

## Telecommunications and revolution

*This document is an analysis of InterInnov, based on several articles dealing with the recent events in Tunisia and Egypt. It was released by InterInnov on the 10 February 2011.*

The recent events in Tunisia and Egypt have underlined the power of telecommunications and social networks in the frame of a revolution. Indeed, the traditional media (international press and television) would have had great difficulties reporting any sort of information from these countries without the help of the new means of information.

### **The telecommunications as a threat to dictatorship**

As the murmurings of revolt got louder in Tunisia and Egypt, one of the first moves of the Presidents, respectively Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak was to censor the Internet. Indeed, the web was rapidly identified as a great means to receive and share information about the events occurring in both countries.

Several video-sharing websites such as YouTube, Vimeo, Flickr and Dailymotion were inaccessible in Tunisia, and “error 404” became another way to name the governmental censorship. In Egypt, the British company Vodafone indicated that mobile telephone companies were ordered to cut off the communications.

### **Telecommunications as a powerful means to help the revolution**

Tunisia is the most connected country in Africa. Its population is very young and Facebook is the most visited website in the country. As a result, the conditions were reunited to allow the Tunisian people to organize the revolution. Indeed, the telecommunications, and especially the social networks have played an important role during this event. By providing a continuous service, the telephone companies from Tunisia (Tunisie Telecom, Tunisiana and Orange Tunisie) have been a great support to the population.

In order to foster this role, Google and Twitter launched together an initiative to support the Egyptians who had been disconnected from their means of communication. They created a service called “Speak2tweet” that allowed the Egyptians to leave a vocal message from a fixed line, which would then be converted into a tweet.

### **How the revolution has changed the Internet**

Telecommunications were not responsible for the events in Tunisia and Egypt. They were not a driver either. The real drivers of the revolution are the people who are struggling against a system. However, telecommunications were used to facilitate the communication and free the speech of the actors.

In countries where the Internet and especially social networks such as Facebook were mostly seen as an entertainment, the vision of the web as changed especially through the role it played in the Tunisia events:



- First of all, it was a place of freedom of speech, where Tunisians could share their views about their government;
- It was a place to learn information on the government and the event: no one could pretend they did not know;
- It was a place to communicate with the rest of the world and spread information;
- It was a place to count the supporters on each side;
- It was a place to coordinate the movement, and organize the demonstrations.