Facebook versus State Control
The Role of Social Media as
Political Infrastructure in Egypt:
An Assessment

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This study investigates the transformative Egyptian media landscape that shaped and reflected the equally transformative political landscape that led to Egypt's historical revolution. It analyzes media systems and development in Egypt and their relationship to the extent political systems. Once completely controlled by the government, independent news sources have been permitted in Egypt. How have these changes affected the news media landscape? What challenges do they present to the new and established media and to the government? It discusses the post- revolutionary phase, in which Egyptian media are undergoing restricting process that mirrors political transformations. In an effort to understand the key factors of media systems transformations and development at modern stages and the role of the social media (SM) before and after the 2011 Egyptian revolution.

The Political development of individual Arab countries is reflected in their media systems: State–run media, directly financed and controlled by the government, have for decades prevailed throughout the region. In the 1990s the majority of Arab countries began to open their media markets to allow privatization and competition with international players. Khamis (2008) determined that the post 1990 period has brought about many significant changes in the new Arab media scene, namely: the emergence of media privatization, the introduction of private satellite channels, the spread of privately owned opposition newspapers, both in print and online, as well as the introduction of the Internet.

By 2011 the region was estimated to have access to over 700 satellite channels in Arabic while the Internet diffusion rates had reached the 25% mark. Web usage in countries like Egypt, the UAE, Jordan, Lebanon, and Kuwait was approaching global level (Ayish, 2010). In Egypt, about 30 million people use the Internet, accounting for approximately 36% of the Total population (Internet World States, 2012), Statistics also shows an increase in the use of social media in Egypt. Pew (2011) confirmed that the usage rate increased from 18% in 2010 to 28% in 2011, He attributed this to the growing role of social media in the political field (Pew, 2011). These changes have created a wave of "liberalization and democratization" in Egypt and the rest of the Arab world. Social media is becoming increasingly relevant for 21st century politics, not only for political campaigning purposes, but also as a platform to encourage the public in engaging political discourse.

The American journalist Thomas Friedman (2009) argued that the Internet, blogs, online social networks such as Facebook, YouTube and text messaging via mobile phones, particularly among young men "is giving Middle Easterners cheap tools to communicate horizontally in order to mobilize politically, criticize their leaders harshly...outside of state control." (The New York Times, June 14, 2009.). However, social networking alone cannot be expected to bring direct political change. It's the long-term impact, the development of new political and civil society engagement, and individual and institutional competencies on which analysts are focusing (Ayish, 2010).

Faris (2010) confirmed that "while states, including Egypt, are adapting to surveillance and filtering of online activities, social media networks make it impossible for authoritarian countries to control their media environments in the way that such regimes have typically in the past." (p.viii). This study will analyze the transition and dynamics of the Egyptian media landscape over the last 60 years. Once completely controlled by the government, independent news sources have been permitted in Egypt. How have these changes affected the news media landscape? What challenges do they present to the new and established media and to the government? It discusses the post- revolutionary phase, in which Egyptian media are undergoing restricting process that mirrors political transformations. In an effort to understand the key factors of media systems transformations and development at modern stages and the role of the social media (SM) before and after the 2011 Egyptian revolution.

In recent years, the Egyptian media

have undoubtedly witnessed significant changes. The post 2000 media landscape has moved from being under a "Nasser-style totalitarian government" to a more liberal, modernized authoritarian government (Hamdy, 2008). According to Hamdy, by asserting control over the media the Egyptian regime has applied a "stick-and-carrot" approach. Favorable reporting is rewarded, critical reporting is punished. In the early 1990s, in affirming its crucial role as a leader in the media field and as a major political player in the Arab world, Egypt was the first in the region to establish direct broadcast satellite (DBS) technology. This was followed by the emergence of media privatization, the beginning of private satellite television channels, the extent of privately owned opposition newspapers, and the introduction of the Internet with its massive flow of information (Hamdy, 2008; Khamis, 2008).

The establishment of satellite television channels in Egypt represented a significant change from the "monolithic", state-controlled and government-owned media model to a much more "pluralistic" and varied media landscape. As a result, the Egyptian media have shifted from total "state media ownership" and harsh "governmental domination" to "private ownership" and "individual or party control" (Abdulla, 2006; Amin, 2002; Khamis, 2008; Rugh, 2004; Zayani, 2008). This transition has been coupled with several changes to Egyptian media law. Rugh (2004) classified Egypt as having a media environment that was moving away from an authoritarian to a more liberal system. On the other hand, other scholars have classified Egypt as being more in a pre-transition stage (Iskandar, 2007; Mellor, 2005). In either case, the Egyptian media scene has changed dramatically. This transitional period can be described as a period of political reform. As a result, this transition has reflected the Egyptian regime's will to accept more criticism and alternative views. The most obvious feature

of this period has been the unprecedented freedom of expression that has created a new generation of journalists who are practising press freedom and criticizing governmental politics.

Taking this into account, the first part of this study discusses the development of the Egyptian media institutions (press, radio, television, and new media). The second part examines the relationship between the political regime and the media institutions, as well as how the regime controls and operates media institutions.

The development of media institutions in Egypt: The Egyptian press

Egyptian newspapers, as in other Arab countries, initially appeared during a period of foreign colonial rule. Newspapers in Egypt are an 18th century phenomenon: the first newspaper was published in August 1798 under the French occupation. Since the beginning, newspapers have been essential communication tools for colonial powers as well as for Egyptian leaders in spreading political and social opinions. The first newspapers were therefore not privately-owned but official government publications. Napoleon Bonaparte established Le Courier d'Egypt as the first newspaper in Egypt. It generally dealt with political news and appeared in editions of four pages once every four days to serve French interests in Egypt (Rugh, 2004). In 1828 Mohamed Ali issued the first Egyptian newspaper in Arabic called Al Waqai al-Misreya, (Egyptian Events). The first popular newspaper Wadi an-Neel, (Nile Valley) was issued in 1867, and this was followed by a number of newspapers that reflected the political, economic, social and cultural conditions. As noted by Dabbous,

The history of the Egyptian press is the history of Egypt. Every political event and reform had its influence on the press. The Egyptian press was the first voice calling for independence, demanding education for the masses, and introducing western thought and ideas." (Dabbous, 1994: 61).

Since the Egyptian press has always been

closely tied to politics, its publications were, over time, organized by a cycle of laws. The first law on publications was issued November 26, 1881 and was the earliest press legislation in Egypt. According to this law, any individual could publish a newspaper on the condition that he had permission from the government. However, this law gave the government the right to close down or confiscate any newspaper violating public order, or religion and morals. After Britain colonized Egypt in 1882, Egyptian newspapers became more popular. It began with the publication of Al-Liwaa by Mustafa Kamel in 1900 and was followed by Muayyad and Al Garida and the emergence of their affiliated political parties. Between 1923 and 1939 the Egyptian press largely enjoyed freedom.

When World War II (WWII) began, martial law was re-imposed, and several papers were closed (Dabbous, 1994). After the 1952 revolution, the government took various measures to unite the press with the revolution. The revolution had a political agenda that implied a contradictory approach to basic democratic values. President Gamal Abdel Nasser, for example, used an "iron fist" policy in dealing with his opponents. He closed many newspapers that had existed before the 1952 revolution. The government also imposed heavy fines on newspaper journalists and and sent many to prison. In sum, Nasser's policy led to a backlash against the margin of freedom various print media had enjoyed (Khamis, 2008).

In 1960 the press was nationalized under the Press Organization Law (Law 156) which enabled the Arab Socialist Union (ASU) to own and control the press. No newspapers could be published without the Union's permission. The main role of Egyptian newspapers during this period was to mobilize public opinion in favor of the revolution's ideology. The press was discouraged from criticizing the basic policies of the national government, including the major lines of its domestic policy. The

media thus focused on Arab nationalism, pan-Arab identity, and support for independence movements all over the world.

The Egyptian media system under Nasser fitted what Rugh (2004) described as the "mobilization press" model (Rugh, 1987, 2004). When President Anwar al-Sadat came to office, the Egyptian press entered a new phase. The new regime removed direct censorship (while retaining government control of the press) and adopted a multi-party system. In 1980, new legislation was passed to organize the Egyptian press institutions and to give them more independence from the government (Law 148, 1980). This law affirmed that the press was "an independent popular authority performing its mission freely in the service of the community."

Under Sadat the new law gave political parties the right to publish their own newspapers, and journalists were free to write as they pleased as long as they followed the official policy. Although the regime supported opposition parties and expressed a more open attitude toward the press, it still took a dogmatic approach to the regime-press relationship: the regime failed to create a democratic environment within which the political parties and their affiliated press publications could operate. After the assassination of Sadat on October 6, 1981 Hosni Mubarak became president. The Mubarak era witnessed a number of important developments which affected the Egyptian media landscape. These deserve further attention and contextualization within the larger picture of changes to the Arab media scene in the post 1990 era (Khamis, 2008).

The press system and political authority

For some commentators, a nation-state's mass media system is a product and a reflection of the character of the political system within which it exists. Severin and Tankard indicated that "political, economic, and social forces directly affect media content. Media ownership and control af-

fect media content, which in turn determines media effects" (Severin and Tankard, 1992: 285). Hamada (2001) reported that the media in the Middle East were the product of two basic components: colonialism and post-independence circumstance. The mass media, as a major source of information in Egypt, have been influenced by the political, economic and social events that have taken place there in the last 60 years or so. Since post-independence, Egypt's media institutions have all been under the direct control of the political regimes, but the type of control has differed.

Press systems prior to the 1952 July revolution

The political situation prior to the 1952 July revolution had increased the influence of the Egyptian press since most Egyptians had united under the goal of gaining independence from the British. Hence the entire press media, seem to have agreed on working toward that goal (Hafez, 1990). Having been mobilized around the idea of liberation, the press was a politically powerful voice, largely due to the absence of an efficient broadcasting system.

Prior to the revolution, and during the two multi-party periods (1907-1914 and 1922-1953), a powerful relationship existed between the press. and Egypt's political parties (Negida, 1988). This era witnessed a highly politicized and exciting media environment and a high level of partisanship among both media professionals and media readers. Just as the political parties in Egypt had been a product of the press – the National Party through the Al-Lowaa newspaper; the Omma Party through the Al-Garida newspaper; and the Al-Esslah Party through the Al-Moaied Newspaper – Egyptian press benefited from and flourished in the presence of the political parties (Abu Zeid, 1977). Each depended on the other.

Press systems under Nasser's rule (1952-1970)

When Nasser first came to power, one of his main goals was to put an end to the

monopolization of capitalist parties. The revolutionary government dissolved all political parties (Vatikiotis, 1991) and in 1956 created a single party called the Socialist Union. Its task was to achieve the goals of the revolution and to encourage efforts towards the political, social and economic development of the state. The Socialist Union fixed priorities of the new regime. The party was to be democratic, socialist and cooperative. Nasser's regime mobilized all the Egyptian mass media to achieve his aims. He nationalized mass media institutions so that their main role from then on was to serve the president and his government. According to Amin, "In 1960 Nasser nationalized the Egyptian press, including all privately owned press organizations, forcing them to surrender their ownership to the National Union (Al-Ithad Al-Ishtraki) and re-imposed a censored press system after a brief lifting" (Amin and Napoli, 2000: 179).

In his significant and comprehensive book, The Functions of the Arab Press in the Arab Society, Rugh classified the Egyptian press as a mobilization press. Nasser's regime considered the press to be an important tool for mobilizing popular support for their political programs (Rugh, 1987, 2004). While Rugh's study presented a comprehensive description of the Arab media, some researchers have criticized it. For example, Hamada (2001) pointed out that Rugh's study included generalities which did not reflect the variety and complexity of the Arab media, particularly in terms of their performance and association with public opinion. In the same vein, Idris (1998) pointed out that:

The Egyptian government allows nowadays some kind of political and press diversity. The Egyptian intellectuals call the press which is owned by government the national press, while they call the rest of the press diverse, opposition, independent press (Idris, 1998: p.63).

McPhail (2006) also criticized Rugh's classification. He suggested that it was dif-

ficult to "categorize media in different countries with various social orders into four categories, namely mobilization, loyalist, transitional and diverse" (p.202). McPhail also criticized Rugh's taxonomy for focusing on only one variable, namely "the relationship to government and not the type of news and editorial comments those media make" (McPhail, 2006: p.202).

With the advent of the 1952 July revolution, the political authority recognized the great importance of the press. Law No. 156 of 1960 was issued to organize and nationalize the Egyptian newspapers. Thus, the ownership of the newspapers Dar al-Ahram, Dar Akbar al-Yom, Dar-Roseal-Yusuf, and Dar al-Hilal was transferred to the Socialist Union, the only political party at the time (Amin and Napoli, 2000). In light of nationalization, the press fell prey to bureaucracy and, at the same time, became a chattel of the political system, a tool to justify and support government action (Hafez, 1990).

Press systems under Sadat's rule (1970-1981)

Hopwood (1982) concluded that Sadat was more open than Nasser because he claimed to keep no secrets from the people and let them have a greater role in government. He changed most institutions except the presidency. In place of power centers, he tried to set up less personal institutions such as the People's Assembly, the press and the multi-party system. Egypt, however, basically remained a one-party state, that of the centre party, which was very much an extension of Sadat's personality.

According to Amin (2006), Sadat's regime, "in theory...adopted an open attitude towards the press, but in practice his press policies were ambivalent" (p.126). In Amin's view, Sadat's political regime eliminated censorship to a large degree but retained state control of the media (Amin, 2002). Anwar Al-Sadat's presidency witnessed political, economic, social, and media orientations which were radically different from those of the preceding period.

Sadat adopted a multi-party system under the 1977 Parties' Law, establishing three political leagues which became political parties. These parties were allowed to publish their own newspapers. Although some controversy existed regarding the relationship between the press and political authority, President Sadat ended the debate by announcing that journalism was to follow the government's directives. Even though political plurality was a fact at the time, the political authority imposed organizational restrictions on journalism.

Press systems under Mubarak's rule

Hosni Mubarak became president after Sadat was assassinated in 1981, Egypt had been under an emergency law which "authorizes prepublication censorship, confiscation of newspapers, and closing down of publications" (Amin, 2002: p.127). However, President Mubarak's policy towards journalism and journalists was characterized from the beginning with calmness, rationalism, and tolerance. As was as was the case under Sadat, no newspapers were confiscated or banned (Hafez, 1990). Mubarak moved Egypt's media system towards more freedom of the press and expression than his two predecessors had and, as a result, the Egyptian press experienced more freedom than the majority of third world countries. Mubarak allowed the opposition's newspapers to criticize the government. In 2004, Al-Masri Al-Youm was issued as a privately-owned daily newspaper. Al-Masri Al-Youm is at the time of this writing one of the most successful newspapers in Egypt. It criticized the regime and published hard-hitting investigative reports against the political regime. Alongside Al-Masri Al-Youm, the Egyptian press environment also witnessed the birth of many small, independent and opposition newspapers. Examples include Al-Badeel, Al-dostour, Elaosboa, Nahdat Misr, Al-Fagr, Sout Al-Umma, Al- Karama, and Alyoum Alsabea. These new newspapers represented a wide array of views. Moreover, newspapers such as Al-Fagr, Sout Al-Umma and Al-dostour

crossed some red lines and criticized the president himself (Khamis, 2008). They also helped to create a more competitive press environment and to increase freedom of the press.

The development of the political system's relationship with the press did not guarantee that the press would become a powerful force for affecting political decision-making or for setting Egypt's public agenda. The Egyptian government, as in other Arab countries, has set the media agenda. As observed by Amin, "Historically, governments have set the media agenda; radio and television have served as a means to promote their political, religious, cultural, and economic programs and filter what Egyptians receive, hear and see" (Amin, 2002: 126). The Egyptian constitution provides for freedom of speech and the press, and substantiates that the press is to perform its mission freely and independently. However, it also sees the press as helping to create a free atmosphere for the society's development with well founded knowledge and contributing to the best solutions in all matters concerning the best interests of the nation and its citizens.

The Supreme Council, in practice, places many restrictions on these freedoms. For example, as Sakr (2005) concluded:

In Egypt, Law No. 40 of 1977 had reintroduced political parties and, with them, political party newspapers, published under strict control. To all intents and purposes, even after so-called independent papers started to be allowed in the mid-1990s, a dualism persisted between government-owned newspapers on one hand and al-sahafa al mu'arda (the 'opposition press') on the other. Journalists in both camps, however, worked under tight restrictions. In non-government press they were denied equal access to source or equal representation on the sole legally recognized national journalists' union. Journalists writing for government organs meanwhile worked to a pre-set agenda that hardly required any proactive news-

gathering at all (p.145).

Furthermore, the press law, publication law, penal code, strict libel laws, and a long-standing state of emergency restrict freedom of expression so that many Egyptian journalists face imprisonment. The new press law that passed its first reading in the People's Assembly in July 2006 was harsh on journalists and a number of journalists and opposition leaders protested. (Sakr, 2007). As Amin (2000) pointed out, "in theory, there is no press censorship, but in fact censorship permeates every aspect of expression in Egypt - not just newspapers, but broadcasting, theatre, movies, magazines, and books" (p.186).

In 2007 five chief-editors from the independent and opposition newspapers were sentenced to between one and two years in prison for criticizing President Mubarak and his prime minister. For example, Ibrahim Essa, editor of the al-Dostour newspaper was charged with "endangering national stability". Adel Hamouda, editor of Al-fajr, along with Abel Halim Quandeil, and Wael Ibrashi, editor of Sout Al-Umma, all received jail sentences, subject to appeal, for "insulting the president" (Black, 2007).

Despite evidence of change, the Mubarak regime continued to use many tools to stifle political expression for political opponents. For instance, he used the law of shame and the emergency law to censor and dominate opposing opinions (El Massry, 2009). However, it is fair to say that during the last four years of Mubarak's regime, Egyptian journalists – more than at any time in recent history – began to feel at liberty to openly criticize the regime and its members. This new-found liberty, as confirmed by Black (2007), "has accelerated in parallel with the recent stop-and-go political liberalization project in Egypt, which began with a public outpouring of discontent as the United States invaded Iraq in 2003" (Black, 2007:2).

The status of Egyptian media under the military council's rule

According to El-Khalili (2013) Egyptian army has always described itself as an army from the people and for the people. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), which came to power after Mubarak, stepped down February 11, 2011. In the early days of its rule it spoke strongly about Egypt's need to embrace freedom and democracy, and confirmed that a free press was a necessary component. Initially, the SCAF's attitude toward the press and freedom of speech was one of tolerance (Egypt State Information Service, 2011). The post-January 25 revolution brought many significant changes to the Egyptian media scene. The military council began by granting a wider margin of freedom to the media and permitting a more plural system in both the political and media domains.

The most salient example of this pluralistic media scene was that the SCAF allowed one of the more popular organizations, the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood, to participate in political life and recognized it as a political party. Furthermore, the SCAF began granting private publishing licenses and gave many political groups licenses to establish new political parties (Egypt State Information Service, 2011). In addition, the SCAF gave licenses to 16 new TVsatelliet stations, moving away from the practice according to which the National Security Agency would have had a final say. In Egypt's television market, stations like CBC, Dream, ON TV, Mehwar or Hayat today operate at eye level with international competitors. It was clear that the SCAF adopted a new approach which critics have termed as a fall-back to old habits. Even though the media landscape has progressed positively in Egypt, the military council imposed restrictions on freedom of speech. The SCAF has used a number of methods to stifle political expression for political opponents. This has been clearly demonstrated by various direct and indirect controls over the media. Walker & Orttung (2012) con-cluded that the SCAF has been criticized for "using the media as an instrument of political manipulation.

According to the constitutional declaration released by the SCAF after the revolution, all Egyptians became entitled to be tried by their "natural judge". However, dozens of activists, bloggers and journalists, however, have since been sent to military courts. The military council also extended the Emergency Law ("http://egyptelections.carnegieendowment.org/ retrieved" http:// retrieved, November 18, 2011). This law affirms that journalists accused of spreading news deemed to be damaging to the president or heads of state can be imprisoned for up to five years. The Emergency Law grants the president the right to suspend basic freedoms; fines and punishments like those listed above can be implemented without fair trial, and news organizations can be censored or closed in the name of national security (Mohamed, 2011).

In September 2011 the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI) together with the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights (EOHR) in a joint report on Egypt's freedom of the press since the revolution, confirmed that local press coverage of government activities continued to be editorially partial, driven by the same pre-revolution biases ("http://www.anhri.net/en/"http://www.anhri.net/en/, retrieved October 25, 2011). The report investigated the media coverage of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces between July 10 and July 30. It analyzed newspapers, news websites and TV channels that were both state-run and privately owned. The report pointed out that the state media had dealt with the news and issues concerning the SCAF in the same manner as previously under the ousted president Mubarak ("http://www.anhri.net/en/"http://www.anhri.net/en/, retrieved, October 25, 2011).

The report showed that the state-owned media simply replaced the image of Mubarak and his son Gamal with that of SCAF

members and the Prime Minster Essam Sharaf. The SCAF members and Sharaf appeared more frequently in the state-owned media coverage. While the state media generally demonstrated support for the SCAF, privately-owned newspapers criticized the military council's performance. The report explained that the lack of change in the state media coverage could be due to two factors. Firstly, the people who had worked in most of the state media during Mubarak's rule were not replaced after the revolution, despite changes among the top leaders. Secondly, it is difficult for any media institution to suddenly change decades-old mechanisms and instill new approaches in a short period of time ("http://www.anhri.net/en/"http://www.anhri.net/en/, retrieved, October 25, 2011).

Hence, some commentators such as Saeed Shoeib, Huweida Mustafa, and Nabil Abel-Fatah have criticized the military council for pursuing the same policy adopted by Mubarak's regime. Saeed Shoeib, the Egyptian journalist, pointed out that the laws and pressures imposed on the media have not changed. There has been much debate since the revolution about restructuring the state media, but little has changed in practical terms. This may be due to two reasons. Firstly, all state media remain under the direct control of the state. Secondly, laws exist that allow the political regime to exercise the right to dominate, interfere and close any channel at any time, while allowing other channels to ignore these laws. (http://arabic.youm7.com/ retrieved, October 25, 2011, retrieved, October 25, 2011).

In the same vein, Huweida Mustafa, the Egyptian journalist and media expert, indicated that the official media are still the mouthpiece of the military council and part of national security (HYPERLINK "http://www.almasryalyoum.com/en/node/511139" http://www.almasryalyoum.com/en/node/511139, retrieved November 18, 2011) Loyalty remains strong and the official media continue to take their orders

from the SCAF.

In conclusion, despite some changes in the media landscape following the January 25th revolution, there is an ambivalent official attitude towards the media. As with the previous political regimes in Egypt, the military council that took power has "in theory" adopted an open attitude towards the media, but in practice still places rigid restrictions on journalists. Compared to Mubarak's regime, freedom of the press under the military council has not changed significantly and the military council has so far failed to present a true democratic environment in Egypt ("http://www.anhri.net/en/"http://www.anhri.net/en/, retrieved, October 29, 2011).

Broadcasting systems and political authority

Radio and television companies in almost all Arab countries are subject to stricter government control than the press, especially since they transcend the obstacles of literacy and reach a wider audience. Governments in the Arab world thus monopolize the ownership, operation, and supervision of broadcast institutions (Amin, 2002). Rugh (2004) affirmed that because radio and television have the ability to overcome borders and literacy obstacles, all political regimes in the Arab world have a much greater interest in controlling them and keeping them as a tool to mobilize the masses and propagate the official line. In addition, the cost of establishing radio or television broadcasting is higher than the cost of establishing print media. Consequently, unlike with print, television production in these developing countries is beyond the financial means of all but a few (Rugh, 2004). In fact, from the beginning, broadcasting systems in the Arab world were controlled by the British and French colonial powers, and were used to achieve their objectives. When colonialism ended, the newly independent states were content to keep the broadcasting systems as governmental institutions. According to Ayish (2002):

Arab governments in newly independent states instituted television as a governmental monopoly. The television monopoly model traditionally derives from the notion of broadcasting as a government operation harnessed mainly to serve national development goals. Drawing on public service and centralized broadcast systems dominant in former colonial nations, strong government leverage over television organizations virtually stripped broadcasters of much of their editorial autonomy. Operating within ministries of information, television organizations, for the most part, were funded exclusively from national budgetary allocations and their employees were viewed as part of public sector bureaucracy (p.138).

In Egypt, revolutionaries realized the importance of radio from its inception and sought to control it. They used it as a political tool to direct the masses and propagate their regime's ideology. The broadcasting system was controlled through the political authority of the Ministry of Information which administered broadcasting activity, appointed staff, and determined the labor policies of radio and television (Hamada, 1993, 1995). The new Egyptian leadership in 1952 recognized the significant role of radio as a political propaganda tool. Through stations like "The Arab Voice", President Nasser broadcast his revolutionist, pan-Arab messages to the rest of the Arab countries, most of which were still under British and French occupation. As mentioned earlier, when Nasser came to power the mass media he established became among the most influential in the Arab world.

Through Sout Al Arab "The Arab Voice", the best known radio station in Egypt at the time, Nasser mobilized not only Egyptian but also Arab public opinion (Boyd, 1999; Abdullah, 2003). Nasser used "The Arab Voice" to help Arab countries gain their independence and to serve other "nationalist" causes (Boyd, 1999). In this context, radio helped Egypt speak to the

Arab nations and became a political and cultural tool in the hands of the government. After Sadat's peace agreement with Israel in 1979, which resulted in Arab countries boycotting Egypt, radio was used to counter attacks from these countries (Boyd, 1999). Although the print media under presidents Sadat and Mubarak witnessed many changes – both towards and away from greater diversity and freedom of expression – the broadcasting system did not see any change under their leadership. This may be as Rugh (2004) suggested:

Anyone with a printing press has the technical capability of reaching the

literate elite, and while this is seen by the government as a potential threat, it is not nearly as great a political threat as radio or television station broadcasting to millions (p.181).

Social media and the regime's response in Egypt

In his book, Understanding Media, McLuhan (1964) argued that "the 'content' of any medium is always another medium" (p.8). He added that "new media are not completely new phenomena. They grow out of old media through complex process of 'repurposing' and 'incorporation'" (p.8). In this same sense, Bolter and Grusin (1999) called that process of representing one medium in the form of another "remediation". They argued that "remediation" is a defining characteristic of the new digital media (Bolter and Grusin, 999: p.64). The structure of the Internet has shifted from a medium which, like traditional media, failed to provide users with interactive opportunities, to a more dynamic technology that enables involvement in the content creation process.

The Internet has quickly cemented itself as the communication medium of the early 21st century. The proliferation of new media has intensified competition for audiences causing a destabilization of the established media order (McQuail et al., 1998). This shift has changed the balance of power between states and oppositions. It

has increased the level of democracy across the world (Wade, 2005). These new forms of media, especially in Egypt, have revolutionized Egyptian society and radically altered its media landscape. It has brought about a new era of diversity of opinions and dynamic public debates which has shifted the focus away from direct state ownership, domination, and control. In the same vein, Khamis (2008) added that these changes in the media arena have encouraged the birth of new political debates and discussions, the formation of new media effects, as well as an increasing wave of "liberalization" and "democratization" in the Arab region.

According to Khamis & Gold (2012) social media has played, and are still playing, a crucial role in the calls for political change that have swept the Arab region. However, as mentioned earlier, social networking alone cannot be expected to bring direct political change. It's the long-term impact, the development of new political and civil society engagement, and individual and institutional competencies on which analysts are focusing (Ayish, 2010). For example Egypt in the last few years of Mubarak's Political regime has witnessed a massive corruption across all platforms. Galal Amin (2009) confirmed that Egypt was in "distress". For example, businessmen see a set in parliament as an easy and speedy way to get a bank loans. Parliamentarians are often able to secure loans without guarantees and also are able to avoid the types of approvals and guarantee needed for other credit seekers. Egyptian people complain often about corruption and shortcomings across all platforms including economic, political, educational, cultural, and social platforms. Egyptians have been complaining about the general quality of life for decades. Although Egyptians never took to the streets in millions as they did during the January 25 Revolution, their anger was obvious in the increasing number of demonstrations, especially sit-ins, in front of the Egyptian Parliament (Amin, 2009; El-Khlili 2013). El Tantawy & Wiest

(2011) suggested that "social media technologies have been used in organizing and implementing collective activities, promoting a sense of community and collective identity among marginalized group members, creating less-confined political spaces, establishing connections with other social movements, and publicizing".

El-Khalili (2013) confirmed that Egyptian young men succeeded in mobilizing for the Revolution of 25 January by diffusion an event on the social networking site Facebook.com setting a date and time for the revolution took the world by storm. El-Khalili added " It was clear that Egyptian tech savvy youth spoke a different language, one that their aging regime didn't speak. However, realizing the need to speak the same language of Egyptian youth netizens, SCAF created an 'official' Facebook page six days after Mubarak stepped down to "communicate with the Egyptian people" (El-Khalili, 2013:3)

Furthermore, Lynch (2005) explained how the new media in the Arab world have acted as motors of change which have the ability not just to set the public agenda, but also to encourage citizens to protest against autocratic Arab regimes. In addition, Faris (2010) noted that "while states, including Egypt, have become more adept at surveillance and filtering online activities, social media networks make it impossible for authoritarian countries to control their media environments in the way that such regimes have typically in the past" (p.viii).

The next section briefly discusses the development of new media in Egypt and discusses the relationship between Mubarak's political regime and the social media network prior to the January 25 revolution.

The first use of Internet services in Egypt date back to October 1993, taking the form of a link between the Egyptian Universities Network (EUN) and the European Academic and Research Network (EARN). The user community at that time was estimated to be about 2,000 to 3,000 users (Abdulla, 2003). Government of-

ficials believed that the Internet had the capacity to stimulate socio-economic development, private sector growth and expansion of the Internet economy (Farag, 2003). They supported the use of the Internet to transform Egypt into a knowledge-based society, thus enabling it to draw closer to western countries in social and economic terms, and secure Egypt's leading position in the Arab world. Among these competing values and uses, economic and business priorities have gained the upper hand (Farag, 2003).

After 1994, the Internet in Egypt became a public service, not only for the educational sector, but also for the commercial community. As a result, the number of users increased from 2,000 in 1994 to more than 25,000 in early 1997 (Abdulla, 2003). In 1996, the free Internet access policy was replaced by an open access policy where Internet access offered to the commercial domain was privatized, and more than 12 private Internet service providers started operation. After a series of negative articles in the state press claiming that the Internet was being used to spread revolutionary material, an official body — the Internet Society of Egypt (ISE) – was formed to act as a regulatory body concerning Internet matters (Abdulla, 2003).

In 2000, the number of Internet users in Egypt was estimated to be at 220,000. Most were located in Cairo, followed by those in Alexandria. There was limited access outside of these cities. In 2002 the user community was estimated to be at about one million users, with one of the largest growth rates of Internet connectivity in the Middle East. Between early 2008 and the first quarter of 2009, the number of Internet users in Egypt increased from just under 11 million to 13 million, equal to more than 17 percent of the population and representing an annual growth rate of 20 to 30 percent (Faris, 2010; Mohamed, 2010). In 2012 the number of Internet users in Egypt increased to be 30.94 million (EL-Khalili, 2013).

In June 2006, the Egyptian High Administration Court confirmed that the Information Ministry and the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology had the authority to block, suspend, or shut down websites that they considered to be a threat to "national security" (Mohamed, 2010). As a result, the security police selectively blocked a select number of websites, blogs and cybercafés, and various kinds of online journalism.

Some media scholars have argued that this number of users qualifies the Internet to be classified as a mass medium that can have an impact on society (Morris and Organ, 1996). The Egyptian government responded to the increase of Internet use by implementing legislation to observe users. With Internet penetration rate on the rise, social media became a significant tool used by activists to uncover corruption, mobilize for protests, and act as a watchdog over the traditional media and the government (El- Khalili, 2013). Also, activists used social media to talk about police violence and mass sexual harassment incidents. As the governmental- owned misled the Egyptians people during the revolution accusing and describing activists as paid enemies trying to disrupt social peace, social media became a popular alternative for seeking the truth in the absence of media credibility. For example, the Egyptian television often hosted celebrity guests who confirmed that foreign hands are playing a role in the revolution by paying protestors $100 along with a Kentucky meal on a daily basis to keep going (El–Wardani, 2011, El- Khalili, 2013).

In one example, Abel-Karim Amer, a 22 year-old Egyptian, became the first blogger to be jailed (for four years, beginning in 2007) after being convicted on several counts of offending President Mubarak. The Abel-Karim story shows the strong link between blogging and censorship in Egypt. Many bloggers were illegally arrested for days or months on the order of the Minister of the Interior. Hence, many organizations

such as Reporters without Borders and the Committee to Protect Journalism considered Egypt to be one of the worst countries in terms of not allowing electronic publishing and for not observing international conventions that prevent the censorship of electronic websites (Mohamed, 2010).

Despite the censorship of online publishing under Mubarak's regime, Egyptian blogs have begun to form a significant virtual society that is having a political, social, and cultural impact on the public agenda. Egyptian blogs have attracted a new generation of political activists. At the beginning, the most important Egyptian bloggers posted comments in English, including the Arabist, Baheyya, Big Pharaoh, and others. No country in the region has experienced a bigger impact from blogging and other types of Internet activism than Egypt. In comparison to other Middle Eastern countries such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt has no strict method to control or filter Internet connections. In 2008, Mubarak's political regime arrested more than 100 bloggers (Faris, 2010; Mohamed, 2010). It is also important to note that the relationship between bloggers and newspapers was initially a toxic one because of the competition between them; some bloggers see themselves as the "new journalists". But this relationship has slowly developed into a cooperative one (Faris, 2010). The impact of bloggers in Egypt is not limited to people who have Internet access: it can also reach out to those who do not (Mohamed, 2010). Mohamed (2010) argued that Egyptian political bloggers depend on sources associated with independent newspapers, satellite television programs, and information quoted from human rights organizations' websites. These sources frequently provide critical and oppositional views to those of the Egyptian government. Some of these criticisms have included statements denouncing the governing regime's corruption, lack of respect for the rule of law, abuse of power, restrictions on

demonstrations and industrial action, and its crackdown on Internet activists.

Bloggers have rarely incorporated links to the Egyptian state media. They enjoy greater freedom to speak out online because the Egyptian government has limited powers to control their online access. For example, political bloggers typically use Internet cafes to collect news and reports from other activists and protesters about arrests and protests. Once they post their messages on a website it was instantaneously transmitted to a potentially large readership. Even if some bloggers are arrested, others still blog about the arrests and reach a wide audience, circumventing the restrictive gatekeeper practices of government-controlled mainstream media organizations (Faris, 2010; Mohamed, 2010). According to one commentator, "nothing will stop bloggers from blogging or reading what they want to read on the Internet: as long as there is an Internet, there is a way to go around censorship and around barriers; they can block a website, but you can establish another one" (Mohamed, 2010: p.190).

Egyptian political bloggers have brought attention to issues of public interest that the traditional media have long ignored. This fact has been evident in regard to stories about sexual harassment and torture of government detainees, exploitation of power, thuggery in the streets, failure to recognize workers' civil rights or their protests to improve their financial living conditions and calls for political reform. Within the Egyptian context, bloggers have set the agenda on other important issues ignored by mainstream news media, and have helped to uncover silent truths not covered by the state media. They have also provided platforms for the Egyptian people to speak out on political matters and have their voices heard (Mohamed, 2010).

Egyptian political bloggers have also played an important role in providing story ideas and information for the traditional media to develop and follow. This means there is an inter-media exchange between bloggers and the traditional media. As such, blogs have become part of the competitive sphere of news gathering and reporting, often providing alternative content to that which is presented in the traditional media. It can be concluded that Egyptian political bloggers have succeeded in setting the agenda for many issues rarely covered by the traditional media. They represent an alternative media or "citizen's" media. The second generation Internet, in the form of blogging and social networks has provided protest channels that governing authorities have not been able to silence. The beginning of the Egyptian revolution was catalyzed through online social media before the physical activism commenced on January 25, 2011. Because of online social media, the revolution moved from the virtual world to the real world. And after having lived under an oppressive regime for thirty years, the people themselves in an 18-day peaceful revolution, forced Mubarak to resign.

Conclusion

This study investigated that Egypt throughout its history, has cast its media in central roles in the political system as mobilizing forces and as instruments of the government. It showed that all the time there are many political restrictions and limitations of the freedom of expression in Egypt. However, the Egyptian political bloggers have brought attention to issues of public interest that the traditional media have long ignored. Within the Egyptian context, bloggers have set the agenda on other important issues ignored by mainstream news media, and have helped to uncover silent truth not covered by the state media. They have also provided platforms for the Egyptian people to speak out on political matters and have their voices heard.

The study assured that the beginning of the Egyptian revolution was catalyzed through online social media before the physical activism commenced on January 25, 2011. Through blogs, Facebook, Twitter and other forms of social media has allowed citizens to engage in a public sphere that would have otherwise been unreachable to them due to harsh domination. As a result, the revolution moved from the virtual world to the real world. And after having lived under an oppressive regime for thirty years, the people themselves in an 18-day peaceful revolution, forced Mubarak to resign. It confirmed that The increasingly widespread use of the internet and the rise in social media, despite the frequent attempts by the SCAF to disrupt their progress and shut down those websites that provide a platform for dissent and criticism, are adding greater impetus to the forces for change. Finally, social networking alone cannot be expected to bring direct political change. It's the long-term impact, the development of new political and civil society engagement, and individual and institutional competencies on which analysts are focusing.

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