

## **New Media Effects on Social and Political Transformation for the Life of Young people**

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### **1- Introduction**

The 2011 year of anger in Arabic countries was a turning point for the political scene of many Arabic countries, whose dictatorships were caught off guard as thousands of demonstrators took to the streets in an expression of dissatisfaction with the status quo and demanded change. In other words, the recent political events in Egypt, Libya, Jordan, Syria, Yemen, and Tunisia in 2011 all confirmed the key role of social networks (Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, etc.) and online political news in supporting citizens with their self-determination and call-for-change to democratic political systems. Also, changes in the media landscape present new challenges for scholars interested in the relationship between the media and civil society and opened many research questions about the natural role of media in general and political content of online media in particular.

“The explosion of the Internet that started in advanced democracies and has spread through much of the globe provides new and unexplored pathways for communication, this inclusion of the Internet in the media raises new questions for citizens, politicians, researchers, journalists and government” (Oates, Owen & Gibson, 2006, p. 1). “Public media plays a major role in organizing the routines and rituals of everyday life and has so over the centuries in its different formats. Today, television is a central presence in domestic and family life. Inviting friends over to listen to music or play computer games has become an important cementing act for the building of friendship among teenagers. Also, reading the newspapers or listening to morning radio news is an almost universal accompaniment to people’s daily journey to work. In addition, many rituals marking important personal moments are bound up with media: going clubbing or to the cinema is central to courtship; weddings and family gatherings are increasingly captured on video” (Deacan, Golding & Graham, 1999, p. 2). In other words, we can see that public media has become an important and almost unavoidable part of everyday life.

More recently, going online has created more opportunities for newspapers and also helped different kinds of traditional media (print, audio, video, or audio and video). The movement away from the

printing process can also help decrease costs, a primary catalyst of the online growth of media. Its role has been increased in the age of open channel or communication through the world wide web, the Internet technology which helped media to increase its size, competing with broadcast journalism and a diversity of audiences from all over the world (global audience), with increasingly diverse content (movies, political, social, sport programs, etc, as well as offering audio/video files, images, and other multimedia text). The possibility of interactive elements between the public, which allow groups or individuals to communicate with each other, through e-mail or forums, letters to the editor (reader report or reaction), online surveys that could be offered, and chatting, is considered one of the key advantages of online media. There is no doubt that Internet technology has made communication much easier and less expensive; it is a great opportunity to communicate, learn, share, buy and sell, and build communities in virtual space or contacting others through social networks (SNSs) all these services have attracted many users and have penetrated into people's lives.

Furthermore, several types of media platforms have accepted the Internet, radio, television, and newspapers have extended their work into this new field through Internet websites (online TV and online newspaper websites). In addition, "the Internet allows people to do a variety of things through its applications. People use email or chat to keep in touch with people who are far away or with people who they meet every day, people use games on the web to have fun or to kill time, while others look for information through search engines. Individuals also go online to get weather reports, entertainment news, local or international news, business information, and political news" (Nozato, 2002, p. 3). Therefore, with the previous statements in mind, the great importance of the Internet and online media in our daily lives is hard to ignore. Additionally, we cannot imagine our daily lives without news, both on Internet websites or a traditional medium, which plays a key role in our daily lives to get information, go shopping, travel, listen to music, etc.

Interestingly, youth participation in civil society and political life through the Internet is increasingly recognized as an important development objective. The opportunities for participation that young people experience in their communities are expected to influence their development and their transition to adulthood. For example, evidence that comes largely from developed countries indicates that young

people who participate in community activities or are somehow connected to their communities are less likely than others to engage in risk-taking behaviors. Moreover, behaviors and attitudes relating to community participation that individuals adopt as young people predict lifelong civic affiliations and perspectives. All these civilian and political changes instigated by Egypt's young people increased their political discussion, knowledge, and participation which related to promoting more political awareness among young people.

Additionally, the increasing importance of the Internet as a source of information and political news in recent decades necessitates research into its growing influence on society. According to Oates, Owen & Gibson (2006): "Internet access has become nearly universal among young people, their facility with the technology has increased along with their trust in the veracity of content it convey, increasingly, young people have become producer of much political content, which has now come to influence mainstream media organization reports" (Oates, Owen & Gibson, 2006, p. 35).

**Secondly**, the world politics changes on the national and international spheres towards democracy, in particular, the political changes (civil wars, revolutions, coups, and demonstrations, the Iraqi war and more) that took place in the Arabic countries and Middle East region.

This change in the level of freedom and desirability for political change through Internet did not exist in Egypt before, all these acts were the "starting points" for the 25<sup>th</sup> January 2011 Egyptian revolution. Nobody will forget the millions of Egyptian protesters in the streets and the crucial role played by the internet in organizing these protests through posts on Twitter and Facebook calls against the government and its authoritarian rule that later led to the step down of Hosni Mubarak.

**Thirdly**, finally, news consumption and news interests among young people are of interest. "new forms of mass communication traditionally have had great appeal for younger people, younger citizens may claim new communication technologies as their own, developing particular expertise and novel applications" (Oates, Owen & Gibson, 2006, p. 20). However, "young people represent a non-homogeneous group and their media use of socio-economic status, such as the formal education, gender, and income, or parental-media use shows that younger generation is still significantly different from adult use patterns and interests" (Eimeren & Krist, 2004; Ferch-hoff & Neubauer, 1997). This use has, however, grown in the last few years from 2000 and 2010.

## **2- Political Communication in the life of young people**

The author in this article is giving an overview of political communication research history and talking about stages of political communication research to understand the effects of political communication in young people life. “Communication is considered to be political if it relates to the exchange of messages among political actors. For example, most of what politicians do is political communication. Likewise, citizens communicate politics when they discuss political issues with friends or family members, phone in to political radio talks shows, or participate in political chats on the Internet. Demonstrations and other forms of protest are more expressive, sometimes even violent forms of political communication” (Schulz, 2008).

However, only a few people engage in such forms of communicative activity. Most citizens confine themselves to the role of passive spectators of politics that is presented by mass media. Nevertheless, the consumption of political media reports is a form of political communication too. Moreover; Jürgen Habermas (2008) indicated that the category of political actors includes all groups, organizations, and individuals who are participating in the process of collectively binding decision-making in society. Some of these actions – and the corresponding communication - take place backstage, i.e., in the arcane spheres of party assemblies, parliamentary commissions, diplomatic negotiations, and meetings in government offices. But a major part is performed in public, for example when politicians give public speeches, debate in a parliamentary plenum, or present statements in front of television cameras.

McNair (1995) observes that the term “political communication” has proven to be “Notoriously difficult to define with any precision, simply because both components of the phrase are then open to a variety of definitions, more or less broad.” The author proposes a definition which stresses the intentionality of political communication, which is described as “purposeful communication about politics” (McNair, 1995, p. 4., in Musiałowska, 2008, p. 13). In speaking about the stages of political communication research, Political communications in the past decades encountered many changes over several stages, until it took the form it looks nowadays. Firstly; communication used by political actors to achieve their own objectives, secondly, communication that is addressed to political actors by non-politicians (e.g., voters). Finally, media discourse understood as communication about political actors. In short, political communication can be seen as

a system of dynamic interactions between political actors, the media and audience members, each of whom is engaged in the process of producing, receiving and interpreting political messages (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995).

One of the most important studies about political communication or the first stages of political communication history the study conducted by Lippmann in 1922 who started to study mass communication and politics through analyzing the New York Times coverage of the 1917 Russian revolution, also the role of mass media in public opinion information in democracy. After that many researchers in this time started to focus on the role of media in public opinion and political interest, such as Lasswell (1927), who started to study political science at University of Chicago and in his PhD dissertation has analyzed the effect of propaganda messages (who says what to whom via which effect). This was the first step to study political communication and the role of mass media in audience behavior and public opinion.

After that, in 1948 Lazarsfeld examined the mass communication effect of radio on American audiences and voting behavior in the presidential election of 1940. Furthermore, Joseph Klapper (1960) at Columbia University wrote a book about “the effect of mass communication that the media seldom have direct effects, but all these studies in the early period study the effect of traditional media such as radio or television and the effect on public opinion and political interest or participation in election campaigns. Recent research in the USA, similar to research of the 1960s about television in America, included results that 56.0% of the American public which responded to the survey reported that TV was their main source of political news, with 24% reading newspaper for political information, and only 14% reported that radio is the main source for political news” (Lynda Lee Kaid, 2004, pp. 4-6).

The second age of political communication, which started in the 1960s, was marked by the increasing importance of television, which dominated the political debate. This period was characterized by four transformations. First, television led to a reduction of exposure to party propaganda as it offered a broader platform for alternative directions and policies. This trend was further intensified by the decline of party press and other organizations attached to the political groupings. Second, television “constitutionally mandated to such nonpartisan norms as fairness, impartiality, neutrality (Blumler & Kavanagh, 199, p. 212) which became centre for political communication. “Third, television contributed to enlarging the audience since it penetrated also

these segments of the electorate that were earlier difficult to reach and thus less prone to the media exposure. Simultaneously, party identification was loosening as a consequence of short-term influences which took a form of news events showing immediate successes and failures of political actors. Finally, the fact that television news was able to exert such short-term influences led to modification of parties' tactics which had to adjust to the "media logic" (Mazzoleni, 1987).

Finally, the third age of political communication brought a rapid proliferation of different communication channels. As suggested by Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999, p. 213) "to politicians, the third age media system must look like a hydra-header beast, the many mouths of which are continually clamoring to be fed. When something happens, they are expected to tell the media what they are going to do about it well before they can be fully informed themselves. For journalists, the news cycle has accelerated, since more outlets combined with increased competition across them piles pressure on all involved to keep the story moving and to find angles on it. Journalists 'feeding frenzies' become yet more frantic. Time for political and journalistic reflection and judgment is squeezed". Simultaneously, "communication abundance changed how voters receive and decode political messages. New media increasingly individualize communication (Schulz, 2004) capacity that is particularly assigned to the Internet" (Castells, 1996 in Musiałowska, 2008, p. 15).

### **3- Political media use and effects in the life of young people**

Political media use refers to people's use of both political media (such as newspapers or news magazines), and political content in all kinds of media including the Internet. Political content normally means nonfictional content dealing with political events, issues, institutions, etc. (e.g., political news, commentary, round tables)" (Peiser, 2008). Political information and political content in various mass media, e.g. television, radio, DVD, Internet and other mass media, are very important to promoting political knowledge, political participation, and political awareness among young people. Increasingly, "the Internet plays an increasing role in daily and political life. There have been widespread hopes that the new technology will help break down barriers, reduce hierarchies, and facilitate easier access to the political field as well as motivate new groups for civic involvement and political action (Jensen, 2006, p. 39).

The four most fundamental factors which have a strong effect in informing individuals about politics are family/home, school, peers,

and media. Increasingly, media exposure is perhaps the most important predictor of learning from news” (Rhee & Capella, 1997; Sotirovic & McLeod, 2004). “Voters learn about issues, candidates, and traits of candidates “(Weaver, 1996). Numerous studies have indicated that media exposure, such as reading newspapers, listening to news on radio, and viewing news on national or local TV, is positively related to young people voter knowledge about the election.

Many studies mentioned the role of media in politics, and, researchers compared different types of media to indicate which one have a strong effect in politics. Giving an example, in a comparative analysis of six elections in various states from 1984 to 1992, Zhao & Chaffee (1995) found that TV news was consistently informative regarding issue differences among candidates. “A survey of North Carolina voters during the 1992 campaign found that TV news was the most significant predictor of knowledge of issue differences among candidates” (Chaffee, et al., 1994). Weaver & Drew (1995) also found exposure to TV news as a significant predictor of knowledge of candidates’ issue positions. Sotirovic & McLeod (2004) reported viewing campaigns on TV contributed to voters’ knowledge in the 2000 presidential election (Wei & Lo, 2008, p. 349). Consequently, political content on traditional or digital media have a strong effect on young people’s learning or knowledge about political issues, and participation in political activities which led us at the end to political awareness.

The press and broadcasted political content are the most important sources or mediators of contemporary political information and current affairs and they are one of the key agents of socialization and integration in complex modern societies. More than most other fields of public policy “making, the press and broadcasting have a pervasive effect on all areas of social and political life in advanced industrial society” (Humphreys, 1995, p. 2). In modern and democratic societies, “mass media use has become an important way to gain political knowledge” (Chaffee, et al., 1994; Choi & Becker, 1987; Scheufele & Nisbet, 2002). Recently we have seen the Internet supporting human rights, introducing different kinds of political activities through chat rooms, social networks, etc. All these activities have demonstrated that political influence can be successful via online actions. The example for this would be the political transformation in Arabic countries in 2011, as the author mentioned in chapter four in more detail.

Additionally, the Internet has increased the amount and the availability of political content. In recent years, the important role of the Internet

as a source for political information especially "political information" about current political issues 'local, national and international' has increased, and the use of the Internet advantage on political aspects rose after 1996, when the Internet emerged as a major non-traditional medium used in political campaigning as candidates for presidential elections started to employ the Internet in election campaigns. Moreover, the Internet has now become a leading source of political news or campaign news for young people, and the role of social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook is a notable part of the story. Fully 42.0% of those ages 18 to 29 say they regularly learn about the campaign from the Internet, the highest percentage for any news source. In January 2004, just 20% of young people said they routinely got campaign news from the Internet (Pew, 2008).

#### **4- The role of Political communication in Election campaigns**

Increasingly, "since its introduction to the world in the mid-1990s, the Internet has emerged as a new medium or channel for political and election campaign information" (Johnson, Braima, & Sothirajah, 1999; Kaye & Johnson, 2002). Past studies have found that online exposure to "political information was related to political knowledge" (Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001). Furthermore, the linkage between exposure to online campaign news and knowledge of political leaders and parties was found in the 1998 midterm (Norris, 2000) and the 2000 presidential election (Kenski & Stroud, 2006; Sotirovic & McLeod, 2004). Drew and Weaver (2006) reported exposure to Internet news as a significant predictor of voter learning in the 2004 presidential election.

Additionally, through the political content which is available on the Internet, "the Internet news influence on voters' opinion formation and on the election outcome, Internet as a widely available source of campaign information used by citizens, journalists, and strategists. Candidates have more to gain and more to lose in this new media environment. Citizens can also become actively involved in interacting with the candidates' campaigns while never leaving their computer. In many countries nowadays politically interested citizens can have a potentially greater voice and impact on the day-to-day campaign agenda simply by consistently offering their opinions and developing a reputation online" (Semetko, 2009).

In addition, the development of political conversation networks can lead to sustained campaign involvement and political action (Knoke, 1990; Leighley, 1990). Among the most famous of these presidential



election campaigns through the Internet websites "the candidate for the presidency of the White House, the current President of the United States of America, Barack Obama in 2009 used the Internet advantages and characteristics to get public support "International, global and national" and donations for his election campaign. "Over the past decades, the amount of available political information has expanded, thanks in part to the Internet. Political candidates also have been using the Internet to update individuals through e-mail to provide information about their issue positions" (Kenski & Stroud, 2006, p. 173).

Election campaigns are among the most important events in the lives of democracies and societies in transition. Campaigns often constitute the high points in public debate about political issues. Election campaign communication takes different forms in different national and regional contexts. It is shaped by both party and media systems and by the regulatory environment governing the campaign process. Election communication is also influenced by the balance of party and media forces in shaping the news agenda, and that balance has been tipped by the increasing role played by citizens and interest groups in generating messages and news about parties, leaders, and issues (Semetko, 2009). The politically interested have a vast array of places to find campaign news, particularly in media systems with a diverse supply of daily newspapers and a well-established public broadcasting system. Television continues to be the main source of information for most people at election time. "Television news is the most common vehicle through which particularly the undecided voters and people who are politically uninterested get information about campaign events" (Semetko, 2009).

Media system changes are a major factor driving the modernization and "Americanization" of election campaigns. The term "Americanization" has been criticized for being applied by some scholars as a shorthand reference to the range of new techniques and opportunities being used to influence voters at election time in countries around the world. Some studies look at the relationship between Internet access and online exposure to information and political efficacy, knowledge, participation and show that "Internet access and online exposure to political information or information about election camping are significantly associated with these important political variables (age, house income and education) and the Internet also can expand the number participating and political knowledge (Kenski & Stroud, 2006, p.173).

In Germany, major changes have been observed by long-term studies showing that strategy or horse race have become increasingly salient in election coverage over the years. In the main evening flagship news programs on television, the top candidates are nowadays more often seen with exciting and colorful pictures, which was uncommon in television news campaign reporting in the past (Schulz & Zeh, 2005). This is partly due to the news discussions of televised debates that have been launched in recent election campaigns (Semetko, 2009, May 28).

In Egypt, the Internet news is often perceived as displacing other traditional media, especially in political news coverage, because the space of freedom of political content in online media such as Internet websites, blogs and online journals is more than traditional media and because national and government media are under control of governmental censorship that controls national and traditional media. In recent years, as we will see in the upcoming chapters the Internet political news and traditional media political content in blogs in Egypt have succeeded through Internet websites to organize demonstrations, calling for political reform, strikes, and devolution of authority "non-patrimonial". They were also able to embarrass the Egyptian government in many situations and succeeded to change some political decisions. The Internet allows independent, inconvenience, and opposition groups to announce their ideas, opinions, and activities without any control or restrictions from the government. For instance, Kefaya group, April 6 Youth, Liberal Youth, and Muslim Brotherhood groups were freely able through the Internet to express their ideas and political opinion. The Internet became the new medium because these activities were not found in the past years.

In sum, no one can deny the great importance of the political role of the Internet in our daily lives because the Internet is considered the most common and fastest mass media that reaches a huge and diverse audience in different areas at the same time. The Internet has played a role in presidential elections and is used for online political information about election campaigns, such as what happened during the American presidential election of 2000. It is obvious that as young people moved through the media environment of the campaigns on their way to the polls many has got their information from websites produced by candidates, parties and other political organizations.

Now the Internet plays the key role in presidential election campaigning, the Internet access and online exposure to information

about the presidential campaigns are significantly and positively associated with the important political variables (Kenski & Stroud, 2006), and political candidates using the Internet to update individuals through e-mail to provide information about their issue positions (Kenski & Stroud, 2006; Bimber, 1998; El Nagar, 2007). Also the Internet can expand the numbers of political interest and political participation through the huge amount of political information.

***The literature up to now in this area***

This part aims to highlight the background literature that is relevant to Internet and its role in our life in general and young people particularly. There has been a lot of empirical research into these matters with varied and inconclusive result, some studies show the Internet to open up spaces for discussion, with participants seeking different viewpoints (Stromer, 2002, 2003), introducing new participants to the discussion (Schneider, 1997), and participants being generally more supportive of diverse and tolerant points of view than non-users (Robinson, Neustadtl & Kestnbaum, 2002). Hussein, 1998 & Taya, 2000 indicated that "the access to information is the most important benefit of the Internet users , also get news, entertainment, funny , spends spare time, and finally e-mail".( Hussein, 1998 & Sami, 2000 ). Young people use the Internet as most important source for information (in U.S using the Internet as one of the most important source for news instead of traditional media (Dorvan, 2000) also get news, entertainment, funny, spend spare time, and finally use e-mail (Hussein, 1998 & Taya, 2000).

Several studies have entered on using Internet news and electronic newspaper, some of this study about use Internet as a source of information or people use Internet for email or chat with friends. Others use Internet for games or to kill spare time or looking for information through search engines. People also go to Internet and online media to get weather report, songs, entertainment news, local or international news, business news, political news. (Bromley, 1995) focused on, the impact of the Internet uses on traditional media and found that interviewees' exposure to more traditional media more than exposure to the Internet.

Daniel, 1998, assesses on the role of Internet as new media and emphasizes that the Internet affect in the educational process, which is an important source to make the pleased change), Abu Youssef, 1998, found, the number of Egyptian journalists who can use Internet is very limited.

Dahvan 2001, examined the impact of Internet in society, in his study aimed to identify the impact of the Internet, newspapers and broadcasting on community and its relationship with engagement of civic activity, he found that the exposures of the both traditional and online media have a positive impact on young people civic engagement. Some studies mentioned who use the Internet?, (Charney & Greenberg ,2001, Ferguson & Perse, 2000), Kang & Atkin,1999), Kaye , 1998), Lin , 2002, Papacharissi & Rubin ,2000) for commercial purposes (Eighmey ,1997), Korgaonkar & Wolin ,1999), Kaye and Johnson,2002) Johnson & Kaye,2003); Lupia & Philpot,2005), focusing in particular on the importance of political interest in the context of Internet use for seeking political knowledge, political information and the major role for Internet news in political knowledge, political participation and political awareness. "Positively influence that the Internet have on international knowledge development in young people in united state" (Christopher, 2008) strongly importance role of political context of Internet in political interest for young people (Eighmey, 1997); Korgaonkar & Wolin, 1999), Kaye &Johnson, 2002), Johnson & Kaye, 2003); Lupia & Philpot, 2005).

Unlike traditional media, the Internet allows its audience to select and choose the extent of their exposure to political information. Its potential for interactivity between audiences and sources, and its wealth of information are all thought to facilitate widespread political change. The Internet's unique transmission capability has altered the flow of information throughout society and consequently has impacted the political behavior of the general public (Bonchek, 1997 in Song-In Wang, 2007, p. 381).

In addition, some studies indicated that Internet effects on political behaviors have become one of the most important research topics in recent years. However, reports have been mixed regarding the links between political information-seeking on the Internet and political participation. Some studies showed that Internet access has positive effects on civic engagement (Jennings & Zeitner, 2003; Tolbert & McNeal, 2003). Nisbet and Scheufele (2004) studied the effects of Internet campaign exposure on political efficacy, political knowledge, and campaign participation, and found that the role of the Internet in promoting active and informed citizenship is modest at best. Others found limited effects of Internet use on political knowledge, political efficacy and political participation (Hardy & Scheufele, 2005; Norris, 1999; Scheufele & Nisbet, 2002). Moreover, some studies evaluate

political participation through Internet in both election and non-election periods (e.g. Song-In Wang, 2007). On the other hand, the Internet does not cause people to suddenly become politically active or participation, because some people participate in politics without understanding or using online political news.

The above mentioned literature supports the idea of the political news role in promoting political, interest, knowledge and participation that related to political awareness, in addition to encouraging young people to participate and engage in societal activities. These studies indicated that Internet has more advantages for users than traditional media (e.g. television, newspaper, radio, etc).

**The literature in this area can be summarized as the following:**

- Individuals are different in terms of why they use political media content, some people watch, read, or listen to political stories to know more about what is happening in their society, while others do it for entertainment purposes. (Kaye & Johnson, 2002; McLeod & Becker, 1981; Gunter, 1991; Kim, Wyatt, & Katz, 1999; Robinson & Davis, 1990; Shaw, 1977).
- Why do individuals use political media content? (I.e. motivations for political media use) is a critical factor in whether one becomes more actively engaged in politics (Becker, 1976; Garramone, 1985). Information-related motivations for media use is more likely related to political engagement than entertainment-related motivations (Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001).
- The Internet is celebrated for offering the possibility of many-to-many communication (Coleman & Gotze, 2001, 17), for bridging time and place (Eriksen & Weigard 2003; Street, 1997, 195), and for the transmission of large amounts of information (O'Hara 2002). It is generally seen as “contributing to new ways of knowing, new strategies for gathering, storing, retrieving, and utilizing information” (Dahlgren 2004). “Because of its horizontal, open, and user-friendly nature, the Internet allows for easy access to, and thus greater participation, in the public sphere” (Brants, 2005, 144). Together with the low (social and economic) costs of publishing, this has created great optimism regarding the Internet’s potential.
- Some studies focused on the political news on the Internet and presidential elections (Farnsworth, Owen, 2004). This study demonstrates that both the frequency of online use and the

salience of the election information obtained can be explained through the particular uses of online information engaged in by audience members. Novel and interactive forms of online information were particularly important for predicting the frequency which users accessed the Internet for news and information about elections. Audience members who actively sought information about candidates and issues tended to use the knowledge they gained online to decide how to cast their ballot (Farnsworth, Owen, 2004).

- Studies focused on the connections between political content and engagement in politics (Wang Song, 2007) show political use of Internet precedes political attitudes, and then attitudes lead to political participation, and political use of the Internet promotes political interest and feelings of trust, efficacy, and participation in campaigns and politics. These studies focused on the role of this information in the public knowledge of local, national or international political issues and its role in increasing political awareness and political cultural.
- Studies focused on the role of online political content. Cao (2008) examined the relationship between exposure to political comedy shows and political knowledge during the 2000 and 2004 primary campaigns in the USA. This study used telephone surveys sponsored by PEW January 2000 and December 2003 and included measures of exposure to comedy shows content in American television and political knowledge; the results indicated that the positive interactive relationship between exposure to political comedy shows and this relation was much higher in 2004 than 2000, as well as there being a positive relationship between political participation and political knowledge.
- Studies focused on the relationships between the uses of media and political awareness and found that they are most strongly associated with informational media, such as Internet use followed by newspaper reading. Watching national nightly TV news or cable news also was positively associated. Political engagement increases during the life course, but lower starting levels among youth have offset increases in older cohorts (Miller, 1992).

##### **5- Many to many communication**

The communication changed from face-to-face communication between sender or creator of the message and receiver at the same place and the same time to “Intra-group communication” or “Institution communication” and “two-way communication” through real time and virtual place using Internet elements, for instance, e-mail, forums, chat rooms, discussion groups, news groups, Facebook, Twitter, and all kinds of social networks. Also available were electronic bulletin boards with the advantage of using this medium for free from any computer connecting to the Internet. All these advantages give users a golden opportunity to communicate and participate in society activities, as well as exchange information, texts, photos, music, and video through “NNTP” (Network News Transfer Protocol) (Hosni, 2003, p.71-83). In addition, scholars interested in media theories, for instance, “Gate Keeper”, try to indicate the role of the Internet in society.

Moreover, the changing in the communication process in the age of the Internet, giving for example, new concepts of communication appeared, such as “Computer-Mediated Communication” “Internet-Based Communication”, “Interactivity Communication”, “Alternative Communication”, “Independence Communication”, “Chatting”, “News Groups”, “Multimedia”, and “Instant Messages”. The old concept of communication changed from “one to many” to “many to many” or “Citizen Journalistic” which means individuals or everyone able to use a computer and searching in Internet websites. It is possible for them to become a journalist or message creator (Hosni, 2003, p. 53-54). Consequently, if you have a computer connected to the Internet, then you have a good medium for contacting and interacting with others.

In addition, “online media, which refers to technical communication media where digital content is transmitted from any kind of several to distant receivers via the Internet (TCP-IP) transmitted control protocol, Internet protocol or other digital networks. Not all kinds of digital media are online media: multimedia CDs, DVDs, DVD players, MP3, or media application are referred to as offline media as a content stored at the place where it is present. Except broadcasting media, such as television, radio, or broadcasting cable, (cable television, satellite television) which broadcasts to all receptive devices” (Schwinger, 2008, p. 3365). Moreover, “online media distinguish themselves from traditional media as a new media and it allows users to enjoy browsing their content and offer not only text but also digital images and videos files. It can present the most recent information and links to associated new articles from local to international topics. This an evidence that

online media attracts the audience for several reasons; personalization of news, audio and video news, and interactivity contact with readers by email, chat rooms, and forums” (Yoshiko Nozaki, 2002, p. 2).

In sum, the Internet technology has made communication much easier and less expensive. It is a good opportunity to communicate, learn, share, buy and sell, and perhaps most importantly, to build communities in virtual space. It has attracted many people and has penetrated into everyone’s life. Mass media also have accepted the Internet as a new technology; radio, television, and newspapers have extended their work into this new field. Additionally, the media product in the Internet age has become more widespread and more accurate and diversity of audience with a huge appetite for more information which has become available through the Internet. Also the audience plays a more positive role in message production and the receiver now is not the only controller in the communication process.

### **5.1 Interactivity**

There is no doubt that the new technology has helped different kinds of media (print, broadcasting) after many of these media evolved into Internet websites, playing an important role in our daily life. Moreover, the traditional media role has increased in the age of open channels and Internet technology; the invention of the Internet has helped traditional media to increase the diversity of their reached audience (global audience or international receiver) by a variety of media contents or messages (movies, political, social, sport programmers, etc.) that has also increased with new offers of audio, video, image, and other multimedia text and visual files available in different languages. This growth has also been fed by the possibility of interactive elements between the public and journalists through feedback, which allow groups or individuals to communicate with each other through e-mail, forums, letters to the editor, question and answer between sender and receiver, and online polls that could be offered in websites and chat rooms and social networks. This is considered one of the most important advantages of online media.

Scholars have also been interested in giving a definition for interactivity, for instance, several researchers’ defined interactivity as "audience participation" (Charity, 1995; Merritt, 1998; Rosen, 1992; & Lawrence, 1993). Newspaper readers also can participate because the Internet is a new medium that could extend the interactivity option of newspapers. According to Jane B. Singer, regarding "the interactive element, the result is a trend toward an integrated newsroom, where



journalists produce content for several types of media" (Singer, 2008, p. 3364). (Schultz, 2003, Charity, 1995; Merritt, 1998; Rosen, 1992) focused on the interactivity option in online journalism through a content analysis of 100 U.S. daily newspapers and found that the Internet has the potential to increase interactive attempts in online journalism and tied U.S. online newspaper successes to used hyperlinks, online polls, chat rooms, online discussions, forums, and e-mail addresses of editors to encourage contact with readers. Nozato (2000) agreed with him when he gave a definition for online newspaper interactivity as meaning that people instantly send feedback to the writer by e-mail.

Generally, interactivity is often used to describe technological features of the new media (Vorderer, 2000) and defined as "a measure of a medium's potential ability to let the user exert an influence on the content and/or form of the mediated communication" (Jensen, 1998, p. 201; Steuer, 1992). According to this definition, the audience is not a passive receiver of information, but rather an active creator. Thus, many authors have defined interactivity based on how many and what types of features are available for users to fulfill interactive communication. In the context of the Internet, for example, these features might include bulletin boards, search engines, registration and online ordering forms (McMillan, 1998); "curiosity-arousal devices, games, user choice options, and surveys" (Ha & James, 1998); or, "e-mail links, feedback forms, and chatrooms" (Massey & Levy, 1999). Indeed, interactivity refers to "a process involving users, media, and messages, with an emphasis on how messages relate to one another" (Sundar & Brown, 2003, p. 34-35). Consequently, interactivity in other words refers to the relation between users and media, and the influence between each other or exchanged messages between senders and receivers. This describes the positive role of receiver in the communication process. Also Rafaeli & Sudweeks (1997) agree with this, writing that interactivity communication requires all messages in a sequence to relate to each other, according to them, interactivity means "effort" or "responsiveness". Moreover, they gave a definition of interactivity as "an expression of the extent that in a given series of communication exchanges, any third (or later) transmission (or message) is related to the degree to which previous exchanges referred to even earlier transmission". James (1998) also proposed that interactivity should be defined in terms of the extent to which the communicator and the audience respond to, or are willing to facilitate,

each other's communication needs, or "the relationship between two or more people who, in a given situation, mutually adapt their behaviors and actions to each other" (Downes & McMilla, 2006, p. 158). Rice (1984) investigated the role of the receiver in the communication process and suggested fully interactive media implies that sender and receiver roles are interchangeable (p.35). Steur (1992) agreed with Rice and indicated that interactivity is "the extent to which users can participate in modifying the form and content of a mediated environment in real time" (p. 84).

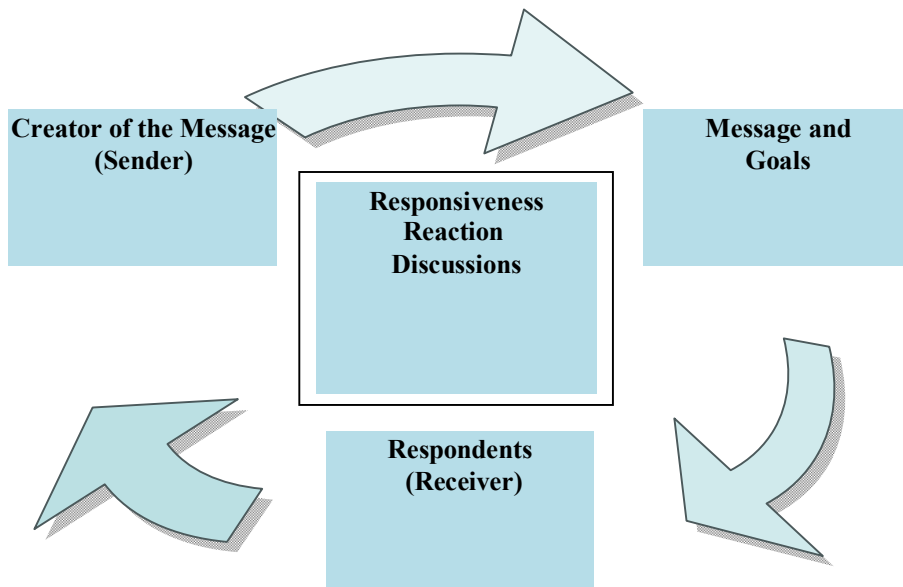
Several scholars have focused on the interactivity option in online media and show that the interactivity option and using mail, forum, and chat rooms, audio and video files in online media are important elements of the Internet (Tanjev, 1998, 2003; McMillan, 2000; Nagwa, 2001; Wendy & Gerson, 1999). Interactivity is one of the most prominent elements of the Internet; especially with the increasing importance of the Internet as an information medium or a mean source for information and news, also the participation of citizens and young people in political life has increased in the last decades using the interactivity elements of the Internet news. These features gave them the possibility to send feedback or reaction about political events and convey their public opinion about current events in their countries, or about international politic issues, or participate by themselves as communicators to express their views and share with others.

The interactive features of the Internet seemingly imply that online media have more advantages than traditional media forms. People's expectations for new types of journalism are driving them online. Some have begun seeing the Internet as an alternative to traditional media (Nozato, 2002, p. 2). The Internet is also considered a very safe media and without governmental censorship (gatekeeper); young people can participate without the fear of punishment from their government, especially in dictatorial governments. Moreover, the Internet is a new medium that could extend interactivity options in print media, especially in newspaper websites or online journals. Joseph stated that any attempts to define interactivity are futile at this time. "Nobody knows, because the field of interactive communication is in its infancy, what the possibilities are. You have to base your definition of interactivity on what's out there" (Downes & McMilla, 2006, p.170). In other words, in the era of new communication and changes every day in the software industry and computer programs, changes in new communication are also being developed quite quickly, and with the

increase of Internet users the interactivity elements will become more and more important. However, you cannot give a clear definition because interactivity changes every day

In conclusion, Interactivity is considered as one of the most important advantages of the communications revolution to have occurred in all communication models and communication processes, particularly in the relation between sender and receiver. In general, “scholars have employed the term of interactivity to refer to everything from face to face exchanges to computer mediated communication” (Downes & McMilla, 2000, p. 157). In addition, they stated that there has been little agreement among them about the conceptualization of interactivity. Interactivity not only has been identified as a core concept of new media, but also interactivity seems to be at the core of new media technologies, and studying it in the context of networked communication has broad social implications (Bucy, 2004, p, 373).

As previously discussed, interactivity as a concept refers to a reaction or responsiveness and exchange messages between sender and receiver, which considered a two-way communication. In other words, according to Li (1998), “it can be shown that the dominant paradigm in traditional communication, one sender to many receivers, can be changed on the Internet to many senders to many receivers”. Rice (1984) and Rogers (1995) suggested that “interactivity communication requires that sender and receiver roles be interchangeable”. In the next figure the Author developed the following figure to summarize the literature about the definition of interactivity.



### Interactivity Mode

#### **5.2 Credibility**

Credibility also is one of the most important features and phenomena of the Internet. The importance of credibility in human communication had already been recognized long before modern communication research emerged as a scientific discipline. At the opening of the twentieth century credibility became a central concept in communication research, first in propaganda, then in other areas such as advertising or political communication.

In the Arabic dictionary the definition of "credibility" is: "honest" and "true in speech", "against lying" (Mohamed, 2004, p. 499). Credibility requires evidence and credibility of the sincerity of speech or subject matter, i.e. "evidence of the truth"; when we believe a human being we support what he/she has said (El-Adnani, 1986, p. 374).

English scholars also were interested in defining credibility. In English, "credibility is defined as a characteristic or force that inspires faith and belief, the belief capacity for belief or the quality or power of inspiring belief" (Merriam Webster, 2010); furthermore, credibility refers to "appearance of truth or authenticity", "believability", "plausibility", "verisimilitude" (Roget's, 1995). To be plausible and credible is the quality of being believable or trustworthy and credible.

The word 'credibility' was used for the first time in English literature in 1957. What about synonyms for the word credibility in English? "The

vulnerability of the ratification of believability and some languages use the same word "credibility" for the translation of the term believability (Fogg et al, 2001, p. 61-62). The concept of credibility is very complicated to study and to give it a clear definition; however, scholars investigated it in various fields and in several studies. Generally, they indicated that credibility means "believability" (Tseng & Fogg, 1999, p. 39). On the other hand, authors used other words to define credibility, for instance: "believability", "accuracy", "fairness", "bias", "trustworthiness", "completeness", "reliability", or "attractiveness" of the media themselves, of news reporters, or of the coverage of specific news issues (Metzger et al, 2003, p. 308).

Scholars in mass communication and media studies are also interested in the credibility concept. El-Menofy (2006) stated that credibility means trust and ratification of the public of the communication content (p. 78). According to this, credibility has to include all the elements of the communication process "sender, receiver, messages, and feedback. Credibility also means feeling satisfied with the audience and convincing them of meaningful information which helps them in development in the same line with the values and principles of their society, which helps to build and not to destroy, provided that the available values of freedom give the audience (via its content) a high degree of awareness, education, experience, and the ability of measurement and evaluation.

According to the Pew Research Center 2011, in spite of several studies indicating how people trust in online media and the credibility of online news, the public continues to take a skeptical view of reporting from major news outlets, especially online news. For instance, not more than one-third of the public said that they believe all or most of the reports by 14 major news organizations. There has been little change in public views of media credibility since 2008. Since the late 1990s, however, there has been significant erosion in the believability ratings of several news organizations. For example, since "1998 ABC News, CBS News, and NBC News have all seen substantial declines in the percentages saying they believe all or most of what they say (among those who say they can rate those organizations). Currently, about two-in-ten say that they believe all or most information from ABC News 21.0%, CBS News 21.0% and NBC News 20.0% – down from about three-in-ten in 1998" (Pew Research Center, June 8-28, 2011, p. 74). Besides, Cassidy (2007) stated that the Internet news is viewed as moderately credible overall and that online newspaper journalists rated Internet news

information as significantly more credible than did print newspaper journalists.

Interestingly, questions have been raised about the credibility of online news or how newspaper readers evaluate the content of online media (Yoshiko, 2002; Brill, 2001; Ketterer, 1998; Lasica, 1998; Online News Association, 2002). These concerns are significant in that journalism is built on credibility (France, 1999). If the public does not believe or trust in the press, they are less likely to pay attention to it (Gaziano, 1988). On one hand, Johnson and Kaye (1998) suggested that lack of trust in information obtained from the Internet could keep it from becoming an important and influential news source. On the other hand, several researchers (Johnson & Kaye, 1998; Flangin et al., 200; Johnson et al., 2000; Schweiger, 2000) stated that Internet users judged online political information sources as more credible than traditional media counterparts and users trust more the content of the online media. This research agrees with this concept because it assures the importance of credibility, and works on the building requirements of public awareness and the ability to evaluate and distinguish between the media messages and public. Following these definitions, the author's definition on the concept of credibility's: *Credibility refers to "truthfulness, objectivity and realism in the media content"*.

### **5.3 Social network (SNSs)**

The world has become a small computer screen , through the new communication platforms, the Internet, and social networks, all of which play major roles in many of our daily lives, information about current events is conveyed directly to us, bringing us closer to the public sphere. Moreover, the Internet and social networks have helped many people and countries during times of economic, health, and natural crisis, for instance: "Twitter and social network was a good supporter to collect donations to help disaster victims and help anyone who had no other way to communicate. Donation efforts on the site mobilized quickly aid the first natural disaster to strike since the social network sites took off; for instance, the American cross tweeted that it was pledging an initial \$200,000 to assist those affected, especially 'Haiti' " (Twitter mobilizes efforts to raise aid for Haiti earthquake CNN- Jan. 13, 2010). In the next few pages the author will focus on the role of social networks in our lives in general and the political aspects of it in particular, using Egypt as a case study for the role of social networking in politics and democracy.

### **Social network; Definition, history, and development**

While SNSs only started to emerge in the late 1990's and have been primarily serving as an online networking tool (Boyd & Ellison, 200), since that time social network sites (SNSs) have become very popular, especially in attracting young people to learn more about politics and changes that are taking place in their country. The users of social network have increased rapidly in recent decade. For instance, two million new users register on facebook every week (Sobel, 2007), the survey of Sonja Utz in 2009 showed that SNS provides an opportunity to reach individuals less interested in politics. In early research, scholars stated that social networks are important to connect people or build relations with strangers. As an example, Barker (1999) once said that social networks are individuals or groups linked by some common bond shared social status, similarity, shared functions, geographic or cultural connection, or specific need and interest. Wellman (1999) agreed with this and described contemporary community networks as narrow specialized relationships rather than broadly supportive ties, as well as sparsely knit, loosely bounded, and frequently changing; and as supportive and sociable although spatially dispersed rather than neighborhood-based (Voydanoff, 1999). So SNSs are very important tools for building relations in virtual places and real time between members of society.

- The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site” (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). During 2005, online social network sites like MySpace and Facebook became common destinations for young people especially in the United States.
- Throughout the country, “young people were logging in, creating elaborate profiles, publicly articulating their relationships with other participants, and writing extensive comments back and forth “(Boyd, 2008).
- First launched in 2004 as a college network, Facebook quickly gained its popularity among the young people. In September 2006, Facebook was opened to everyone with a valid email address. Although in this way it is made harder to track the exact number of young users on Facebook, the general consensus is that the majority of active Facebook users are still young people. On the 1st of September, 2006, Facebook was primarily used by college students; and with Facebook, people were wandering around accepting others as ‘friends’, commenting on others’ pages, checking out what others posted,

and otherwise participating in the networked environment. In addition, with Facebook any action or post is broadcasted to everyone in the appropriate member list, it is called “The Wall” (Boyd, p. 1). In addition, the appeal of MySpace, Facebook, and other SNSs is allowing users to “network” with each other. Subscribers also create self-presentation profiles and connect to profiles of existing friends and their friends’ friends; keeping in touch with friends and making new acquaintances among other subscribers are the heart and soul of any SNS (Monica & Raluca, 2009, p. 1).

- Finally, SNSs were one of the first social variables recognized as “potentially alternative or complementary to socio-economic classes in sociolinguistics” (Watts, 2006; Britain & Matsumoto, 2005). Social network models have been applied to communities where the social class distribution of community speakers is uneven or problematic (e.g., small rural and non-industrialized communities) (Gal, 1979; Holmquist, 1985; Lippi-Green, 1989). Moreover, SNSs have been the hot spot of the web for the last few years; about 7 out of the top 10 most visited websites worldwide are SNSs, with MySpace and Facebook consistently rated the sixth and seventh most visited site since early 2007 (Alexa.com, 2008). Launched in 2004 states that, MySpace reached about 110 million active users by January 2008, with 60 million users in the United States alone, also launched in 2004, Facebook has about 65 millions active users worldwide as of February 2008 (Monica & Raluca, 2009, p.2), now over 500 million users, Facebook is now used by 1 in every 13 people on earth, with over 250 million of them (over 50%) who log in every day. The average user still has about 130 friends, but that should expand in 2011. Over 700 Billion minutes a month are spent on Facebook, 20 million applications are installed per day and over 250 million people interact with Facebook from outside the official website on a monthly basis, across 2 million websites. Over 200 million people access Facebook via their mobile phone. 48.0 % of young people said they now get their news through Facebook. Meanwhile, in just 20 minutes on Facebook over 1 million links are shared, 2



million friend requests are accepted and almost 3 million messages are sent (<sup>1</sup>).

**Social network (SNSs); users, characteristics and features**

Social networks allow individuals to be connected by one or more specific topic or field of education, financial exchange, common interest, political discourse, political party, belief, knowledge, or academic field. Social networks operate on many levels, from the level of members up to the level of nations or participating in society organization, and play a key role in solving the problems that face the public, how organizations are run, and the degree to which individuals succeed in achieving their goals. Consequently, a social network (SNSs) in its simplest form is a network map of specified topics, which helps individuals to contact and build their community through Internet websites.

The author will focus in this part on the political role of social networks which support societies to change their respective country's political system or call for change and reform the political process. Social networks not only help the public in the time of economic and health crisis, but also assist them in the time of political crisis to support human rights and call for change, especially in dictatorial governments, "while SNSs now are quickly gaining popularity among young people in helping them get connected with others, they are also transforming into the youths' major source of political information. Key features provided on Facebook, such as linking, wall-posting, or resource time to update on video-sharing websites such as YouTube, all these advantages through SNSs have created opportunities for young people to exchange their political views and become more politically active" (Ellison, Steinfeld & Lampe, 2007).

Since its introduction, social network sites (SNSs) such as MySpace, Facebook, Cyworld, Twitter, etc. have attracted millions of users, many of whom have integrated these sites into their daily practices. Social network sites help strangers to connect with each other, based on shared interests, political views, or activities. "Some sites cater to diverse audiences, while others attract people based on common language or shared racial, sexual, religious, or nationality-based identities. Also these sites also vary in the extent to which they incorporate new information and communication tools, such as, mobile

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<sup>1</sup> Source: <http://www.digitalbuzzblog.com/facebook-statistics-stats-facts-2011/>

connectivity, blogging and photo/video-sharing” (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Increasingly, with their tremendous and increasing level of acceptance among a wide range of users and young people, social networks (SNSs) are becoming a focus of attention not only for researchers but also for the public and today’s youth. In addition, SNSs privacy elements have been recognized as an important topic in the Internet for some time, and technological developments in the area of privacy tools are ongoing, especially individual account privacy and privacy needs of their social networks. Besides, “online social networks (SNSs) such as Friendster, MySpace, Facebook, and all other types of social networks have experienced exponential growth in membership in recent years. These networks offer attractive means for the interaction and communication, but also raise privacy and security concerns” (Acquisti & Gross, 2006). The users of a social network are quite safe and their information stays inaccessible for strangers because most social network sites require approval for two people to be linked as ‘friends,’ thus achieving a level of safety through privacy elements (Boyd, 2008, p. 6). On the other hand, some scholars argue that although online social networks offer novel opportunities for interaction and safety among their users, they seem to attract non-users’ attention particularly because of the privacy concerns they raise (Acquisti & Gross, 2006).

For these advantages, social networks are gaining increasing importance for many people’s work and leisure time, as they allow for interaction independent of a fixed location (Preibusch, & Berendt, 2007). According to PEW Internet “Teens and Social network” 2009, found that 65% of online teens have a profile online. Moreover, girls, particularly older girls, more likely to use SNS than guys (86.0% of girls 15-17 have profile online, compared to 69.0% of boys 15-17) (Pew internet, April, 10, 2009).

It is important to note that the number of users of social networks is increasing day by day. According to National School Boards Association (July 2007), “online social networking is now deeply embedded in the lifestyles of young people; as an example, 9 to 17 year olds said that they spend almost as much time using social networking services and websites as they spend watching television. In average they spend about 9 hours a week on social networking activities, compared to about 10 hours a week watching TV. Overall, 96.0 % of students with online access report that they have used social networking technologies, such as chatting, text messaging, blogging

and participating in online communities, such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, etc.” (National School Boards Association, July 2007).

In addition, according to a survey conducted by Pew Internet & American Life Project in August of 2008, it was found that 33% of Internet users had a profile on a social networking site and that 31.0 % of these social network members had engaged in activities with a civic or political focus, such as joining political groups, or signing up as a “friend” of a candidate on a social networking site. Moreover, 15% of Internet users have gone online to add to the political discussion by posting comments on a website or blog about a political or social issue, posting pictures or video content online related to a political or social issue, or using their blog to explore political or social issues. As expected, those who use blogs or social networking sites politically are much more likely to be invested in other forms of civic and political activities compared to those who go online but do not post.

Taken together, social network sites have many advantages for society, especially young people, because “SNSs are based around profiles, a form of individual home page, which offers a description of each member. In addition to text, images, and video created by the member, the social network site profile also contains comments from other members, and a public list of the people that one identifies as friends within the network” (Amanda, 2007, p. 5). Also, one of the key advantages of SNSs is that they allow individuals to contact through public discourse, build friendships, contact between strangers, whether they know each other or not, because they will recognize each other from their profiles or account which include descriptors such as name, uploaded profile photo, e-mail address, job, and interests, as well as often containing personal details typical of those sites: demographic details (age, gender, location, etc.), tastes (interests, favorite bands, etc.), a photograph, and an open-ended description of who the person would like to meet.

Moreover, the individuals who have accounts or profiles on Facebook or Twitter or any type of SNS are visible to anyone if he/she, friend or not, can contact them to send them questions, links, comments, pictures, or news. Also “social network sites like MySpace allow users to choose between whether they want their profile to be publicly available or ‘for friends only’, but Facebook takes a different approach, by default its users who are part of the same network can view each other's profiles and all account information, unless a profile owner has decided to deny permission to those in their network” (Boyd & Ellison,

2007). Moreover, participants can also leave messages or comments for friends or contacts who are offline at the moment. Additionally, social network sites allow users to share ideas, activities, events, and interests within their individual networks.

#### **5.4 Blogs**

Social network, participatory media, collaborative media, and Web 2.0 tools may be among the descriptors that would be more inclusive than “blog” but share common elements. Blogs: one of the most important advantage within the last few years, a new generation of computer-mediated communication has emerged (Blood, 2002; Herring, Scheidt, Bonus, & Wright, 2005; Miller & Sheperd, 2004). Readers or audiences often have the opportunity to comment on any individual posting on other people blogs wall, or sharing information, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics, photo, and video. “Weblogs, or “blogs,” are frequently updated websites where content (text, pictures, sound files, etc.) is posted on a regular basis and displayed in reverse chronological order. Blog can also be used as a verb, meaning to maintain or add content to a blog (Rebecca, September 7, 2000). Additionally, “most blogs are interactive, allowing visitors to leave comments and even message each other via widgets on the blogs and it is this interactivity that distinguishes them from other static websites” (Mutum & Qing, 2010).

The term “weblog” was coined by John Barger on 17 December 1997. The short form, “blog,” was coined by Peter Merholz, who jokingly broke the word weblog into the phrase we blog in the sidebar of his blog Peterme.com in April or May 1999 when he wrote this letter “Please stop using the term “web log” to refer to a chronologically-ordered frequently-updated website. The correct term is “weblog”. “Blog” is not short for “web log”, it is short for weblog. Shortly thereafter, Evan Williams at Pyra Labs used blog as both a noun and verb (to blog, meaning to edit one's weblog or to post to one's weblog) and devised the term “blogger” in connection with Pyra Labs' Blogger product, leading to the popularization of the terms (Wortham, 2007).

Many blogs also provide interactivity elements through commentary or news on a particular subject; others function as more personal. Additionally, blog combines text, images, audio video and links to other blogs, and other media related to its topic. The ability of readers to leave comments in an interactive format is an important part of many blogs. Most blogs are primarily textual, although some focus on art

photographs, videos, music, for instance, MP3 or songs blogs and audio is another type of blogging, featuring very short posts.

Readers, friends or any organizations often have the option to comment or send fans on any individual posting, which is identified by a unique URL. Through such comments and references to other online sources in the postings, as well as through links to favorite blogs in the sidebar (the "blogroll"), blogs form a clustered network of interconnected texts: the "blogosphere" (Schmidt, 2007). Since its introduction to the world, blogs increasing and growing every day after a slow start, "blogging rapidly gained in popularity. Blog use spread during 1999 and the years, "between 50 and 85 million blogs as of June 2007" (Sifry, 2007), the majority of blogs are of the personal journal type, which deals with the bloggers' personal experiences and reflections; within this group, female and teenage bloggers are in the majority, while the journal blog may evoke images of the solitary diary (Hodkinson, 2006; Wei, 2004). The use of blogs in generating competitive advantage, and their application as knowledge management tools, is crucial to understanding the relevance of blogs for a range of professional organizations as well as community groups (Bruns & Jacobs, 2006, 2-3).

In recent years blogs started to play an important role in politics. Since 2002, blogs have gained increasing notice and coverage for their role in breaking, shaping, and spinning news stories. The Iraq war saw bloggers taking measured and passionate points (Dean, 2009). Increasingly, "the 2004 U.S. Presidential Election was the first Presidential Election in the United States in which blogging played an important role. Although the term weblog was coined in 1997, it was not until after 9/11 that blogs gained readership and influence in the U.S. The next major trend in political blogging was "warblogging": blogs centered on discussion of the invasion of Iraq by the U.S" (Adamic & Glance, 2005). Although official campaign blogs played a lesser role in the Bush and Kerry campaigns, with the Bush campaign's blog being criticized as little more than a place to post press releases, both parties launched innovative online campaigns to boost their grass-roots efforts (Boutin, 2004).

Interestingly, "the Obama campaign obviously does recognize the great potential lying in the digital media. Many media observers noticed his campaign's extensive application of the new media, which has greatly facilitated mobilizing people online to contribute their efforts offline in the old-fashioned ways, such as door knocking and precinct-walking

across the entire country” (Dickinson, 2008; Drehle, 2008). Through the Internet and social network “Obama’s campaign strategy has been succinctly dubbed as “19th century politics using 21st century tools” (Drehle, 2008). Moreover, “it was still primarily reliant on ground efforts to mobilize voters in the traditional sense. But running an election in the 21st century, the Internet is undoubtedly very powerful in connecting people, spreading information, and reinforcing beliefs. In the months before the election, there were over 2 million supporters of Obama on Facebook, Twitter, and blogs which was growing all the time. A majority of his Facebook supporters are believed to be young people. A special feature of Facebook is the “wall post,” which is for others to talk to the owner of the page” (Jingsi Wu, 2008).

According to what is discussed above, the important role of social networks as a new medium in the age of the Internet and new media has increased and social networks help the public in general and young people in particular to contact with each other and build their own community. In addition, the public and more specifically the young people can use social network to engage not only in making friendships, but also to participate in political actions.

One of the most important features and advantages of using social networks is that the public can participate with others in political discussions by using their Facebook or Twitter account, personal blog, YouTube, or by posting pictures or videos about political or social issues, or any kind of content online related to political issues. This is exactly what happened during the Egyptian revolution, when young people used Internet and social networks to organize their demonstrations. More information concerning this particular event will be discussed below.



Social network forms

### **Social network and political transformation in Egypt**

The recent political events in Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Tunisia reflect the key role of social networks and online political news in supporting citizens with their self-determination and call for change towards democracy and freedom. The protestors were able to use the Internet, Facebook, and YouTube to organize rallies with the help of social network sites and to send video files to international media documenting the arresting and killing of demonstrators. In the following pages the author will focus on Egypt as a case study for two main reasons: Firstly, it is the homeland of the author, Secondly, the young people in Egypt used social networks as a pivotal method towards changing their country's political system.

No one denies the role social networks played as an effective tool in the Egyptian revolution. When Egyptian young people used social network to organize and announce their demonstrations through it and were able to change the national political system that led President Mubarak and his government to step down. "The Egyptian government noticed this and therefore it cut off 88.0% of the major Internet service providers from inside and outside the country on Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> of January 2011" (The Guardian, Jan 28, 2011). Young people and activists had been using social networks in order to communicate and organize the demonstrations through blogger pages and Facebook to inform people where and when protestors were gathering. Moreover, "the Egyptian government prevented the access not only to the Internet websites, but also to social-networking sites like Twitter and Facebook, as well as

BlackBerry service and some international television channels such as Aljazeera TV. Nevertheless, on the 25th of January 2011 millions of Egyptians poured into the streets of Cairo starting to protest against the economic policies, government corruption, and called for an end of the nearly 30 year rule of President Hosni Mubarak” (The New York Times, March 12, 2011).

The Egyptian government not only stopped Facebook service, but also the Twitter website had been cut off in an apparent move to thwart protesters using the social network in the anti-Mubarak campaign. The “twitter team said that its service remained blocked but some people were using proxy servers to successfully send ‘tweets’” (Doherty, Jan. 27, 2011). Moreover, US State Department spokesman PJ Crowley said in a tweet (message) on Twitter stated: "we are concerned that communications services, including the Internet, social network and even this tweet are being blocked in Egypt" (Silicon republic, Jan. 28, 2011). All these procedures against social networks and the Internet were meant to thwart demonstrators and repress the revolution.

So what exactly makes SNSs, especially Twitter and Facebook, the medium of the moment? They are free, highly mobile, very personal and almost instantaneous. They are also built to spread, and fast. Twitters like to append notes called hash-tags (#) to their tweet. Moreover, Twitter is promiscuous by nature: tweets go out over two networks, the Internet and SMS, the network that cell phones use for text messages, and they can be received and read on practically anything with a screen and a network connection (Grossman, 2009).

In addition, Twitter is practically ideal for a mass protest movement, both very easy for the average citizen to use and very hard for any central authority to control. The same might be true for e-mail and Facebook, but those media are not public. They do not broadcast as Twitter does. Similar steps were taken in Iran on June 13, 2009 when protests started to escalate; the Iranian government moved to suppress dissent both on- and off-line, and the Twitters responded with tweets from those unwilling to accept those oppressive limitations, both in English and in Persian. While the front pages of Iranian newspapers were full of blank space where censors had white-ousted news stories, Twitter was delivering information from street level, in real time (Time News, June 17, 2009). This happened during Iran’s recent elections, as much talk as there is about Twitter and other social network supplanting the likes of CNN in covering breaking news, they are really another source rather than a replacement and Twitter users know that as



well as anyone else. Thus, they want and demand big news organizations to step up, nimbly and responsively, to cover fast-changing events like this ([CNN, June 7, 2009](#)). Also, the people participating and observing Iranian demonstrations uploaded videos to YouTube which international channels picked up and broadcasted further.

Moreover, several Egyptian newspapers quoted that the Egyptian government, in order to prevent the demonstrators from contacting each other, reportedly disrupted mobile phone networks. In addition to this move, the Egyptian government cut off mobile phone coverage and Internet services and sent columns of riot police trucks into Cairo in a bid to thwart thousands of activists due to join anti-regime protests during afternoon prayers. Thus the Egyptian government had cut off every communication tool used by protest organizers (El Ahram Youm7, El Masriun). Moreover, “every Egyptian provider, every business, bank, Internet cafe, website, school, embassy, and government office that relied on the big four Egyptian ISPs for their Internet connectivity was cut off from the rest of the world.” (PCmag, 28th of January, 2011(2) and customers of link Egypt, Vodafone Mobinil, Telecom Egypt, UP-DATA, and Etisalat Misr Cell saw all phone text messaging cut off, as well as their access to the Internet.

All international media were focused on the events in Egypt and gave the Egyptian revolution ample coverage; The Telegraph newspaper on 13th of February 2011 quoted that “Egypt's five primary Internet providers – Link Egypt, Vodafone – Raya, Telecom Egypt and Etisalat Misr –have stopped moving data in and out of the country. Also, cell phone, text and Blackberry Messenger services were also cut off in what appeared to be a move by authorities to disrupt the organization of demonstrations” (3).

On the 13th of April 2011, Egypt's prosecutor general ordered the detention of former President Hosni Mubarak, ahead of an investigation into corruption and abuse allegations. Additionally, his sons Alaa and Gamal were also detained amid allegations of corruption and violence. Moreover, he and his sons have been banned from leaving the country and their assets have been frozen. His two sons and a growing number

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<sup>†</sup> Source: <http://www.pcmag.com>

<sup>‡</sup> Source: Source <http://www.bbc.co.uk>, Egyptian national TV <http://www.egyptv.net>

of ministers and officials from his ruling era are facing investigation, (4) all Arabic and world media cited this event.

After all these events, Egypt now changed to a more democratic political environment through a new constitution, free parliament elections, and free elections to choose a new president with more democratic and fair procedures, unlike the last two presidential elections. Interestingly, one of the most political benefits of Egyptian revolutions towards democracy environmental that the dissolution of the NDP (National Democratic Party) “has been a key demand of the protesters who drove him from power, its' offices was among the buildings targeted during the uprising. An Egyptian court has ordered that the former ruling party of ousted President Hosni Mubarak should be dissolved. On 16th of April 2011, BBC News and National TV in Egypt have quoted that all assets of the National Democratic Party will be seized and handed to the government, the supreme administrative court ruled” (BBC News & National Egyptian TV, 16th of April 2011). The NDP had dominated the country's politics since it was set up by Mubarak's predecessor, Anwar Sadat, in 1978. This means, the closing of the door against a monopoly of politics by one political party, and a new era of multiple parties can participate in politics.

Egyptian citizens will never forget the 25th of January 2011; it will be always a remarkable day in their history. Thousands of people came together to rise up peacefully against a dictatorship led by President “Mubarak who has led Egypt since 1981. Everyone in 1981 trusted him to lead the country after serving in the military for a long period and reaching promotion level of Egyptian Air Chief Marshal. During his 30 years of power he has served the Egyptian people well up, he had strengthened the economy until recent years, and he made himself very rich in the process off the backs of the Egyptian people. 24 million of the 78 million people survive on \$2 a day and the next level of society not much more than that. The Egyptian people rose up for better” (5). After that, former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, who was forced to step down by a popular uprising in 14 February 2011 and number of his former government members, is due to appear in court, charged with corruption and ordering the killing of protesters. The 83yearold has been held under arrest at a hospital in the Red Sea resort

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<sup>‡</sup> Source:BBC.com

<sup>°</sup> Source [http://www.bukisa.com/articles/453581\\_egyptian-protest-25th-january-30th-january-week-one](http://www.bukisa.com/articles/453581_egyptian-protest-25th-january-30th-january-week-one)

of Sharm el-Sheikh during his trial. No one could have predicted that the mass demonstrations which erupted earlier this year would prove to be disastrous for the Mubarak regime. Now he has been toppled and will stand trial along with others who were equally complicit in crimes against the Egyptian people. (6)

#### **6- Recommendations:**

Some limitations of the current study could be identified for further investigations. Further research should use larger number of participants in different geographical areas, conducted for a longer Period in multiple waves survey panels to prove the causality relationship among Political awareness and political interest, knowledge, and participation , and considers other groups of population not only young people. Moreover, we need for more research and comparative studies among young people in Egypt before and after the revolution that changed the political conditions for the better understanding for political process, which will have a strong and positive-related influence on their political participation, which has a strong influence on the political awareness of young people. Therefore, the researcher recommends that further studies should be made in order to obtain more definite results, instead of depending on the results of just only one study. Using other measurement instruments than those used in the current study would be also important.

In addition, the scholars should give more attention in their research about the role of online political news in our life, and have to give more interested about the key role of social network in political transformation and democracy. Finally, the normative aspects of future research should not be forgotten, rebuilding Egyptian media system after post-Egyptian revolution.

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<sup>7</sup> Source: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14381303>

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