Away from Tahrir Square, does the new media matter?

Effects of ICTs on political communication in local communities in Egypt

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Abstract

The Internet and Social networking sites (SNSs) represented important channels for the dissemination of information, discussion, and participation in the events that paved the way for the 25th of Jan Revolution and throughout the transitional phase in Egypt. The rates of Internet accessibility are noticeably increasing. They mounted to 38% in July 2012 compared with a rate of 13.7% in 2007, with annual growth a rate of users 17%. The Internet role in the Egyptian case has been of interest to the researchers who are the studying the influence of technology use on the political communication.

Within this context, this study poses a pivotal question: How far influential is the use of new media on the political communication system in local communities? This qualitative study has come up with the conclusion that the political communication system in local societies has not undergone a noticeable change if compared with the role of the Internet in the political communication system at the national level. The system structure is still basically controlled by national TVs as main sources of political information with a nearly total absence of the Internet and its applications. The Locals feel

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that there are no opportunities for them in the traditional media to express themselves and discuss their problems; for the traditional media is concerned with the public issues rather than the local ones, the impact of which is manifested in poor knowledge of the local public affairs and local policies. The locales did not seek to benefit from the technology available to voice and expose their issues at both the local and national levels. This created a sense of marginalization, inefficacy and un-enthusiasm in any societal or political participation. These results underline the fact that the availability of technology in itself does not automatically guarantee its use in developing the political communication system in local communities.

Introduction

The ICTs have discharged a prominent role in affecting the political changes brought about by the Arabic Spring Revolutions, especially in Egypt. The Internet and social communication networks were important channels for information dissemination, discussions, interaction and participation in the events that paved the way for the 25th of January Revolution and the transitional phase.

The steady growth of the Internet use in Egypt reflects the interest on the part of the citizens. Internet access rates hiked from 13.7% in 2007 to reach 38% in 212. The rate of Internet users is 31% of the population, with annual growth rate 17%.[1] A study attributed the increase in the use of social networks, especially the Facebook, in Egypt throughout the 2011 which witnessed more than a million new users, to their political role.[2] The role played by the Internet and its applications has a wide impact on researchers

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and those interested in the relation between communication technology and democratization. After the Revolution of January 2011, the Internet and social networking sites became of interest to politicians and political institutions at the national level. This induced several of these to create sites or accounts on social networks. Studies also show that the Internet became an important source of political information in Egypt. It precedes traditional media like radio.[3] Another study highlights that 67% of social networks users are using them for political purposes. It points also out that those who use social networks amongst the Internet users think that the political role of networks is largely effective (89.5%). This is substantiated by the fact that (five from every ten users) mentioned that the Internet made them more active participants in the political process in reality. In addition, (60.5%) evaluated the influence of the Internet on the rate of their political participation to be ranging between high and average with a percentage of (60.5%).[4]

The reasons that led the citizens at the national level to benefit from the technology in changing the political communication system are more or less the same reasons that can lead the locales to benefit from technology in affecting change. The harsh control imposed by the political system on traditional communication platforms to serve its purposes, the fact that the media voices the opinion of the elite and marginalizes the ordinary citizens, the absence of interaction mechanisms between the political institutions and the citizens as well as between the media and the citizens are the same reasons that compose the sufferance of the local communities.

Given that technology has expanded to reach the local communities–though on a smaller scale- and Castelles prediction of the impact of the use of ICTs on various aspects of the societal systems[5], including the media system the present study seeks to understand the dynamic of the relation between new media technologies and political communication process in prei-urban and rural communities in Egypt.

Role of New Media in Political Communication

The interaction between communication and democratization constitute an important and still largely unexplored territory for researchers in the field of political science and communication, especially in developing countries and countries in transition. Comparing to the attention scholars have given to other aspects of democratization in Africa for example in the 1990's, the role that the media and information communication technologies (ICTs) play is a topic deserving more attention.[6]

Voltmer argues that in order to encourage the development of a vivid civil society and to overcome the autocratic dominance of political elites, it is important that alterative views have accessed to the forum of the media. He argues that information quality and the need for orientation are probably of even more significance in new democracies, especially during the period immediately following the breakdown of the old regime.[7]

The notion of public sphere that most fruitful interaction between political theory and media studies is more broadly understood as a general context of interaction where citizen get informed and public discussion takes

place. In the general sense of the concept, voicing of diverse views and access to a wide range of information and experiences is a precondition for citizens' effective societal and political participation.[8]

Along with the increase in the communicative action and the societal and political participation of the citizens due to the expansion in the use of ICT, Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action has become an important approach of understanding the nature of the changes in the communicative system and their potential developments.[9]

Chadwick posed a number of issues within the frame of the discussion of the Internet-politics relation. Of these issues are: decentralization, participation, rationalization, community, governance and Libertarianism.[10] Dahlberg proposed three models, through which the relation between the Internet and politics can be understood. The first model is the cyber-libertarianism. This is based on the role of the Internet in facilitating the political marketing mechanisms like the field surveys, public opinion polls and tele–voting as substitutes for traditional practices patterns. The second model is communitarian. This is based on the role of the Internet in maximizing the Gross-roots participation, this has its ramifications on strengthening or empowering the local political communities through availing more opportunities of engaging in the political process. The third model is based on the Deliberative Democracy that can be realized through deploying technology in interaction and the exchange of ideas in the Public Sphere.[11]

Concerning the trends of research on the role of the Internet in realizing democracy; these can be divided into two main categories. The first is that the Internet may help improve the political practices in a way that renders it more expressive of citizens and more democratic. They see that the new media provide huge opportunities for participation and creativity. They can also be an instrument of consolidating the values of citizenship and democracy. (Coleman & Moss, 2008[12]; Erikson, 2008[13]; Kennedy, 2008[14], Coleman & Blumler (2009)[15] and Penman & Tumbull, 2012)[16] . In this regard, researchers depend on several pretexts that support their viewpoint. The most important is the fact that the Internet provides cheap and easy channels and enjoy larger amount of freedom in exchanging the political information. This strengthens the opportunities of rendering a society more aware of the public affairs. Moreover, the Internet and its applications provide opportunities of interaction amongst the citizens via the forums and social communication networks. This renders citizens more capable of seeking consultations and exchanging information. It also increases the representation of citizens in the decision-taking process. The final result predicted on basis of these optimistic opinions towards the role of the Internet is offering the citizens equal opportunities to participate in the virtual public sphere without any social, political or media constraints. This results in more rational, transparent and democratic decision making process.[17]

On the other hand, some researchers believe that the hypotheses on the role played by the Internet in improving the democratic practices are exaggerated.[18] Those researchers depended basically on the Digital Divide

hypothesis which holds that the opportunities of accessing and using the Internet are basically associated with the socio-demographic variables like education, gender, age and income. This makes the whole idea of equal opportunities of access and use non-realistic. (DiMaggio et al. 2001[19], Norris, 2001[20]) The inequality of the Internet access has a logical result; that is the marginalized population brackets, with regard to the Internet access, will not receive equal opportunities of participating in the political discussions in a way that enhances the fact that the current situation remains as it is.

For analyzing the impact of new technologies on the political communication system Dahlgren supposed that the uses of new technology may lead to the destabilization of the political communication system. He argues that this destabilization has positive aspects, for it shakes the traditional structure of the system and seeks creating a new structure. Besides, it offers an opportunity for the integration of new citizens. This increases the representation rule in the political communication array and opens new channels and chances for interaction amongst the parties engaged in the communication process. Dahlgren defines three dimensions that can represent a model for analyzing the effect of technology on the political communication system and its role in the Public Sphere. The model comprises the dimensions of structure, representation and interaction.[21]

The rates of the access to the Internet and its applications demonstrate an increase. Also, Internet access has reached an increasing number of localities. The proportion of localities with public Internet access centers (PIACs) stood at 41% at the end of 2008, up from 39% at the end of 2007.

The proportion of government entities with websites or a web presence reached 22.35% in June 2008. 77.8% of government entities that use the Internet had a website or web presence by June.[22]

The Problem statement:

(Voltmer) argues that viewing political communication as a system of interaction implies that all three sets actors (political actors, media and audience members) on the performance of the other actors of the system, requires for democratic transitions that radical new role orientations and rules of interaction within the political communication system.[23]

While studies confirm that Internet and social media were used in the Arab Spring, especially the Tunisian and Egyptian Revolutions as tools for political communication, it is unknown the extent to what this new media affects the patterns of political communications in peri-urban and rural areas.

This study raises a question about whether the digital age has changed the structures and dynamics of the political communication system at the local communities. On other words, how far mechanisms of dealing with political information, political discussion and interaction and political participation at the local level have changed according to use the Internet and its applications?

The Study Questions:

The present study seeks to answer the following questions:

Q1. What are the ramifications of the use of the Internet and its applications on the structure of the political communication system in the local communities?

Q2. What are the ramifications of the use of the Internet and its applications on the opportunities of expressing the citizens in local communities?

Q3. What are the ramifications of the use of the Internet and its applications on the prei-urban and rural citizens' interaction and participation?

Methodology:

Data Collection tool:

This quantitative study depended on the Focus group discussion as a tool of data collection. This tool is suitable for the nature of some of the local citizens targeted with this study. It helps to get more detailed information on the structure and mechanisms of the political communication system in local communities. The guide of the focus groups included the following:

- The sources of the citizens' political information at the local level.

- The issues that represent the local citizens' sphere of interest.

- The citizens' sense of how available are the opportunities they have to express their issues

- The mechanisms of the citizens' interaction with the political issues and politicians at the local level.

- The societal and political participation of the local citizens

Sample and society of the study:

Six focus group discussions were held of a sample representing non users of the Internet and users of the Internet (two groups of each). Besides, the group discussions included two mixed groups which include users and nonusers of the Internet. 3 groups were constituted of females and equivalent number of groups was constituted of males. 52 participants whose age exceeded 18 years participated in these discussions: 27 ladies and 25 men. These focus group discussions were conducted during June and August 2012.

This study has been conducted in the villages of "Al Bergaya" and "Bani Huseen" in Al Minya Governorate which is about 250 km south of Cairo. The village of "Al Bergaya" which is located in Al Minya District is 7 km north of the capital city of the governorate: Al Minya. The population of Al Bergaya mounts to 23 thousand people. "Bani Huseen" is a village in Al Minya Disritct also and is about the same distance east of Al Minya city and has a population of about 11 thousand people.[24] The community at study, Al Minya Governorate, is one of the five governorates where Human Development Indicators (HDI) are low if compared with the rest of the Egyptian governorates from 2005 till 2010. The population of the governorate of Al Minya amounts to 4 million people. Al Minya has the largest number of the poorest villages in Egypt. It has 356 villages from a total of 1141 villages (31.2%). Illiteracy rate is high in Al Minya. It amounts to 41.3% in the age bracket (15 years) compared to illiteracy rates in Egypt (34%).[25]

The governance system in local communities does not achieve any political, administrative or financial decentralization to these communities,

though they are called local administrations. Despite the Egyptian Law of local administration No. 43 for the year 1979 adopted the parallel system in structuring the local establishments or what is known as the two-board system, for in every administrative unit, be it a governorate, a city, a neighborhood, or a village, there is an appointed board and an elected one. Yet, the real practice shows the control of the executive board appointed by the governor over the process of decision-taking and implementation of the local policies. The absence of a political will to shift to decentralization and the shortage in legislations and legal measures that support the political, financial and administrative decentralization are considered major reasons for the dedication of centralization in practicing the political duties and responsibilities at the local level. This system has some negative aspects, the most important of which is the weakness of the local institutions – whether elected or appointed- that they cannot meet the needs of the citizens; and the poor investment of the available resources whether those transferred to it from the central level or those collected at the local level. Besides, it resulted in unclear institutional relations: whether vertical or horizontal.[26]

The local communities also suffer from the absence of an active existence of the political parties and their committees at the local levels. Though the legal political parties exist strongly at the central level, their existence at the local level is merely symbolical (at the governorate level) It almost disappears totally in the local communities (at the level of districts and villages), especially in the Governorates in Upper Egypt.[27] This is associated with the lack of effective existence of the civil society organizations at the local level. Some of these organizations may exist but those are only interested in

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offering direct care services to the local citizens like providing them with health and educational services as well as economic assistance. Yet, the active civil society organizations which work in the field of civil education, Human Rights, Women rights and citizenship do not exist. .

Results:

First: the Effects of the use of ICTs on the Structure of the Political Communication System in Local Communities:

The first dimension of the studying the impact of new communication technologies on the political communication system in the local communities is linked with monitoring the features of the official institutions- such as the media establishments and the patterns of ownership. This has to do with some of the traditional aspects of the democratic practice such as the access to the media and the dynamic of inclusion and exclusion. As for the Internet, the structural aspects that have to be subjected to analysis include the geographical distribution of the Internet with all its economic, legal, social, cultural and technical aspects.

The present study shows that the Television is considered the most important element of the structure of the political communication system in the local communities. National TVs channels are the main sources of political information for the largest part of local citizens, especially the information pertaining to the national issues. Another study shows the same results. It funds that local communities are depending more on television and friends to

get political information, while urban residents are depending more on newspapers and the Internet.[28] The participants' answers came to assert this. Here are some examples: "No one knows of politics except through TV", "We watch TV news twenty four hours", "TV covers it all".

The citizens depend basically on national channels broadcast whether on satellites or not. These are state-owned channels side by side with some private channels. Though here is a local TV channel supposedly concerned with the local affair, the majority of those participating in the discussions did not depend on this channel because as they put it, "it doesn't care a fig about our issues."

The groups that use the Internet, particularly the male, depend slightly on the social networks and the electronic news sites to obtain the political information. As for the female users of the Internet, they do not depend on it as a main source of political information. The Internet use of most of the local citizens is for educational purposes or for social communication and has nothing to do with politics. These results that demonstrate a qualitative gap in the political uses of the Internet conforms to the results of the study of (Albrecht) on the participation in the electronic political discussions which was implemented on one of the applied projects in Hamburg in Germany. This study showed that only 27% of the participants are female while the rates of women's access to the Internet mounts to 42%. It means that the Digital Divide hypothesis is not fit for interpreting these results.[29] Also, this results are similar to another study investigated the political communication in Sub-Saharan and concluded that political communication generally takes place in

Sub-Saharan Africa via the traditional media channels, despite the growing importance of new media.[30]

However in another context, a study conducted by Pew highlights the effective role of the Internet as a source of political information in local communities, especially amongst youth. Those who fall into the age bracket (18- 39 years) depend largely on the Internet to acquire political information with a rate of (26%) compared with (19%) depending on TV and (16%) on newspapers. Meanwhile, the older persons who belong to the age bracket (exceeding 40 years) depend first on newspapers and TV with a rate of (34%) for each, compared with a rate of (12%) depending on the Internet.[31]

In sum, the results regarding to the structure of the local political communication system demonstrates that the traditional media, specifically the state-owned TV and the private stations, are the means of conveying the political information to the local communities. At the same time, there are no local media on which the citizens depend to get the information on the local reality. Likewise, it can be said that the local citizens' dependence on the Internet as a means of getting the political information on the national and local situations is very limited.

In order to understand these results it is plausible saying that the local political system has reflected on the local media structure. If one proceeds from the assumption that the political system in a country influences the media system in that country , the local political situation has impacted the

local media as the centralized local political system has resulted in media centralization and weak media structure.[32]

In the community under study, there is one radio station, North of Upper Egypt. It was established in 1981 and broadcast from Al Minya Governorate which is of a central position amongst the four governorates composing the North of Upper Egypt zone. There is also one television channel that covers the same governorates (Channel 7) which began its broadcast in 1993.[33] The local newspapers in the community under study are very limited and often owned by the local authorities and the content they present is dedicated to justifying the acts of the local authorities and defending them. These newspapers often include political propaganda and are non professional.[34] 90.8% of the families in Upper Egypt (the Community at study) own television sets. This rate increases in the urban areas to reach 96.1%. The rate steeps in the rural areas to reach 87.5%. The radio is less prevalent with a rate of 62.4%. However, this rate increases in the urban areas to reach 76% and decreases in the rural areas to reach 54.1%.[35] The Internet access rate in the community under study is 25% amongst families residing in the urban areas and 10% amongst families in rural areas.[36] The Digital Divide between the urban and rural areas can be attributed to social, cultural and economic reasons.[2]

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[2] Statistics point out that 46% of the users access the service through Mobile Internet and USB Modem; which signifies a possibility of the increase in the number of the Internet users. The Mobile Internet may be used by 91.3% of the population (Jan., 2012).[2] The Facebook usage rates in Egypt have mounted to nearly 10 million users, which is equivalent to about 55% of the total number of Internet users and 12% of the total number of population. Also, statistics show interestingly that the gap in Internet usage between males and females in Egypt is decreasing. Males are more likely to use the Internet than females. The percentage breakdown of male/female Internet usage changed from 61% vs. 39% in January 2008 to 59% vs. 41% in January 2009.[2]

This analysis shows that there are few media platforms that speak in the voice of the local citizens. The studies of the impact of depending on the local media on the sense of belonging and the integration of the locales demonstrate that there is a strong relation between dependency on the local media and the realization of community integration, interest in the local policies, the knowing of the local issues and the political participation at the local level.[37] A study by MacLeod concluded that the use of local media may increase levels of integration and participation amongst the locales.[38] in order to achieve this, more efforts on the part of the civil society organizations to educate the local citizens who have access to the Internet how to use it as a substitute for and a means of circulating the political information. This also requires national and local initiatives to provide more opportunities for families in local communities to access the Internet.

Second: The Effect of the Uses of ICTs on local Citizen's Representation:

This dimension measures how far the locales are represented in the traditional and new media and how far the media express the societal needs in a way that consolidates its role as democratic institutions that help provide an atmosphere that encouraged the formation of the Public Sphere alongside with the political and social institutions. Lyle& McLeod argue that democracy ascribes sovereignty to the people, not to a monarch, an autocrat or an elite group. Democratic government operates on the basis of a majority decision within the population. For democratic government to function, the population

must be aware of the options through as full and open an exchange of ideas as possible.[39]

In this context, there is a set of questions that have to do with the output of the media, how expressive they are of the multiplicity, how committed they are to precision and objectivity, their political propensity and the like.

The central issues and policies at the state level receive more attention from the local citizens. This is logical in light of the local citizens' dependence on the national media that is only concerned with the national affairs and almost ignore the local community's issues. Further, there is the absence of the local media that voices the needs and views of the citizens. The result is the lack of interest in the local affair. Most of the groups participating in this study expressed their interest in the agenda of issues posed by the national channels. They said, "We care about the general issues because they are more important while the village news is limited." The central issues such as elections, security, corruption, unemployment and the absence of or difficulty of getting some of the essential material like fuel overwhelm the political discussions at the local level with a nearly complete absence of local policies discussions. The interest in the local issues may take the shape of a complaint of some of the services presented to the local citizens that have to do with bread, the bad conditions of education, farmers' problems and query workers issues without referring to this in the context of criticizing the local policies. Those issues were often tackled in contexts pertaining to the central public policies. This means that the system does not represent the local citizens and does not voice their issues.

Most of the local citizens feel that there is no important information pertaining to the local reality they can research. If there is information on the governmental activities at the local level, the citizens depend on the interpersonal source (for example from an officer from the village and working at any of the local political institutions and who contributes to or has knowledge of the decisions pertaining to the local community. This person, through the word of mouth mechanism, transfers this information to the local citizens. Some citizens may want to know more of the political information pertaining to the local or national reality provided that these items of information are new. They said, "If something comes up, we receive it". Some of the participants showed their desire to acquire more political knowledge but they do not know what sources to depend on saying that, "we want to, but we don't know how to get it"

Though the citizens at the local level depend largely on the TV news Channels and talk shows as major sources of political information, the confidence rates differ from one group to another. Yet, the rates are generally low. Most of the groups are inclined to give a negative evaluation of these stations depending on the conflict in the viewpoints and ideas presented on each channel saying, "Each channel has its own opinion and this makes one's mind burst out". Another statement was as follows, "the media needs to be cleansed", and "there are many people on TV who tell not the truth". The citizens believe that the media openness witnessed in Egypt after the 25th of January revolution is not subject to the professional standards and that the

media is rather expressive of the political, economic and social elite that are close to the decision making circles in the capital in a way closer to the political propaganda than political information; the thing that made the citizens criticize the media.

As a result of this, the local political elite are negatively evaluated. This took the shape of the attack launched by most of the participants on the popular and executive leaders at the different local levels starting with the village and ending with the governorate. Besides, there is a negative trend towards the national political elite whether those represented in the representatives of these local communities at the central level (Parliament Members) or the central ministries. Some of the subjects' statements came as follows:

- "Those VIP are the ones who impede our life"
- "If they worked for the best interest of the country, we would be satisfied but this is not the truth."
- "We are speaking two different languages"
- "Everyone is concerned with his own interest and no one cares until a disaster occurs."

Through these statements the participants voiced the negligence suffered by the local communities. The local citizens' political dissatisfaction extended to reach the central political elite represented in the government and the ministers. It also expanded to include the local authorities and the local political elite represented in the governorate, the heads of cities and villages, the mayors and sheikhs. "No one hears from the people and the governor

does not heed the needs of the people," they said. Another statement was, "We never see them and they never mingle with people." "We see them only at the times of election to secure votes." All the same, some unofficial political elites were highly appreciated by the participants, especially by the illiterate women and those who have less degree of education. These unofficial political elites are represented by the VIP's; those are the ones often socially active in solving the social and economic disputes among citizens.

As for those who use the Internet, they showed relative interest in some of the problems suffered by their local communities and launched electronic initiatives like "Al Bergaya Sons Group" on the Facebook and the page entitled "Al Bergaya" to discuss and review the village problems. A group of female activists in "Al Dawadya" Village- one of the villages affiliate to "Bani Huseen village"- created a blog to discuss the social situation of women in their village.

From all the above mentioned, it is concluded that the traditional media that controls the political communication array in the local communities is not confided in by the citizens. Most of the citizens believe that the media does not express their issues or problems and helps them not voice their opinions. one says, "The internal affairs are marginalized."

The masses may follow this media to obtain the political information but they do not confide in the material presented by them and feels that it serves the best interest of the elites at both the local and the national levels. The Internet and its applications are not used on a noticeable scale for political

purposes so far as a substitute for the empowerment of the local communities to integrate their opinions in the public discussion.

<u>Third: the Effect of the ICTs on Citizens Interaction and Participation</u>

The concept of interaction is closely knitted with the ideas of the public should be viewed as different from the media audience. It is arguable that the public exists as a result of discursive interactive processes. This means that the individuals' consumption of what is presented by the media in an individual manner through their follow-up of the media does not result in the public. This idea reveals that the formulation of the public opinion basically draws upon people's participation in public discussions on the issues posed and this extends to a direct interaction with politicians and the political institutions.[40]

With the emergence of the ICTs, their role in developing participation in the local communities has become one of the most important topics in the western societies during the last two decades.[41] Some are of the opinion that the new media gives the opportunity to the locales to express their views locally and nationally as a means of integration and effective participation at both local and national levels.[42]

Some see that the use of the Internet can consolidate the community cohesion, political deliberation and political participation. This is basically dependent on the role that can be played by the Internet in enhancing the civic engagement. There are several practices that can lead to this end such as the establishment of community networks, the growth of the online political communities and the central and non-central governmental efforts that aims at

encouraging the citizens to participate in the process of decision taking through several mechanisms.[43]

Some emphasize that the emergence of the social networks has offered the citizens new patterns of civic engagement and extra channels of consultation, exchange of expertise and interaction with other citizens and other local communities. This facilitates the process of societal discourse, coming up with creative ideas, cooperation and participation.[44] Interactive patterns of online communication amongst the citizens and between the citizens on the one hand and politicians in local communities on the other hand can increase the interest in political matters and expand the patterns of citizens' engagement as well as help consolidate the sense of belonging and confidence.[45] It is arguable that new media could be used as means of furthering social and political transformation by inserting local voices and stories into national narratives as port of ongoing struggles for self-determination.[46] This means that it can offer communicative opportunities for empowering local communities.[47]

However, results of this study show that apart from the bilateral dialogues amongst the local citizens to convey the information relevant to the national issues, no effective political communication networks can be detected in the local communities. The elders, illiterate and women depend on TV to know the national political affairs and sometimes they communicate with their relatives and neighbors just to convey this information. Meanwhile, the youth and those of higher educational degrees – both male and female- exchange with their peers the political information and discuss them and never wait for

assistance in taking decisions. Most of the participants manifested an interest in the exchange of information pertaining to the national or central issues compared with the local issues, "If something happened in my village, I am not very enthusiastic to convey it," they say.

The results denote that women at the local levels, especially those of intermediate educational degrees and those illiterate still rely on the local political elite "VIP" who, for them, enjoy more awareness and the ability to judge the political affairs correctly. They utter statements as "The VIP's lead us, for they know what is for the best interest." That way the group of illiterate women or those who received lower educational degrees expressed themselves. These personalities represent traditional models active at the level of local communities, offer social services and help the local citizens solve their social problems. Sometimes, they even offer them economic support. Those representing the active frames at the local levels are of good reputation and are known to be righteous. They do not seek personal interests and enjoy a great deal of credibility. It is notable that those on whom some of the local citizens, especially women, depend do not represent the official political leaders: "the Mayor and the Sheikh of the town". "We do not believe in any one because most of them seek their own interests." "People confide no more in the mayor as they used to." "Though there is a head for the town, many of us disagree with him", "I insist that there is no one in this town I can follow, I take my own decisions based on what I watch on TV". This demonstrates that the direct interaction with the political elites is rather limited.

The difference between the local citizens is clear in those whom they may resort to so as to assist them in taking their political decisions. The less educated- amongst men and women- are inclined to seek the help of those associated with traditional values in the local communities that are often ethical ones like, "gallant, kind-hearted, helpful, honest, performing good deeds without seeking his personal interests." Meanwhile, the more educated youth is inclined to depend on those who meet professional standards like those who understand politics, those who are persuasive, reliable, realistic, and educated."

The participation of the local citizens in political institutions is rather limited as a result of the control of the traditional elite on the societal and political action at the local level or as a result of the prevalence of societal culture that hinders the social and political participation of women. Most of the participants do not engage in the local social or political participation. Yet, there are some of the initiatives that show the participation mentioned by the male group of those who have higher educational degrees if compared with women and those who received lower educational degrees or the illiterate despite the low rate of the societal and political participation at the local level.

The local communities' residents feel that they are politically ineffective at the local and central levels. Though some of them express their sense of importance at the time of national elections (The Parliamentary and the Presidential), they feel that this is but a temporal interest associated with the elite's harvesting the local citizens' votes so as to be their representatives in

the political institutions without caring about the local citizens. The results show the citizen's lack of interest in participating in the local societal and political events. This is evident from the opinions of the participants which they put as follows:

- "Representatives are already chosen by turn amongst the VIP's. They choose those close to them to hold offices."
- "whether we speak or not, no one listens."
- "I'd like to participate but they manipulate the results as they will."
- "I hope (to participate) but I cannot help it"
- "The village in general has no significant role and those with dough only have influence."
- "I feel that I have no role to play just like the other 30 million Egyptian who are of no influence whatsoever."
- "We will act as people do."

Others hold that their participation is important. They say:

- "My participation counts whether they care about it or not."
- "Yes, I count. If each one conveys a message to the officials, they will know all about us."

Some of the Internet users showed enthusiasm in participation. The answers of some of the male users demonstrated that the Internet gave them the opportunity to affect the local decisions via the village electronic group. This group includes young people and new societal leaders. It practices a sort of virtual political opposition to the local political leaders. Some of the

participants said that the Internet helped them be effective inside their local community. However, this remains on a very limited scale and does not represent a phenomenon in the local political communication system.

In sum, the interaction of the citizens in local communities with what is presented by the media is limited. Sometimes, they convey the political information without discussing it with the traditional social networks. Similarly, the traditional communication means offers no opportunities for an exchange of opinions and ideas on the issue posed. This is due to the inability of the means available in the local communities to guarantee that. Though the Internet safeguards the citizens' direct interaction with the information it offers and provides them with mechanisms of dialogue amongst its users and though it can be a tool of the political and societal participation, this is not realized in the real world.

Similar to this result, other studies demonstrate the limited influence of the new media in changing the patterns of political communication, a study conducted on the use of local communities of the web and social networks in 27 cities inside the EU states concluded that the availability of technology in itself does not guarantee its use for enhancing the political e-participation and corporate dialogue whether on the part of the citizens or the local political authorities.[48] Another study shows that the usages of the Internet and its applications have not created great changes in the traditional political system in Australia.[49] A Third study concluded that the availability of technology in the governorates was not effectively used by politicians so as to change the

pattern of political communication amongst citizens in the local communities and the local authorities in Egypt.[50]

Conclusion and Discussion:

The present study on the role of new communication technology in changing the political communication system in local communities has proven that it has limited influence. Compared to the role played by the Internet and social networks in changing the system of political communication at the national level in Egypt through its use as a tool of political communication prior to and during the 25th of January Revolution, the local communities have not benefited so far from the potentials of the technology such as going beyond the traditional patterns of getting political information, discussing, interacting to, and participating in them.

The study adopted the Dahlgen's model to analyze the effect of the new technology on the political communication system. The model includes three dimensions of analyzing the effect of technology on the political communication system. These are the structure, the representation and the interaction. This qualitative study has proven that the structure of the political communication system in local communities has not changed. Local citizens depend on the traditional media, especially TV, as a main source of political information while they rarely depend on the local media. The Interpersonal communication patterns are highly important in conveying the political information pertaining to the local public affair, particularly the services. Some of the university male graduates depend sometimes on the Internet as a

source of political information but on a limited scale. The results also demonstrate that the media express the political elite at the national level and are interested in the public issues without offering the opportunity for the local citizens to express their issues and voice their ideas concerning the national and local political issues. This is reflected in the lack of confidence on the part of the citizens in what is presented by the media and their distrust of the local and national political elites.

The local citizens who have the Internet service did not benefit from it as a substitute to change the traditional patterns and a tool for integrating their voices into the public sphere. The study also highlighted the absence of the mechanisms of interaction amongst the citizens in discussing the local issues and the absence of the opportunities of interaction with the media. The study also demonstrates that the local citizens have no great desire in the political and societal participation because they feel that they are not influential in changing the prevalent political situations. These results can be summarized by saying that the availability of the Internet in some of the sectors in the local communities did not affect a change in the political communication system in local communities.

Yet, the results show that the patterns of political communication at local communities have not reached the degree of the overall change. It follows that this phase is still a transitional one in which the traditional systems exist alongside the new ones. The rates of adopting these new systems differ from one society to another. There are several locales have not realized up till now the changes that occurred in the political communication systems or have no ability to deal with the new systems and patterns. The marginalization and

exclusion of some of the local areas- impeding them from being vital and effective in new technology uses for political purposes- represent a new form of divide that can hurdle creating a cohesive society.

These results may go counter to the hypothesis of the role of technology in changing the political communication system referred to by (Voltomer). Even those who have the opportunity to access the Internet in the local communities did not change their political communication mechanisms. Boulding believes that it has to be taken into consideration that the systems connected with individuals and establishments are not subjected to the same rules that govern non-human systems.[51] It is highly important to remember the applied aspects of the individual and institutional behavior that cannot be envisaged according to the rules of simple systems. This means that there may be political variables such as the nature of the political regime, the political will and the political culture; and social variables like the educational level and the nature of the social relations prevalent in a community that may play a role in negatively affecting the act of benefiting from technology in changing the traditional patterns of political communication in local communities. Johnson 2010 argues that many of the systems have some characteristics like the lack of harmony between its constituents, the absence of defining lines between it and other systems, the growth of or the emergence of subsystems, imbalanced interactions within the system or a change in the input in a way that renders it more sophisticated and makes its interpretation in a simple linear manner a non-realistic one.[52] Thus, the use of approaches that adopt the analysis of complex systems is the most convenient approach towards studying the modern phenomenon in which the

basic systems overlap with the subsystems as well as the other basic systems. This is supported with other studies within the same context denoting that the benefiting from technology is more to the interest of the rich and middle classes than the poor and the inhabitants of rural areas; and that the success in the use of technology to encourage the civic engagement has to do with the individuals and institutions that use them more than it has to do with technology itself, "technology determinism approach".[53]

In the process of change while overlooking the internal social and cultural factors that may have a great influence on the patterns and mechanisms of the use of technology leads to a sort of oversimplification in tackling complex systems.[54] Researchers should focus on assessing why the situation in local communities has not changed? How it could be changed? Who has the responsibility or who can support these communities to benefit from this new technology? The way to empower local communities might start with equipping them with communication and political knowledge to allow a greater and effective participation of the locals in the public sphere.

Notes:

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8. Karppinen, 2008, p. 31
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10. Chadwick, 2006, p. 22-33
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31. Pew, 2011b
32. Lyle and McLeod, Ibid, p. 83
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34. Ibid
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44. Chadwick, Ibid
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48. Bonson et al., Ibid,
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50. Saleh and Ahmed, 2009
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