The Boosting Effect Of Social Networking On Resilient Processes

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When facing serious challenges in life, individuals tend to find their way out through many coping mechanisms to override the harmful effects of changing circumstances on our mental health. In the last three years, the Arab world was shaken by a wave of protests fueled by a lack of social justice and a very difficult economic situation. During the five days following the fall of the dictatorship in Tunisia, Marzouki et al. (2012) analyzed a sizeable text corpus about the role played by Facebook during the revolution as perceived by Tunisian citizens. Although the results were in favor of a perception based on information sharing, media coverage and political challenges that Facebook was able to carry during the revolution, resilient processes were not explored in this seminal study. One key feature in Marzouki et al. work is the presence of a Virtual Collective Consciousness (VCC) generated by a momentum of complex interactions between individuals sharing common goals and driven by a widespread consensus. On the other hand, strengthening social ties during times of misfortune is a common feature among the resilient processes. Our hypothesis is as follows: Facebook can be also a placeholder for collective resilient processes modulated by risk factors during a crisis (i.e., revolution). After revisiting the same corpus collected by Marzouki et al., the analysis of similarities showed that the Facebook informational support is well anchored in seeking social support. Moreover, protective factors (mainly collective) seem to give rise to this informational role significantly assigned to Facebook during the uprisings. These findings show that the ability to keep working toward a goal in the face of difficulties can be enhanced by virtual interactions, which makes social networking a good outlet for resilience when positive feedbacks and common shared values are available in the cyberspace.

1. The background

Over the past three years, the Arab world has been shaken by a wave of protests fueled by a lack of social justice and a very difficult economic situation. Tunisia was the flagship of these uprisings. During the five days following the fall of the dictatorship in Tunisia, Marzouki et al. (2012) analyzed a large text corpus collected from 333

respondents about the role played by Facebook during the revolution as perceived by Tunisian citizens. Although the results are in favor of a perception based on the sharing of information, media coverage and political challenges that Facebook has achieved during the revolution, resilient processes have not been explored in this seminal study.

Studying resilient processes in a large-scale group begins to gain importance (e.g., . Countries affected by poverty, war and other collectively experienced traumas led to the hypothesis that resilient processes can also be shared within the social network (e.g., Davis, 1992). For example, Panter-Brick and Eggerman (2010) interviewed 1,011 pupils and 1,011 caregivers in their school settings in Afghanistan to identify key life stressors and possible solutions to attenuate them. The subjects' responses were analyzed using an approach based on thematic inductive analysis. For adults, the main concern is to fix their "broken economy" which is the main source of the experienced discomfort. For students, the primary focus is on how to be able to evolve in decent learning environments and thwart poverty. Thus, any tendency towards hope comes from values centered on moral and social order such as faith, family unity, morality, honor, etc.

Collectively shared high moral values such as freedom and dignity were at the heart of the drive that put forth Tunisian citizens in the worldwide scene as the leader of a new breed of revolutions. A key element to the success of this new kind of revolution, referred to as leaderless revolution, is the presence of a Virtual Collective Consciousness (VCC) generated by the dynamics of complex interactions between individuals sharing a common goal and motivated by a broad consensus (Marzouki & Oullier). On the other hand, the strengthening of social bonds during time of crisis or trauma is a common feature to resilient processes. Our hypothesis is as follows: Facebook can also be a space where resilient collective processes caused by risk factors (e.g., Rutter, 1990) during the revolution may occur following decades of dictatorship, oligarchy and lack of freedom of expression (i.e., *social suffering* - Kleinman, Das, &, Lock, 1997). We also expect to observe more pronounced collective protection factors in the corpus relative to individual factors since Tunisian citizens are akin to sharing common values via their social networking platforms.

2. The goal
We used the corpus collected by Marzouki et al. (2012), to examine if the Facebook informational support is anchored in seeking social support, and to what extent individual and collective protective factors play the role of buffers to mitigate risk factors and to ultimately generate this informational role during the Tunisian revolution.

3. Method

An online questionnaire consisted of two closed questions: (a) Are you a Facebook user? and (b) How do you feel the importance of Facebook in the Tunisian revolution of January 2011 (from 0: not important at all to 10: very important)? The open-end free question was: According to your rating, please explain in one sentence your choice. All participants were anonymous Internet users completing the questionnaire. The original sample was 352, of which 333 (94.6 %) were retained in the final analysis.

4. Results

We have selected the participants' answers that contain the following key words typically associated with the resilient processes: *support*, *aid*, *solidarity*, *hope*, *project*, *collective*, *better life*, *love*, *potential*, *positive*, *best*, *solution*, *collectivity*, *together*, *resolution*, *support*, *help*. Two main branches are linked as shown in Figure 1: **Facebook** and **Information**. In fact, in the first branch "seeking informational support " can be considered as part of "seeking social support" that is a critical dimension to give rise to resilient processes. Hence, it is likely that this first branch would support the emergence of the second one. This begs the question: *what the part individual and collective factors play in this complex social dynamics as a function of risk factors*? That's why risk factors were extracted based on the following key words: *poverty, dictatorship, combat, suffering, aggression, despotism, violence, lie, suppression, and the protective factors were extracted based on (individual): freedom, truth and (collective): family, united, union, people, religion, mobilization*. Consequently, only 26% of the original sample was used in this study. As expected, the results revealed more prominent collective factors reflected by three big clusters: Information support, social support and virtual social support (see Figure 1).
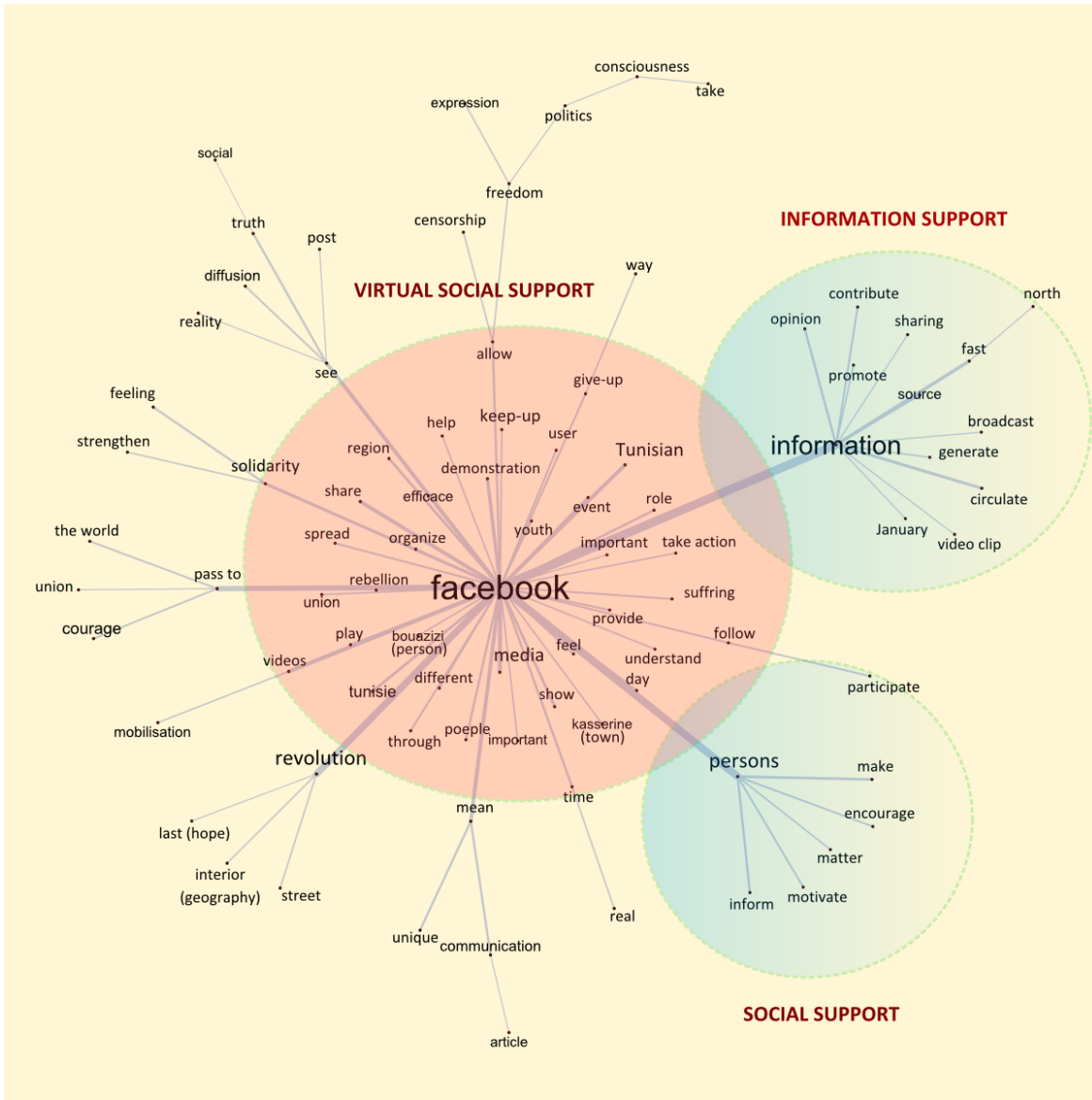
Figure 1. Maximum leaf-spanning tree solution after the lemmatization of the partial corpus that was extracted based on the presence of key words associated with: resilient processes, protection factors (individual and collective) and risk factors in participants' answers.

5. Conclusion

The exposure to traumatic events forces people to look for outlets via multiple coping strategies in order to circumvent the adverse effects of such negative incidents on our mental health. After revisiting the same corpus collected by Marzouki et al. (2012) study, the similarity analysis showed that informational support provided by Facebook is rooted in seeking social support. In addition, collective protective factors occupy a large

place relative to individual factors and are more likely to lead to this informational role during the revolution. One may ask, why only 1/4 of the original sample exhibited words associated with resilient process? A possible explanation of this interesting statistic maybe attributed to the time frame where the study was launched. Indeed, few weeks after the fall of the regime, Tunisian citizens were not yet focusing on future plans for their social life but were more trying to collectively enjoy the unexpected retaliation that Facebook played in their favor. Hence, resilient processes take sometime to be settled providing a clear orientation in the future as partly showed in some studies (e.g., Seginer, 2008)

The present study showed that the ability to continue to work actively to achieve goals in the face of life's difficulties could be enhanced by virtual collective interactions. Consequently, social networking can be considered as an interface where the expression of resilient processes is made possible by the presence of positive feedbacks and common values shared within the cyberspace. Future studies on the anthropology of well-being and hope can further investigate the role that social networking may play in shaping individual and collective resilience as well as virtual social identity and its dynamics (e.g., Carbonella, 2003).

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