Discussing the cultural social media environment in Egypt. A changing arena of the metanarrative: Visions, arguments, description and critics.

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Abstract:

During the last decade the technological communication development in the Arab cyber culture has been extended not only in time, space and content, but also in creating new types of " Social Network Sites" (SNS) in Arabic language that converge between the local narrative identity and the new social communication technologies.

The aim of this research is to analyze the development of several socio-cultural criteria related to the online elements that grasp processes in the modern Arabic cultural and art formats. Using a qualitative method in this study on several private and collective social media (Facebook and Instagram) pages has an objective to analyze the innovative contents that highlight the identification of the hyper local-social interactivity participations and its changing narrative aspects. It requires observing profoundly this hybrid Arabic cyberspace represented in some alternative communities.

This research could help in gathering the heterogeneous social media elements that could develop cohesion, unity, and shared experiences among virtual/real relationships in the society. This study could be a sample for mediated cultural studies on regional and international perspective. It reveals a step forward for an international adaptation in different regions.

Introduction:

Arab cyber culture has been proliferating not only in time, space and content, but also in creating new types of " Social Network Sites", SNS, in Arabic language that converge between the local narrative identity and the new social communication technologies discourse.

The influence of the political changes after the waves of the uprising in the Arab world has created consequences of a gradual and increasing societal behavior among all social classes. We observe a significant share of influenced information and different types of storytelling on the social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. There is an ascending interest of the integration of cultural models in the social media that influence the Arab society on the virtual level and on the community /personal level.

Therefore, as Pierre Levy defined that new media have produced a new kind of knowledge space and a communication space. It is "de-referentialized" as Levy called it. We could characterize the complexity of the cultural and societal process of high sharing elements, or the numerous creations of cultural communities that redesign the 'relation to knowledge' as one of the major consequences of the political changes in this region. In this environment, information and communication are valued not only for their substance or meaning, but for their capacity to be processed circulated or developed by connecting more population and influencing more public either virtually or really. Eventually, this emancipatory break from the conventional form of knowledge (linear media structure) that has been trapped in the hierarchical and rigid socio-political process stimulates an acquisition of generic information skills and competencies in a contemporary knowledge culture internationally and locally.

Obviously, the development of the social media communities as part of the new media process have incorporated various social and cultural contexts such as, new fields of attractions by extending our abilities to communicate; engaging and developing communication activities and practices; enhancing social arrangements or organizing a variety of cultural domains that could be included in one space. Thus, we observe lately the shift of multiple Facebook users towards the societal interest. We could observe the high concentration on cultural events, the amplification of

cultural infrastructure elements on social media, the combination of technological forms and the practice of individuals/organizations or institutions are emerged that introduce different characteristics of types of storytelling, mechanism of hyperreality, virtuality, anonymity, interactivity, participation, etc…. This observation reflects the new cultural image of reshaping the socio cultural forms on Facebook in Egypt. This reveals a space of continuous new cultural media contexts that explores *recombinant* shaping of innovative personal or collective interconnectivity. These factors enhanced questioning the aspects of gathering the storytelling elements in an interesting and attractive content creativity.

1. **The aim of this research**:

- Studying and analyzing the socio-cultural criteria of these cultural communities/groups/individuals.
- Specifying innovative content (open text in relation with the context).
- Analyzing development of socio-cultural criteria on selected pages on the Facebook..
- Studying the modern Arabic culture and art formats within the socio-cultural and political context.
- Analyzing the innovative content of the narratives, its design and types.
- Highlighting the process of the hyper local-social interactivity.
- Measuring the participation of the changing narrative aspects.
- Observing profoundly the hybrid Arabic cyberspace represented in some alternative communities.

2. **New Paradigms and exploration of new models of digital communication**:

This research is an attempt to study to socio-cultural and political social media narrative in the changing digital networking world. Marie-Laure Ryan (2003) has been explaining that narrative is defined as a mental image, or cognitive construct, which can be activated by various types of signs. This image consists of a world (setting) populated by intelligent agents (characters). These agents participate in actions and happenings (events, plot), which cause global changes in the narrative world. Narrative is thus a mental representation of causally connected states and events, which captures a segment in the history of a world and of its members. Evidently, this definition corresponds to the space of creativity on the personal/group

pages of the social media, especially in Facebook. The socio-cultural social media pages are revealing certain characteristics that contain: music, painting, sculpture, literature, drama, the opera, photography, architecture. Specialist in phenomenologist school would describe and organize the content of the social media into visual, auditive, verbal, and perhaps gustatory and olfactory whether we consider the storytelling on cuisine and perfume could be included as part of the "narratology" within the social media space.

The innovative approaches regarding social media tools open the imagination of artists to introduce detailed and descriptive art knowledge. In some cultural social media pages, the artists dedicate their interest to explaining the history of art in a visual method. In some cases, information theorists or historians of writing would think of sound waves, papyrus scrolls, codex books, and silicon chips. "New media" theorists will argue that computerization has created new media tools and animated techniques out of old ones: film-based versus digital photography; celluloid cinema versus movies made with video cameras; or films created through classical image-capture techniques versus movies produced through computer manipulations. In this case, the metanarrative will be in a dynamic encoding/decoding process while utilizing the expression " technologizing of the word" of Walter Ong (1982, 2002).

Marie-Laure Ryan (2003) exposed the concept of the "narrative medium" when she explained that the semiotic definition should thus prevail over the transmissive one. In this study, we selected six Facebook pages, considered as narrative medium. What counts for the researchers while exploring the study, is a category that truly makes a difference as to what stories can be evoked or told, how they are presented, why they are communicated, and how they are experienced? Narrative differences may concern three different grammatical domains: semantics, syntax, and pragmatics.

Concentrating on the narrative theory, semantics becomes the study of plot, or story; syntax becomes the study of discourse, or narrative techniques; and pragmatics, an area still relatively unfamiliar to literary critics, becomes the study of narrative as performance.

In addition, inspiring from Marie-Laure Ryan (2003, 2004), the narrative pragmatics studies investigate the uses of storytelling and the mode of participation of human agents (authors, actors, readers, users, followers, participants) in the narrative event. On the semantic level, the technological facilities of Facebook media may thus create different variations on the basic cognitive structure. On the discourse level, there are innovative tools to produce different multimedia stories, which will

necessitate different interpretive strategies on the part of the user/follower/participant. On the pragmatic level of the Facebook narrative, there is an offer of different modes of user involvement and different multimedia responses with narrative. The multimedia narratives could attract more relevant content and levels of interactivity that would have an impact regarding the main storytelling and encouraging the followers/users participants to simultaneously respond narratively.

In addition, Irving and Klenke (2004) noted that metanarrative requires the integration of historical, sociological, psychological, cultural and contextual perspectives. Narrative inquiries, because of their potential for representing life experiences, deepening understanding, and connecting the individual story to social contexts (Goodson, 1995; Stake, 1995), have been used by noted scholars in fields such as anthropology (Crapanzano , 1980), psychology (Erikson, 1962, 2001), and sociology where individual narratives have been woven into community mosaics (Terkel , 1972). Consequently, Denzin (1994) identifies several paradigms that influence the interpretation of narrative texts such as post positivistic and interpretive approaches, more specifically a framework the author refers to as interpretive interactionism. This interpretive framework is particularly appropriate because narrative research takes hermeneutics one step further by arguing that people understand and explain their lives through stories and that these stories feature plots, characters, times, and places.

Klenke (1996) in her book "Women and Leadership: A Contextual Perspective" pointed out that contextual factors set the boundaries within which leaders and followers interact and determine the constraints and demands that are placed on leaders. More specifically, Klenke (2002, 2004) stated that exercising leadership in the context of political systems where leaders are appointed or elected is different from practicing leadership in social movements where leaders often emerge as a result of a crisis or shared ideology. Evaluating a leading artist calls for a different set of criteria than evaluating a leading scientist. Religion, information systems, and formal and informal organizations are complex networks of relationships, each with its own set of contextual parameters.

Klenke (2004) considered the metanarrative as a qualitative method of inquiry, which integrates historical, psychological, and cultural perspectives and offers a highly developed body of self-knowledge depicting the narrator's self-interpretation that reflects the ontological integrity of meaningful experiences in the individual's life.

Marie-Laure Ryan (2003, 2004, 2016) formulated a schema of spacio-temporal design that conduct us to know that the social media narrative tools represent some features related to possible areas such as: (a) senses being addressed; (b) priority of sensory channels (thus the opera will be considered distinct from drama, even though the two media include the same sensory dimensions, because the opera gives the sound channel higher priority than drama); (c) spacio-temporal extension; (d) technological support and materiality of signs (painting versus photography; speech versus writing versus digital encoding of language); (e) cultural role and methods of production / distribution (books versus newspapers). The uses of spacio-temporal extension and sensory dimension could be considered as primary taxonomic categories. These criteria seem indeed more relevant to the issue of narrativity than distinctions relative to technological support, though the latter are not negligible. Ryan founded that the drawback of this prioritization of sensory dimensions is that a given technology or cultural channel needs to be listed twice when it is used to transmit different types of sensory data: digital writing is distinguished from multi-media applications of computer technology; silent film is distinguished from multi-sensory movie productions. The examples that illustrate the various categories can be either submedia or genres. By using the heading of submedium rather than genre when the members of the category exploit different aspects of the same technology; we explore the decision between genre and submedium was particularly difficult in the case of digital technology, because of the unique bi-leveled structure of the medium: an invisible digital code—the sofware protocol—producing different forms of communication and visible expression.

3- **Methods and techniques to investigate the metanarrative on social media**:

This research is merging the quantitative and qualitative methods within the framework of selecting six different personal pages on Facebook that encouraged their founders to create related social cultural Facebook groups. The choice of sporadic posts on the pages, from different timing and different content on their social media helped in evaluating the content from a descriptive, explorative, operational and deductive perspectives. This led us to question the process of the integrated elements of the research regarding using the technological facilities to be connected with the culture of the Egyptian society in order to create different socio-cultural-political environment. Therefore, during collecting the data (posts on Facebook) we have been focusing on:

1) Creator of the content (one individual/ several persons) one to many;

2) Formats/types of the content (multimedia elements: texts, audio, videos, movie clips, animations, jokes, graphics, music, etc.), and

3) Users/ participants/ consumers/ producers/ pro/summers. (many to one/some to one/ many to many).

4) Interactivity (the variety of icons, the comments and the sharing process).

Therefore, Lievrouw and Livingstone (2006) explained that the world of social media is not determined by an independent, inevitable causality or evolutionary process unique to technology itself. In several cases we find designers, users, participants, followers, among others can take advantage of the current state of this technological tool of knowledge and recombine technologies, information and new knowledge to achieve their particular goals. The essential continuous nature of the social media in the context of the evolutionary development of technology would guide us to perceive with a closer analysis the new practices of redesigning, rebuilding and implementing new tools within the context of the social media.

Narrative across the social media environment from a socio cultural vision in Egypt encourages the researchers to connect with the promoters of selective six Facebook pages by making intensive personal interviews. The target of this study is to understand the presupposed concept of narrative tools and elements in their pages and their dynamics to merge the verbal acts of storytelling within the facility of the medium to define as a mental image, cognitive construct, participation in actions-events, moments of capturing emotions- art- mental representations, etc.

The personal interviews are designed to constitute an overview on the different levels of analysis from the macro systematic factor passing through the miso level into the micro interpersonal communication level. One of the objectives of the qualitative method in this study is to provide an overview about the concepts of meaning and metanarrative for the interviewed as they administrate their personal Facebook pages. At the same time, it is essential to study the propositions of a framework to describe the interrelationships among the created posts. The personal interviews would help in providing examples to evaluate the constructed proximities/distances with the users/participants of their pages. Referring to McQuail (1991, 27-28, 2010) he commented on the fusion of mediated

communication with the society and put in evidence the dimension of the cultural systematic process of communication on macro level. Therefore, the personal interviews describe the reciprocity factors of the communicator and the followers/participants regarding their types of narratives. This interactivity creates a new space of storytelling process within the narrative of the post. Regarding this perception, Saperas (1998, 115-116; 2015) was referring to the influence of the media as a micro social level including the society and the public opinion that represent a fundamental path in the communicative system. Although the social media system in our case here is depending on a structure of complexity and diverse mechanism of a social system; it has transversal forms of different characteristics. Therefore, the interrelation between the communicator of the post and his/her followers/participants do depend to an integrated communicative process of a general socio-political-cultural- educative and economics context.

The qualitative perspective constitutes a better understanding of the compiled data. It helps to obtain a clear vision of interpretation with objective that proposes explanation and comprehension. The intensive interviews method assumes a flexibility of induction that enriches the interpretation of new horizons. This embraces the subjects of observations of the mediated process used to clarify the quality of the evolution of the context regarding the space, the aspects of interests, the relationship between the social media as a medium and its effects on the addressed themes, etc. The semi-structured questions asked to the Facebook interviewees have been designed to respond to the various values of culture. This method is providing an exposure with unlimited spectrum regarding exploring their thoughts, their innovative contents, and their future plan. The interviewees are considered the source of information that address the interrelationship between the space of social media with the semantics, syntax, communication impact, the formats of shaping the information, the parameters of media narratives, etc… In-depth interviews style could be considered as an adding value for the research analysis by opening another exploratory field to fulfill the unclear visions or to modify the blurred concepts that have been published in the social media pages.

This research is centered on six cultural Facebook pages:

1- George Fakhry: artist, painter and intellect. He published his personal page on his name since 2008. The target of his page is to remain in permanent communication with the events and the processes that are occurring around on local level and in the world, and to maintain a close connection with his friends, virtually and really. It is

divided into 2 sessions (part is educational and the second part is for selling and marketing my products).

2- Amr El Kady: dentist, and has a hobby of making photography. His page is almost dedicated to landscape photography. He started to use social media since 2009. His page was hacked. He decided to quite Facebook. Then he got back to use the social media because it is a space for exposure and to market his photos. He started to create a photography group and his followers are more than ten thousands users/ followers/ participants.

3- Mostafa Al Garhy: journalist and poet. He created his page "Kataba" (to write) to encourage cultural participation from a regional and international participation of writers, journalists, poets, artists, etc. It is a private initiative that started in 2005 by publishing a monthly magazine. Then he switched to online, particularly when the social media started to have an impact. He has more than seven thousand on the page and five thousand users/followers/participants on his personal page.

4- Shama Bashary: artist, specialized in jewelry and a public employee in the morning, regarding her personal description. She started to open her Facebook page since 2009. Her page represents a cultural – artistic space where she can expose her jewelry products, explaining the origins of her inspirations. The Nubian culture is very present in this page.

5- Mawlana page: it is a private cultural center in downtown Cairo. Two partners found it: Mohamed El Sayed (dancer, trainer and a Sufi person) and Mahmoud Fawzy (poet and writer). The users of this center opened this page as a consequence of their real meeting. The public and the visitors of the center are posting the events and the cultural activities. It is a place to gather Sufis, dancers, poets, musicians, writers, young generation interested in culture, cinema, arts, etc.

6- Sayed Abdel Azim: artist and specialized in animation and graphics. He decided to create cinema group page and launched in 2012. This page is focusing on the art, science and industry of the cinema. The followers/users/ participants of this page are whether students in the academy of arts, movie directors, scenarists, practitioners, interested in this field, etc. This page provides information about the Egyptian, Arab and international movie industry, history. It facilitates academic knowledge, diversity of this specialization. It is a closed group.

4- **Discussion and findings:**

We are facing waves of changes or cycles by using these technological social media tools; meanwhile, it brings a magnitude of ideas that could appear as revolutionary, in other words it is a via of breaking with the past in some points and enhancing new perspectives in an ongoing media process. We are exploring the point- to-point network that brings hybridization in the socio technical landscape of the social media, particularly in the cultural interconnectivity. This type of social connectivity develop new configuration on a large-scale production and a massive distribution of information. For instance, we could figure the intensification of the multiplex interconnection where many individuals', nodes, groups, organizations and others are becoming units of information all linked and embedded into a huge network of connectivity's. Therefore, this system of mega networks reveals a new step in the technological step of the social media.

One of the most important elements while choosing these pages is the diversity of the perspectives. We discovered homogenous cultural content from national and international content and context. Meanwhile, heterogeneous context based on attractive metanarratives enriched the content of these socio-cultural pages.

Schultz (2004) and Hjarvard (2008) explained the role of the media in social change in broader sense. Winfred Schultz (2004) identified four types of processes whereby the media change human communication and interaction. First, they *extend* human communication abilities in both time and space; second, social media could substitute social activities that normal take place on face-to-face principle. Third, the media in general and the social media particularly, instigate an amalgamation of activities. Fourth, participants or actors in many different sectors could adapt their behaviors to accommodate the social media valuations, formats and routines. For Stig Hjarvard (2008) there is a conception of an ongoing process where we discover that the media change human relations and behaviors. Thus, it changes the society and the culture. Still we can find that the studies on the interaction between technology and culture and the circumstance that culture also forms technology are neglected.

Therefore, we find that El Kady, Fakhry and Al Garhy (2019) described their personal experiences among their followers as a highly developed self-knowledge and establish human connections knowledge to share common spaces depending on their sociological, cultural, psychological and political orientations. The metanarratives in these Facebook pages can also take the form of master stories for organizations, master stories which form different cultural fabric into which new members are woven through the acculturation process.

We found during the analysis the element of a human integrated self-knowledge that is connected with the historical, psychological, and cultural perspectives in different examples such as, the recalling of the lyrics of an old song. Shama Bashary designed an earring with the song's words and she posted a photo of a friend from different nationality wearing it. This narrative explains the integrated metanarrative that offers a highly developed value of self-knowledge, respect of her identity, promoting her old traditional art and exchange of culture to develop new perceptions towards the society and revive the historical concepts.

In addition, analyzing "Kataba" page of Mostafa Al Garhi (2019), we recognize that he is insisting on protecting the status of independent institution, directed by Mostafa Al Garhy. This Facebook page is considered a cultural magazine, with more than 20.000 users and followers. This page provides poetry, novels, translated books, fine arts, paintings, cinema, music, cultural videos, etc…. Al Garhy call it a free space for free creators. It introduces cultural society based on shaping a space of tolerance, understanding, cultivation of the users, etc… In the personal interview with Al Garhi, he insisted on consolidating the refined cultural product. He is helping the new journalists, writers, poets, art critics, etc by opening the page as an opportunity for them to be acknowledged professionally within the international culture community.

In the pages of Amr El Kady and Sayed Abdel Aziz, we observed their concentration on the visual art, photography's, selecting some clips of significant and important scenes from diverse types of movies (regional, national or international). We deduced some new dimensions to narrative interpretation (such as integration of contexts, purposeful meaning making of lived experiences, multiple-level approaches), yet at the same time, retains the notion that from a hermeneutic point of view regarding the personal messages behind these visuals, indication of personal visions, human life in general experiences and a process of community narrative interpretation.

Conclusion:

The socio-cultural community on Facebook in Egypt is developing a new emphasis towards the socio-technological innovations in recent decades; particularly after the failure of the Egyptian Revolution on the socio-political perspective. The Facebook communities are creating a different metanarrative from the socio-cultural, political and economic environment. They are associated with globalized, digital, networked, convergent media in late (or reflexive or post) modernity that include a different interest to examine and experiment an open knowledge of network society. They are experimenting a cultural digital transformation related to their habits, social traditions, and personal interpretation (typical Egyptian animation, jokes, sarcastic multimedia narratives, etc). The social media tools are connected to the wider media ecology that is grasping the attention towards new horizontal interactive society. The abundant technological facilities encourage the appearance of more   complex of societal processes and rapidly unfolding interplay elements between social, political, economic, and technological transformations. It is generating considerable public and policy interest; as a result, this perspective on metanarrative is attracting much excitement.

The development of a successful interactive environment of social media reflects positive understanding and emotions toward culture exchange. The social media enhanced a parasocial interaction within the community. This gathering develops cohesion, unity, and shared experiences, virtual/real relationships. The merging of community engagement identifies an innovative element of online / offline productions, such as the intense wave of publication of books and novels of the young writers; the artists performances in the streets. The street theatre in rural areas received a tremendous success online and in several poor areas as part of the face to face art. There is an innovative phenomenon of communicating culture to raise awareness in the society.

Now, there are multiple cultural groups on the Facebook, engaged during the last few years to highlight on different themes: political, economy, feminism, sexualization, etc… Still there is a gap between the internet citizens in Egypt and several types of the population that are not connected, for several reasons: some are incapable to use an electronic device, the analphabetism, the refusal of the concept

of Internet as it would distort the social values in the society; or simply for financial reasons.

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