THE PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN LIBYA

By

NADIA NSIR

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
Department of Teaching and Learning

DECEMBER 2014

© Copyright by NADIA NSIR, 2014
All Rights Reserved
To the Faculty of Washington State University:

The members of the Committee appointed to examine the dissertation of Nadia Nsir find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

_________________________________
Joy L. Egbert, Ph.D., Chair

_________________________________
Janet Frost, Ph.D.

_________________________________
Richard Lamb, Ph.D.
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to gratefully and sincerely thank Dr. Joy Egbert for her guidance, understanding, encouragement, and most importantly, her friendship during my graduate studies at Washington State University. Her advising was supreme in providing me with a wide experience and knowledge for my career goals and life. Not only she encouraged me to grow as a graduate student but also as a better instructor and an independent thinker. For everything you have done for me, Dr. Egbert, I appreciate it.

Many thanks also go to the members of my committee: Dr. Janet Frost and Dr. Richardson Lamb for their time and consideration in reading and improving my paper. Special thanks also go to Dr. Tom Salsbury and Dr. David Johnson for their feedback, support and patience. I owe all of my professors my deepest gratitude and respect and offer my gratitude to the Department of Teaching and Learning at Washington State University. Thanks to all of those who supported me in any respect during the completion of this dissertation.

To Ala, Nusa, Mohamed and Rosa, my kids, who shared with me all those happy and hard moments while doing my Ph.D. I appreciate all the long time you spent waiting impatiently for me to finish and spare more time for you. I hope my experience will encourage you all to be ready to get your Ph.D. in earlier ages. “Shukran Jazilan” to my husband, Ali, for encouraging me to study, work and finish my PhD. I appreciate all the consideration and will never forget the tea and coffee you were making me while I was studying.

Finally, and most importantly, I would like to thank my mother, Lutfia Alshain; her support, quiet patience and deep love were definitely the foundation upon which all my life has been built. Her prayers for me and her continuous devotion mean a lot to me. I have all the appreciation and the respect to my late father, Abdurrahman Nusier, for raising me to be as ambitious and diligent as I want. It was his love and unending support that helped me gain all the motivation to tackle challenges and get stronger.
THE PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN LIBYA

Abstract

By Nadia Nsir, Ph.D.
Washington State University
December 2014

Chair: Joy L. Egbert

This dissertation consists of two manuscripts to investigate the use of social media in Libya since the uprising in 2011. The first paper is an exploratory study that explores perceptions of Libyans on the role of social media in the 2011 Libyan uprising. The study investigates data from two sources: (a) a questionnaire addressed to 10 Libyan participants, and (b) a document analysis of the main social media pages mentioned in the questionnaire responses of the participants, to provide supplementary insights in support of the findings. The document analysis involved coding some of the posts and the comments on this page. The results from this small sample suggest that participants perceive that social media in general were essential in spreading the news of the uprising, enhancing their political awareness, literacy and spreading the news for the Libyans who were outside the country and desperate for information about the country’s events. Furthermore, participants perceived that social media facilitated the start of the uprising in Libya and the connection between the activists and the people who follow them on social media.

The second paper also utilizes qualitative research methods to explore Libyan English language (EL) teachers’ perspectives on the use of social media tools for learning and professional development. The study reports the results of data collected from 50 Libyan teachers of English language (EL) who participated in a questionnaire, interview, and document
analysis. The results of the study show that Libyan ESL teachers are interested in the use of social media for personal and professional educational education. Social media might also provide Libyan ESL teachers with learning collaboration and interaction with each other and within the online communities of practice. The teachers have positive perspectives of becoming members of online communities to obtain continuous sustained resources for their professional development.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENT</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE LIBYAN UPRISING:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMPLICATIONS OF THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN EDUCATION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding Social Media</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The New Phenomenon of Social Media</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context for the Use of Social Media in the Libyan Uprising</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedure</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results and Discussion</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE SEGUE BETWEEN THE PAPERS</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIBYAN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS’ USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Context of EL Teachers Professional Development in Libya</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptualizing the Areas Related to the Study</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and Cultural Contexts of Teacher Learning</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Communities of Practice (Authentic and Professional Contexts) .................................................. 43
Online Communities for Practice (Virtual Context) ................................................................. 46
Teacher Professional Development Within Online Communities ............................................. 47
Social Media as a Tool for Professional Development ........................................................... 48

Methodology .............................................................................................................................. 49
  Research Questions ..................................................................................................................... 49
  Data Collection .......................................................................................................................... 50
  Procedure .................................................................................................................................. 51
  Data Analysis ............................................................................................................................. 52
  Findings and Discussion .......................................................................................................... 52
  Conclusion ................................................................................................................................. 57
  Implications ............................................................................................................................... 58

References .................................................................................................................................. 58

Appendix B ................................................................................................................................. 66

Appendix C ................................................................................................................................ 69
LIST OF FIGURES

1. Figure 1. Two-step flow of a mass communication model.................................12

2. Figure 2. Conceptual framework showing the features and contexts of learning through using social media for online professional development........................................39
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family
PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE LIBYAN UPRISING:
IMPLICATIONS OF THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN EDUCATION

NADIA NSIR

December 2014
Introduction

New technology makes new things possible; put another way, when new technology appears, previously impossible things start occurring. If enough of those impossible things are important and happen in a bundle, quickly, the change becomes a revolution. (Shirky, 2008, p. 107)

The above quote aptly describes the revolution of the Arab Spring through the assistance of social media. Social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and weblogs might have helped in telling the world about the uprising that ignited in several Arab countries (Abud & Moran, 2011; Huang, 2011; Political Unrest in Libya, 2011; Viguier, 2011).

Even after some of the governments shut down their countries’ access to the Internet, cyber-dissidents and activists were able to break through the strict censorship, seeking sociopolitical change and digital rights of speech (Morozov, 2011; Viguier, 2011). For example, in his article, Abu-Fadil (2011) noted:

Despite the chokehold on Internet service, Libyan dissidents managed to get their message out any way they could. When it was difficult to disseminate from inside Libya, they crossed the border into Egypt or Tunisia and sent their reports from there. (p. 75)

During the Arab uprising, social media, in general, were used in one way or another in some Arab countries, including Libya, despite the severe censorship of media (Chebib & Sohail, 2011; Crovitz, 2011; Dorsey, 2011; El-Shahat, 2011a, 2011b; Khalifa, 2011; Howard et al., 2011). People rethought their oppression, and their engagement with these social media might
have led to a paradigm shift among the unexpected societal changes and political transformations (Ghannam, 2011; Lepioufle, 2011; Morozov, 2011). The literature mentioned that the use of the Internet, social media, and Social Networking Sites (SNS), indicative of the adoption of new technological literacies in these countries, might have represented a tool that helped facilitate resistance to the oppression of the autocratic regimes during the Arab uprising (Al-Momani, 2011; Attia, Aziz, Friedman, & Elhusseiny, 2011; Burkhart & Older, 2003; Dorsey, 2011; Ghannam, 2011; Hintler, 2011; Howard et al., 2011; Pintak, 2011). These technological tools could have made it possible for Arab protestors to speak out about their oppression and suffering. This study focuses on the use of social media as it was used in the context of the Libyan uprising. The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of Libyans regarding the role that social media played in the uprising and political movement in Libya in 2011.

Exploring the perceptions of the role of social media in the Libyan uprising may provide a better perspective on the effectiveness and the use of social media in this large-scale, trans-societal endeavor. Understanding these perceptions can have implications for the change that the Libyans aim to make in many sectors of the new Libyan society, including literacy and education.

This study first reviews the literature, offering a short account of social media tools and their use to change political regimes in the Arab world in general, and in Libya in particular. Next, the paper covers the methodology and data analysis used in the study. The method will be followed by results and discussion of the analyzed data. Then, an overall interpretation of the results is presented in the light of the two-step flow of mass communication theory and the uses
and gratifications theory. Finally, the paper proposes conclusion and implications regarding the research and the results obtained.

**Literature Review**

Given the rapidly spreading revolts and uprisings in some Arab countries in 2011, scholarly literature about the relationship between social media and these uprisings is increasing. Numerous articles have been published about the relationship between social networks and the revolt in Egypt (Chebib & Sohail, 2011; El-Shahat, 2011b; Ghannam, 2011; Khalifa, 2011). Others were written about the same relationship in Tunisia (Ghannam, 2011; Mabrouk, 2011; Rifai, 2011; Sghiri, 2011; Sullivan, 2011a). Yet, little information has been published about the use of social networks and social media in the Libyan uprising. Further, few data have been collected, and little actual systematic research on this topic has been conducted.

**Understanding Social Media**

Since this study focuses on perceptions of the role that social media played in enhancing the Libyan revolt for sociopolitical change, their definition should be clear to make the study intelligible. According to Boyd and Ellison (2007), social media is defined as:

> . . . web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. (p. 211)

Social Media are continually expanding to accommodate the growing demand for communication, social interaction, and entertainment. Joinson (2008) stated that, since
Facebook started registration to non-college-based users in September 2006, fast growth in the number of users has taken place, especially among non-educational organizations. Social media resembles social clubs or communities with memberships where people meet and discuss social events or personal activities and thoughts (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Hogan, 2009; Joinson, 2008; Junco, 2011; Livingstone, 2008). More broadly, social media create a global community through their outreach in many places in the world. As reiterated by Luis Moreno Ocampo, the prosecutor of the international criminal court, in the video *KONY 2012: Invisible Children*: “We are living in a new world, Facebook world—in which 750 million people share ideas, not thinking in borders. It’s a global community; bigger than the US” (Vandivort, Longerbeam, Clendinen, Jougllet, & Russell, 2012, time 27:37). Thus, social media turned out to be important for exchanging news and building social ties, since they involve an ever-expanding number of people.

**The New Phenomenon of Social Media**

Networking technology, with its perpetual innovation, enhances many unexpected societal changes and political transformations (Byrant & Zillmann, 2002; Hogan, 2009). Many researchers have corroborated that social media presents a new phenomenon being used in the Arab political uprisings and revolutions seeking sociopolitical change. This phenomenon was referred to with different expressions such as: “cyber-activism in the Middle East” (Morozov, 2011, para. 8); “digital revolution” (Ghannam, 2011, p. 17); “end of a cultural paradigm” (Daoudy, as cited in Lepioufle, 2011, para. 1); “technology-driven accounts of political change in the Middle East” (Morozov, 2011, para. 12); “there is a new generation” (Bayoumi, 2011, “Caught by surprise,” para. 4); and “we have a striking phenomenon” (Khalifa, 2011, “Opinions
In fact, in his 2011 article, “Arab Protesters and Social Media: Need for Engagement,” Dorsey noted:

If there is one event or region that has highlighted the impact of technology and social media on policymaking, social movements and protest, it is the Arab revolt that has been sweeping the Middle East and North Africa since December last year. (p. 1)

As an example, some writers have also given monikers to the uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa such as Facebook Revolution, Twitter Revolution, the Aljazeera Revolution, Revolution 2.0, the Youth Revolution, and Digital Revolution.

Such a shift in the general role of social networks from the typical activities (gossip, photo sharing, etc.) to supporting sociopolitical change was unexpected even by the users of these social media themselves (Byrant & Zillmann, 2002; Hogan, 2009). This new phenomenon of using social media in the Arab uprisings has not turned out to be what was originally expected out of use of it. As a result, a controversy appeared among the media experts and the public about the importance of the role that social media have played in sparking and developing the Arab uprisings. Three different opinions appeared in this controversy. The first group considers social media to be essential to those uprisings, and among this group is blogger Andrew Sullivan (2011a) and Mashable.com’s San Francisco bureau chief Chris Taylor (Morozov, 2011). In contrast, the second group sees the media as insufficiently powerful to make political and/or social changes and consider them merely as tools or agents of change. This group includes Lawrence Pintak, the founding dean of the Edward R. Murrow College of Communication at Washington State University (Pintak, 2011). Finally, members of a third group had had a
particular opinion about the role of social media in the Middle East and Arab countries, and then they changed their minds about this role. For instance, Malcolm Gladwell, the journalist and writer for *The New Yorker*, first doubted the role of social media in sparking a revolution, but later stated that the digital networks and activists played a role in organizing protests in Egypt’s revolt, suggesting they might be powerful enough to play a role in toppling the political regime (as cited in Melber, 2011; Morozov, 2011). In criticism to Gladwell’s previous underestimation of the role of social media in Arab uprising, Melber (2011) stated that Gladwell made many enemies with his essay, with disbelieving in the power of social media in political arrangements in the Arab Spring by assuming that asking why people were forced to these protests is more important than asking how they achieved such effective protests. Malber commented that:

> It is *not* a surprise that many Egyptians do not love their dictator—that is not what shocked Washington and the Arab world last week; it is that people managed to plan and execute such a massive public demonstration of that sentiment. So the “how” is more striking than the “why.” (2011)

A different example of the third group in the controversy about the importance of the role that SNS played in supporting the Arab uprisings is writer and blogger Evgeny Morozov, who initially wrote that technology played an important role in facilitating protests in Moldova, but later shifted to the stance that the Internet helped dictators more than revolutionaries (Morozov, 2009, 2011; Sullivan, 2011a).

Within the same controversy, author Siva Vaidhyanathan, a media scholar and professor at University of Virginia, commented about the lack of clarity regarding the use of SNS, “Who’s
No one really knows. . . The reason no one really knows is because there’s no simple answer” (as cited in Rathbone, 2011, para. 2). Yet, looking for answers is helpful in placing the impact of SNS in perspective. According to Vaidhyanathan (2011), people keep adopting technologies for unusual purposes rather than using them for the purpose for which they were originally intended. He stated, “We desperately need deep analysis of the role of social media in these two events [i.e. the Egyptian and Tunisian revolts]” (as quoted in Rathbone, 2011, para. 5).

Based on the discussed literature and keeping in perspective the lack of analysis of the use of social media in Libya, we can infer that perceptions of the role of social media in the Libyan uprising need exploration and analysis.

**Context for the Use of Social Media in the Libyan Uprising**

Before the Libyan uprising erupted in February 2011, two other North African Arab countries, Tunisia and Egypt, experienced political revolts. In these two countries beside Libya, activists utilized social media in calling for protests and sharing ideas around their uprisings; however, the contexts of the uprisings in these three countries varied. As described by Anderson (2011), “The young activists in each country have been sharing ideas, tactics, and moral support, but they are confronting different opponents and operating within different contexts” (p. 7).

The context of the Libyan uprising can be understood when it is compared and contrasted with those uprisings that took place prior to it in both Tunisia and Egypt. The first point of comparison is the time each of these uprisings took. Compared with the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings, the Libyan uprising was the longest and the most violent. It turned out to be a civil war that went on for 9 months, while the Egyptian uprising was as short as 18 days and the Tunisian uprising finished in 28 days (Storck, 2011). Another difference is the number of
Internet users in each of these countries. According to the statistics of December 2011, Libya—which has a small population of 6,597,960 people—has 391,880 Internet users, who represent 5.9% of its population (Internet World Stats, 2011). The percentage of Internet users in Libya is small compared with Tunisia, where 36.3% of the population (of 10,629,186) are Internet users, and Egypt, where 26.4% of its population of 82,079,636, are Internet users. Moreover, Internet development is another factor in the Libyan uprising that differentiates it from those of Tunisia and Egypt. Unlike Tunisia and Egypt, the Internet development in Libya was recent and slow. In fact, RAND’s National Defense Research Institute labeled Libya as one country “fearful” of the consequences of Internet development (Burkhart & Older, 2003). Moreover, Burkhart and Older (2003) mentioned that “almost all of the countries [North Africa & the Middle East countries (MENA), with the probable exception of Libya, have established computer science and related curricula, beginning in the elementary schools” (Burkhart & Older, 2003). Thus, Libya’s Internet use pales in comparison to Internet use in Tunisia and Egypt.

Perhaps one reason for the delayed Internet development in Libya was governmental control over Internet use. As an example, even before the Arab uprising, some Libyan bloggers tried to utilize the Internet to disclose corruption and tyranny, but they faced hard punishment from the Libyan government. In fact, Libyan journalist Dhaif Al-Ghazaly was the first Arab online blogger killed in 2005 in Libya, and, “before stabbing him to death, his murderers cut off his fingers as a chilling message to the rest” (Pintak & Fouda, 2009). As a result of the absolute repression of the autocratic regime, Libyans were most unlikely to utilize the Internet for the purpose of protesting. Burkhart and Older (2003) observed that, “Libya is likely to remain isolated and increasingly beset with internal strife. Knowledge is not power in Libya; raw
physical power is” (p. 54). Gazzini (2007) noted, however, that Internet cafes giving access to towns in the desert and satellite Internet connections bypassing state servers and censors eventually helped spread World Wide Web access in Libya to a certain extent.

The Libyan protest against Gaddafi started on February 17, 2011, concurrent with the calls on SNS for a day of rage. The International Crisis Group report (2011) pointed out that calls for protests “quickly escalated; calls for a large-scale ‘Day of Rage’ on February 17 circulated via online social media networks and protests took place” (p. 3). When protests started, the use of Facebook inside Libya fell by 76% (Huang, 2011), due to the blackout of the Internet in different parts of the country, and because many people fled during the violent combat between the regime and rebels. Abu-Fadil (2011) reported on the Arab regimes’ blackout of the media to inhibit reporting of the unrest news: “There are ample examples of Arab regimes trying to bar or completely stifle media covering the wave of revolts gripping the Middle East and North Africa region, notably in . . . Libya ” (p. 74). Abud and Moran (2011) also mentioned the blackout the Libyan regime imposed in response to the uprising, explaining that “communications to the east, with infrastructure centralized in Tripoli, were cut, including Internet, landline, and mobile phones; during the conflict, Misrata, in the west, also became similarly isolated” (p. 11).

However, Internet connections returned to some regions in Libya, and some other areas were able to use satellite phones and limited Internet connections through a satellite that bypassed the government censors. Eventually, despite all the attempts of the government to block access to the Internet, Libyan people used Facebook, YouTube and Twitter to upload videos and images taken by the protesters and rebels and to report the suppression of the uprising
by the government to the outside media such as Aljazeera and CNN. Moreover, Libyan people used other means to get their revolution news to the world. Abu-Fadil observed another way of circumventing the Libyan regimes censorship: “When it was difficult to disseminate from inside Libya, they crossed the border into Egypt or Tunisia and sent their reports from there” (p. 75).

Dorsey (2011) stated that social media were used by the Libyan activists to organize peaceful protests in February against Gaddafi’s regime before the situation escalated into a civil war. Moreover, Abud and Moran (2011) mentioned the use of social media in the Libyan uprising, explaining:

Media activities have played a high-profile role in all stages of the uprising. As in other countries’ Arab Spring movements, protagonists repeatedly refer to the importance of online social media networks to share information on protests, crackdowns, and responses; to foster debate; and to mobilize broad participation in the rebellion, including circulation of the call for the ‘Day of Rage’ protests. (p. 12)

Moreover, Dorsey (2011) mentioned in his article “Arab Protesters and social Media: Need for Engagement,” that social media transformed the communication standards from one-way control by the government to engagement in interactive ways hard for these autocratic governments to cope with Internet and social media enabled public opinion to become part of the public domain, and “as a result, governments and institutions, irrespective of the political environment they operate in, are being forced to rethink their approach to communications” (p. 2).
To find the theoretical background that might explain the use of social media in Libya and the Arab uprising, two theories will be introduced in this literature review, the first of which is the two-step flow theory of mass communication, presented by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955). This theory hypothesized that some people might help in the facilitation of the flow of information by adding their personal opinions, which made them opinion-leaders. They spread the news to others, influencing their attitudes; those others are considered opinion followers. This process might lead to the social movement. Figure 1 is a model of the two-step theory.

![Two-step flow model](image)

*Figure 1. Two-step flow of a mass communication model. (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955)*

This model shows how the news was eventually spread to more people. Despite the blackout of the Internet, the news was still disseminated when activists found ways to get connection through any place that had Internet access and collaborated to overcome firm censorship.
Another theory related to the study is gratifications theory, which was founded by Bryant and Zillman (2002). According to this theory, the audience actively chose the proper media for their communication to satisfy their wants and interests, leading to symbiotic influence between media on one side and the individuals and the societies on other side (Bryant & Zillman, 2002).

Further knowledge of the role social media played can be attained through an analysis of the perceptions of this role by a sample of Libyans who used Facebook and social media during the Libyan uprising.

**Method**

**Research Question**

This study aims to explore the perceptions of Libyans about the role and use of SNS and social media in the Libyan uprising using a questionnaire and document analysis. It will investigate how the Libya people perceive the role of social media played in the Libyan uprising by addressing the questions:

- How did Libyans use social media for the Libyan uprising?
- What were the Libyans’ perceptions of the role and the importance of social media during the Libya uprising?

**Participants**

As previously mentioned, the study consisted of document analyses and a participant questionnaire. The questionnaire was sent to 10 Libyan participants living outside Libya at the time, based on convenience sampling. Most of the questionnaire participants were Libyan graduate students studying in the United States at the time of the Libyan uprising. Only one of the participants was not in the United States. The sample of the study was a convenience sample
in which the subjects were convenient in access and proximity. At the time of data collection, Libya was a war-torn country and it was not possible to collect data from inside the country, so the questionnaire was sent to the available Libyan subjects who were abroad and directly related to the study questions, since they were interested in following the news and updates regarding the Libyan uprising. They were asked about their own experience of using social media during the Libyan uprising. The sample was small, but it was enough for such an exploratory study, since the results will not be generalized.

Data Collection

This exploratory study collected data from two sources: (1) a questionnaire that was designed based on questions that the study aims to address and focused on the social media used by the Libyans during the Libyan uprising, and (2) document analysis involved investigating the main Facebook page that the participants mentioned they were using: Almanara- المنارة للإعلام الرئيسية (https://www.facebook.com/pages/المنارة-الاعلام/179449562095105).

Procedure

The questionnaire used to collect data was set up using SurveyMonkey (an online survey tool). The participants received e-mail messages with a link to the questionnaire in SurveyMonkey along with an approved consent form. The survey was online for 30 days, but the responses used in this study were received from the 10 Libyan participants within 10 days of the surveys being posted. This sample provided information in their responses and showed their perspectives and experiences related to the Libyan uprising. This information is applied for the purpose of this exploratory study rather than being generalized for a wider population.
The document analysis was obtained from coding posts, videos and comments on the Facebook page that the participants mentioned they are using to follow the uprising news.

**Data Analysis**

After reading the interviews and gathering the data from the questionnaire, I conducted data analysis. The responses to the questionnaire questions and the document analysis were all coded (open coding) to get a set of codes (coding scheme) (Boeije, 2010). Later, through further coding of the data, many categories emerged, which in turn were organized and sorted. Thereafter, the data analyzed were connected to existing theories of social media, and mass communication, in order to draw conclusions and rationalize the outcomes or the results that were produced. This theoretical coding (Boeije, 2010) helped to infer or rationalize the findings in light of the theory and establish a theoretical reasoning behind the occurrences found in the categories and the analyzed data. The categories will be explained in the discussion section to facilitate understanding of how the data were interpreted in answering the research questions.

Codes obtained from open coding led to the following themes: (a) the role of social media in starting the Libyan uprising; (b) the role of social media during the uprising including spreading news and creating political and social awareness through social media, solidarity of Libyans towards the change, and highlighting corruption and removing communication fear developed by the regime; (c) the power of technology in fulfilling the demands of uprising; and (d) negative effects of social media during the Libyan uprising.

**Results and Discussion**

This section discusses the data gathered from the 10 participants and the three activists to bring meaning to the research questions related to the role of social media during the Libyan
uprising. This section addresses the overall interpretation of the data, and implications of this study will be discussed in the last session.

The role of social media in starting the uprising. Analysis showed that seven out of 10 of the questionnaire participants and all of the activists in the document analysis mentioned that social media helped in starting the Libyan uprising. Moreover, it was noted in the document analysis that the start of the uprising itself helped in creating many new Facebook pages to post general and local updates and news. Some participants either were not sure of the role of social media in starting the uprising, or they felt that the uprising started earlier than the day assigned on social media to the start of the uprising in Libya (Feb 17). The point of view of one of the respondents was that social media had played a dramatic role in escalating the uprising, but not in starting it; and that, on the contrary, some of the “Facebook pages were invented as a result of the uprising.” Thus, most of the participants expressed the belief that social media might have facilitated the start of the uprising, which in turn contributed to the creation of many Facebook pages. Based on these responses, Libyans might have chosen social media as tools to satisfy their needs in communicating about starting the uprising.

Libyans’ use of social media during the uprising. Analysis of the questionnaire data revealed that all the Libyan participants have Facebook (FB) accounts, which they used along with other social media to follow the news of the uprising, and the events in Libya, during the Libyan uprising of 2011. Two of participants had been using FB for at least a year before the uprising, while eight of the participants started using FB once the uprising started. There were key popular pages on FB, for example Almanara [ المنارة للإعلام الرئيسية], a Facebook page that was used by all the participants to follow the news of the Libyan uprising.
All the participants mentioned that they had used SNS and social media mainly to get the news about the Libyan uprising. They mentioned that they as Libyans and the entire world were able to know the events of the uprising and the events occurring in Libya through images and videos. The participants had positive impressions about the news they received from the social media; they reported that it was instant and trusted, being from insider witnesses. Some of the phrases used by participants in response to questions about the use of social media included the following: “presented hidden truth,” “Without social media, uprising news would not be known,” “timely news,” “helpful [social media],” “excellent [social media],” and “insider perspective.” Furthermore, other responses were received about changes that were brought about by social media in Libya. Participants responded saying that social media had helped them in numerous ways, impacting their lives by helping them exchange experiences and different viewpoints and learning more about the uprising events. These findings suggest that Those Libyan participants who were outside Libya could have actively used social media for their reasons needs in communicating and following the news. This also implies that they were Opinion followers to the posts and comments of the activists spreading the uprising news on social media.

**Role of social media in communicating and exchanging the news.** In discussing these data that relate to the first research question, this information provided insights about a theoretical connection of data analyzed. According theory that relate to the study is the gratifications theory, the media can be used to satisfy or “gratify” the people’s needs, motives, and desire to communicate. The responses from the participants and activists emphasize and explain the importance of the social networking websites or social media in exchanging news and information among Libyans, in updating the world about the news of the protests, and in
enhancing socio-political awareness, which included starting the protests. This approach by stating that the main role social media tools play is “to spread information and coordinate actions . . . [as] modern networking theories” (2011, p. 152). The audiences of social media found widespread communication to be essential in coordinating and organizing the protests efficiently. These comments imply that social media could have satisfied the needs of the Libyans to communicate and to support the uprising in its critical stage of change. In addition, the choice of the social media, might have involved them energetically in following the news posted by the Opinion Leaders.

Social media meeting Libyans’ need to communicate. Data related to the perceptions of the role of SNS during the Libyan uprising address the second research question. The data indicate that participants perceived that social media played a role in the “team spirit” and connections among Libyans and induced many Libyans to “coordinate efforts” and “organize the groups.” Activists and Facebook users could post their comments, texts, and videos utilizing interaction and collaboration supported by social networks. They exchanged ideas and viewpoints and influenced each other, leading to a sense of solidarity among Libyans towards bringing about sociopolitical change.

Another essential role that participants perceived SNS as playing was uncovering the corruption of the regime and its violence in the crackdown on the protests. The participants reported that the use of SNS encouraged people to express their opinions and break their fear of the regime, leading to sociopolitical change. Among these responses was the following: “Social networking helped and influenced our opinion and showed us and to the world the brutality of the previous regime against the Libyans.” Noticeably, the role and importance of social networks
and social media as perceived by Libyans during their uprising in 2011 can be interpreted in light of the two-step flow theory of mass communication (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). In discussing these roles played by social media in the Libyan uprising, participants revealed that the use of social media. Based on participants’ responses, the participants expressed the perception that social media had an impact on their understanding the Libyan situation from different perspectives and/or influenced their opinions.

**The power of technology in fulfilling the demands of the uprising.** The participants perceived that social media imparted the participants and activists with the power of communication through sending news and videos, exchanging views, and sending and responding to the call for protest. Participants said that social media and social network sites have many characteristics that made them powerful in the Libyan uprising, such as the instantaneous and updated spread of information and reliable news from insiders with images and video footage. Images and videos of the government’s violence against the protestors were more powerful and expressive than written and spoken words.

According to some responses, participants reflected that social media played an unprecedentedly powerful role in terms of the transparency and accessibility of the news. Some of these responses were: “It [social networking] could picture the situation, so I could evaluate sources and decide which is true and which is not”; “I used to pass videos and pictures to international news agencies like CNN”; “any mistake done by a political figure or any member of the transitional council and government is posted immediately to Facebook with evidence like a video, a picture, or a document.” With all that perceived by the participants, it could be inferred that social media might have enhanced the communication, which had been censored by
the previous Libyan regime. The participants in the questionnaire and the document analysis labeled social media “very powerful” and referred to the “power of social media” and the “inability [of the previous Libyan regime] to shut [down] new media innovations,” adding that things would have been “harder for Libyans if SNS were not there” and that “without social media, uprising news would not be known.” These responses revealed the participants’ intentional choice of using social media to fulfill their demands and empower their communication during the uprising.

**Negative effects of social media.** Some participants mentioned in their responses to the questionnaire negative effects of SNS during and after the uprising, noting that social media “turned to be used for spreading rumors after war,” offered “a chance for irresponsible people to attack others under free speech/free Libya,” could be instrumental in “spreading lies” and “misleading public opinion,” in addition to taking up too much of their time.

**Conclusion**

This pilot study enhances understanding of the perceptions of the social media in the Libyan uprising. Results from the questionnaire and document analysis show that the participants perceived that social media might have helped in starting the Libyan uprising since calls for uprising posted on Facebook pages some time before the uprising started on February 17th. Participants also perceived some roles social media could have played during the uprising, such as providing instantaneous news about the uprising supported by videos and images from insider sources to the people outside Libya, having helped the Libyans and the world to understand the reality of the incidents taking place during the uprising. According to the different perceptions of the different roles of social media, Libyans might have started using
social networks on a daily basis to make their voices heard, share ideas, and unfold the news and the corruption of the political regime. The active and interactive roles social media played during the Libyan uprising may helped give other Libyans a chance to enhance Libyan people’s sociopolitical awareness, know more about each other, exchange their experiences and culture, and influence each other.

Implications

Further studies could be conducted regarding the perceptions of Libyans who were actually in Libya and witnessed the use of social media in the uprising there. The current study has the perceptions of Libyans attest to the significant role that social media and SNS played in the Libyan uprising. Thus, possible further qualitative study could look at how Libyans who lived through the uprising inside Libya perceive these themes and/or similar ones concerning the role of social media in the Libyan uprising. It would be informative to conduct some retrospective interviews to add to the outcome of this study, especially since it has a small number of participants and they were not in Libya during the incidents of the Libyan uprising.

Moreover, implications were drawn from the participants’ views about the changes that should be made in Libya to better distribute knowledge. The participants believed that the majority of Libyans needed to develop skills that will help them learn and use SNS more effectively. Participants suggested incorporating social media in classrooms and school activities to facilitate the younger generation’s acquaintance with social media.

Given the outcomes and advances demonstrated by Libyans in the course of the uprising in terms of communication, collaboration, and developing media literacy, I believe that social networks as an essential component of social media should be utilized in empowering the
students to take control of their learning through good connections and interactivity in the learning process.

**Limitations**

Before discussing the implications of the findings further, the limitations of the current study must be taken into account. In terms of participants, this study focused on a group of Libyan students who lived outside Libya at the time of the uprising. It was not possible for me to include student actually located in Libya due to existing uprising and war conditions at the time this study was undertaken. Also the participants were only 10 participants, since the study as an exploratory study and adding to the sample size would not have affected the generalizability of my study.

Moreover, although, the participants came from different parts of the nation, they were not entirely representative of all views of different perspectives of public opinion. It was not also possible to get responses from pro-regime participants and none were taken within the sample.

The validity of the study was verified using two techniques: document analysis and questionnaire. The reliability of the study questionnaire is not confirmed as the questions for this study were generated only based on current literature review available from very limited studies undertaken in this subject area.
References


Appendix A

Questionnaire

Personal Details

1. What is your gender?
   Male
   Female

2. What is your age?
   13-19
   20-29
   30-39
   40-49
   50-59
   60-69
   70 or more

3. Which term best defines your usage of Facebook or any other social networking sites?
   Before the Arabic uprising
   Before Libyan uprising and after other Arabic uprising
   After Libyan uprising

4. Which country are you from?
   Libya
   Other
   other (please specify)

5. Which of the following best describes your level of education?
   High School Student
   High School Diploma
   Undergraduate student
   Bachelor's Degree
   Graduate student
   Master’s degree
PhD degree

7. How long have you been using Facebook, Twitter or YouTube?

   Less than one year
   1-2 years
   2-3 years
   3-4 years
   More than 4 years

Please answer the questions and explain your personal opinions regarding the following statements:

1. With whom are you interacting about Libyan uprising? How?

2. Where do you get news about Libya uprising and the current events? Why?


4. What Facebook sites do you use and why?

5. Do you think that the social networking Sites such as the Facebook and Twitter helped in starting the Libyan uprising?

6. What other networks do you use to find out about current Libya uprising news?

7. How has social networking influenced your view of the current Libyan situation?

8. What is your overall idea about the role of Social Networking in the Libyan situation?

9. What changes have the Social Networking Sites made in knowledge and education in Libya?

• I may need to send follow-up questions to a few of the participants of this study. Please indicate whether you agree to send you an email to be further contacted for this study.
   o I agree
   o I don't agree
THE SEGUE BETWEEN THE PAPERS

The first paper was a pilot study that has provided a clarification to the perception of the Libyans on the use of social media during the Libyan uprising. The findings showed that social media could have played a major role during the uprising. Understanding these perceptions can have implications for literacy and education in Libya and the use of social media for the Libyan uprising might indicate of use of social media for other educational purposes in Libya. Therefore, the second paper aims to explore Libyan English language (EL) teachers’ perspectives on the use of social media tools for professional development. The second paper also proposes a model to explain the contexts and aspects of teacher learning using social media as online professional communities of practice. The model utilized to reports the results of data collected from 50 Libyan teachers of English as a second language (ESL) through a questionnaire, an interview and document analysis.

Therefore, the second paper’s study was inspired by the findings of the first paper to help teachers and course developers have a better idea of how to choose and create appropriate tasks for their students.
LIBYAN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS’ USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

NADIA NSIR

December, 2014
Introduction

In Libya, there has been a major shift from complete media censorship to more openness in posting and receiving online information. Social media played a role in the 2011 Libyan uprising as a communication tool that helped in sending instant information, supported by videos and images from inside Libya throughout the world (Nsir, 2013). After the uprising, Facebook pages became commonplace in Libya. In fact, According to Silverwood-Cope (2011), the use of Facebook in Libya increased by 588.86%, with Facebook users increasing to 316,000 within only six months in 2011. Silverwood-Cope (2011) noted, “Libya is Facebook’s fastest growing country in terms of percentage increase in national users over the last 6 months” (para. 1). As Facebook becomes more popular in Libya, Facebook pages and groups might develop the capability to be an important resource for interaction and knowledge for Libyans in different areas, including education, economy, politics, social discussion and holding surveys (Abdulhadi, 2013). This rapid change raises questions about whether Libyan English Language (EL) teachers have been inspired to use and integrate social media in EL teaching and for their professional development.

Libya endured severe control and a long history of political and social censorship. This censorship caused historical difficulties with community collaboration in learning. As a result of censorship and with the limited In-Service Education of Teacher (INSET) available to Libyan teachers, there are not enough regular professional development and workshop sessions for Libyan EL teachers. In his research on the use of the Internet to support the professional development of the Libyan In-Service EL Teachers, which involved a questionnaire, in-depth interviews, and a case study design, Elmabruk (2008) emphasized that the status of the INSET in Libya was “grim” and “erratic” (p. 25) and only arranged
when there were pedagogical needs instead of being instituted as long-term policies for continuing professional development. Since 2011 and with the rapid increase in the use of social media, Libyan people, including Libyan EL teachers, are increasingly adopting communication and interaction using social media tools. However, with the technological changes made on the way EL teachers and educators are able to communicate, teach, and learn, effective professional development may be achieved through teachers’ networks and online professional communities (Borko, 2004; Garet et al, 2001; Lieberman, 2000; Wilson & Berne, 1999). In other words, with social media, both teachers’ networks and professional development opportunities might expand to better accommodate teachers’ learning (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010; Lipponen, 2002; Vannatta et al, 2001; Watson, 2006).

The purpose of this study is to explore Libyan EL teachers' knowledge and use of social media in EL teaching and whether they use it for their own professional development purposes. The proposition to be investigated in this study is that online communities can provide sustainable communication and professional development opportunities to satisfy ESL teachers’ learning needs through online interaction, participation and collaboration.

The results of the study may offer new ways to develop and use online professional development for Libyan EL teachers using social media tools. Moreover, Libyan EL teacher educators might better plan for online professional development opportunities and collaborative communities to overcome the lack of community collaboration for EL teachers in Libya. The significance of the study exists in addressing the increasing use of social media tools by EL teachers in Libya since 2011, and the importance of using social media with more confidence for improved teacher learning and better professional development sessions.
The study can also address whether social media can help EL teachers meet their educational needs and solve the issue of the inadequacy of traditional professional development.

The next section provides a literature review that involves an overview of the context of English language teachers’ professional development in Libya. Following the overview, the literature provides a conceptual framework about teacher learning that integrates different contexts of learning related to the study. This literature review provides a model that illustrates this conceptual framework and helps in guiding the study. The paper then provides the methodology and data analysis used for the study in the light of the model presented. Next, the paper covers the results and discussion of the data analyzed and finally, the paper draws conclusions and implications related to the research and the results obtained.

**Literature Review**

To investigate the Libyan EL teachers' use of social media for professional development, the context of EL professional development in Libya will be explained first, followed by a conceptual framework, which represents the interaction of the areas of teacher learning through online professional development. This conceptual framework will be explained to guide and justify the study.

**The Context of EL Teachers Professional Development in Libya**

According to the literature, the Libyan uprising changed Libya from being the fifth most-censored country in the world (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2006) to become the world’s fastest-growing country on Facebook (Silverwood-Cope, 2011). Since then, social media has been incorporated as an important resource for interaction and knowledge in the country in different fields, including education. The United Nations & League of Arab States stated, “in the four countries that witnessed a change in government in 2012, namely Egypt,
Libya, Tunisia and Yemen, revising the entire education system has become a political priority” (2013, p. 19). Thus, Libyan EL teachers’ knowledge about social media counts, since developing EL teaching and learning is one of the prospects of the sociopolitical changes the country aims to do. Mourtada et al. (2013) attested that, in the Arab region, education is a main area wherein social media has become largely institutionalized with an established critical mass of users, especially among those who suffer from remarkable educational challenges. Since Libyans implemented new practices and use of social media in the uprising (Nsir, 2013), EL teachers might extend the use of social media to help their students with learning English (Buttò & Gruenewald, 2012; ICFF Monitor, 2012; Jones et al., 2012; Lazar, 2012; Linvill, 2012). While Libyan researchers studied some aspects of teacher education and use of technology in EL teaching in Libya (Elhensheri, 2004; Elmabruk, 2008; Elmagarmid & Samuel, n.d.), there is a gap in literature related to whether EL teachers in Libya use social media for professional purposes and in their teaching.

Due to political reasons, the English language was fully withdrawn from educational institutes in Libya from 1986 to 1992, creating weakness in the level of English proficiency in the country for students, teachers, and educators (Elmabruk, 2008). During this period, a local training organization called National Centre for Educational Planning and Training was established in 1993 to be responsible for the professional development for teachers including EL teachers. Unfortunately, this program could not put professional plans in practice until later, when the British council reopened in Tripoli in 1999, to hold scattered professional development sessions with the Libyans, such as conferences (Elmabruk, 2008). In 2000, the Internet became available to the public in all Libyan cities (Eid, 2004; Free house, 2012; Gazzini, 2007). However, the Internet was not utilized for professional development or
education purposes (Elmabruk, 2008). Strict censorship was imposed on education and educational activities and what could be discussed, or written, in teachers’ training sessions was both censored and reported to the government. Teachers and students were not allowed to seek educational change or share ideas, since personal opinions were considered offensive actions against the government. Moreover, the government restricted expenditure and consideration to education (Duncan, 2011; Elmaazi, 2013; Elmabruk, 2008; Loeb, 2012, 2012b).

Online professional activities and computer-assisted language learning (CALL) have been introduced in Tripoli since 2004, but they are not as common or systematic in English Language Teaching (ELT). There are also educational social media including blogs such as English Teachers' Forum – Libya, International House – Tripoli-Elite, and Yahoo groups such as LA-TEFL: Libyan Association for Teachers of English as a Foreign Language, but it is unknown how they add to the knowledge and professional development of EL teachers in Libya. In his research, Elmabruk (2008) found that, although Libyan EL teachers are “aware of the Internet potential for improving professional development” (p. 180), online professional development is not very successful due to many reasons, such as: 1) some teachers are low skilled in technology, 2) “scarcity of organized In-Service Education of Teachers (INSET) provision” (p. 181), 3) “the absence of school-based Continuing Professional Development (CPD) of any sort” (p. 181), 4) “Internet facilities are non-existent at public schools” (p. 181), 5) “teachers’ usage of the Internet appeared to be oriented more towards advancing language skills than professional development as such” (180), and 6) “the low pay and lack of financial or promotional incentives” for the public schools teachers” (p. 181).
Conceptualizing the Areas Related to the Study

There are three key areas relevant to the study, which will be discussed and conceptualized to assist the interpretation of the study’s methodology and findings. These key areas are: 1) social learning of the teacher, 2) communities of practice (CoP), and 3) online professional development, with communication as a main aspect to connect these three areas. In other words, teachers with their social and cultural knowledge participate in online professional communities of practice through communication. The conceptual framework in Figure 1 connects these areas in a model to guide the study and further related research. The explanation of the model will follow the illustration.
Figure 2. Conceptual framework showing the features and contexts of learning through using social media for online professional development.

The framework illustrates the mutual interaction between social learning and the communities of practice through the bi-directional arrows. Social learning is important in the knowledge acquired by the community of practice, and this community of practice can learn for the society as it learns from it. Meanwhile, “communities of practice have become a
popular theme of teacher professional development” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 186), and the reform
and development gained from professional development will mutually influence the learning
of community of practice itself and the knowledge in society through students’ learning
outcomes.

As the main focus of the study is what English language teachers in Libya know about
social media, the following sections will address the three areas of teacher knowledge and
learning mentioned in the framework.

**Social and Cultural Contexts of Teacher Learning**

To understand how teachers learn from the society, we need to understand the contexts
of the social communities within which teachers acquire their knowledge and keep learning
in the first place. Educational theories relate teachers’ learning to social interaction and
communication (Roschelle, 1992), which is primarily rooted in John Dewey’s inquiry-based
theory, addressing the social context of learning (Dewey, 1916). Dewey emphasized that
social experiences are meaningful in acquiring knowledge and those experiences could easily
be understood within their social context. Moreover, the prior experience and knowledge
teachers bring with them to the learning environment play an important role in their learning
as adults (Knowles et al., 1998; Lee, 1998), since this prior knowledge represents a basic
resource for the learning process to be effective (Duncan-Howell, 2007; Lee, 1998).

In addition to the social context of learning, learning also takes place within a cultural
context in which people act and interact in shared experiences (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky
created the social development theory, in which he stated that learning occurs through action
and interactions when learners engage in culturally-developed tools such as speech and
writing. In agreement with Dewey, Vygotsky also emphasized the role of the social
interaction between the educator and the students in helping the students learn and in facilitating their thinking (1978). Kaufman (1959) also underlined the importance of interaction within a community. He stated that people within any community are involved in social interaction within their location as their interactional field. This interactional field can be any different setting that involves the shared interaction of the community, whether this setting was a real or a virtual space (Nolan & Weiss, 2002). Thus, this social interaction is essential for teachers to share services, interest, and support to other members of the community within their shared community space (Haythornthwaite, 2002; Nolan & Weiss 2002). Accordingly, Engestrom (1999) stated that the interaction within systems results in the learning of the teachers as members.

To summarize, shared experiences and social interaction can be understood as the social and cultural contexts of the teachers’ knowledge from the society as a large community.

**Communities of Practice (Authentic and Professional Contexts)**

Situated learning theory focuses on communities and knowledge, and as it emphasizes the important role of social interaction, it also considers the importance of both the authentic and the professional contexts of learning. In general, learning was perceived as a social phenomenon (Duncan-Howell, 2007). Lave and Wenger (1991) extended the definition by considering learning as the process of joining a Community of Practice (CoP) as a member. A CoP can be defined as a group of people who share interest for something they are all doing and collaborate to do it better (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998, 2007). In other words, learning takes place within the CoP in two different contexts: 1) when members of a CoP interact and participate to share authentic situations (i.e., authentic context), and 2) collaborate with the other CoP members to fulfill their professional interests and needs (i.e.,
Regarding authenticity of learning, a CoP is valuable in helping its members learn new ideas and different teaching strategies, as well as re-think their strategies of teaching. At first, learning happens through their participation as new members, and over time, they become full experienced members. Even though there are different levels of participation and involvement for the different members of the community, they create together a shared history and knowledge (Haythornthwaite, 2002). The more skills and confidence these learners obtain, the more they move toward the center of this learning community (Haythornthwaite, 2002; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1996, 1998). This active participation and practice of the CoP members will promote the learning process from being surface-level to deep learning (Duncan-Howell, 2007; Newman et al., 1995). Thus, practice and participation within a Community of Practice will eventually generate authentic knowledge (Bond, 2004; Wenger, 1998). Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989) suggested that Communities of Practice share socially constructed beliefs and conceptual knowledge. They added that the teaching experience and the professional development training sessions represent conceptual knowledge for the teachers. Based on this knowledge, teachers participate in the community and culture to transform this knowledge into practice, and this transformation is actually inserted in authentic situations. A CoP is usually rooted in the workplace and makes the learning experience authentic (Duncan-Howell, 2007; Evans & Rainbird, 2002) and by that, they enhance the professional communication and learning of the teachers.

Beside the value of a CoP as an authentic context for supporting professional development, it enhances communication and collaboration among teachers and their
community around professional inquiry to meet their learning needs (Duncan-Howell, 2007; Miao, Fleschutz & Zentel, 1999). A CoP focuses on a common need or interest for teachers and involves teacher collaboration to add to what might be missing in the professional context of learning from traditional professional development sessions (Maxwell, 2013). They entail collaboration and shared goals based on practice (Wenger, 1998). Collaboration enhances teacher learning when the members of the CoP collaborate with varying levels to share learning. This ensures the sense of membership and belonging to the community leading to its development (Haythornthwaite, 2002; Kaufman, 1959). Within a CoP, the teachers’ need to create new knowledge motivates them to solve educational issues and enlarge their pedagogical understanding (Riel, 1996). Consequently, learning through collaboration between teachers within a CoP is a natural outcome of membership in a CoP, allowing teachers to receive feedback and acquire new skills from other teachers. This leads to an increase in interest and commitment of the teachers in adopting new practices (Day, 1999). According to Lieberman, “Professional community meant that teachers pursued a clear and shared purpose for all student learning, engaged in collaborative activity to achieve that purpose, and took collective responsibility of their students’ learning” (2000, p. 222). Ultimately, Communities of Practice provide learning in professional contexts by helping teachers be engaged in collaborative interest to achieve their shared educational goals (Maxwell, 2013).

Regarding ESL professional Communities of Practice in Libya, it was the responsibility of the ministry of education to plan for teachers’ training and development sessions. Professional development plans arranged for Libyan ESL were never regular, nor were they continuous. They were arranged more as educational courses than professional development
to help the teachers cope with the new syllabus, which was “more advanced than the teachers” (Elmabruk, 2008, p. 25). Thus, these communities of practice turned to deal with the teachers as students and lacked the collaboration and teacher participation needed for the authentic and professional contexts of the learning process. None of these professional sessions were online and they were of a limited interest and progress in the teacher performance (Elmabruk, 2008).

**Online Communities for Practice (Virtual Context)**

Research mentioned many advantages of online communities such as the creative and practical interactions between participants, the huge communities, the intensity of practical interactions, the unlimited resources and accessibility, the availability of contextualized activities, the mutual benefits of participants, the representation of the communities’ members, and the varying expertise (Hammond, 2000; Hung & Chen, 2001). Thus, online learning communities ensure sharing opinions, knowledge, and experiences among wide audiences and through continuous and optimum communication (Trinten, 2001). Online Communities of Practice (CoP) offer sustained learning and are not constrained by time limits. Thus, the virtual context of learning added the privileges of continuous communication, time span for practice, and wide audience to the learning communities, leading to the enhancement of professional development outcomes.

Before the Libyan uprising in 2011, a wide range of the public in Libya, including EL teachers, accessed the Internet through Internet cafes that were firmly censored by the government. Not many people had access to private Internet service. Moreover, schools lacked “technological infrastructure,” “adequate network facilities,” and computer “qualities and trained teachers” (Elmabruk, 2008, p. 27; Rhema & Miliszewska, 2012, p. 428). In 2005,
the Libyan government, with the help of UNESCO, worked to implement information and communication technology (ICT), virtual learning and teachers’ training into education in Libya. However, despite the vast budget spent on this project, incorporating technology into educational settings still faces many challenges, and online learning for students and teachers still lag behind (Hamdy, 2007; Rhema & Miliszewska, 2012).

Educational reform was one of the main concerns of the political change that took place in Libya in 2011 (Ameemullah, 2012; Law, 2014; Salem, & Alshaer, 2013). Unfortunately, the change in Libya was chaotic, and the main demands of the change were not met (United Nations & League of Arab States, 2013). Yet, teachers, students, and educational institutions started increasingly using social media tools in formal and informal education and knowledge transfer (Salem, & Alshaer, 2013). This study aims to investigate whether Libyan ESL teachers use social media to meet their needs for collaboration and professional development purposes.

**Teacher Professional Development Within Online Communities**

Professional development is essential for teachers to gain new information and update their learning and teaching skills (Richardson, 1997). Research found that traditional professional development sessions, including workshops, forums, and annual conferences, are only relatively effective and helpful for teacher progress, since they rarely meet teachers’ needs and lack the proper environment to facilitate teacher learning (Maxwell, 2013). Moreover, it has been claimed that, with traditional professional development, teachers do not acquire novel and practical teaching skills (Griffin, 1983; Richardson, 1990). Traditional professional development lacks common interest, which is a main component of the Communities of Practice and essential for any effective learning within a community.
(Maxwell, 2013). Maxwell mentioned that there are certain traditional challenges that might represent obstacles in the potential of a teacher’s professional development. These challenges involve teacher isolation, lack of time for collaboration and reflection, varied interest among teacher population, and lack of resources. Thus, online professional development can provide a better form of professional development with its longer time, sustained participation, and more focused purpose for the benefit of the student learning (Ingvarson et al., 2003; Lieberman, 2000; Maxwell, 2013).

Social Media as a Tool for Professional Development

Social media can offer effective platforms for teachers to share experiences and discuss teaching strategies and ideas. Social media tools, such as Personal Learning Networks (PLN), offer instant opportunities to learn from other educators and provide suitable settings for collaboration and engagement (Beck, 2014; Fisher, 2012; Tobin, 1998). Moreover, online media can enhance professional development for teachers through the chance they have to decide whether they try suggested strategies and approaches of teaching themselves, unlike the case of traditional development, in which teachers are reluctant to incorporate new practices suggested unless they are confident they can make them work (Guskey, 2002; Maxwell, 2013; Richardson, 1990, 1992; Richardson & Placier, 2001). Participation in online communities can raise the motivation and the interest for teachers (Borko & Putnam, 1995; Richardson, 1990).

Online communities of practice can expand the effectiveness of professional development through their virtual context. In a study of online Communities of Practice for professional development of teachers, Duncan-Howell (2007) identified important variables to be considered for successful online professional development, such as the engagement of the
teacher, sustained and ongoing time for practice, collaboration, and meeting teacher needs and interests.

To sum up, the model offered for the conceptual framework pertaining to this study might explain the characteristics of effective online professional development within five different contexts of learning within which teachers learn and develop their knowledge. These five contexts are the social, cultural, authentic, professional, and virtual contexts. The model also includes the features of effective professional development that teachers may utilize to develop their knowledge. These include: experience, interaction, participation, collaboration, interest, and sustained learning. To investigate these features, teachers are asked about their knowledge and experience with the features related to the Communities of Practice and online professional development, namely, participation, collaboration, interest, and sustained learning.

Methodology

Research Questions

Drawn from the problem statement, the research questions are:

1. For what purposes do Libyan EL teachers use social media and what interests them in it?

2. In what ways do Libyan EL teachers collaborate using social media and what do they learn from their use as well as from each other?

3. What roles do participation and interaction play in Libyan EL teachers’ learning and teaching?

4. Do Libyan EL teachers find social media suitable for their sustained professional development? If so, how does virtual environment help them develop?
Data Collection

The questionnaire was the main data source for this research paper. The study participants were 50 Libyan EL teachers of different ages and EL teaching experiences. There were 15 male participants and 35 female participants. Out of the 50 participants, 44 chose to answer the questionnaire in English, and six answered the questionnaire in Arabic. Most of the questionnaire participants were from Tripoli, Libya; only four were from other cities in Libya. Most the participants were Libyan; only three of them were native speakers of English, and another two were speakers of English as a second language and were not Libyan, but they are EL teachers in Libya. However, all the participants lived and/or taught English in Libya for many years.

The questionnaire, with its open-ended questions, was set up using an online survey tool and was then posted on Facebook pages (Brickman-Bhatta, 2012, p. 57). According to Brickman-Bhatta (2012), Facebook pages can be used to ask the participants to answer the survey out of the group of individuals on that online resource (Brickman-Bhatta, 2012; Creswell, 2005). To increase the number of participants, more data was collected using a snowball sampling or networking method (Boeije, 2010). Snowball sampling involves asking a small number of participants to suggest other participants who may be approached later to answer the survey, and in this way, data could be accumulated through existing social structures (Boeije, 2010; Brickman-Bhatta, 2012). The web-based questionnaire addressed the research questions with a final question that asked the participants if they were willing to be emailed with follow-up interview questions.
The second data source was 10 interviews with semi-structured questions for collecting further data to provide a holistic image for the data being discussed. More details about the interview with open-ended questions are explained in the procedure section.

To triangulate the data, document analysis was carried out to the main social media page mentioned by the participants in their responses to provide additional insights in support of the research question and the findings. The document analysis involved coding the posts and the comments on this page, which were written by Libyan EL teachers.

Procedure

The questionnaire was set up both in English and Arabic versions using the online Surveygizmo tool (http://www.surveygizmo.com). The link to the questionnaire and an approved consent form were posted on the two most common Facebook pages used by EL teachers in Libya as online teacher networks for forum and practice. The participants were asked to suggest other EL teachers in Libya and some of the participants themselves asked if they could forward (share) the questionnaire to other EL teachers they knew. The survey was accessible online for one month, and the responses were received from the 50 participants within this period.

The interviews questions were held online with 10 participants via Facebook messages and Skype, seeking more explanation and clarification for some of their replies that were not explicit enough in their questionnaire responses. The interviews were online, synchronous and asynchronous, using Facebook messages and/or personal emails. The interview served as a complement to the questionnaire that provided more in-depth responses.
Regarding the document analysis, it was focused on the Facebook page that many of the participants mentioned as the most common social media resource Libyan EL teachers use: *English Teachers’ Forum – Libya* (https://www.facebook.com/groups/136514713026199/).

**Data Analysis**

The questionnaire and interview responses were gathered and organized in tabular form then open coded (Boeije, 2010). The contents of this Facebook page, including the posts and the comments, were open coded and analyzed to add to the data that the participants mentioned in their responses to get a broader image of the responses collected. When analyzed, coded data were placed in different categories that logically interconnected, based on shared similarities. The analyzed data were synthesized in accordance with the research questions and theoretical framework to draw conclusions and implications. The results and discussion section give more details about the emerged categories.

**Findings and Discussion**

This section discusses the coded and analyzed data in the light of the theoretical framework and research purpose.

**Experience of using social media for personal and social interaction.** In answering the question of whether Libyan EL teachers use social media or not, data analysis showed that all 50 participants used social media. This makes sense because all of them answered via social media platforms. Moreover, the sample was convenient and there was no chance for the researcher to travel to Libya and meet teachers who did not use social media. The most common social media tools used by the participants was Facebook, which was used by 80% of the participants; followed by Twitter, which was used by 28%, followed by YouTube and
LinkedIn. Only three out of the 50 participants who answered the questions stated that they used Blogger, beside other social media tools.

The participants had been using social media for a period between one year and 13 years. It was reported that 10 participants had been using social media for five years, 11 participants for less than five years, and 29 participants for more than five years.

The participants mentioned that Facebook helped them form social and professional relationships with other EL teachers outside the area of their schools and the teachers with whom they worked. Participants mentioned that this social and professional interaction positively influenced their teaching knowledge and professional development.

Participants and interviewees mentioned in their responses that they learned many things through using social media and that that their experience of interacting online with other community members had a noticeable impact on them in many aspects, including: 1) personal skills as ‘expressing themselves to others,’ ‘managing time,’ and ‘enhancing their hobbies like cooking, typing, and photography’ through social media; 2) awareness and ethics such as responsibility for what they post, respecting their own and others’ confidentiality, accepting others’ opinions, using technology in a wise, respectable way, and not to be biased or deceived by misleading posts; 3) communication skills by maintaining interaction with diverse people, and ‘overcoming shyness of real conversations in English’; and 4) knowledge of breaking news, different cultures, law, politics, civil rights, religious information, and social gossip.

As indicated in the conceptual framework of this study, interaction and experience are main aspects of social learning for teachers. Based on these comments, Libyan EL
teachers expressed that their experience of social interaction via social media might have a positive impact on the learning and knowledge.

**Purposes and interest in the use of social media.** The participants mentioned many advantages of the social media tools that would encourage them to use them (e.g., they are ‘popular,’ ‘convenient,’ ‘useful, ‘effective,’ ‘easy,’ ‘accessible,’ and ‘enjoyable’ for both teachers and students). Their motives to use social media were either curiosity, ‘attempts to improve writing skills,’ communication with friends and other teachers, and ‘to be included and updated with the new teaching aspects.’

Questionnaire data analysis showed that all the participants were utilizing social media in general and for different purposes such as social, personal, political, and professional educational purposes. First, 43 out of the 50 of the participants mentioned that they used social media mainly for social purposes such as communication and networking with people, family, and friends. Some of these participants stated that social media such as Facebook and Twitter helped them share ideas and feelings, exchange information, and stay in contact with ex-colleagues. The second purpose was the academic and educational professional development purposes. Some of the responses used by the participants were that social media helped them academically in terms of sharing articles, notes and useful websites. Others mentioned that they used it in collaborative learning and informative discussions. Participants also mentioned goals like learning new teaching techniques and ideas, getting academic information, and interaction with other teachers.

Ten participants indicated that they used social media to interact with their students. Some of the statements the participants used were: “Giving web support and information to the parents and students,” “some of my students share ideas and feelings,” “send students
feedback on their work online,” and “ask students to submit their work online.” Furthermore, some participants reported that social media helped them in developing their professional abilities in different ways by upgrading themselves as teachers to the same know-how of their students, using Facebook to practice writing and discussion skills, or getting updates about new instructional strategies. The third purpose the participants reported was personal development and interest. Participants mentioned that social media kept them updated with what was happening in the world and opened for them a window to different cultures. Some of the participants mentioned other personal interests, such as expressing their thoughts in the written forms, and watching videos. The fourth purpose, which nine out of 50 (80%) of the participants mentioned, was sharing and following political news and events, and posting political viewpoints on Facebook pages. These findings suggest that teachers’ interest in the use of social media could influence their learning through using them.

Libyan EL teachers' participation and collaboration within social media in EL learning. From the data collected from the third and fourth research questions, 43 participants mentioned they interacted and collaborated with other teachers on social media in things like discussions, answering surveys, and posting articles and educational news. Ten participants thought that the use of social media might help bring both teachers and learners to a social medium of communication in which the language can be taught and learned in an entertaining, communicative way. Others referred to ‘building up knowledge through collaboration with other teachers’ in ‘searching,’ ‘introducing teaching material,’ ‘sharing reflections and suggestions.’ Four participants stated that they used social media tools for advertising and developing their private schools and language centers through communicating with EL teachers on social media tools. At least seven participants mentioned
that using social media tools allowed them to have a good time learning from other teachers about teaching English with fun, using innovative methods of teaching, and learning about Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and its application in ELT. Only four teachers mentioned that they used these tools interactively with their students through posting new information and websites for the students and their parents to learn English, and through creating educational Facebook pages for students’ work and assignments and for group discussion. Relying on these responses, Libyan EL teachers participated and collaborated within some Communities of Practice, from which they might have learned within an authentic and a professional context. Participation and collaboration with other teachers are aspects that can influence the learning of the teachers.

**Teachers’ sustained learning & online professional development.** 43 Participants thought that Facebook was the most popular social media tool in Libya to be used for professional development of Libyan EL teachers, and most other teachers had Facebook accounts. Also, 18 of the participants stated that social media tools enhanced them professionally as EL teachers. They mentioned that they get to share information and new educational ideas easily and at any time by interacting with other teachers. They also stated that they found themselves involved in continuous, authentic, and unique ways of presenting and exchanging material. 20 participants also mentioned that social media tools updated them with new technologies for ELT and helped them develop their knowledge and practice in ELT without any limits in time and resources. According to some of the participants, online professional development through social media allowed them to enjoy extensive reading of chosen articles and other teachers’ creative ideas. Moreover, participants stated that social media tools with their sustained information gave them and their students a ‘better attitude’
to ‘a quiet engaging teaching and learning process.’ Participants also reported that social media sustained tools were more powerful as innovative strategies than traditional tools and that they ‘facilitate learning autonomy,’ providing a great source of information all the time. Participants believed that social media tools might help students learn the language independently, ‘promote students’ autonomy,’ ‘enhance the sense of responsibility towards language learning,’ and ‘shifts learning English outside the inner circle of English which exists in Libya.’ However, some participants thought that because social media are open-continuous source, they need good time-management, reform in educational infrastructure, and enhancement in Internet access in the Libyan schools, if such media were used for professional development. To the contrary, four participants mentioned that social media do not offer a reliable environment for learning. According to these comments, social media could provide EL teachers in Libya with autonomy in learning and sustained professional development.

**Conclusion**

It has been discussed in the study that online Communities of Practice can provide learning support to Libyan ESL teachers. Libyan ESL teachers used social media for social and professional educational purposes, as well as to help them meet their needs to acquire new skills and knowledge. Online communities on social media may facilitate for ESL teachers in Libya communicating and collaborating with one another, besides enhancing their personal skills and awareness. They have positive perspective of becoming members in online communities and some of them use them for their education and professional development. Libyan ESL teachers can find social media a continuous sustained resource of virtual professional learning.
**Implications**

This study contributes to an understanding of the perceptions of the Libyan EL teachers of the use of social media for online professional development and teacher learning.

It might also be interesting to see if further research takes a step further to provide interventions or teacher development and assess the actual results. More participants and wider population may be utilized for that purpose.

According to the model, the contexts of learning and the aspects of learning proposed might allow instructors and professional development designers to have better ideas of how to create appropriate teacher development sessions. Furthermore, the proposed model itself might need future testing and evaluation.

**Limitations**

The limitations of this study include that the Libyan EL teachers were only contacted online, since it was not possible face-to-face contact. Therefore, Libyan English teachers who might not be using social media were not included in the study and the sample was not random. Moreover, there were only 50 participants, which might be a small number of participants in general, but it still works for such an exploratory study and since the results can not be generalized. Furthermore, the questionnaire involved some English-native speakers who live in Libya and work there as English language teachers, and their answers might not be reflective of Libyan teachers.

**References**


Appendix B

Libyan EFL Teachers Questionnaire

1. Name:

2. Email address:

3. Gender:
   - Male
   - Female

6. What is your age?
   - 20-29
   - 30-39
   - 40-49
   - 50-59
   - 60- or more.

7. Which city do you teach English in?

Education

8. What is your educational level?
   - What is the field of your educational level?

9. How long have you been teaching English

10. Where did you teach English?

Professional Training Earned

11. Do you have any certificates in teaching English? What are they?

12. Have you taken any courses in integrating technology in teaching English?
Experience of using social media for personal and social interaction

13. Do you use social media tools for personal purposes?
14. How long have you been using social media?
15. What is your experience in learning to use social media?
16. What do you learn from interacting with others using social media?
17. Do you use social media to interact with the other teachers and teaching community?

Purposes and Interest in the use of Social Media

18. What other all your purposes of using social media?
19. How often do you use social media?
20. How important is the use of social Media to you? What do you learn form using them?

Participation within educational Communities of Practice through Social Media

21. Do you use social media in your classroom and how do you use them?
22. What role do you think social media can play in English language education in Libya?
23. Do you participate in discussions and information exchange with other EL teachers?
24. What is Social Media adding to your learning and knowledge?
25. Do you use social media in your classroom and how do you use them?

Learning through Collaboration With Other EL Teachers Using Social Media
26. Do you use any social media tools in EL teaching? Why?

27. Do you use social media to interact with the other teachers and teaching community?

28. What role do you think social media can play in helping EL teachers interact together?

29. How can EL teachers learn from each other through social media?

**Perception of Social Media for Sustained Online Professional Development**

30. How are the continuous online communities of practice different from face-to-face ones?

31. Have your teaching practices developed due to participating in online continuous communities of practice?
Appendix C

Possible Interview Questions

1. You mentioned ______. Could you please tell me what you mean by ______? Please explain.

2. In your response to question ______ in the questionnaire, you said that ______. Could you clarify that more?