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Discovering the Libyan youth movement's identity through Facebook

Kurzfassung: Die vorliegende Studie zeigt, wie kritische Diskursanalyse dafür verwendet werden kann, die Identität eines politischen Akteurs zu erkennen und – sogar im Kontext einer Revolution – zutreffende Vorhersagen seiner Intentionen und Ziele zu machen. Unter Verwendung von 45 Bildern, die auf der Facebook-Seite der Gruppe während der ersten Wochen der libyschen Revolution von 2011 gepostet wurden, benutzen die Autoren der Studie die kritische Diskursanalyse um die Identität der libyschen Jugendbewegung empirisch zu erfassen. Die Autoren entdeckten eine Vielzahl an Diskursen, die es erlaubten, eine Gruppenidentität zu identifizieren und Vorhersagen über die Ziele und Intentionen der Gruppe zu treffen. Diese Ergebnisse sind auch insofern bedeutsam, als sie Belege für den praktischen Nutzen diskursanalytischer Ansätze in der kommunikations- und politikwissenschaftlichen Forschung liefern.

Abstract: This study demonstrates that critical discourse analysis can be used to quickly discern the identity of a political actor and make accurate predictions about that actor's intentions and goals, even in the context of a revolution. This study's authors used critical discourse analysis to empirically assess the identity of the Libyan Youth Movement using 45 images posted on the group's Facebook page during the opening weeks of the Libyan revolution of 2011. The authors uncovered multiple discourses which permitted the positing of a group identity as well as predictions of the group's goal and intentions. The findings are significant in that they provide new evidence to support the practical utility of discourse analytic approaches in contemporary communications and political science research.

Introduction

This study used data collected during the opening weeks of the Libyan revolution in order to test whether discourse analysis could be used to quickly discern the identity of a political actor and make accurate predictions about that actor's intentions and goals, even in the context of a revolution. The authors assumed that new media, like other forms of communication, allowed for the expression of identity and that discourse analysis could be used to uncover the discourses which underlay that identity. Following the argument of social constructivist author Ted Hopf who argued that discourse analysis can allow for the prediction of an actor's political goals (Hopf, 16), the authors endeavored to uncover the identity of the Libyan Youth Movement (LYM).

This article proceeds by first briefly presenting the background to the Libyan Revolution of 2011, then providing a discussion of the study's methodology, and next a presentation of the study's quantitative and qualitative findings. The second half of the paper explores five of the most prominent and interesting discourses uncovered in the analysis of the images and text from the LYM's Facebook page followed by a discussion of the researchers' conclusions about the identity of the LYM which were reassessed for their accuracy 16 months after their initial postulation. Lastly, a description of some of the limitations of the study and possible areas of further research are provided.

Background

The Libyan revolution broke out following nearly two months of revolutionary protest in the neighboring countries of Tunisia and Egypt. The Tunisian and Egyptian protest movements resulted in the toppling of the *de facto* dictatorships in those states on January 14 and February 11, 2011, respectively. On February 6, 2011 the LYM created a Facebook page which allowed for the posting of images and text (LYM Facebook website, 2011). The LYM described itself as, "a group of Libyan youth, both inside and out of the country, with a shared desire, with the help of Allah, to return our country to prosperity InshaAllah [God willing] (Ibid)." The following day the group established a Twitter page and on both social media websites the LYM urged people to go out and protest on February 17, a date it termed the national "day of anger (Ibid and LYM Twitter website, 2011)."

On February 16 protests erupted in Benghazi, Libya's second largest city, and were quickly followed by other protests across the country during the following days (*Bloomberg*, February 25, 2011). The protests soon became violent and within five days protesters in Tripoli had been attacked by militias loyal to Libya's aging dictator, Muammar Qaddafi, and Libyan government aircraft had been used to strafe and drop bombs on protesters (*New York Times*, February 21, 2011). On February 26 the UN Security Council voted unanimously to impose sanctions on the Qaddafi regime (*New York Times*, February 26, 2011) and in the following days the country descended into civil war between opposing groups of conventional forces (*New York Times*, February 25, 2011). Throughout this entire period thousands of messages were posted by the LYM on their Twitter and Facebook pages which became a *de facto* voice of the opposition.

Theory/Methodology

Discourse analysis is a broadly defined semiotic methodology that has risen to prominence in the past two decades for its ability to provide researchers with a tool with which to study the meanings of text, images and speech. The procedures for conducting discourse analysis are not homogeneous and there is no one universal methodology for conducting a discourse analysis (Fairclough, 20-22, 2000, Titscher, Meyer, Wodak and Vetter, 51, 2000). Epistemologically this *status quo* has garnered widespread acceptance from the social science and humanities branches of the academic community. Friedrich V. Kratochwil for example has argued that in the context of deciphering meaning from some form of expression the discussion should and simply cannot reasonably be deduced to universally "increasing the frequency of observations and/or the reduction in 'variance' (Kratochwil, 26, 2007)."

Other more conservative authors might argue that the discourse analytic findings are inherently subjective and therefore of a dubious empirical nature. This categorization however of discourse analytic findings as inherently subjective must be accepted by academic community. University of Cardiff professor Theo Van Leeuwen has addressed this point and argued against positivist attempts to standardize the discourse analytic methodology. He states that meanings derived through discourse analysis will inherently remain subjective due to their temporal and contextually determinant interpretative nature and therefore will always lack "objectively fixed meaning (Van Leeuwen, 5, 2005)."

Any methodological critique of discourse analytic methods, due to the methodology's inherent nature as subjective qualifier of meaning, must therefore be assessed in retrospect. This study does exactly that by revisiting and weighing their validity and the accuracy of the study's original findings 16 months after their initial postulation. In choosing this self-critiqued methodology the authors aimed to address the subjectivity critique inherent in the study's choice of methodology and demonstrate the methodology's accuracy and potential for providing a relatively robust level of predictive power.

This study was not the first to conduct an analysis of an actor's identity using discourse analysis nor was it the first to use social media as evidence. In 2003 Ted Hopf's groundbreaking book, *"The Social Construction of International Politics,"* described and defined Soviet and Russian identities and discourses in 1955 and 1999 largely using a heuristic methodology of textual analysis and just as effectively put discourse analytic approaches on the radar of social constructivist political scientists (Hopf, 2003). More recently American University of Sharjah professor, Abeer Najjar, incorporated social media as evidence in her discourse analytic study of identity portrayal by Palestinians during the Gaza War of 2008-2009 (Najjar, 2010).

This study's methodology followed in the footsteps of Hopf and utilized a heuristic discourse analytic methodology. Guided by the hypothesis that social media could be used to convey an identity the authors selected the contemporary topic of the nascent group of Libyan revolutionaries, some of whom were said to have had links with Al Qaeda (*Telegraph*, March 18, 2011). The LYM's Facebook page was found and the authors decided to assess the images posted by the LYM page's author. The LYM Facebook page's author had created a total of nine photo albums at the time of the analysis and each album contained a minimum of five photographs. In order to review the largest sample of images without biasing any one album over another the first five images from each album were selected to be included in the sample.

A total of 45 images were then reviewed collaboratively by the researchers who spent two minutes analyzing each image independently and then held an open group discussion to determine which discourse predominated in the image. The names of discourses were based on the researchers' interpretations of the symbols present in the images they viewed and were shaped through group discussion. Ultimately 10 discourses were distilled from the photos and any accompanying text (when available). All discourses were present in at least two images and only one discourse was labeled per image and in cases where more than one discourse was identified in the image a decision about which discourse was dominant was made by the researchers during the group discussion in which all parties were given equal opportunity to express themselves.

After a period of five days the researchers repeated the review process and observed a slight alteration in their findings (less than 15% of the photos were classified into a different discourse than originally determined). The second review's results were then used for the study's analysis of the LYM's identity.

A rudimentary quantitative component of the analysis was conducted via statistical analysis of three variables: 1) the overall aggregate occurrence of the discourses, 2) the temporal frequency of occurrence of the discourses and 3) the discourse's occurrence across the different albums sampled by the researchers. These results were used to weigh discourses in terms of relative importance and potential for shaping the identity of the LYM and ultimately affecting the researchers' predictions of the group's goals and intentions.

Following the quantitative evaluation the discourses were then defined in light of their presence in the historical narrative of Libya. The researchers used a historical literature review and this method allowed the facts of history to speak for the relevance and meaning behind the found discourses and minimized the imposition of the researchers' exogenous interpretations onto the findings of the study's discourse analysis. The researchers then collectively assessed the results of this

historical literature review and predictions of the LYM's goals and intentions were made during collaborative discussion.

Following initial presentations of the researchers findings to students and faculty at Uppsala University the results were presented at an international conference at the School of African and Oriental Studies in London during April of 2011. The predictions made by the researchers were then evaluated in June and July of 2012 and a final concluding section was added in order to assess the validity and accuracy of the study's initial findings.

Data

A total of ten discourses were distilled from the images posted on the LYM's Facebook: Collectivist (15.56%, 7 images), Pan-Arabic (15.56%), Pride (13.33%, 6 images), Pro-Kingdom of Libya (13.33%), Victim (13.33%), Unity of Masses (11.11%, 5 images), Pro-Revolution (4.44%, 2 images), Solidarity (4.44%), International Youth Culture (4.44%), and Religious Affirmation of cause (4.44%).

The following provides a description of each quantitative test and their results. After the tests were completed the results were ranked and scaled for cross-evaluation. Each test was scored according to a different scale (1-4, and 1-5) but these scores were standardized by lowest common denominator and all discourses were then ranked according to their total score, giving equal weight their relevance in each test.

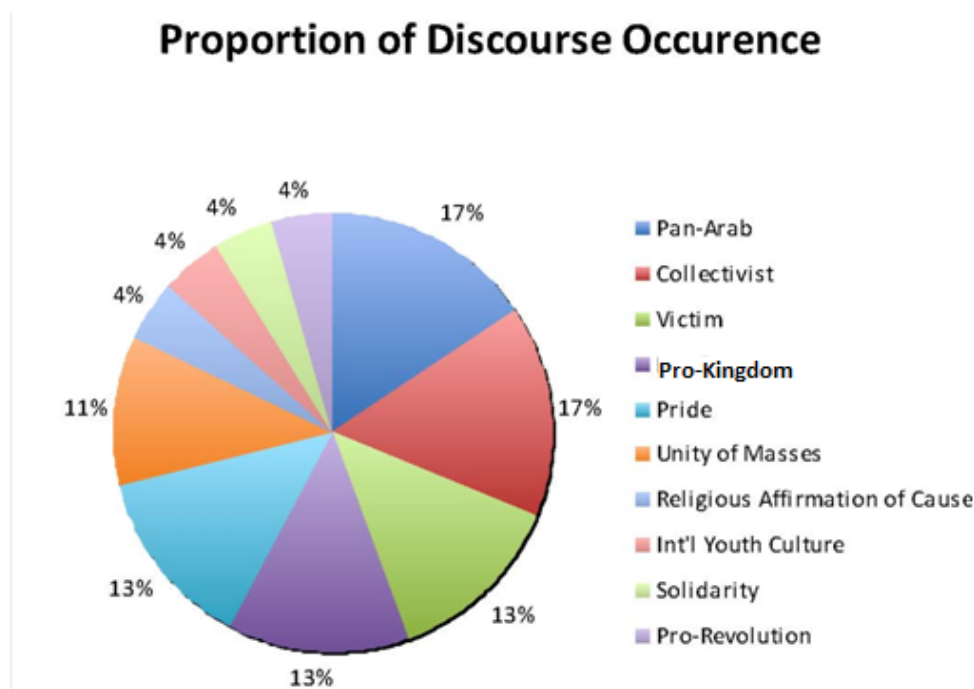


Figure 1

Figure 1 demonstrates the proportional occurrence of each found discourse. As shown in the chart, the pan-Arab and collectivist discourses occurred in the largest proportions and collectively accounted for one third of the images. The victim, pro-Kingdom, pride and unity of the masses discourses collectively accounted for 50% of the images surveyed. Lastly, the religious affirmation of cause, international youth culture, solidarity and pro-revolution discourses collectively accounted for only 16% of all of the images. The discourses were ranked and scored based on the number of photos that they were found in and these were later tabulated into the discourses' total scores during the final step of the analysis.

Figure 2 demonstrates the distribution of discourses across albums. This type of analysis allowed the researchers to evaluate which discourses were found solely or overwhelmingly in just one album. For example, the victim discourse was found to be the dominant discourse in 6 photos (apx. 13% of the total) however it occurred overwhelmingly in just one album ("Latest From Tripoli Hospital"). Figure 2 also shows that the solidarity and pro-revolution discourses, each occurring just twice, were also only present in one album each. By contrast, the pro-Kingdom, pride and unity of the masses discourses each appeared in at least three albums, with no one album comprising more than 50% of occurrences. Additionally, the pro-Kingdom discourse occurred in the largest number of albums, with no albums accounting for more than a third of the

total images. The discourses were ranked and scored based on the number of albums in which they occurred and these were later tabulated into the discourses' total scores during the final step of the analysis.

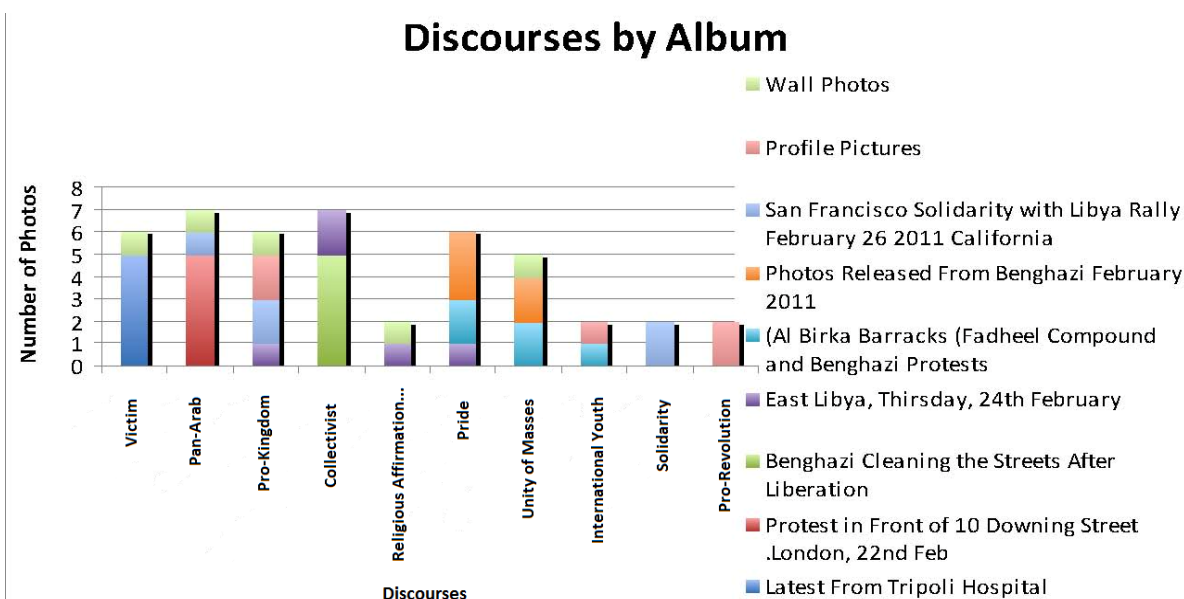


Figure 2

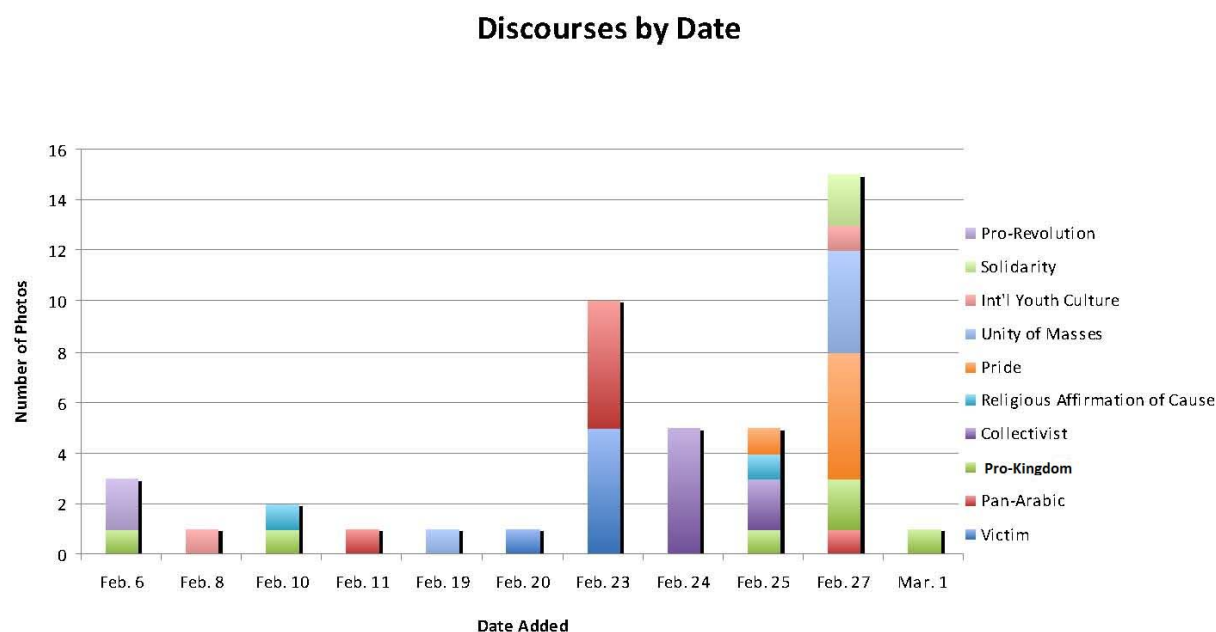


Figure 3

Figure 3 displays the dates when each image was posted on Facebook, the number of images posted on that day and the type of discourse found in each of the surveyed images. This frequency data analysis revealed the repetition of discourse occurrence over-time and served as an indication of discourse continuity and reveal fleeting and momentary discourses. For example, the repeated occurrence, once again, of the pro-Kingdom discourse, across five of the eleven days when images were posted, during the span of nearly a month, served to highlight the robust importance of this discourse. Conversely the fact that the victim, collectivist, and pride discourses each appeared most prominently in just two consecutive posting days (Feb. 20 and 23, Feb. 24 and 25, and Feb.25 and 27, respectively) detracted from the relevancy of these

discourses. Other discourses (the pan-Arabic, solidarity, international youth culture and religious affirmation of cause) also occurred on staggered posting dates and indicated the potentially significant relevance of these discourses. The discourses were ranked and scored based on the number and proximity of days during which they were added to the LYM's Facebook page and these scores were later tabulated into the discourses' total scores during the final step of the quantitative analysis.

Final quantitative analysis

Discourse Name	Discourse occurrence	Discourse distribution by album	Discourse distribution by date	Total relevancy of Discourse (proportion of total accrued points)
Pro-Kingdom	45	60	60	165 (16.23)
Pan-Arab	60	45	48	153 (15.04)
Unity of the masses	45	45	36	126 (12.39)
Pride	45	45	24	114 (11.20)
Collectivist	60	30	24	114 (11.20)
Victim	45	30	24	99 (9.73)
International youth	15	30	36	81 (7.96)
Religious justification of cause	15	30	36	81 (7.96)
Solidarity	15	15	12	42 (4.13)
Pro-Revolution	15	15	12	42 (4.13)
Total				1017 (100)

Table 1

Table 1 presents the scores of the found discourses in order of their relevancy when equal weight was given to each of the three quantitative tests discussed above. The three central columns detail each discourses score out of 60 for the above discussed quantitative tests. A score of 60 indicates that that discourse was assessed as the most relevant discourse in a given test. The far right column indicates the total score of each discourse and ranks them according to their overall proportion of the total accrued points.

The following section discusses five discourses that the researchers found to be most interesting to the discussion surrounding the identity of the LYM. Although the top two ranked discourses are assessed the authors chose to also address the discourses which they found most interesting in terms of their occurrence in the data and their implications for the actors goals.

Discourse analysis

This section presents five of the most relevant discourses manifested on the LYM's Facebook page. These discourses were heuristically determined by the authors partially due to the results of the quantitative test and partially as a result of perceived importance of specific discourses on the overall identity of the LYM. Each subsection provides a description of at least one of the images which was classified as principally manifesting that discourse along with a historically oriented analysis of the discourse. The five discourses discussed are the pro-Kingdom, pan-Arab, victim, international youth culture and the religious affirmation of cause discourses. This section is followed by a discussion of the identity revealed when all of these discourses were viewed collectively and also a list of predictions which were made concerning the LYM's goals and intentions.

Pro-Kingdom discourse



Figure 4 and 5

Perhaps the most difficult discourse to define and interpret was also ranked as the most relevant by the quantitative analysis. Unlike other discourses the pro-Kingdom discourse was found in images throughout the entire period and in many images a pro-Kingdom discourse could also be viewed as a secondary discourse (e.g. in figures 7 and 11, below) although this was not included in this study's results.

Figures 4 and 5 clearly evidence the pro-Kingdom discourse through their use of symbols and in both images the flag of the Kingdom of Libya is present. Figure 4 could have been viewed as part of a solidarity discourse as the subject was clearly participating in protest, however the protester's Kingdom of Libya flag, attached to her shirt tells the viewer not only that she wants Qaddafi to be "Gone" but also that she supports a former version of Libya, represented by the Kingdom of Libya flag, which is attached to her shirt and placed over her heart.

Figure 5 presents an alternative historical signifier of identity by presenting what appears to be an antique souvenir from the pre-Qaddafi era. The image demonstrates that there is an alternative historical Libyan discourse, different from that of the Qaddafi regime's Libya. In order to understand this discourse we must try to understand and define the Libyan Kingdom.

The United Kingdom of Libya became an independent country in December of 1951 and is the only country to have been created by the UN General Assembly (St. John, 21), an interesting fact when considered alongside the role of the UN in the context of the recent Libyan conflict. The Libyan Kingdom, was a pro-western, non-democratic monarchy ruled by King Sayyid Idris, who ruled in part with the help of a traditional group of religious scholars (the *ulama*) who were formally designated as an institution (Ibid, 39). Multiparty elections were once held at the beginning of King Idris' rule however the country was far from a democracy. Public patronage was common place and most Libyans worked in the public sector, in fact by the mid-1960s Libya had the highest percentage of public employees per-capita of any country (Ibid, 39-41).

Despite the Kingdom of Libya being regarded as one of the most conservative Arab countries its closest allies were Great Britain and the United States who provided large amounts of aid as well as financial and security support to the King (Ibid, 41-44). Economic wealth in the Kingdom during the 1960s increased rapidly however it did not trickle down to the general population due to cronyism and when pan-Arab demonstrations broke out during the 1960s and the Idris regime failed to strongly condemn Israel following the 1967 Israeli-Arab War the stage was set for the 1969 *coup d'état* led by Qadaffi (Ibid, 44-45).

Despite the historical distance between the Libyan Kingdom and the contemporary situation it is still possible to identify several characteristics of the old regime which might be relevant today. First, the Libyan Kingdom occupied approximately the same territorial boundaries as the Libyan state did in January, 2011. Also, although initially ripe with regionalism, the separation between the Western (Tripolitania), Southern (Fezzan) and Eastern (Cyrenaica) regions were not as great as they had been during the pre-colonial period (Baldinetti, 143). Second, during the Kingdom era religion was used for political legitimization and the country's religious elite were incorporated into the political apparatus through the formal institution of the *ulama* religious council which was later shunned by the Qadaffi regime (Baldinetti, 144). Third, Libya kept a low profile in international politics and geopolitical decisions were decidedly non-radical, based largely on a realpolitik calculus of security and economic concerns, with Qadaffi's favored ideologies (Pan-Arabism, Pan-Africanism, and anti-imperialism) either completely absent or having a non-influential presence in the national level political arena.

Pan-Arab discourse



Figure 6

The pan-Arab discourse was ranked second in relevancy during the quantitative analysis and images with pan-Arab discourse were mainly characterized by the presence of symbols that indicated the unity of Arab people. For example in figure 4 (above) a young man, perhaps an Arab, wears a black and white checkered keffiyeh (of Palestinian resemblance), and stands with his arms spread between two Arab flags, the Tunisian and the Egyptian, which he grips in his hands. The young man's position appears to be symbolic of Libya's geographic location, sandwiched between Tunisia and Egypt.

With the knowledge that this image was posted on February 11, 2011, the day Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's resigned from office and following the ouster of Tunisia's President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, it seemed probable that this image was an expression of pan-Arabic solidarity sentiment. This picture was posted nearly a full week before the protests in Libya began and it could also be viewed as a way to further reassure the audience of the legitimacy of their cause which was similar to, if not a copy of, the Tunisian and Egyptian protests.

Libya has a long history of pan-Arabism and the political philosophy, despite having roots in Cairo's Libyan expatriate com-

munity during the 1930s (Baldinetti, 2010), became a feature of the Libyan political scene in the aftermath of the Arab-Israeli conflict of 1967 and ultimately more profoundly following the 1969 *coup d'état* which brought Qadaffi to power (Vandewalle, 2006). During the 1950s and 1960s, Libyan King Sayyid Idris permitted Egyptian discourses to pervade Libyan society principally through the "adoption of Egyptian administrative and judicial models, widespread access to Egyptian newspapers" and radio programs (St. John, 2011, 45). By the late 1960s groups of Libyan oil workers and students were actively following the Arab nationalist movement (Ibid, 45).

The 1969 *coup d'état* brought Qadaffi to power, a man whose ideological mentor was one of the fathers of pan-Arabism, Egypt's longtime president Gamal Abdel Nasser (St. John, 50-51). Qadaffi's brand of pan-Arab nationalism presented Libya as the "heart, vanguard and hope of the Arab nation" and routinely rehashed pan-Arabic slogans originally expressed by the Baath party and Nasser regimes (Ibid, 51,53).

In the political climate of recent years the Qadaffi regime had grown frustrated with the absence of a pan-Arabic movement on the geopolitical stage and responded by focusing its attention away from the pan-Arabic movement and instead focusing on pan-Africanism (Ibid, 134). The relatively sustained occurrence of the pan-Arab discourse in the images supported an interpretation of the discourse as the reemergence of a historically prominent, common, popular and perhaps also latent discourse within Libyan society.

International youth discourse



Figure 7 and 8

The researchers chose to dig deeper into the discourse of international youth culture because it had arisen as a point of discussion for leading academics interested in new and digital media (see Castells, Fernández-Ardévol, Qiu and Sey, 2007). Facebook was originally designed for use among college students and with this in mind, as well as the similar knowledge that the Facebook group's name was the Libyan *Youth* Movement, the researchers were keen to interpret the discourse once it had been found in the data. Although, ultimately the researchers were unable to find a large number of images (2 in total) conveying a youth discourse, this was an interesting and possibly significant discourse which the authors believed might have a broader resonance across Middle Eastern protest movements, many of which had also used Facebook and been described as youth led in mass media reports (*New York Times*, March 17, 2011, *Washington Post*, February 28, 2011).

Figure 7 (above) was one of the first photos posted by the LYM and the elements of subject's age and clothing were the deciding factors for categorizing it as representing an international youth culture discourse. The image's subject is clearly

a young man, perhaps even a teenager. His attire, all black, fits well with that of international anarchist culture (*National Post*, June 28, 2010). Originally an international movement itself, anarchism has, in the contemporary context, aligned itself with international movements such as "feminism, environmentalism, [and] anti-globalization (Ibid)." Furthermore, the subject's black "hoodie" sweatshirt, as argued by journalist Denis Wilson, has significance as the attire of such international youth subcultures as hip-hop, skating, snowboarding and punk (*New York Times*, December 23, 2006). Lastly, a bandana, and not a keffiyeh, is worn across the lower half of the subject's face, a widely used international hip hop culture symbol borrowed from L.A. gang culture of the 1990s (Savage and Hickey-Moody, *Critical Studies in Education*, vol. 51, 3, 2010, 285). Hip-hop culture has recently risen to some prominence in Libya and the Qadaffi regime specifically targeted one hip-hop website, enoughgaddafi.com, which had posted anti-Qadaffi rap and hip-hop songs during the lead up to the revolution (*Public Radio International*, February 19, 2011).

Figure 8, was deemed to represent international youth culture primarily because of the graffiti sprawled on a wall next to a landscape of destruction. The choice of English text, "GAME OVER," was almost surely learned via a Western video/ arcade/cell phone or web based game and it strongly conveyed a message which would easily be understood and likely resonate with youth from nearly any country. This hypothesis was supported by the fact that the photo was taken by someone and then posted on Facebook, and not merely left for local consumption, thereby acknowledging its international comprehensibility. Interestingly though the text is not alone and stands alongside an image of Qadaffi as a satanic figure with an X across his face. The artist's message is also easily understood by anyone unfamiliar with phrases of the international gaming dialect. In sum, both the satanic caricature and the text convey the same message but by adding "GAME OVER" the author gave the graffiti a nuanced transnational youth resonance delivered to its audience via a social networking website designed for youth.

Taken together the above images are indicative of an international youth discourse. The images clearly indicate that there was awareness by the LYM page's authors that their audience was also an international one. Furthermore, Figure 8 serves to demonstrate that the discourse is also found "on the ground" and not just by the LYM page's authors, whose location are both inside and outside of Libya (See about section description above). The added knowledge that the LYM used Facebook, a website used by only 2.43% of Libyans, (*Guardian*, Arthur, July, 20, 2010) in a country where only 5.5% of the population in 2009 were regular internet users (CIA World Factbook, 2011) evidences the international orientation of the LYM. Despite the limited occurrence of the images, their occurrence, when contextualized into Libyan society in 2011, hinted at a greater significance than alluded to in a merely quantitative analysis.

Victim discourse

After protests broke out on February 16th, a victim discourse began to appear in the LYM's Facebook postings. On February 23rd, a Facebook album titled, "Latest From Tripoli Hospital" was posted by the page's author(s). The first photo of this album (Figure 9) displayed an alleged cadaver with a caption underneath the photo stating, "Marwan in his 30s. He wasn't protesting, He was just driving his car down the street. He got a bullet in his back. Tripoli 21.02.2011 (Facebook, LYM)." While the photo is disturbing and saddening, the caption goes further to explain that even an innocent bystander has become a victim. This picture, along with the others in the album, provided evidence of a victim discourse, which was not displayed in the images prior to the rebellion and the Qadaffi regime's violent response (see figure 2).



Figure 9

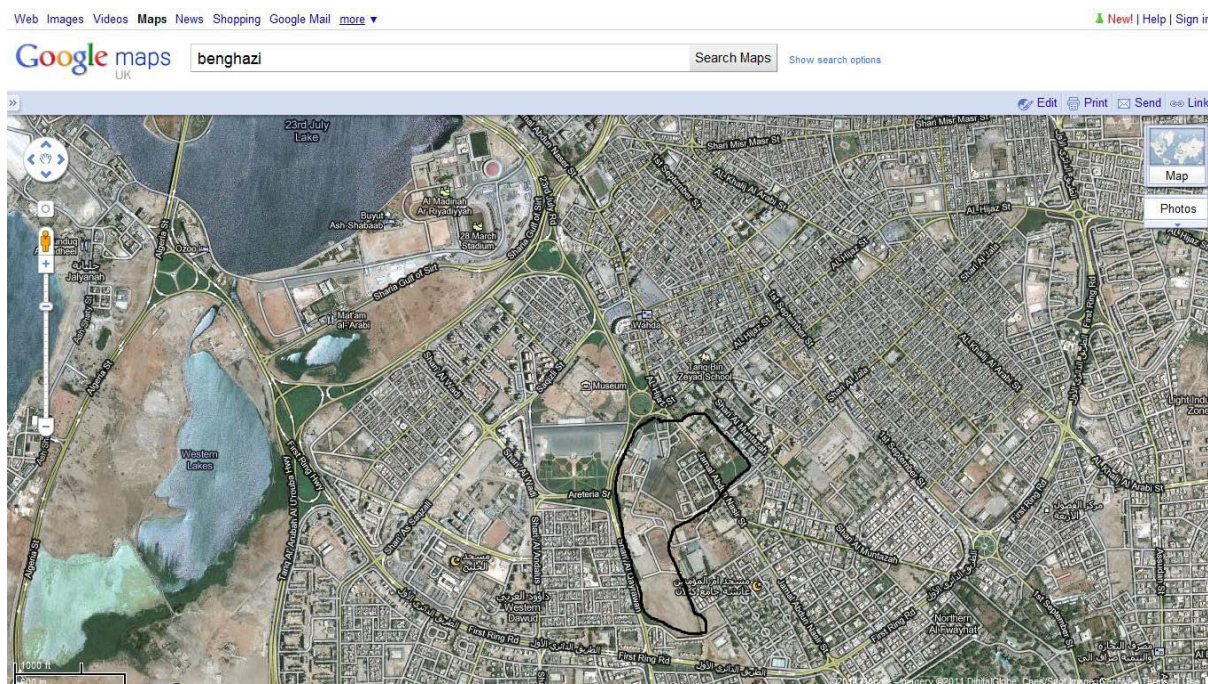


Figure10: Caption: "This is the al birka barracks in benghazi, the current last stand and scene of a massacre yesterday please spread to all." -20/2/2011

As mentioned earlier almost all victim images were concentrated in just one album and the only other photo categorized as being part of a victim discourse but not in the "Latest From Tripoli Hospital" album was posted on February 20 and shows an aerial view of Benghazi. In an indicated area on the map has been circled (see figure 10) and a caption reads "this is the al birka barracks in Benghazi, the current last stand and scene of a massacre yesterday please spread to all (Facebook, LYM)." Not only does the author imply victimization by specifically mentioning a "massacre" but the reliance on an aerial image of Benghazi is synonymous with the representations of massacre sites such as the aerial photographs taken of mass grave sites in Bosnia, Darfur and even concentration/extermination camps from the Holocaust era (*AP*, July 15, 2011, Parks, July, 2009, and United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2012). This form of victimization presentation was later mimicked by the U.S. embassy in Damascus when it endeavored to show mass graves in Houla, Syria during mid-2012 (*Al-Jazeera*, June 1, 2012).

Victimhood is also not a new discourse to Libyan society and Libyans must have suffered horribly under Italian colonial rule at the start of the 20th century. The effects of the Italian occupation's war and famine halved Libya's population between 1911 and the mid-1930s, and the 1910s and 1920s witnessed the confinement of nearly two thirds of Eastern Libya's population into concentration camps, in which perhaps as many as 70,000 Libyans died (St. John, 20). More recently, the Qaddafi regime itself has shown a willingness to manifest a victim identity through its demand for an apology and financial compensation (in the form of a \$5 billion investment deal) from Italy for its colonial occupation in 2008 (*Ibid*, xviii) and under Qaddafi Libyans were regularly made the victims of human rights violations and harsh repression for opposing the regime (*Ibid*, 79).

Religious affirmation of cause

The LYM referenced the divine will of Allah twice in their brief "about" section on the group's Facebook webpage profile; "We are a group of Libyan youth, both inside and out of the country, with a shared desire, with the help of Allah, to return our country to prosperity InshaAllah [God willing] (Facebook, 2011)." Given these initial references to religion the researchers kept an eye out for a religious discourse in the images posted by the group's authors on Facebook. Ultimately only two images were found which were labeled as predominantly representing a religious affirmation of cause discourse however they were posted in two different albums and during different periods (see figures 2 and 3 above).



Figure 11: Caption: "Exclamations of joy fill the air as residents of Benghazi find themselves in an unimaginable situation: Freed from Gaddafi's rule for the first time in more than four decades."

One of the images, Figure 11 (above), shows a group of men, at least five of whom have their hands gesturing as if in prayer. In the foreground of the image the central figure appears, eyes closed with hands raised toward the sky while calling out an unknown phrase (possibly a prayer). There are at least four images of the Libyan Kingdom's flag in the photo and the graffiti in the background urges Libyans to rise up against Qaddafi. These clues, along with the group's original statement about its desire to overthrow the Qaddafi government "with the help of Allah" led the researcher to the conclusion that the image could represent an attempt by the LYM to present their struggle as religiously righteous and justified (Facebook, 2011).

Although the researchers were unsure about drawing many solid conclusions about the importance of this discourse it is interesting to note that the discourse appeared both before and after the outbreak of the protests and had a consistent presence in the historical narrative of the country. Approximately 97% of Libyans are Sunni Muslims (CIA Worldfact book, 2011) and as in nearly all predominantly Muslim countries, religion plays a role in national politics. Muslim states (and their politicians) have in recent years frequently used Islamic symbolism in politics (Akbarzadeh and Saeed, 2003, 2) and Muslim parties play a major role in domestic as well as international politics throughout the Muslim world (Lewis, 2003, 14).

In Libya, whose population is largely opposed to militant Islam (St. John, 73), there have also been instances of religiously justified action. The most recent example was a violent demonstration outside the Italian consulate in Benghazi during February of 2006. The demonstration followed the publication of an Italian cartoon featuring an image of the Prophet Muhammad (Ibid, 79) and the Qaddafi regime subsequently responded to the protests (which spread to other cities) by pardoning "132 political prisoners, including 84 members of the banned Muslim Brotherhood (Ibid, 79)."

Discussion of identity

The final stage of this study's analysis consisted of a collective discussion by the researchers of the quantitative and qualitative analytic findings discussed above. This collaborative discussion allowed for the positing of a set of probable intentions and goals for the LYM based on the researchers' interpretations of the group's discursively manifested identity. The predictions were finalized prior to the UN Security Council passage of resolution 1973 which enacted a no-fly zone over Libya. In order to address critiques of the subjective nature of discourse analytic findings the accuracy of the list of goals and predictions was evaluated 16 months after its initial postulation. This allowed for a weighing of the findings' accuracy in relation to the political climate immediately following the fall of Qaddafi and the Libyan elections of July 7, 2012.

The importance of deducing accurate interpretations of the found discourses and the identity of the LYM was paramount for the researchers and served as the foundation of the study's practical utility. Accurate predictions about the intentions and goals of the LYM (or any other international actor) are extremely valuable to policy makers who often face conflicting information regarding the alleged goals of a given actor but are nevertheless forced to make decisions about how their country should react to a given situation. Just such a situation arose in Western countries during the opening days of the Libyan revolution and mass media outlets highlighted and debated the links between the rebels and radical Islamic groups such as Al Qaeda (*The Telegraph*, March 25, 2011).

The final step also served to corroborate the quantitative and qualitative findings through discussion and brought the researchers to the conclusion that the victim discourse was not strongly significant and appeared only on two days immediately following attacks by Qadaffi loyalists against the protesters. The victim identity seemed to be an unlikely candidate for a democratic Libya, rich in oil, low in population, and situated close to a wealthy Europe which had already demonstrated its eagerness to trade with and invest in the country during the years immediately prior to the 2011 protests (EU Commission, accessed July, 18, 2012). It seemed unlikely to the researchers that in a post revolutionary situation the LYM would have either a use for or a need to express a victim dominant identity.

The transnational youth culture identity, although not as temporary as the victim discourse, was seen as an attempt by the LYM to interweave itself into the international narrative of the Arab Spring revolutions against autocratic regimes. In a sense, this identity was a progressive globalized self which the authors deemed to be a possible attempt to dispel fears expressed by some in the Western world that the Libyan revolutionaries might be a pro Al-Qaeda movement. The transnational youth culture identity by contrast presented a strong connection to international youth subcultures like hip-hop, rebellion and contemporary anarchism, all of which are movements rarely associated with Al-Qaeda's religious conservatism and xenophobia.

Similarly, the religious justification of cause discourse only appeared in two images however its presence both prior to and after the protests was seen to be an indication of the continuous relevancy of religiously justifying the actions of the revolutionaries during both peace and war time. Although religion is a highly controversial topic in the contemporary geopolitical climate (to say nothing of the academic one), the use of religion to justify a group's actions is as old as religion itself and should therefore not come as a surprise and certainly not be taken as synonymous with a definitive link between the LYM and militant Islam.

The Pan Arab identity figured prominently as a part of the LYM's identity. Pan-Arabism gave the LYM access to a close as well as a geographically broad and numerous audience while also serving to legitimize the LYM by placing it alongside the revolutionary movements in Egypt and Tunisia.

Finally and perhaps most significant was the LYM's pro-Kingdom identity. The prevalence and frequency with which this discourse revealed itself testified to its centrality amongst the found discourses. Although, like each discourse, it is not possible to fully define what the pro-Kingdom identity implies the researchers were able to assume that the LYM's manifestation of this discourse provided clues about the scope and orientation of the LYM's goals.

Predictions of goals and intentions

After collectively viewing the discourses the researchers proceeded through open discussion to make the following predictions about the LYM's goals and intentions. The predictions were reviewed 16 months later and revealed that six out of the seven predictions were accurate. The predictions are listed in italics below followed by as description of their accuracy written in July of 2012.

1. The LYM will demand the removal of the Qadaffi family from power.

Correct- While seemingly obvious, the fact that no serious negotiations were ever attempted between the opposing sides during the war and that the unconditional demand of the Libyan revolutionaries remained the removal of the Qadaffi family from power throughout the entire length of the conflict. This is a significant and accurate prediction. The prediction is further evidenced by the fact that even following the capture of Tripoli, anti-Qadaffi forces continued to fight and it was only after the capture and extra-judicial murder of Qadaffi that the Libyan government officially declared victory and an end to the conflict (*NTC declares 'Liberation of Libya'*, Al Jazeera, 24 Oct. 2011).

2. The LYM will likely appeal for aid from and cooperation with other Arab countries and the international community.

Correct- During the Libyan civil war and the subsequent period the Libyan Government consistently appealed to other Arab countries and the international community for aid and cooperation (*BBC*, August 24, 2011). During the war this mainly took the form of humanitarian aid (*BBC*, March 2, 2011), military equipment, hardware and training (Roberts, *Foreign Affairs*,

September, 28, 2011) and during the subsequent period it has been manifested in humanitarian aid (*Gulf News*, March 6, 2012) and state building assistance.

3. The LYM will favor the establishment of a democratic Kingdom style government following the removal of the Qadaffi regime. Furthermore, the new government will view Libya as consisting of the same territorial boundaries as it had prior to the February protests.

Correct- Just as the Kingdom of Libya government stated off with multiparty national elections (albeit marred by fraud and probably foreign manipulation [Baldinetti, 2010, 142]), the current Libyan government through its draft constitution has introduced a similar model (Draft Constitution, Part III, August 3, 2011) by which a portion of the national assembly was elected by the population on July 7, 2012 (*Reuters*, July 7, 2012). The capital city prediction was also verified by the Libyan government when it declared in articles 1 and 23 of the *Draft Constitution* that the political capital of Libya would remain Tripoli (Draft Constitution, August 3, 2011). Finally, there have not been any attempts by the government to alter the borders of Libya from their pre-revolution status.

4. The LYM will likely advocate for greater equality in the geographic distribution of resources across Libyan society (most are currently concentrated in the Western part of the country and among a small elite).

Correct- The importance of a federalist assembly to write and pass a constitution alongside articles 6 and 8 of the *Draft Constitution* reveal a desire for greater equality. Specifically the *Draft Constitution* guarantees equal opportunity to all Libyan citizens regardless of their "religion, doctrine, language, wealth, race kinship, political opinions, social status, tribal or eminent or familial loyalty (Draft Constitution, Part III, August 3, 2011)." Furthermore Article 8 states that "The state shall further guarantee the fair distribution of national wealth among citizens, and among the different cities and districts thereof (Draft Constitution, Part III, August 3, 2011).

5. The LYM could attempt a restoration of the Libyan monarchy, currently in exile.

Inconclusive- While the study did originally use the most cautious wording for this prediction it remains at best an unsettled issue because the new Libyan constitution is still yet to be voted on.

6. The LYM could attempt an opening of society to greater influence by international youth culture, perhaps by eliminating restrictions on internet communication imposed by the Qadaffi regime.

Correct-Since the fall of Qadaffi the Libyan government has taken important steps to rebuilding the country's telecommunications infrastructure, and asked for assistance from Middle Eastern as well as several industrialized countries on how to create a telecommunications infrastructure to support the democratizing state. (*Wall Street Journal*, January 24, 2012) The Libyan government has embraced what is being called the "e-Libya initiative" which aims to create an open and transparent government, improve the quality of service, strengthen e-commerce, and establish e-learning systems (Ibid, 2012).

7. The LYM could use religious arguments and symbolism in order to gain support for and justify their struggle.

Correct- Religious symbolism remained prominent throughout the entire length of the Libyan revolution. Reference in the draft copy of the Constitutional Declaration, issued in August of 2011 by the new Libyan government declared in its opening paragraph that "the Religion of the State and the principal source of legislation is Islamic Jurisprudence (Shari'a)" (*Draft Constitutional Charter for the Transition Stage, The Constitutional Declaration*, copy provided via Cline Center for Democracy, University of Illinois, August 3, 2011).

As evidenced above, when collectively viewing the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the discourses it was possible to make accurate predictions about the LYM's goals and intentions. Specifically, the researchers believed that the Pro-Kingdom discourse had the most profound influence on the LYM, closely followed by a Pan-Arab discourse. International youth culture, religious justification of cause and collectivism were all discourses which the researchers believed could end up playing a milder role in future developments within the LYM however this prediction was less than certain.

Limitations

Ontological and epistemological arguments aside, this study was limited by the researchers' own lack of knowledge of Libyan society, politics, history, culture and language. Out of the four researchers only one had ever traveled in the Arab world and this did not include travel within Libya. Furthermore, of the four researchers, three were Americans, of which none had significant prior recollection of Libyan/American foreign policy decisions and one member was Estonian and also did not possess significant prior knowledge in Libyan foreign relations. That said, since time has validated the accuracy of the

study's findings it only seems to lend greater support to the utility of discourse analytic approaches for contemporary political communications research.

A traditional critique would be that the study's small sample size (n=45) was insufficient for scientific research however this sample size is defensible due to the time restrictions allotted for conducting the study (less than one month in total).

Of equal if not greater importance is the limited time horizon of the study. The researchers conducted all analysis using images posted up until March 1, 2011, largely before the creation of a hierarchical rebel army and political structure. It is possible that the subsequent creation of these institutions has significantly altered the discourses within Libya. This may be a valid critique and the utility of this study's findings are likely to decrease over time as with all analysis of current events.

Further research

This study aimed to test whether discourse analytic research could be conducted for political communication research using social media to better understand current events. It would be interesting to expand the study of social media's on-line expression by analysis of similar often nebulous or ill-defined rebel movements (e.g. in Syria or even in Afghanistan). When done in a historically informed and empirically rooted manner these studies offer an opportunity to understand the underlying discourses which shape the identity of poorly understood actors. Ideally, accurate predictions of an actor's intentions and goals can be used as the basis for finding common ground and for pursuing peaceful and collaborative political engagement whenever possible.

Conclusion

This study provided more evidence that discourse analysis of social media (Facebook) can be used to uncover discourses and make accurate predictions about an actor's identity. The authors are not the first to use discourse analysis to study identity using social media but hope that these findings provide evidence that the study of identity through new media can be a valuable and rapid method for conducting analysis of social movements. Despite the study's limitations its findings are accurate, relevant, and having withstood the test of time must therefore be deemed scientifically valid.

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