term “wikileaks” by users in Tunisia**



Source: processing by F. Vitali on Google Adwords data.

**Figure 2.1.3. – Survey of searches carried out over a period of time (1/11/2010 – 31/12/2010) on Google News for the term “wikileaks” by users in Tunisia**



Source: processing by F. Vitali on Google Adwords data.

The above figures set out in the graphs show the number of web searches performed for a specific term in relation to the total number of searches on Google Search (Fig. 2.1.2) and Google News (Fig. 2.1.3) over the same period of time (1/11/2010-31/12/2010). They do not show the absolute search volume figures as the data is normalised and presented on a scale from 0 to 100; after normalization, each point on the graph is divided by the highest value and then multiplied by 100. When the data is insufficient, 0 is shown.

Assange contends that the publication of this information played a key role in paving the way for the Tunisian uprising which a month later sparked the ouster of the regime. From a social point of view the Wikileaks leader is probably claiming merits which are not his as the revolt cannot simply be explained in this manner. In fact, people took to the streets to demonstrate ten days later, when a young street trader set himself alight following confiscation of his goods.

The revolt took root because economic, political and social conditions in the country were close to collapse. And yet it cannot be denied that the Wikileaks revelations, disclosing to large sectors of society, including the military<sup>22</sup>, that the United States<sup>23</sup> had such a low opinion of the ruling class, served as an effective catalyst for change<sup>24</sup>.

Thus the people in the Maghreb became aware that not only it is possible to rebel against corrupt dictators, but it is also possible to oust them through “semi-peaceful” protests. A sort of chain reaction was generated in the North African countries encouraged by local groups organised through social networks. Groups which, like Assange, professionally leveraged synergies with traditional media in order to gain national and international coverage for their actions.

During the Arab Spring social media also demonstrated that they were not merely an amplifier, a megaphone for Internet rumours, but that they were capable of giving rise to a what we could call a full-blown “social additive effect”. Acting in the same way as additives in chemical reactions, they contributed to altering and bolstering certain social phenomena, frequently helping to create new ones.

Another lesson to be drawn on the power of internet comes from Egypt and specifically, Wael Ghonim, a Google manager who was probably the leader of the on-line protest movement and who set in motion the social revolt<sup>25</sup> which ultimately triggered the fall of Hosni Mubarak. Not only did he have the courage to openly challenge the regime, using specifically Twitter and Facebook to organise the protest movements, but Ghonim also had the advantage of “knowledge”. As he was the marketing manager for Google in the Middle East and North Africa, he had access to all the network trends in those countries, not only the most searched for words but also the popular “mood”. These are data that, with the help of current

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<sup>22</sup> See also the analysis by M. Naim in “Nella rivolta in Nord Africa più decisivi i fucili e le Tv di Twitter e Facebook” [*In the North African revolt rifles and television have had a greater impact than Twitter and Facebook*], *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 27/2/2011, even if there is no disputing the role played by Internet in the Arab uprising.

<sup>23</sup> The French, who considered Tunisia as falling within their sphere of influence, are still trying to find out whether the impact of the Wikileaks investigations was purely casual, or whether it was manipulated by the American government.

<sup>24</sup> Two of the protesters’ slogans were “*bread and water but Ben Ali out*” (Houbz wa maa wa bin ali ala bara), or “*bread and water but no Ben Ali*” (Houbz wa maa wa la bin ali), making it clear that improvement in the economic situation would not have satisfied the people. The aim was to oust the regime.

<sup>25</sup> The development of certain phenomena on Internet is almost never a product of simple spontaneity, but it is addressed and promoted by strategically studied actions. See for example A. Maher, “Per rovesciare Hosni studiavamo Belgrado” [We have studied Belgrade to overthrow Hosni], *Il Riformista*, 23/2/2011.

sentiment analysis and social network analysis techniques, allows one to carry out investigations which are much more accurate than a simple social search, thereby making it possible to predict trends.

This fact is well-known not only to analysts who have estimated (see figure n. 2.1.4) that the value of each single Facebook user's data is approximately \$100, but to stock exchange investors who use Twitter data to forecast market trends, to the CIA<sup>26</sup> which has invested in Facebook, and to the Russians who have striven to copy the Americans. In fact it was none other than the Russian Deputy Prime Minister, Igor Sechin, the energy *tsar* and one of premier Vladimir Putin's closest allies, who went so far as to accuse Google and its Egyptian manager of fuelling the revolt by "manipulating popular sentiment"<sup>27</sup>.

**Figure 2.1.4. – Value of user profiles: calculated according to estimates of the company's overall value**

FACEBOOK					
SOCIAL NETWORK	WHEN	VALUE OF COMPANY (DOLLARS)	USER DATA VALUE (APPROXIMATE)	EVENT	VALUE PER USER IN THE INVESTMENT (DOLLARS)
Facebook	01/2011	\$ 50,000,000,000	500,000,000	Goldman Sachs and Dst investment	\$ 100
Facebook	06/2010	\$ 23,000,000,000	400,000,000	Elevation Partner investment	\$ 57
Facebook	05/2009	\$ 10,000,000,000	200,000,000	Dst investment	\$ 50
Facebook	03/2008	\$ 15,000,000,000	80,000,000	Li Ka Shing investment	\$ 187
Facebook	10/2007	\$ 15,000,000,000	50,000,000	Microsoft investment	\$ 300

Sources: CrunchBase, Businessinsider, Facebook, Sec, others. Processing: Repubblica.it  
Taken from M. Munafo, "Dear user, how much are you worth? The account "pricelist". Repubblica, www.repubblica.it, 08/1/2011.

Only in the future will we have sufficient information to make an assessment of the trends surrounding the uprisings in the Arab world, from Bahrain to Libya, as well as with regard to Wikileaks. Probably in one year's time we will be able to answer the question posed last<sup>28</sup> 11 January by a number of diplomats specialising in new media: "who benefited from publication of diplomatic documents by Wikileaks?"

<sup>26</sup> N. Shachtman, "Exclusive: Google, CIA Invest in 'Future' of Web Monitoring", *Wired*, 28/7/2010.

<sup>27</sup> G. White, "Russia's Sechin Defends Investment Climate", *The Wall Street Journal*, 22/2/2011 (www.Wsj.com).

<sup>28</sup> The meeting "WikiLeaks and the Future of Diplomacy" was held in Geneva on 11 January 2011. See also <http://edip.diplomacy.edu>.

Commentators initially posited the notion that it was the Chinese. Now, the answer seems a lot less straightforward. In all probability, the Americans did not choose to generate the flow of information, even if on several occasions, though embarrassed, they benefited from the effects of the revelations on international policy.

## CONCLUSIONS

On 15 February 2011, in the midst of the Arab Spring, Hillary Clinton gave her second speech on internet freedom. “Internet Rights and Wrongs: Choices & Challenges in a Networked World”<sup>29</sup>. That speech was more multifaceted and less philosophical than her first speech in 2010. The Secretary of State was aware of the trade-off proposed by experts like Shirky and Briggs, and stated:

*“For the United States, the choice is clear. On the spectrum of Internet freedom, we place ourselves on the side of openness. Now, we recognize that an open Internet comes with challenges. It calls for ground rules to protect against wrongdoing and harm. And Internet freedom raises tensions, like all freedoms do. But we believe the benefits far exceed the costs”.*

Although she made mention in her speech of the Arab states, Iran and China, this time it seemed to be directed as much at western governments and those Americans who believed it necessary to keep internet under control.

Measures adopted in order to “regulate” the web may be justified as lawful and warranted by the fight against terrorism, copyright breach or defamation on blogs and social media. A form of control however which offers “non-democracies” the technological instruments and legal principles to justify censoring a blog, arresting a dangerous “hacker,” or “turning off” public communication networks in the event of a cyber attack<sup>30</sup> by a domestic or foreign “enemy”. Two days after Hillary Clinton’s speech, Barak Obama had dinner with the top 12 American ICT manages, notably Mark Zuckerberg, Eric Schmidt, Carol Bartz and Larry Ellison. The purpose was conceivably to discuss how to reorganise the NetFreedom Task Force, or maybe to debate the future of the world. Certainly the Russians and the Chinese will not be standing idly by.

<sup>29</sup> See also “Internet Freedom Fact Sheet” (<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2011/02/156623.htm>).

<sup>30</sup> The geographically limited version of so-called “Internet Kill Switch” which ought to allow the American President to “turn off” Internet even for 120 days in the event of a cyber attack (Cfr L. Larivera, “La militarizzazione del ciber spazio” [The militarisation of cyberspace], *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 2/10/2010, pp. 82-91), has been temporarily put into practice by both Mubarak in Egypt and other dictators in North Africa and Middle East.

aircraft. In 1999, during the Balkans conflict he was Operational Commander of the Italian Air Force which was involved in the conflict, as well as Vice-Commander of the entire multinational air force coalition. At the end of these operations he was summoned to Palazzo Chigi by Prime Minister D'Alema as his military adviser, a position he maintained with the subsequent Prime Ministers Amato and Berlusconi. In the five-year period at the Prime Minister's office he was also head of the crisis unit (NPM), president of the Interministerial Committee for Transport Safety (COCIST), and president of the Interministerial Working Party for Defence Exports (GLICED). In 2009 he was one of the founding members of the ICSA (Intelligence Culture and Strategic Analysis) foundation.

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