Eastern Illinois University
The Keep

Masters Theses   Student Theses & Publications

1-1-2008

Collectively we unite on Facebook: A case study of Egypt's collective action on Facebook toward social change

Basma Botros
Eastern Illinois University

This research is a product of the graduate program in Communication Studies at Eastern Illinois University.
Find out more about the program.

Recommended Citation

Botros, Basma, "Collectively we unite on Facebook: A case study of Egypt's collective action on Facebook toward social change" (2008). *Masters Theses*. 110.
http://thekeep.eiu.edu/theses/110

THESIS REPRODUCTION CERTIFICATE

TO: Graduate Degree Candidates (who have written formal theses)

SUBJECT: Permission to Reproduce Theses

The University Library is receiving a number of request from other institutions asking permission to reproduce dissertations for inclusion in their library holdings. Although no copyright laws are involved, we feel that professional courtesy demands that permission be obtained from the author before we allow these to be copied.

PLEASE SIGN ONE OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS:

Booth Library of Eastern Illinois University has my permission to lend my thesis to a reputable college or university for the purpose of copying it for inclusion in that institution's library or research holdings.

Basma Botros

_____

Author's Signature   Date

I respectfully request Booth Library of Eastern Illinois University **NOT** allow my thesis to be reproduced because:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Author's Signature   Date

This form must be submitted in duplicate.

Running Head: COLLECTIVELY WE UNITE

COLLECTIVELY WE UNITE ON FACEBOOK

A CASE STUDY OF EGYPT'S COLLECTIVE ACTION ON FACEBOOK TOWARDS

SOCIAL CHANGE

BY

BASMA BOTROS

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIRMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER IN COMMUNICATION

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2008

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING

THIS PART OF THE GRADUATE DEGREE CITED ABOVE

Melanie Mills 12/11/08   _Mark Ag_ 12-11-08

THESIS COMMITTEE CHAIR   DATE   DEAPRTMENT/SCHOOL CHAIR   DATE

Copyright

Collectively We Unite on Facebook:

A Case Study of Egypt's Collective Action on Facebook towards Social Change

Basma Botros

2008

Abstract

The development of the famous social networking site, Facebook, has been associated with significant challenges to regimes that are characterized by being repressive to its citizens in terms of freedom of speech and expression, and mostly are third world developing countries that suffer. Egypt provides a good case study of Facebook ability to organize a strike among its citizens. April 6, 2008 is curved in the memories of Egyptians as a "general dissent day" that was initiated through Facebook and then was transmitted to almost every Egyptian citizen using other media sources. This paper shows how Facebook facilitates collective identity for social change. Qualitative research was conducted using a case study method in order to answer six research questions.

Acknowledgment

I would like to acknowledge and extend my heartfelt gratitude to the following persons who have made the completion of this Master thesis possible. I want to thank my Committee Chair Member: Dr. Melanie Mills, for her vital encouragement, assistance, constant reminders and much needed motivation. Dr. Mills and I have gone through a lot of challenges to make this thesis happen. She was always there, to listen, read and give advice. She was responsible in involving me into qualitative type of research and the love of writing in the first place. She taught me how to think outside of the box and against what it is typical. She helped me to break all the chains and to become creative. She showed me different ways to approach a problem, express opinion, and ask questions. I also want to thank the other two members of my committee, Dr. Mark Borzi and Dr. Rodney Marshall, who helped me with their valuable and insightful remarks, and who also helped me to complete the writing of this thesis as well as the challenging research that lies behind it.

My parents: Maged Botros and Mary Grace for their confidence and faith in me along with their constant support and encouragement. I want to thank them for giving me this opportunity to be well-educated and to become a better person. I might not have been able to make it if it weren't for them. They have put a lot of faith in me and I reward them with this thesis, for every advice they said, every prayer they made, and ever pain I caused them until I approached this step. My brother Sherif Botros for being the mountain that I lean on, as he always reminded me of being there for support when needed. Last but not least, I want to thank my faithful friends, who always listened to my complaints and frustrations. They might be miles apart, but never missed any chance to give some of their time for some spirit-lifting words. Most importantly, to God, who made all things possible.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE

Review of literature

Introduction

We are merging into a new era where technology has no limits and imagination is thus endless. The true reason for this technology advancement is the Internet which has made our lives easier and faster. Looking back in time, we will find many changes in our political systems that have resulted from being linked to a cause or as an adaptive mechanism to advancements in media processes. These changes included "voting, party identification, and national sentiments" (Benette & Entman, 2001, p. 1). Nowadays, technology is used to improve the quality of our lives and relationships which includes but is not limited to staying-in-touch with family, friends, colleagues and all of those people whom we care about or might care about one day (Hash, 2007).

Every day we hear, see or read about a new innovation that makes us wonder and leaves us with more puzzlement and confusion about the human mind and its capability to twist technology for serving mankind. "New technology has given us the ability to transform basic aspects of our lives: the way we converse and learn; the way we work, play, and shop; even the way we participate in political and social life" (Shapiro, 1999, p. xi). One of these innovations is the Internet, which did a great job in connecting people together, and enabled us not only to have friends in our community, but it also expanded our social lives to include those who live in other countries and speak other languages. Thus, it allowed users to "break down boundaries, erase distances, and build alliances" (Shapiro, 1999, p.120).

Social Networking

In recent years, the Internet has grown in its social networking value, with websites that connect people together. The most famous among these websites is "Facebook." Recently social networking sites became increasingly important and popular places for raising political awareness and encouraging collective action among its members. Gulati & Williams (2007) have argued that the Internet, in general, and social networks, specifically, have become major attractive sites for researchers like me and others because of the entire buzz aroused around it. Social networks are produced when a group of people, organizations or social entities are connected together to form meaningful relationships for the purpose of sharing a common interest. D'Amico (1998) has argued that "the Internet has become a prime venue for social interaction (as cited by McKenna, Green, Gleason, 2002). The Internet has made it easier for social networks to evolve and reproduce "through facilitating bonding without being in close proximity either spatially or temporally, across national borders and time zones" (Gulati & Williams, 2007, p.3). Social networks that are formed through the Web are called "virtual communities," which enable users to share their opinions with other people from all over the world who have their same interests. Thus, they initiate contacts with others and they control these virtual communities in any way they prefer (Gulati & Williams, 2007).

Facebook

Background.

Facebook, as reported by the New York Times (2008), was launched on February 4, 2004. When first created, Facebook users were merely college students who had a valid college ID in order to create an account and log in. Yadav (2006) explained that the idea of connecting with others proved to be so popular amongst students that it soon spread to other ivy-league

schools such as Stanford, Yale, and Columbia (As cited by Hash, 2007). Therefore, when its

founder, Mark Zuckerberg, a Harvard student at that time, sensed the great acceptance of his new

invention, he gradually began to expand it to include high-school users, which consequently led

to its growth (Hash, 2007). Finally, in September 26, 2006 Facebook was open to everyone

outside the .edu domain without targeting specific audience or restricting its membership to a

specific group (Gulati & Williams, 2007). According to Vogelstein (2007), Facebook popularity

has tremendously grown since July 2006. The number of users has increased from 7.5 million to

36 million users in August 2007 (As cited by Hash, 2007).

Facebook has many advantages that led Myspace, blogs and email users to switch their

activities from the previously stated sites to Facebook. The greatest advantage of Facebook is as

an "outreach tool", where users get connected to their old and current friends as well, in addition

to being connected with family members in an easier and quicker way than using regular emails

and chat programs. Sending messages on Facebook is easy, quick, casual and cheap. Most of all,

it has an easy-to-use homepage. Members don't have to worry anymore about expensive phone

calls with limited minutes and/or limited text messages, because Facebook is such a perfect

substitute. It also allows users to post an unlimited number of photos, organizing them in albums,

tagging other friends for sharing purposes and adding comments on these photos.

Users can add information about themselves that ranges between very personal like

religion, marital status, political views, birthday, email address, AIM, home address, etc. to very

shallow information about one's self such as: name, school, hometown, major, education, etc. In

both cases, users are in control of who can access their profiles and view their information. They

can choose a "friends only" option, "people in their same networks," "friends of the friends,"

"some of their friends only" or "none of them." Users can also post quick notes about anything,

and write their stories that reveal a lot about their lives and personalities. One big advantage of

Facebook is that it provides its users with daily "mini-feeds" that tell them what actions and

activities their friends made. These include but are not limited to: accepting friend requests,

applications being joined and used, games that are being played, comments that are being made,

pictures that are being posted, and any change occurred in relationship status (Hash, 2007).

Facebook groups.

One other thing that adds to the fun side of Facebook is the ability of its users to join

many groups that fall into their interest areas and which are centered on almost any topic in

different aspects of life (Gulati & Williams, 2007). These groups fall into categories that range

from music, dance, art, politics, medicine, love, loss, hope, innovations, countries, religion,

support, fundraising, jokes, petitions, self-help, and others. People tend to join groups on

Facebook that are sometimes against the government, especially in third world countries.

Basically anyone can form a group around any subject, especially since the process of creating a

group is simple and easy, but the challenge is to make this group becomes bigger by time. It

resembles a snowball, through inviting one's friends first and then each friend invites those

friends that exist on his/her list, it is that simple. Members of these groups have a complete

freedom of sharing their subjective opinions through writing on the group's wall, and others are

free also to reply back in an open discussion (Gulati & Williams, 2007).

Facebook unique features.

All of these stated features help in making Facebook a unique platform on its own

capable of competing with other major social networks. As noted by Shapiro (1999), the Internet

is considered to be an extension of mass media by serving as a TV, Radio, and newspaper, all in

one platform, which definitely encourages people to abandon these kinds of traditional media. As

Bill Gates noted: "We could give this big machine orders and it would always obey" (As cited by

Shapiro, 1999, p. 25). Thus, the Internet in general and Facebook specifically, are considered to

be of a great compliment to traditional media because they include specific features that make it

a unique medium, yet it also includes the features of the TV, Radio and newspaper "all in one

machine," which explains its high popularity. Through Facebook, members can watch videos or

even upload their own. Members can also listen to music and dedicate it to their friends, and they

can join many of applications that would provide them with daily news, alerts and updates of

what is going around them locally, nationally and internationally.

According to Alexa's (2007) statistics, the popularity of Facebook has gone way beyond

the United States, including other countries (as cited by Hash, 2007), People found in Facebook a

great help tool in their society to inform them of on-going events. People are more aware that

Facebook has the potential to go beyond its primary use for social networking due to its

capability of spreading the news to a larger number of audiences and in a very short time (Hash,

2007). For example, when the shooting at Northern Illinois University occurred, a group was

launched for the purpose of a nation-wide support to the parents of the students who were killed,

assuring them that there were people out there in this big world who are sympathizing with them,

besides strengthening the ties with NIU students who also needed to feel that they weren't alone

in this incident. At the same time, it was the easiest and quickest way to check on fellow

classmates, express sympathies and concerns through posting online memorials and prayers for

example. This new technology was the mean for students to build social ties and get connected to

other members of their society (Boogart, 2006).

Internet use is on the rise as a facilitator tool for social interaction and relationship

formation across intercultural and space boundaries. It provides its members with spaces to share

their common and varied interests, and users get easily attracted to it as they can share their personal experiences with others who might find those experiences useful. As a result, users get to know each other better and identify their points of commonality that enable them to keep in touch and to develop their sense of belonging to the group (D'Amico. 1998). Thus, they use it in their attempt to fulfill important social and psychological needs (Mckenna, Bargh, 1999). People get to join different Facebook groups according to their area of interest, especially those that fit their values, express their voices and most of all, is of a great use or importance to them.

People, online, reveal some intimate information about themselves when they have a sense of trust that is developed between them and other users online. It is known that the Internet can be deceiving, because of the hidden identity of its users. Usually, users do not disclose personal information about themselves immediately, but once they check other users' honesty and trustworthiness, they begin the process of disclosure deliberately and voluntarily (Derlega, and Chaikin 1977). Users are aware that sharing intimate information with anonymous people online is okay since they have no connection with their face-to-face social circle and thus they don't have to worry too much about 'social disapproval.' This process of information-sharing strengthens group members' ties and makes them more capable of standing collectivity to express their opinions and interest (McKenna, Green, & Gleason, 2002). Establishing relationships online is easier than face-to-face settings because people online don't have access to 'physical features' that play a role in the process of attractiveness (Mckenna and Bargh, 1999).

"The unique structure of the Internet allows individuals to easily find others who share specialized interests. We tend to be more attracted to others who are similar to ourselves and share our opinions" (McKenna, Green, & Gleason, 2002, p.11). Members of Facebook groups, especially regular ones, are motivated to transfer this on-line relationship with people of their

same interest into an off-line relationship. In other words, online users tend to transfer part of their activity into public and face-to-face interactions, instead of mere on-line ones (McKenna, Green, & Gleason, 2002). So for example, members of Facebook groups might hold regular or casual meetings to discuss topics, hold discussions, run an activity, visit a place or hold a 'real life' strike. Interpersonal relationships are the key element towards group formation on Facebook. A group is usually established by two or three people, these people get to invite others by disclosing some information about themselves and the main reason of the group, which leads to a consequent increase in member numbers, who has the same interest, to form a public sphere capable of creating a social change.

Facebook political features.

It has been argued by Shapiro (1999) that "dissidents around the world use the Internet to evade censorship and get their message out" (p. xi). Facebook also has a political capability, and it was obvious when in 2008 a group was launched on Facebook as a sort of support for presidential candidates like Barack Obama and Hilary Clinton (Hash, 2007). There are many groups on Facebook for supporting the Democratic candidates; the biggest group amongst all "Barack Obama (One Million Strong for Barack)" had 927,320 members as of November 2008. As noted by Hash "the phenomenal coming together of people is a vivid example of the power of Facebook's platform" (2007, p.3). Facebook not only encouraged its users to support candidates but it also encouraged them to share their opinions in the voting process (Westling, 2007). The voting phenomenon isn't a mere American thing, but occurred in many other countries outside of the United States, countries that might have not practiced voting in "real" life before. They found it a real opportunity to express in virtual communities. In modern democratic societies, access to communication is a bench mark for power and civil equality in the society (Benette & Entman,

2001). New technologies have led to a major transformation in the economical, social and political realities that we currently live. They not only provide a wide access to a variety of information, but they help in the immediate delivery of this information to many receivers (Ghareeb, 2000). The Internet is considered to be a "window" for people who live in Middle Eastern nations to breathe fresh air through. This air is unpolluted with their government's monopoly and monarchy because of the difficulty to control it. It opened a "door to the outside world," for Egyptians in order to observe and compare their state of affairs to other developed nations (Ghareeb, 2000, p. 416). Individuals finally feel free to transcend the barriers and stumbling blocks that have been put in place by governments and to express their opinions freely advocating human rights and encouraging the public to act on their own.

Public sphere

  Definition.

It is obvious, after the great advancements of the Internet that it could be of a great use to political campaigns through engaging the public interest in the campaigning process (Westling, 2007). The Public Sphere, as defined by Benette and Entman (2001), refers to "the areas of informal public life-from cafes, to Internet chat rooms, to the exchange of opinion in magazines and televisions talk programs-where citizens can go to explore social interests and conflicts" (p.2). People everywhere tend to take part in these public activities in order to be able to judge governmental policies and decisions with a total freedom and away from any censorship that is often found in traditional media (Benette & Entman, 2001).

  Background.

Originally, the concept of "Public Sphere" was developed by the German philosopher Jurgen Habermas (1989), who thought of the ideal Public Sphere as the equal access provided to

the citizens to any form of media to express their thoughts openly and deliberatively away from

the governmental chains, and through building consensus among citizens which will in turn

affect the choices and decisions made by the government (Benette & Entman, 2001). But the

problem is that the real world is never ideal and thus the notion of the "ideal Public Sphere" is

imaginary as well. Since we don't live in an ideal world, we need to collectively organize

ourselves in several Public Spheres according to our interests to express our needs, especially

those marginalized ones, which consequently will produce social movements capable of

producing social changes. So by definition, a social movement is "collectively acting with some

degree of organization and continuity outside of institutional channels for the purpose of

promoting or resisting change" (McAdam & Snow, 1997, p.xviii).

Every Public has one or several Counter Publics that come alive due to their tension with

other several and larger groups of Publics at the moment they are aware of being marked off

from the majority of people, and thus they become a subordinate or a subculture to the larger one

(Warner, 2002). Publics for Warner are mere fictions who come into being as a dynamic,

animated and multileveled group of strangers in order to be addressed. Warner argues that our

identities differ according to different contexts, thus our identities as Publics differ from our

private identities. Brouwer (2001) also offered a definition of Counter Publics as the expression

of opposition; when certain people feel rejected and marginalized from mainstream Public. This

constitutes a discursive space that consists of verbal, non-verbal, and visual communication.

Each Public engages in "dialectic" with several and multiple Publics in their efforts to prove

their existence. Pezzullo (2003) defined Counter Publics as a collective response to the

hegemony of patriarchal societies, due to the feeling of oppression and discrimination in the

hope of exerting social change. Her definition resembles that of Brouwer (2001), in which

Counter Publics are formulated through a discursive action (performance) expressing a specific opposition.

When applying the previously stated definitions to what is being explained in this paper, it will be found that there are some citizens who are active in their political participation and who are aware of what goes around them, and their needs are expressed clearly and sharply. These people are called "activists" and they are usually successful in altering governmental decisions and policies. They also "affect how much everyone else in society pays for taxes, gasoline, health care, etc." The Internet is the perfect place to do this (Bennette & Entman, 2001, p. 4) because it gives these "active" citizens the opportunity to communicate among themselves and help make the Public Sphere "come alive" by building virtual communities and generating new spaces, which serve their interests through their interaction (Benette & Entman, 2001). In his book, Shapiro (1999) found that online communities promise a lot in terms of "their ability to educate and entertain and to promote learning and even political change" (p.121).

Public sphere and its impact on the government.

Cappella and Jamieson (1997) found a connection between communication's impact on the government's policies and the Public Sphere because people evaluate communication in the public life and understand whether they are being deceived by the government policies or that it quietly represents their needs and interests. As Mueller, Kuerbis, & Pagé (2004), have argued, people are more aware now of their legal rights, these same rights that establish them as humans and citizens of a civic society. They are more aware now that their legal right to vote, for example, is not the only condition that makes their society a democratic one, because they are also aware that their vote is a passive one if there are only 'pre-chosen' candidates. But they also have the capability to organize themselves in several Public Spheres and express an interest

through a collective action that is capable of producing a positive outcome. They "promote ideas, ideologies, values, policies, laws or regulations that they believe will benefit society as a whole" (Mueller, Kuerbis & Pagé, 2004, p.5). Thus, people learn to judge their circumstances critically when they have the opportunity to look at those same circumstances elsewhere, and how other nations get to deal with it (Shapiro, 1999).

The Internet has many advantages over traditional media. These include but are not limited to being considered as a "many-to-many" communicative tool that encourages interactivity as is the case in social networks and group chats. Mass media like TV, Radio, and newspapers, on the other hand, are characterized to be "one-to-many" communicative tools, thus information moves in a one direction only. In other words, as noted by Lasica (1998), "the Internet puts the masses back into mass media" (As cited in Shapiro, 1991, p.41). Traditional media like press and broadcasting have some limitations imposed on what is being written or said, and it mostly serves a specific stratum in the society, or in other words "the elites." It serves those who have power and access to information, money and resources (Bennett & Entman, 2001).

The Internet helped in the spreading new social and political ideas. "They may also be changing the nature of the decision-making process in each country, weakening hierarchical systems, reducing the power of the state, and redistributing power downward" (Ghareeb, 2000, p. 398). The openness to new media and information technology led to the shrinkage of audiences who are exposed to traditional media that is highly controlled by governmental officials, especially since that traditional media itself could be found online, even a better altered version of it. For example, some newspapers would prefer publishing articles online due to the greater space of expression given to them.

Governments everywhere, no matter how liberal a nation is, may constrain its citizens

and marginalize their voices. Governments in the Middle East are becoming more worried

everyday of the Internet's implications and its capability to break down "authoritarian control, if

not totally undermine, the capacities of authoritarian regimes to blunt the circulation of opposing

views" (Rodan, 1998, p. 63).

Internet's impact on governments

Shapiro (1999) has argued that "it is not just a change in how we compute or

communicate. Rather, it is a potentially radical shift in who is in control of information,

experience, and resources" (p. xi). Each day, the Internet proves itself to be one of the biggest

nightmares for oppressive governments due to their limited control over the flow of information

in these nations. That is why most of the Middle Eastern governments apply contradictory

policies in terms of censorship and surveillance systems that vary widely, ranging from the most

loosely to the most strict and aggressive forms of censorship. "Governments continue to exercise

controls, because of the presence of 'objectionable' material ranging from pornography, to

libelous and other legally objectionable material; this also allows the authorities to restrict access

to political dissidents' messages" (Ghareeb, 2000, p. 415). Sometimes, citizens share in this

process of marginalization by abiding to certain taken-for-granted ideas without questioning or

even wondering about them. This will lead us to talk about the concept of "ideology" which is

defined as a network of shared convictions, beliefs, and attitudes that helps in shaping people's

identity and their way of viewing the world around them (Jasinski, 2001). People are muted

about ideologies because they are being previously interpellated in subject positions for social

cohesion needs (Althusser, 1971). Thus, we think and act according to some set of ideologies

that everyone believes in and that differ from one culture to another and are altered from one

generation to another. Ideologies outline ones culture and exclude others coming from outside of this culture. Habermas (1989) believes that through communicating with each other, people can reach a degree of consensus that would help in protecting them against what they take for granted. Thus, it is these processes of discourse among citizens that helps un-blindfold them.

Internet and the Public Sphere.

Communication is a way for people to express their interest and opinions and to learn how specific governmental regulations and policies could affect them in one way or another, either negatively or positively. Habermas (1989) mentioned that in order for democracy to occur, there should be multiple and different Public Spheres but overlapping and interweaving ones as well. Thus, Public Spheres are characterized by being in a constant change because of being socially constructed by the society and through the interaction of its citizens among themselves and also their interaction with media, which is shaped by power itself (Bennett & Entman, 2001). Boundaries that divide different Public Spheres are in a constant change which is decided and shaped by power practices in society. Mckerrow (1989) offered a definition of what he called a "critique of domination" and "critique of freedom." He mentioned that critique of domination is the repressive power that delimits people's potential through ideology in order to marginalize certain groups. The critique of freedom is the productive reflection of the self in search for what we take-for-granted in order to try to alter our realities in our favor instead of the favor of specific privileged groups.

The Internet serves as a great addition to the public sphere because it supports its multiplicity and changing nature. As been noted by South China Morning Post, "Internet and associated technology is like a snowball which is rolling and getting bigger. It gives everyone a voice, which is why it will still be going while those who seek to regulate it will have departed

the scene" (Rodan, 1998, p. 64). Users are provided with "communicative spaces in which to travel, visit, and participate" (p. 50). Not only that, but it allows users to launch their own spaces as well (e.g. webpage, websites, networks, groups, events, etc). It plays a great role in providing us with an infinite amount of knowledge and information that widens our worlds, enabling us to be more aware of what is going on and to have a firmer grip of everything around us, in addition to becoming more aware of what is considered to be acceptable and what is not in terms of governmental practices and decisions (Bennett & Entman, 2001). It is important to note that there are some changes that occurred in the political system as a result of the new media introduced in the 20th Century, most importantly the internet. These include, but not limited to, a) Weakened political party systems, b) offered a new platform for hate speech, c) stimulated a new capacity for grassroots democracy, d) permitted the third world to leapfrog painful stages of industrialization into an information economy, e) speed up the process of government responses to international crises precluding appropriate deliberation, and f) Limited the capacity of authoritarian regimes to control the flow of information within and outside their realm (Bennett & Entman 2001, p.299).

Online Activism

Internet technology is considered to be an important tool for activists to achieve their goals, especially those of marginal nature since accessing the net doesn't have any specific requirements, like TV for example, make them accessible only to a specific group in society. Thus, "Internet technology provides disproportionately greater benefits to traditionally weak actors" (Marmura, 2008, p. 248). It might seem normal for Americans to launch many online

"tical groups to express their opinions freely and publicly, but what is unusual is to find

from Third World nations are using Facebook as their sword for activism and

opposition against their current governments and rulers. Although the Internet in general and Facebook specifically are usually discussed as a medium for social interaction, it has been lately documented in news headlines such as BBC and Times that users in the Middle East such as Egypt and Syria, are using it as a medium for activism and facilitating social movements. Online social networking sites such as Facebook, encourage their users to share photos, comments, stories, and videos, have also emerged as a strong political weapon in third developing nations. "Technology has provided young people with spaces that transcend the barriers that nation-states might want to impose" (Ghitany, 2008).

CHAPTER TWO

Theoretical Framework

Uses and Gratifications theory

Blumler & Katz's (1974) theory of Uses and Gratifications takes a different approach

when looking at the media's role. Audiences are not anymore the "passive" receivers who are

waiting to be persuaded. Instead, audiences are active members who play a positive role in

choosing what to be exposed to when it comes to media messages. Thus people's communicative

actions are voluntary; they exert free will and make conscious choices, in order to achieve future

goals through strategic thinking and deliberative actions (LittleJohn & Foss, 2005). It is worth

noting that audiences are capable of forming independent and stable decisions even in very noisy

and politically manipulated nations. "Citizens often achieve impressive levels of rationality in

their political thinking, despite being bombarded with strategic and often emotional political

messages" (Benette & Entman, 2001, p. 7).

As New York Times writer John Tierney has noted, "Individuals are acquiring more

control over their lives, their minds, and their bodies, even their genes" (Shapiro, 1999, p.11).

The special features of the internet encourage its users to become creators of information

themselves, as opposed to being passive receivers of media content and mere slaves to the needs

and desires of the elites (Shapiro, 1999). The opportunity given to us through the Internet to

control the flow of information will allow us to "create new forms of social life and political

power" (Shapiro, 1999, p. 50). Through the internet, recipients not only choose what media

content to be exposed to, but they can share their immediate opinions, feedback, discussions,

oppositions, and/or agreement to what they have been exposed to, thus they are active

participants expressing a free will without any censorship.

Shapiro (1999) has noted that, "unfettered speech can shape and transform individual's expectations, giving them a renewed sense of the possible" (p.65). Focault (1978) argued that discourses help to produce, strengthen, or weaken power. That is why effective discourses are needed to challenge what people take-for-granted, and they become powerful the moment they question it and decide to do something about it. In order to try to overcome our senses of lacking power, "we transformed what were sources of confusion into sources of power" (p.28). Foucault (1978) also explained the powerful attribute of discourses through the production of new knowledge and not just explaining and manifesting existing ones. He argues that discourses are epistemic. They are capable of creating new meanings and exerting power through prohibition and exclusions. He views knowledge as an important term for exerting power over things and people, and when power exists through discourses, it encourages resistance and action (Shapiro, 1999).

Power of new media.

Activists are seeking to transfer power from the hands of large institutions into the hands of individual citizens especially those who are marginalized and voiceless. The Internet and other forms of new media helped in giving individuals this opportunity to "govern information, experience, and resources" (Shapiro, 1999, p. 10). It is important to mention that we are entering into an era where hierarchies are being demolished and gatekeepers are no more effective, diminishing the authority of many figures and institutions that mainly possess power and control resources. Virtual activists are really aware that there is a great connection between using the Internet and the increase of one's control over his/her real or external world (Shapiro, 1999). "Our actions online have a real impact on the lives of other human beings" (Shapiro, 1999, p.31) A simple click from one's computer, wherever one is sitting, can result in extreme control of

remote things that seemed impossible before, things like controlling stock prices, starting or

ending a war, taking an online degree, cheating someone, donating money for an organization,

making bombs, and so on.

With its global and potentially anonymous nature, the "Net can frustrate governments'

attempts to hold individuals responsible for their behaviors" (Shapiro, 1999, p. 63). Governments

are becoming more afraid of the power of new media (e.g. Internet) and the transformation of

power from their hands into the hands of individuals and marginalized groups in their search of

"democracy, free expression, and civilized life" (p. 41) that seems abandoned by traditional

media. It is obvious now that "each individual or group has the ability to disseminate speech far

and wide without having to get permission" (Shapiro, 1999, p. 41). It is this feeling of control

that makes them powerful and makes their voices louder through their collective identity in

virtual communities. Our desire to control is a human instinct that no one can overcome, and

when control is absent we normally feel useless, helpless and powerless. Thus, the Internet helps

us in satisfying this instinct by minimizing our sense of anxiety through putting us in charge of

everything, exactly as "the captains of the ship" (Shapiro, 1999).

Governments' attitudes towards the Internet

Reactions of governments differ from one nation to another. For example, Third World

nations might respond to any resistance from their citizens through force and aggression, while

other developed nations might respond in a different way, maybe through using speech or logic.

Some developing nations create Internet codes to block or alter some websites that could be

judged as "against the government" so its citizens won't have any access to these websites, and

thus people would never be able to question what they take-for-granted or don't know. New

media are considered the nightmare of current governments because of their ability "to challenge established political and legal institutions" (Shapiro, 1999, p. 63).

Regulations of the Internet.

Shapiro (1999) argued that there are some nations, usually developing ones, that force some regulations to limit the access of their citizens to some "inappropriate" Internet content. The most famous nations that apply these regulations are: Singapore, Vietnam, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Iran. It had been noted that most Middle Eastern countries that attempt to control Internet content by installing filters that would remove all inappropriate material. Allam (2007) has argued that countries on the top of the list that applies little or no filtering are: Egypt, Morocco, Lebanon, and Jordan. That doesn't mean that there is no surveillance applied to specific materials on the Internet that range from pornography to political opposition material. Any Internet users who cross the above red lines are exposed to detention and police brutality in these countries. Egypt is one of the countries that is considered to be the most freed country from Internet censorship in the Arab and Middle Eastern nations in its effort to be a democratic state that encourages freedom of speech and expression. President Mubark finds information technology capable of "supporting national efforts toward more freedom, democracy, and respect of human rights" (Allam, 2007, p.17). It is extremely easy for users to have an Internet connection at a low cost. All they need is a telephone connection in order to log into the Internet, it is that easy. It seems that it is hard for the Egyptian government to sacrifice its bureaucratic regime to keep its democratic image in front of its citizens due to the many challenges that it faces as a result of information technology.

Examples of some countries' Internet regulations.

Iran, for example, won't allow more than two members in a chat room, in order to avoid any source of disturbance and resistance that might occur when there are too many people in one chat room (Shappiro, 1999). In Palestine, the Internet is censored by Islamist militants who have shut down many Internet cafes as a result of its users being exposed to pornographic material and other material that is classified as "inappropriate" to agreed upon customs and traditions, especially Westernized ideas that are exported and implanted into the minds of youth through using the Web. Another example is Iraq, but Internet censorship is different there because it is controlled by U.S military. Many Internet cafes have been shut down as well in Iraq as a result of spreading and sharing news about plot attacks, and military secrets through the Web. Moreover, militants have used websites such as: Facebook, Myspace and Blogspot to show their pictures in military to their friends and families in their home countries, which would spread news about weapons that are used, for example (Allam, 2007). Tunis is another Arabic country that is located in North Africa. Tunis tends to block specific websites from the public use, and it holds owners of the Internet cafés as responsible for any users who spread oppositional material against the government. Not only that, but it goes further in criminalizing those users who cross the "red lines" by jailing them for expressing their opinions freely. Saudi Arabia is considered to be the strictest Arabic nation in its Internet censorship. It has blocked "thousands of Web sites that deal with pornography, religion, and human rights" (p.4) Medical Saudi students even complained that they can't view some material that is related to human body, or even some medical information about breast cancer because of the word "breast" (Allam, 2007, p.17).

It might seem true that governments in the Middle East are in control of information that flows from the Internet. What they are not aware of is that the people of Internet generation are

geniuses, and are capable of finding ways to "stay a step ahead of government censors," (Ghareeb, 2000, p. 416) through using new and advanced kinds of proxies that are produced each day. Users can also change their addresses on regular basis or use other Internet server providers that are free from the government control, or use public Internet cafes instead of home computers so as to make it harder for the authorities to track their information and actions (Ghareeb, 2000).

Bennett & Entman (2001) have defined "Public participation," as "meaningful for the outcome of the political process, for the individual's self development as a citizen, and for increasing the collective capacity of citizens to act on their own behalf" (p. 58). Thus, the Internet stands as a perfect opportunity for those who seek public spaces in order for their voices to be heard and their opinions to be generated, which will consequently affect their political engagement in real life and help in increasing their awareness against what they take-for-granted, which can then result in attitude change (Bennett & Entman, 2001). It is also important to note that State sovereignty is an important requirement for the development of a civilized place for the citizens to live. It is not a matter of mere control. Citizens should put in their minds that without the State power, their worlds would be barbarous places to live. There would be no specific laws to punish those who have done something wrong. Life would resemble an animal kingdom where those who survive are the most powerful (Shapiro, 1999).

We are in an era where we can access the internet anywhere and everywhere. There is not a matter of inconvenience and inability anymore. Since we are already receiving Internet in a handheld devices (e.g. Cell phones), which might have seemed impossible before, it is no wonder that we might receive it in other new interfaces in the future (Shapiro, 1999).

Research Questions

When Facebook emerged, no one imagined that its platform would be used to carry out real-life actions of political impact. In case of Egypt, I am interested in looking at the following six questions in order to be able to strongly support my extensive case study explanation with significant evidences that will be yielded after discussing those questions in details.

RQ 1: How did Facebook facilitate the production of a collective identity that moved people to collective action?

RQ 2: Why did Egyptians decide to do something about their life oppressive circumstances at this time, although they have been suffering for a long time?

RQ 3: Why did they choose Facebook specifically instead of any other media sources to prepare for their collective action?

RQ 4: How did Facebook facilitate a real-life strike?

RQ 5: What was the impact of the strike that was organized on Facebook?

RQ 6: What was the position of government toward Facebook after the strike had been held?

Case Study and Method

Definition

As defined by Stake (1995) in his book, "A case study is expected to catch the complexity of a single case." Usually, researchers apply case study methodology when there is a specific case that catches their interest, and stirs their curiosity to know about it more. It is "the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances" (Stake, 1995, p. xi).

There is an extensive platform of research already available which deals with related topics ranging from cyber activism, social movements, politics on the Internet, cyber space,

information and communication technology, information control, freedom of speech and expression, but there is little to almost no research about the impact of Facebook on facilitating the production of online collective identity for the purpose of expressing a nation's rights and performing social change in third world developing countries. Thus, the framework of this study considers the important aspects of Facebook that encouraged people, or in other words, pushed them to perform an action. Research on Facebook is relatively new, because not too many researchers are yet aware of its political and social impact especially in authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes. For this reason, performing an extensive case study as a research method for data collection is the best way to understand this phenomenon.

Egypt as a case study

As a framework for my case study, I have chosen Egypt as a site for my analysis. I want offer an extensive analysis of the Internet use in Egypt, specifically related to the recent real-life strike that occurred in Egypt on April 6, 2008 that was primarily organized through Facebook. The previously stated research questions are addressed by analyzing this strike and providing an exhaustive description of what happened. A brief background description about Egypt will be also given so that the reader will understand how the circumstances that fueled the strike that Egypt has witnessed recently constitutes a technological turn in this nation.

The strike didn't occur because of the introduction of computers and satellite systems but rather through the practices that are carried out using these devices. Egyptians decided to collectively act. They decided to introduce change to their repressive life circumstances and they found in the Internet in general, and Facebook, specifically, a tool for achieving that.

Background.

Egypt has the largest population in the Arab world, 81,713,520 people as of July 2008. It has a Republic-based government that operates as a semi-authoritarian regime and as a result, it allows some degree of expression and freedom of speech especially in non-traditional and independent media sources (CIA, 2008).

Thus, Egypt could be considered a "civil society," which prevails stronger in its system than in any other neighboring countries. It is characterized by a "multiparty system and an elected legislature but there is no real possibility of a change in power through elections" (Kalathil & Boas, 2003, p. 120). Mostly, election results have been in favor of the current president, Mohamed Hosni Mubarak, who has been ruling Egypt since October 1981, making him the longest ruling president. Egyptian presidents leave power upon only one condition; their death. There are many oppositional parties that work against the government, but most important amongst all of them is the "The Muslim Brotherhood," which is considered to be a political pressure group that includes leaders who exert a great force to fuel citizens against governmental policies (Kalathil & Boas, 2003).

Egypt is a monarchy as well as a poor country, as opposed to Saudi Arabia and/or United Arab Emirates, for example. Poverty as a consequence, helped fuel people with strong feelings to dissent and stand for their rights in order to elevate themselves to humanity level. It introduced the Internet technology in 1993, which is considered to be quite early, compared to its counterparts in neighboring countries. Not only that, but Internet users have grown from 560,000 users in 2001 (Kalathil & Boas, 2003) to 6,000,000 in 2006 (CIA, 2008).

Egypt and Internet use.

Egypt has changed a lot in the recent years. Cafes are usually overcrowded with Internet users who are willing to get use of a free wireless connection for several hours in return for buying a drink. Usually the famous Facebook homepage will be found popping up in almost every computer machine in the place. Amongst a list of the most country usage of Facebook, Egypt is ranked the 6th after USA, UK, Canada, Australia, and Turkey with about 396,200 users constituting by that 0.47 of Egypt's population (Ghori, 2007).

According to a 2007 statistics, Egypt has the most advanced web system, compared to other Arabic countries that don't follow any restrictions or any content censorship. (Ghori, 2008). Instead, it follows a system of surveillance that helps them in pointing out those who cross the red lines-ranging from pornographic materials to political opposition one-and as a result criminalize their online activities. Thus, Internet users-including political activists-who use the web to perform their social and political actions, are aware that any behavior against the government may led to their punishment. As a result, they take precautions measures to protect themselves, like logging onto the internet from anonymous Internet cafes under false accounts and several nicknames (Allam, 2007).

Brief back strong of April 6, 2008 Egyptian strike

April 6, 2008 is a date that will be remembered by all Egyptians. It is the day when they held a strike to express their outrage against their government policies, including price hikes of their food needs such as: bread, rice and wheat which constitutes a big portion of poor people's meals in Egypt, besides their willingness to strike against their monarchy regime that became widespread in Egypt. This strike didn't come out of nowhere; instead it was fueled by the 27-year old Esraa Abd El-Fattah, who launched a Facebook group that attracted over 73,000

members. As noted by journalist Mona Elthawy, in her article *Generation Facebook*, "Facebook is the stage for the latest twist in the generation gap, playing host to politically hungry young Egyptians eager to take on their aging leader" (Eltahawy, 2008, para.1). Esraa and her generation have known no other leader than their current president, and they were eager for change, eager to break their poverty chains, eager for establishing a real democratic environment that would enable a real voting process and real candidate alternatives, and many other things that they thought of as their normal rights in a civil society. One Facebook group member said, "If God created the world in six days, we can't expect to change Egypt in just one" (Al-Jazeera, 2008, par. 12).

Esraa, as well as many other Egyptians, found April 6 an opportunity to elevate the country's statutes to a higher level, until she had spent more than two weeks in prison where her ambitious faded away (Human Rights News, 2008). Before the strike took place, Esraa was detained and was taken by police officers from a coffee shop located in Cairo because of her ability to group people virtually under one purpose (AFP, 2008), Although the strike was a nationwide one, as it has been planned for, it mostly took place in Nile Delta city of Mahalla El-Kobra, "an industrial town 110 KM North Cairo" (Al-Jazeera, 2008, par. 2). This is considered to be the place of the biggest textile factory, and the strike has led to around 50 people being getting detained and more than 100 others were injured during the riots as a result of clashes that occurred between police officers and strikers (BBC, 2008). Strikers tore down President Mubarak pictures as a form of dissent against his regime. Also, workers avoided going to work at that day grouping in the streets, holding signs and chanting slogans against low salaries met by price hikes of food and lifestyle (AFP, 2008). As a result, police armed forces reacted back by throwing tear gas and rubber bullets at strikers in order to end their strike. Al-Jazeera

correspondent in Egypt, Amr El-Kahky has noted, "There is a combined frustration at the government failure to find resources to lower high prices and anger towards municipal council corruption" (Al-Jazeera, 2008, par.7).

As reported in Al-Ahram Weekly (2008), "Rumors abound that the government is considering closing down access to Facebook, the website that has become a favorite venue for Egypt's disaffected young……detention is only one card the state can play in dealing with virtual protesters. There is an ongoing debate over whether the regime intends to block, or at least strictly monitor, the Facebook pages that have become a tool in the political mobilization of Egypt's disaffected young" (Ghitany, 2008, par. 1 & 7).

After establishing the back strong, it is time now to devote the next chapter to elaborate on the strike case study in a more detailed and extensive explanation of what had happened and why.

CHAPTER THREE

Extensive case study narrative

Introduction

It was a sunny weekend filled with spring air and colored in rainbows due to the scattered

flowers on several trees that are planted along the way; some in red, others in pink, orange, and

yellow. The blossoming flowers and budding trees were enveloping me in a richly perfumed

scent. I stopped and tried to open my eyes and stare as long as possible at this magical nature; I

tried to gently breathe in as much as possible this sweet air in my lungs. It was such an awesome

feeling; it was refreshing and joyful. So, I decided that I should get use of this weather and go sit

somewhere outside. I chose to go to Cilantro Café; one of the stylish and most crowded Cafes in

Egypt.

Cilantro has a nice setting outside, about four or five tables set outside in the sun for

those people who don't enjoy the air-conditioned areas. As usual, it was just as crowded as every

day; it is surely a favorite place for many Egyptians. The air was filled with genuine smell of

Guatemala coffee that Cilantro is famous for, besides the smell of French croissant, fresh ham,

cheese, and the long menu just goes on and on. Starting from orange Juice and ending with

chocolate cakes with rich layers of Swiss chocolate. Along with the food smell, there was this

familiar smell of cigarettes and people's perfume as they were laughing and enjoying each

other's company.

It was not too long until the waiter reached me with his usual smile, "How are you today

Ma'am, what can I get for you?" I immediately replied with a smile as well, "great thanks, my

order is as usual." I have been a regular customer of this branch for a long time ago, and waiters

know me very well, and they know that I never change my order; hot cocoa and a strawberry

cheese cake, but they always ask me what I want to order, maybe in their hope that I would

chose something else from their long list. While I was waiting for my order, I kept watching

everyone in the Café, including those who were sitting inside, through the clear glass, and I was

astonished to see that almost every person or a group of people are sitting around a laptop,

giggling and staring at its screen. I wondered to myself, why they just don't do that at their

homes? Why do they waste their time to enjoy their day with each other face-to-face instead of

socializing with others virtually? I was just stunned with the famous Facebook homepage

popping up in the screens of the most youth sitting in the Café. Probably, they are getting use of

the free unlimited Wi-Fi that the place offers as a service for its visitors. Internet fees could be

expensive for some people in Egypt, where they either pay a monthly fee for their speed wireless

Internet, or they go for the other option which is the dial up, where ISPs offer users some

numbers in order to be able to access the Internet and the fees are deducted from the regular

phone pill, which becomes a disaster for parents when their kids spend hours browsing. I have

realized that Facebook became a fashion in Egypt; it is a way to show off among your friends

that you have an account, with hundreds of friends on your friend's list and joining tons of

interesting groups, and competing with those same friends in games and applications.

In Egypt, the Facebook phenomenon started as anywhere else; a tool for socializing and

networking with others from your country and other countries. It was not too long before

Facebook found another usage among Egyptians, which is forming collective identity in the hope

of social and political change (Fam, 2008). Egyptians, especially activists, finally found an exit

for them to use during an emergency alarm, a window where they can breathe from when they

become chocked by life's oppressive circumstances. It is Facebook that gave their voices a

courage to talk, and gave their bodies a push to act. It was their exit to better life situations and a

relief from their problems. I bet the Egyptian government didn't consider all the consequences it would face due to the empowerment of Facebook. They might have thought that it is "just a website of no possible or serious harm."

The story started when Egyptians felt a significant increase in the prices of potatoes, bread and gas. This increase wasn't a surprise for Egyptians that emerged in one day, rather it has become a lifestyle or a regular feature of Egypt; suffering from unemployment, which consequently lead to poverty. Poverty on the other hand, had been met by a hike in prices of almost everything in Egypt to a breaking point for the people.

The waiter finally brought my order while interrupting my peace of mind in which I was thinking about the current circumstances of Egypt. He asked me if I needed anything else, and I just shook my head in my attempt to encourage him to leave me alone with my series of thoughts. I took two sips of my hot coca; delicious as usual, but then I was interrupted again, not by the waitress this time but through this scene of three girls who were sitting in another table beside me. Unfortunately, I couldn't hear the girls' speech but it seems that they were busy with something on their laptop as they were really focused and unaware of other people around them. I leaned backwards in my chair as I was trying to figure out what they were giggling and anxious about. As I expected, it was the Facebook again that grabbed their attention and they looked as if they were transferred into another imaginary place. Still I could hear nothing of their conversation, all I could figure out is their non-verbal actions that were extremely exaggerated. They were whispering at each other ears, pointing at the screen and then laughing out loud. It seemed that the three of them shared a secret, and Facebook was definitely involved. I re-adjusted myself in my chair and re-took another look at everyone in the café, I wondered if Facebook was becoming a trend; a lifestyle of Egyptian youths daily routine? "The spread of the

Internet and related information technologies in the Middle East has drawn attention largely to their impacts on knowledge, attitudes, and practices," (Anderson, 2000, p. 419) which are obvious in the significant increase in the number of Internet cafes even though is still a limited number of population who have access to these new technologies.

While I was sitting at the café, I thought of the incident of April 6 strike, and how it was planned for. I imagined those same youth in the café being responsible for creating anti-government groups and taking on their shoulders the responsibility of changing Egypt into a better place. Egyptian youth, like me, have always dreamed of Egypt being a developed country; one that appreciates humanity and one that is a right-giver. Since globalization and the emergence of satellites, Egyptians have always longed for a place that resembles those countries they see on TV, magazines and/or the Internet.

They longed for better salaries for a better living. They longed for getting rid of unemployment and becoming productive citizens through having fair and better chances of work. Egyptians always dreamed of better education for their children; and who doesn't? Education is a basic wish for parents to their children, and to be proud seeing them better people in the future, capable of improving their country (Radsch, 2008). Egyptians always longed for better sources of public transportations, ones that are cleaner, convenient and more comfortable. They longed for better hospital services, ones that appreciate humanity and put treatment of patients as their main goal. They want justice to spread everywhere in the country, and those who don't follow the rules should be punished fairly without any favoritism. They need security and long for freedom and dignity. No corruptions or bribes. Simply, longing for an ideal country and since nothing is ideal, they would be more than happy to accept anything less than they wished for as long as they are treated as humans (Radsch, 2008). The longer their exposure to global media

sources, the more they dissent their life in it, besides dissenting the current regime that has been

long enough even before most of these youth have been born, so they never experienced any

other regime instead (Eltahawy, 2008).

Finally, my friend came to entertain my loneliness and share the good weather. His name

is Shaker. He is a college friend and he is among some of the other few friends who I kept in

touch with even when I migrated to the States. The reason that Shaker and I are still quite good

friends is that he not only has a Facebook account, but he also is an active member of it, which

means that he is usually online, he always posts pictures, updates his status, joins new groups,

and adds new applications every day. Shaker's Facebook profile is always problematic for me to

browse as it takes several minutes to download and view his page completely and be able to surf

it. One of the groups on his profile grabbed my attention and was called "April 6-A general

Strike." I had to ask him what this group is for, its theme, goals, etc. Since I left Egypt long time

ago, six years, I wasn't aware anymore of what was happening over there. I was only aware of

some headlines, but I was also missing a lot of details. So, here is Shaker sitting at the other end

of the rounded table in Cilantro Café, and after some warm greetings and exchanging each

other's news, I finally asked him about April 6, and if this date is considered important for him

and why? I was amazed with the speed of his answer; Shaker didn't even take time to think about

it. It seemed that this date had just been carved in his heart and memory forever.

Shaker paused for a little time; it seems that he went with his memory about a month ago

when the strike had taken place, and he then started explaining the April 6 movement. He

explained that it was open for all Egyptian citizens to join especially youth who are considered to

be the future of this country. For the first time in Egypt, you see people talking about nothing

other than the strike's news. Whenever you enter any place, you become a listener to the topic or

a speaker of (Nashwa, 2008). This group of youth may share nothing in common except for their

love of their country hoping for change. They may not belong to any political party and they may

not be even involved in politics, but they are insistent in uniting hand in hand to carry on what

others before them have left uncompleted. This group believes in their ability to change what

was their reality and/or taken-for-granted before, willing to give their lives for better future for

them and later generations (April 6 Youth Movement, 2008). Shaker explained that April 6 was a

significant day where Egyptians agreed to protest in a peaceful way so people wouldn't criticize

them for being barbarians, and thus their slogan was "Stay at Home, do not go out; Don't go to

work, don't go to the university, don't go to school, don't open your shop, don't open your

pharmacy, don't go to the police station, and don't go to the camp" (Radsch, April 2, 2008)." We

don't want blood, we don't want violence, or fighting, we just need our rights. This slogan has

been campaigned for in almost all media sources, including Facebook, which was an important

source of propaganda, besides, of course, private media that doesn't belong to the government

and that possess a good degree of freedom (April 6 Youth Movement, 2008). "The main

complaint is economic, driven by rising food prices, depressed salaries and what opposition

leaders say is an unprecedented gap between rich and poor" (Slackman, 2008, para 4). It is

important to note that over than a third of Egyptians live either below or just above the poverty

line of $2 a day (BBC, 2008).

Shaker and I were interrupted by the waiter again, who came to see if Shaker wanted to

order anything. Both of us leaned backwards in our chairs and stopped our conversation

suddenly as if we were doing something wrong. Shaker was whispering as if he was hiding a

secret from someone and I could barely hear the soft tone of his voice in the middle of other

people's loud conversations, laughs, and coughing. During our conversation, Shaker's eyes were

moving everywhere uncomfortably. It looked like he was checking people around us to make

sure that no one was listening. He made his order clear and quick to the waiter and he stared back

at him to make sure that he was at a quite good distance from our table, and then he leaned

forward again in his attempt to continue our conversation, but I re-interrupted him as I was

curious to know exactly why he was acting in a deviant way. Shaker replied in his low tone that

it was unsafe to talk publicly and loudly about political instances like this, and that he was afraid

that his speech might be over heard by anyone. I was really confused. If, as Shaker says, he was

afraid to talk publicly, how could Egyptian youth successfully organize this big strike then?

Shaker explained that Egypt has a great online-policy, which classifies it as one of the freest

countries in the Middle East. The Egyptian government doesn't block the access to any website

or censor any online content like Saudi Arabia for example, which makes people confused with

its false freedom. In fact, it is true that Egyptians can report, say or write anything online, but

they can be punished for their behaviors if they ever tried to cross the red lines that are taken-for-

granted between citizens (Allam, 2007). Redlines are those rules and laws-even unmentioned or

unpublished ones but rather taken-for-granted- that expects people to act accordingly, and if

anyone broke those rules, they get to be punished. These include anything that could pose a

threat upon the government or national security. Other rules deal with pornographic materials,

gambling, religion, gay/lesbian issues, violence and so on (Allam, 2007). In spite of what the

government calls "Internet freedom," online activists still get detained for their online actions,

because the government is aware of the Internet's capability as a political tool. It has power that

is capable of changing people's style of communicating (Kofman & Muller, 2006).

Shaker went on explaining the April 6 Strike that was led by an Egyptian woman, Esraa

Abd El-Fattah, who created and organized a group on Facebook under the name of "April 6-A

General Strike." It is uncommon to see women activists in Egypt, or women who take part in the process of change, so she was exclusively a unique case. Abd El-Fattah was detained, in a coffee shop near her work the day before the Strike took place and she was accused of masterminding a nationwide strike, causing disruptions and street riots (Kasinof, 2008). Shaker paused for a moment as if he was collecting the pieces of a puzzle in his mind; he wanted to provide me with every possible detail that he known. He looked as if he had forgotten to tell me an important note about Esraa. He quietly reported that everyone should understand that Esraa was an ordinary girl, a girl who took everything for granted like many Egyptians. Although she was a part of an oppositional party (The Tomorrow Party), her colleagues described her as the "Tomorrow's biscuit" as she always displayed sweet and good intentions to everyone, she never seemed aggressive or had any cruel intentions to disrupt the peace and security of Egypt's street, as she has been accused by authorities (Mukkaled, 2008).

The waiter came again with Shaker's order leaving me with a chance to grasp in what he just narrated so far. I found the story of Esraa is quite interesting. I even imagined myself being put in her place, but, not courageous enough to take on my shoulders what she did. I always preferred silence; I was a person who enjoyed looking at everything happening from very far away without taking part in anything. I always tried to seem uncurious about my country's life circumstance as I never believed in change or a citizen's ability to change the reality in any way. Thus, I feel very proud of Abd El-Fattah, a young Egyptian woman who performed an action that many strong men won't have the courage to do. Shaker disrupted my thought after taking a sip of his hot tea, and continued by saying that Esraa's group on Facebook managed to attract over 75,000 members who had the same intentions that she had. Her group took a U-shape graph as it began with a lot of members and then a lot of members also decided to leave the group when she

was detained and the strike was over. Then it has been getting re-crowded with members again, maybe because of the group's active effort to perform a new action every now and then. In spite of Shaker's hard effort to explain what had happened on April 6, 2008, I still felt that I was missing a lot of details. After talking for what seemed four or five hours, Shaker excused himself to leave as he had to do something else. I was left alone at the café again, and I was glad for that as I felt my head was going to explode from the too many pieces of information and too many questions that I was thinking of. I decided to leave in order to trace every single strand of missing information that Shaker couldn't provide me with.

April 6 movement

I finally went home after a long and interesting day. I was now curious enough to know what had happened in details, and the only way to know more was through an extensive and exhaustive online research about the topic. I had my laptop in front of me, and decided to begin with the Esraa Abd El-Fattah group, "April 6-A General Strike," which had a lot of information but unfortunately, it was all listed in Arabic. So, I had to go through a lot of translation in order to be able to provide some information from the group in my research. In order to understand the group's intentions and main goals, I had to go through its layout first. Its slogan was "come on Muslims and Christians, Egypt won't change unless we are united hand in hand together for a better future" (April 6 Youth Movement's, 2008, para 1). The group is calling for a peaceful strike, with no sign of violence. The only way for that is through staying at home so as there is no way for clashes between citizens and security officers to occur. Everyone should hang a black flag outside each home (Nabil, 2008). Also, whoever was going to take place in the strike was requested to wear black clothes or hang a badge of the strike's slogan on their clothes, and so on (Nashwa, 2008). Dina, one of the group members, wrote on March 31st:

The Egyptian masses have been suffering from an oppressive authoritarian rule for so long. But the conditions got worse and strikes became organized by non political activists such as strikes of workers and government officials. Given the deteriorated status many Egyptians from different backgrounds, those who belong to a political party and those who don't all decided to strike on April 6th. The idea of the general strike spread rapidly among Egyptians. As a response for that the Egyptian Government arrested 300 political activists from the opposition including "Kefaya" movement and the Muslim brotherhood. We'd like you to help us, the Egyptian youth who refuse to give up, to spread out the message about the strike and the government's reaction

The movement's group on Facebook

This group, as any other Facebook group, includes the following: Basic information section, recent news, discussion board, wall posts, pictures and videos. In the following lines, each section of the movement's group will be discussed in details.

Basic information section.

In the "basic info" section, some information could be found that describes the goals of the group. The founders of the group, who replaced Abd El-Fattah after her detention, had offered some links of websites that include live interviews with other activists, writers, and citizens who talk about the government and the national party. There is also a link to the official website for the for the strike movement itself under the name of "an oppositional movement," and then there is a link called "April 6 movement diary," where the main goals of the movement and the strike are listed in details. Also, there is a link for group members' emails, where members can provide their contact information in order to fully participate and became fully aware of the new activities, updates, and news. Finally, there is a section in the basic info part

that describes the rules for communication and discussions, which members should follow. These rules include: No discussions that belongs to religion or that compares different religions and which might aggravate hatred among members. Swearing and bad words are not allowed for any movement or oppositional party. When talking about a new movement, it is not allowed to talk about any other topics that might disrupt people's attention. It is not allowed to talk about personal matters or things that might hurt other people. Finally, those who won't follow the previously stated rules will either have to suspend his/her membership in the group or erase his/her posts.

"Recent news" section.

The next section is the recent news. This section included a lot of information about the movement's news, but there is one link that attracted my attention the most, which stated the following: "if you live outside Egypt and want to take part in change from where you are, but don't know what to do, enter this link and invite others," this link will lead you through another Facebook group, where active members are trying to take place in change as well, even though they are thousands of miles away from Egypt, or they might have migrated many years ago.

"Discussion board" section.

The third section is the discussion board, which includes over 7,000 posts as of October. 2008. One of these posts that was created on Nov. 3, 2008 and which grabbed my attention had the headline "Lucky Americans." In this post, one member explained that by Tuesday, all Americans will have the right to vote for their favorite presidential candidate. He explains his dream of the day where all Egyptians will be capable of freely choosing their president. He dreams of presidential debates between many candidates and that all citizens will be able to celebrate democracy and freedom of choosing. He dreams of the Egyptian flag drawn on every

Egyptian face, not just in football matches but in election places as well, as a sign of pride and

country's loyalty. You're lucky Americans. Another member replied to this post saying that this

is a beautiful dream, but Egyptians still have a long route to achieve it, and if people have died in

the past for freeing our country from external invasion, we will do the same to free our country

from the "internal" invasion, and oppressive circumstances.

I focused my search on the posts that preceded the strike by a week as I wanted to know

if people were really aware of this strike, what feelings, preparations, and slogans and so on.

Also, I wanted to find an answer for one of my research questions in which I am wondering

about how the Facebook group facilitated a real-life strike. I was amazed by the significant

efforts of the group to keep its members updated with all the details about the strike. This

information ranged from places of the strike, reasons and goals of it, political parties that are

participating, sources of media that support the strike, letters to the president, to how to react if

you they detained. Also, there was some information to enlighten the spirits of the participants

and encourage them that it is a real nationwide strike with some possible positive outcomes.

There were also a lot of posts from group members expressing their happiness in advance of

what was going to take place the next day, in spite of the possibility of being detained or tortured

as a result of possible riots. What I also found important is a note which was created by one of

the members including some advice for those who are going to participate in the strike. This

includes placing girls/women at the end of demonstration group so as if any clashes occurred

between police and citizens; they will be away from any hurt, detention or sexual abuse. If

anyone has a cell phone or any expensive belongings, leave them at home for the possibility of

being stolen. Don't push each other, instead; focus on achieving the goals of our movement such

as dissenting prices hike. Don't initiate clashes with policemen. Remember it is a peaceful strike.

The Facebook group also dedicated some phone lines for members or protestors who might get caught by police forces during the strike, in order to report incidents of arrest. The group also announced the information that a group of lawyers promised to defend the detainees who will be arrested in the strike on April 6, 2008 for free. This coalition consisted of a group of lawyers who are "interested in human rights and freedom enough to volunteer their services" (Al Hussaini, 2008, para 6).

Next, I started to research all the posts that took place on April 6, 2008. All posts, which exceeded the 300 posts on that day, were updates of the situation in Egypt's street hour by hour. Members who were participating in the strike were posting information and pictures from the demonstrations, encouraging people to hold on and to stay at their homes or to join them. They also included links from BBC and CNN talking about the Egyptian strike. Among the posts that I thought were important was an update of those who were detained in the strike. To my surprise, most of the group creators on Facebook were arrested a day before the strike, including Abd El-Fattah, which led other members of the group to post prayers and wishes for the detained people. Another post was by a member who accused people that belong to government of surveilling their online actions and reported them to the authorities, and accusing them of being un-loyal to their country and that whatever happened won't prevent strikers from continuing what they have already started. "The regime has consistently tried to contain the situation through a combination of repressive and conciliatory measures. Government officials have issued warnings to industrial workers that participation in strikes or any other protest activities would cost them their jobs. More often than not, security forces have been deployed to preempt or smother strikes" (Hamzawy, 2008).

The strike was divided into two parts, a stay-at-home strike and worker/activists strike in

Cairo's largest streets. Splitting down the strike into two parts was expected to have the most

significant effect for fulfilling the mission and goals of the strike. "Some schools cancelled

classes and told pupils to stay at home, possibly because of fears of trouble in the streets rather

than the strike itself" (BBC, 2008, para 13). Some of the pictures that were taken when the strike

occurred were able to capture this essence. It was unbelievable to find Egypt's most crowdest

streets were so empty. It might be evidence of people's solidarity by taking part in the strike and

staying at home, or because of their fear to go out for the possibility of getting injured or

detained (The Arabist, 2008).

Recently, Egypt has become a site for dangerous behaviors as a result of different kinds

of developments that it is witnessing. On April 6, 2008 a number of civil society organizations

ranging from independent unions, networks of young activists (some of them might belong to

political parties), independent media, and others organized a national strike day to express their

frustration with the current social and economic conditions that they are facing in Egypt. "The

government took the threat of a mass mobilization so seriously that it issued a warning to

potential strikers, saying it would take necessary and resolute measures toward any attempt to

demonstrate, impede traffic, hamper work in public facilities or to incite any of this" (Slackman,

2008, para 5). The Egyptian security forces were successful in their attempt to contain the strike

and crackdown the riots in most Egyptian cities and provinces. In spite of that, security forces

weren't able to stop workers-strike that took place in Mahalla El-Kobra, an industrial city in

northern Egypt. It has been reported that the workers-strike there was enormous, where huge

demonstrations took place (Hamzawy, 2008).

It has been reported that massive riots led to clashes between security forces and

protestors. There were numerous reports of violent confrontations and clashes between thousands

of protesters and security forces that went on for two days. "Riot police fired tear gas on Monday to disperse hundreds of people throwing stones in Mahalla el-Kobra" (Al-Jazeera, 2008, para 2). Witnesses also said more than 100 people were injured in the textile town. In Cairo's main square, there were also as many as 2,000 protesters who were gathered and got into clashes with police forces, about 50 more people were detained as a result of the riots that took place in Cairo and several other provinces because of the heavy police presence that pre-occupied the streets before even the strike took place and so strikes and demonstrations elsewhere in Egypt were cancelled (BBC, 2008).

"Wall posts" section.

After conducting intensive research on the Facebook group, through reading all wall posts, I found that members' wall posts exceeded the 5000 posts, and it started on March 22, 2008. On each day, the posts were more than 50 pages, with about 20 wall posts in each page. Every day that passes, the wall posts are increased, get more exciting, members were more optimistic, and were also more intense. On April 5th, I realized that members wrote different wall posts each minute. In each minute, about 20 wall posts were written from different members. On April 6, 2008, it seemed from people's wall posts that they started their organized move very early in the morning. At 12:00 a.m. members wrote comments about getting ready to leaving their homes to join El-Mahalla El-Kobra people. It is unusual to see women and girls leaving their homes at this late time, but it seemed that they did on that day. Everyone was willing to go hand in hand, even against their values, in order to say it out loud "We have enough." Slackman 92008) reported that "the center of this normally bustling, overcrowded, traffic-clogged city was largely quiet Sunday, the roads nearly empty, many of the stores shuttered, as the riot police

came out in force to prevent a general strike aimed at signaling widespread discontent with

President Hosni Mubarak and his government" (2008, para 1).

Overall, April 6, 2008 was a national battle, where all Egyptians were required to stand

hand-in-hand to defend their families, country, their kids' future, and country resources (Elaph,

2008). What happened on April 6, 2008 was capable of arousing more challenges in the face of

the government as a result of its monarchy power and oppressive regime. "Widespread public

outrage and a growing willingness by workers and professionals to press their demands by

striking" (Slackman, 2008, para 3). In the following lines is a summary of the April 6, 2008

strike as it has been reported by (Digiactive, 2008):

Description: Egyptian activists used a Facebook group, (April 6 - General Strike for the

People of Egypt), to drum up participation in a general strike on Sunday, April 6.

Organizer: It is unclear who first called for the strike, which was originally limited to the the

Mahalla El-Kobra state-owned textile factory in northern Egypt. From this strike, a general

solidarity strike was devised and several organizations became involved in promoting it,

including bloggers, members of the progressive group Kefaya (Enough!), the Muslim

Brotherhood, and the opposition El Ghad (Tomorrow) Party.

Purpose of Action: The purpose of the strike was to protest low wages and rising food prices

in Egypt, as well as to make a more general show of disapproval of the Egyptian government,

led by Hosni Mubarak

Organizing Tools: Facebook, digital images

Outcome: On Sunday, thousands of people participated in the strike in Mahall al-Kobra,

clashing violently with police. In other parts of the country, thousands of Egyptians skipped

work and school in solidarity with the factory workers, in spite of harsh threats from the government.

Ease of Replication: Starting a Facebook group is very easy, but coordinating with offline groups is also extremely helpful in getting people to attend a protest.

After the April 6 strike was over, the group announced another general strike that was scheduled to take place on May 4, which is the same day of the Egyptian President's birthday (Kasinof, 2008). The Egyptian Facebook group/movement had served as a significant sign of rebellion for several reasons. It challenged the perception that there is no prospect for independent, secular opposition in the country. "The majorities of Egyptians are under 30 and have known no other ruler than Mubarak. They have not seen real political parties because the government has long restricted opposition parties and free media. The Facebook movement engaged large numbers of youth for the first time" (Mansour, 2008, para 3, 4, 5).

CHAPTER FOUR

Discussion

Research question one

> *How did Facebook facilitate the production of a collective identity that moved people to*
>
> *collective action?*

Amira wrote on the Facebook group wall on March 25th, "I hope that all members could

spread the word to all their friends and families. We should make our voice heard by all the

people in the world." Also, Sakr wrote on the same day, "this group is the thing that we were

missing and needed many years ago. I hope that it is just the beginning for real change."

Members of the Facebook group, who created the event and who were the most people aware of

what needed to be done, agreed on slogans, themes and goals for spreading it as text messages.

They agreed that each member in the group should at least send the message to 5-10 of his/her

friends, so all Egyptians were aware of it as well. They also agreed on printing the slogans and

spreading them everywhere in the streets and hanging them on every wall. It has been also

argued through the group members that newspapers and channels reported the news of April 6

strike, which had an influence on other members to believe that this strike was a real one and not

just people who had nothing to do so they created the group. Not only that, but also some wall

posts exchanged the news of Egyptian immigrants taking a place in the strike through peacefully

demonstrating in front of their countries' embassies on April 6 to support their counterparts in

Egypt, which was a positive source of influence. One of the group members reported on March

27th that the group sent emails to all the famous independent TV channels, in their hope that the

news of the strike would be announced on TV. Not only that, but they posted some of these

email addresses on the group wall, so anyone would feel free to email them, believing that email

quantity would lead to dramatizing the event. They also created a topic in the discussion board

part so all of the emails would be concentrated in just one place. The emails included: CNN, AL-

Jazeera, Human Rights Watch, BBC, Reuters, along with many other news channels and

newspapers. Here is the message that was attached in every email:

> All national forces in Egypt have agreed upon the 6th of April to be a public strike. On the 6th
>
> of April, stay home, do not go out; Don't go to work, don't go to the university, don't go to
>
> school, don't open your shop, don't open your pharmacy, don't go to the police station, don't
>
> go to the camp; We need salaries allowing us to live, we need to work, we want our children
>
> to get education, we need human transportation means, we want hospitals to get treatment, we
>
> want medicines for our children, we need just judiciary, we want security, we want freedom
>
> and dignity, we want apartments for youth; We don't want prices increase, we don't want
>
> favoritism, we don't want police in plain clothes, we don't want torture in police stations, we
>
> don't want corruption, we don't want bribes, we don't want detentions. Tell your friends not
>
> to go to work and ask them to join the strike

For illiterate people, group members exchanged the news for raising awareness for

people who can't read and write about the strike's mission. These people might not possess the

resource (e.g. TV, Internet, radio, etc.) or time to know what is happening. So members decided

to talk about the topic loudly in crowded streets, coffee shop, taxis, buses, and so on. "To get the

word out, the Facebook group encouraged its members to use spray paint and banners to

advertise the strike. They wrote slogans on currency, choosing notes of the smallest

denomination to better reach the poor" (Knickmeyer, 2008, para 18).

Research question two

    Why did Egyptians decide to do something about their life oppressive circumstances at this time, although they have been suffering for a long time?

Individual demands of workers have been successful to be turned into a potential mass movement, because of food products inflation, including bread and cooking oil. "The rising cost of wheat, coupled with widespread corruption in the production and distribution of subsidized bread, has prompted the president to order a resolution to the problem" (Slackman, 2008, para 14). In my opinion, Egyptians had enough already and their sense of being handicapped had worn out their poor bodies. They didn't want violence; they only wanted to deliver a simple, but effective, message to the government. There is no need for angry and intense-faced security forces. Egyptians wanted to break the chains of their life routine and thus, they thought that staying at home and hanging the flag from a window or balcony, would be considered to be proofs to the whole world that Egyptians aren't barbarians but rather deprived of their rights, and maybe if they were living in a different circumstance they would be better citizens. I see it as a sign of patriotism and love for their country. Egypt is one of the countries that is witnessing a "burgeoning social crisis caused by out-of-control global inflationary pressures, a crippled welfare system and persisting high levels of poverty and unemployment is further complicated by a broader political deterioration" which questions the degree of stability that these countries, including Egypt, are facing (Hamzawy, 2008, para 1).

Egyptians have been suffering from oppressive life circumstances since many years ago and it is not something recent. Products' prices, including basic food sources, have increased significantly from one year to another. "Even Doctors have also threatened to strike, complaining

that physicians with 20 years experience, for example, often make no more than 450 Egyptian

pounds a month, the equivalent of about $80" (Slackman, 2008, para 12). Government statistics

had offered some figures showing the percentage of inflation (Shahine, 2008, para 17, 18, 19):

It hit 12.1 percent in the 12 months to February. Prices for dairy goods rose 20 percent,

vegetables 15 percent and cooking oils 40 percent. Analysts say they do not see Mubarak,

who will turn 80 in May, embarking on radical reform to ensure a more equal distribution of

wealth, or to revamp a dismal education system to sharpen the skills of the workforce. The

only successor under serious discussion is his politician son Gamal. Both father and son deny

(sic) any plans for such a succession.

In 2006, El-Shabab magazine (translated as Youth) included in one of its issues an article

under the name of "why people didn't do anything about prices hike?" which I found to be an

interesting article that could be used as evidence for how a Facebook group could be seen as the

main driving force for people to act. If people were having the same problems, and were facing

the same conditions, why did they decide to act on April 6 than years ago? This article has

included the opinions of some citizens. For example, Mahmoud said that satellite TV and

independent media channels have taken over a greater part of their attention that exceeds the

amount of attention given to the state media, since they are more appealing than traditional

media which played a great role in directing their interest to outside issues rather than the inside

ones. Montaser also blamed the media for the many lies and contradictions that they included in

their delivered information, which made it difficult for citizens-many who are uneducated-to be

able to distinguish between the truths and lies. Thus, people in Egypt see the media as an

unreliable source of information. He also said that some Egyptians are aware that the

government was not the only cause for prices hike and couldn't be blamed alone, as we are living in a globalization era and chose to fall within an open market politics, in which what happens inside the country is affected and can't be separated from what happens in the world around them. Montaser goes on explaining that he doesn't believe that a strike would yield any outcomes, and he advises others to go search for a second job that would become an additional source of income. Fathy, like Montaser, believes that holding a strike is nonsense since their voices would never be heard, and things will just stay the same. Deep inside of us, we will always have this feeling that life is led by and outside force that goes beyond our capabilities to change anything. The article had also assessed the opinions of some experts. For example, Dr. Hanaa, a professor in public opinion has defined public opinion as an opinion expressed by most people concerning a common event or a common case, which occupies their minds, and directs their attention and affects their values like prices hike, increase in bread prices, democracy and freedom, security, peace, and so on. This opinion is expressed in many ways including movements and demonstrations and in many other ways, and it increases with the increase of the dramatic events in people's lives such as the feelings of instability, wars, crisis, difficult situations, and so on. On the other hand, the outcome or the effect of expressing public opinion depends on the degree of freedom that each country provides to its citizens. Developed countries, which enjoy a greater freedom, care about public opinions and they get to measure it through public polls, surveys and questionnaires in order to be able to evaluate the activities of presidents, vice presidents, officials, governors, and so on. Adel, a professor in politics and media, adds on to what Hanaa has said, by discussing the role of media in shaping public opinions. Media could range from traditional sources, oppositional ones, and/or independent media. Moreover, family values, joining a political party, being included in a group of friends

and the personality are all factors that help shape people's public opinions. Currently satellite channels play the biggest role among all of the previously stated reasons in shaping people's opinions that people are willing to express. Sometimes people's public opinion matches that of the state and many other times it opposes it.

When they first created the Facebook group, many members thought it was an April fool joke, which is very obvious in their wall comments and posts. Wafeek, on March 25th said, "Are you really talking seriously or is just April's fool. I feel it is just a trick, and if it is a real strike, what proof can be given to assure us that is real?" Some couldn't accept the idea that Egyptians would be capable to perform a real-life strike especially that they are spreading the message through Facebook where its users from the Egyptian population constitute almost nothing of Egypt's total population. At the same time, Egyptians reached a point where even April's fool would seem ok if it was going to free them from poverty and repression.

Research question three

Why did they choose Facebook specifically instead of any other media sources to prepare for their collective action?

Every era is marked by a new innovation that goes beyond humans' imagination. Throughout the past years, almost every new technology was seen as the reason for a significant political, social or economic change. For example, "the printing press is widely believed to have contributed to the success of the Protestant Reformation. President Jamal 'Abd al-Nasir's skilled use of radio helped him to strengthen his popular base in Egypt and in the Arab world" (Ghareeb, 2000, p. 396).

Unlike traditional oppositional sources, Carr (2008) have reported in the "Daily News"

The internet has proved something of a more intractable 'enemy,' the anonymity of its users, combined with the visibility of measures taken to curb internet freedom has proved to be something of a conundrum for the Egyptian government, constantly trying to maintain a balance between quietly and clumsily quashing dissent while preserving an international image of Egypt as an investor-friendly, stable, democracy.

The American Wall Street Journal has reported that Facebook is not just a social-networking website, but rather that it has evolved as a social and political tool in some countries, facilitating collective action and creating in people the hope for change (Fam, 2008). The new generation of Egyptians are aware that the Internet and Facebook are new ways of activism; new ways of expressing an opinion with no possible chains to shut them up. At least so far, security officers cannot reach them through it, since its characteristics make it hard for them to be tracked (Elaph, 2008). Thus, some Egyptians have called Facebook new Oppositional Party that possesses the power to threaten the government, be it in a developed country or a developing one because of its capability to attract a significantly increasing numbers of new members each day and from all over the world (Asharq Alawsat, 2008).

Eltahawy (2008), a journalist who has been specialized in Arab news and who lectured extensively on blogging said that, "necessity being the mother of invention, led Egyptians to use Facebook to express themselves politically as well as socially," since there are only very few ways for Egyptian citizens to be able to stand up for their rights and express it loudly, and so getting hold of Facebook was very important to them since it provided them with some opportunity for freedom (as cited by Kasinof, 2008, para 8). Also, Abd El-Hai, who is an administrator for the 6 of April Facebook movement also reported that the "Facebook just became a natural extension of his political activities, because it is an easy way to connect with

other Egyptians who share similar ideologies....The first time I saw that it was a better way to broadcast my videos and pictures, and I started to write notes and I found that many people would make comments on my notes, some of them 200 or 300 comments" (as cited by Kasinof, 2008, para 9).

Human Rights Watch reported that, in spite of the developed Internet policy that Egypt has employed in 2005 and that explains rules and regulations of Internet access. Blocking websites are still "subject to executive authority regulations concerning sites that threaten the safety and security of society within the framework of existing laws" (as cited by Carr, 2008, 11). I think Facebook members in Egypt were deceived with a notion of false freedom that is given to its citizens from the state to citizens in terms of using the internet. El-Hamalawy is an Egyptian blogger who reported to Global Voices Advocacy (Al Hussaini, 2008, para 7) the following:

"We, the Egyptian bloggers, have always prided ourselves on the fact that we have one foot on the ground and the other in the cyberspace... But this time, it seems some have thrown both their feet as well as brains in the cyberspace and are living some virtual reality, mistakenly believing (helped by the media sensationalist coverage of the Facebook activism) that they are the ones behind the events in Mahalla" (Global Voices Advocacy, 2008)

In his attempt to calm down some of the group's members after many of the online activists were detained the night before the strike had occurred, Ali wrote the following on April 6, 2008 on the group wall: "it's practically impossible to identify your computers! Don't worry! Maybe they can see your posts, but they won't be able to identify your computers! It's practically impossible without contacting Facebook team itself, and accesses (sic) the website's access logs

to catch the IP addresses! - I am computer programmer." Of course it is hard to know for sure whether this group member is a truthful one or may be a spy for the State, as it is really easy to be deceptive online and to hide one's identity (Lu, Hung-Yi, 2008).

Even after the strike took place, Egyptians are still using the online social networking tool Facebook, even after the detention of many members, to reveal the government's attempt to muzzle the media and hush any information about police brutality that took place during the April 6 strike. "Internet users in Egypt have given the popular Web site Facebook a new role: a platform for political activism, such as promoting anti-government demonstrations" (Kasinof, 2008, para 2). It has been reported that the Web offers its users a safe political space-a role the mosque has traditionally played in Egypt. "With Facebook, young secular people can communicate, build relationships and express their opinions freely. Every member in the 100,000-strong online community could be, at any given moment, a leader of a movement" (Mansour, 2008, para 4).

Research question four

How did Facebook facilitate a real-life strike?

It has been argued that new technologies help in "creating new opportunities and new realities. It is also offering access with little or no filter for the exchange of information and opinions" (Ghareeb, 2000, p. 396). On the strike's group that was created on Facebook, Nassar, a group member, wrote on March 22nd.

I guess, a lot of people know nothing about the strike, but it is okay, we still have time. We have to write a statement and invite all laborers, workers, technicians and students to join and become a member in the strike. We should all help in spreading it (the statement), and we

should ask for support from all anti-government organizations as well as human rights

organizations.

Some people argue that it is impossible for Facebook to be the main cause of April 6,

2008 strike, since a big number of people in Egypt are poor and thus, they rarely have an Internet

access or even have some money to spend in an Internet cafe. In my opinion, Facebook should

be considered the main driving force for pushing people to dissent their life oppressive

circumstances. When I mention the word "people," I am aware that I am only talking about those

who have an Internet access and are literate enough to be able to use the online resource for

activism. I am also aware that this subculture that could be considered as representative of the

whole population because, they might be different in their educational backgrounds, but they

share the love of their country and are deprived of some common needs that they all lack.

Internet activists are the ones who take on their shoulders the burden of being the speakers and

representatives of those in the population who prefer to remain silent. Considering Facebook as a

main driving force in this strike doesn't mean that no other sources of message delivery were

used for the people who didn't own computers, have Internet access or can't read and write.

Other sources of propaganda were used such as privately owned TV-channels, privately owned

and oppositional newspapers, street banners, hand-to-hand slogans, speeches in religious places

(e.g. mosques and churches), speeches in universities and schools, spread-of-word in work

places, and so on. Each one of the previously stated sources of propaganda is capable of

initiating a nationwide strike on its own, and history has witnessed many strikes that were driven

by college students, mosques speeches, newspaper's headlines, and other sources. I also realize

that each of the previously stated sources have referenced Facebook as the main reason of this

strike, where the idea has been initiated in the first place and then was widely spread by other

sources. Thus, Facebook became "the official enemy of the state" (Egyptian Chronicles, 2008, para 1).

One of the political activists reported that she thinks that although only a tiny fringe of the population has access to the Internet and even a more tiny sample use the Facebook, she still believes that Facebook was the main mobilization source for the strike, since the 70,000+ members who joined the Facebook group acted as advocates for other people and they attempted to spread the word to everyone from taxi drivers to the breadlines (Ghariba, 2008). She went on explaining that cell-phones text messages were also used as a second source of word-spreading, since a lot of Egyptians, including poor people, own cell-phones. All of this lead to the awareness of independent media of the big event that was about to take place and that might be capable of changing what was always taken-for-granted.

All the previously stated sources are missing one important source of opposition and that is Political Oppositional Parties since Egypt is characterized to have a multi-party system. Egyptian Oppositional Parties are divisions that include members who are aware of their rights and who are courageous enough to dissent against the government and their policies. People from some of these political parties and movements went into the street to lend their support to ordinary middle-class people who are barely involved in politics, they just long for a better living (The Arabist, 2008). Egypt has many Parties but only one of these Parties belongs to the state and is dominant in everything and it is called "The National Democratic Party." In the following lines is a list of the Egyptian Parties and groups participating in the Strike. Kafiya (translated as Enough); a famous oppositional group that most of the population knows about and that had held many strikes before. The Muslims Brotherhood is another movement that is very famous in Egypt, where most of its actions are considered to be a troublesome for the state, since it is main

goal is ruling. It is "the only opposition group with a broad network and a core constituency" (Slackman, 2008, para 10). The Democratic Front Party, The Arab Nasserite Party, The Gad Party (translated as Tomorrow) and the list just goes on and on (Human Rights News, 2007).

The April 6, 2008 Egyptian strike had been uniquely prepared to be the first one of its kind in the Egyptian history. Citizens everywhere, were sent follow ups and updates before, during and after the strike took place. Most of oppositional newspapers promised citizens, with large headlines on its first pages, a huge raging strike to stand for their rights. They encouraged everyone to take part in it and emphasized that it is a time when their voice will echo everywhere for the possibility of changing state policies (The Arabist, 2008). On the other hand, state newspapers only were trying to freak people out by spreading the news that students and employees would be punished if they were absent from their classes or work, in the regime's attempt to crack the strike down (Egyptian Chronicles, 2008). The evening before the strike took place, a speaker from the Ministry of Interior was showed on the state's television, "telling people that they could get into a lot of trouble for participating in a general strike which wasn't going to take place anyway" (The Arabist, 2008, para 2). Civil disobedience is defined as a street-based collective action, for both making and reclaiming one's rights, which is the kind of action that was taking place in April 6 strike. It is usually organized through labor unions, crafters, professional associations, student unions, and ordinary citizens who are aware of their rights. Kifaya and other political movements take on their shoulders the responsibility of initiating this mode of dissent. These movements are organized by its members who "venture into the most challenging, the most difficult terrain: seeking to activate societal sectors unused to expressing opposition of any kind, whether street protest or dissent in salons and political parties

or writing letters to newspapers or joining a block association or any of the myriad other ways that politically aware citizens air their views" (The Arabist, 2008, para 12).

To sum it up, "internet activists depend on traditional methods to disseminate their ideas such as writing messages on banknotes, distributing leaflets, and sending telephone messages," (Fam, 2008, para 5) so, it is not only Facebook, but many other additional resources that were used to inform people about this strike. Still, we need to keep in mind that everything was originally done on Facebook first, and then members took it from there and spread it as widely as possible

Research question five

What was the impact of the strike that was organized on Facebook?

It is hard to know a definite answer for this question and it is even harder to decide if it was a mere success or a mere failure or both. Some people evaluate success by assessing the strike's outcomes, while other people evaluate the success of the strike by looking at people's ability to participate, and their capability of spreading the word. It might not have measurable outcomes at this time so soon after the event, but since they could successfully unite under one main goal, the next time might be more successful. The latter group sees the fact that many classrooms at schools and lecture halls at universities were nearly empty suggests that the call for a general strike had a real, widespread public resonance (The Arabist, 2008). The fact that the state made many attempts to crackdown this strike is seen as further evidence of its success. These attempts include officials ordering cell phone companies to block all text-messaging and voice services that were used to inform people about the strike (Knickmeyer, 2008).

Also, Facebook has been announced by state newspapers as a threat to governmental

policies. The April 6 strike at least shows that there is a slight attitude developing about Egyptian

citizens' willingness to speak for their rights, which is a thing that they haven't done for a long

time (Nkrumah & El-Sayed, 2008).

Although it was planned to be a general strike, April 6 ended up as a strike that occurred

only in some few but big places in Cairo, likely due to the news spread of activists and bloggers'

detention the night before the strike took place, which might have affected people's courage to

take part in it anymore since it was threatening to them (Al-Jazeera, 2008), which is still

considered an impact or otherwise the state wouldn't have thought about tracking down those

activists through their cell phone messages. For example, Esraa Abdel Fattah, the 27-year-old

Egyptian woman responsible for creating the Facebook group, was arrested in a coffee shop

close to her work and was charged for her attempt to organize and spread riots and for

encouraging behaviors that threatened the regime's peace and security on April 6. However, she

was released on April 23 after a personal note that was send to President Mubarak by her mother

asking him to have mercy on them and release her daughter (Kasinof, 2008). Eltahawy (2008),

an Egyptian journalist, believes that "Facebook is having that large of influence," she said.

"There is a tremendous ripple effect – those who read about the strike on Facebook will then tell

their friends and so on and so forth" (as cited by Kasinof, 2008, para 11). Melad is another

member of the Facebook group. He reported on March 22, 2008:

There might be one thousand or one million who will join this strike, but most importantly is

the continuous action and not the temporary one. Tomorrow we hold a strike, the day after an

opposition, and then a demonstration and so on, but everything should occur in an appropriate

timing. Our ability as citizens to change to the nation is going to be in a slow motion yet productive. Let us insert the first screw in the oppressors' back through our positivity and through our involvement in every opposing current, be it small or big.

It has been reported by the Washington Post (2008) that "the government took actions of its own as May 4 approached. Authorities announced bonuses for the Mahalla textile workers and a 30 percent raise for civil servants, defusing some anger over rising prices" (Knickmeyer, 2008, para 10 on p. 2).

Al-Gomhuriya newspaper (translated as The Republic), wrote in one of its issues that the Facebook should be banned due to its capability of being a national threat. In another Egyptian magazine, Rose El-Youssef, also described Facebook as a "secret room aimed at running Egypt" (as cited by Ghariba, 2008, para 2).

Research question six

What was the position of government toward Facebook after the strike had been held?

In the age of information revolution, Middle Eastern governments are facing challenges being imposed on them due to the open market era that we are living in right now. "Governments and businesses will face choices and dilemmas, created by the increasing interconnectedness of world markets and the decreasing ability of the nation state to control the information flow within its borders" (Ghareeb, 2000, p. 396). It has been reported by in one issue of the Los Angeles Times, that the "government of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak is considering blocking Facebook, the social networking website that has become a popular hangout for twenty somethings worldwide and a favorite venue for Egypt's disaffected youth" (Mansour, 2008, para 1). The reason "authorities had threatened to take tough measures action against anyone taking part in a strike, saying no public demonstrations would be tolerated. Strikes are illegal in Egypt

and in the past the government has ordered the police to break them up by using force" (BBC, 2008, para 10).

Fam (2008) reported that Egyptian government must have felt threatened as it takes the challenge seriously, because Egyptian security forces arrested the creator of the Facebook group, Esraa Abd El-Fatah, when she promoted for the Egyptian strike that took place on April 6, 2008 in protest of financial inflation and bad life conditions. Hossam, wrote on the group's wall on April 5th: "Judge Mostafa reported to Al-Ahram newspaper that anyone who will take place in the strike will be detained for a period of time that is not less than 3 months and doesn't exceed a year. Anyone who will not go to his/her work will be punished." As a result of this strike that had been held by opposition groups on Sunday April 6, 2008, President Hosni Mubarak announced an increase in State workers' wages that reaches 30 % (Slackman, 2008).

On the night before April 6, 2008, the police arrested many online activists in a meeting they were having in one of the coffee shops in Cairo. They had also put many national security forces that exceeded the number of demonstrators in order to be able to control the riots. Whoever participated in the strike publicly on that day was detained or threatened to get detained. Thus, one of the group creators called one of the group members on the phone in order to post updates about the strike. He warned everyone not to go protest in the agreed places as they would get detained, instead they should either stay at their homes and strike by not going to work and schools or go join other demonstrators in the lawyers' syndicate. The idea of arresting many activists the day before the strike occurred is a great evidence that the government felt threatened by its youth, and feared that they may produce riots that would be echoed all over the world through independent media, satellite TV and Internet, which led some national media sources to warn the state in its front headlines from Facebook and Internet activism: Most

official and state-owned media opened fire on the Facebook being a dangerous tool that threatens the status-quo of the government and its policies. Although the strike of Mahala El-Kobra is said to be very successful, "elsewhere in Egypt, protests against economic conditions have largely failed in the face of a heavy police presence. But traffic in Cairo was reported to be lighter than usual as many people avoided going to work or school" (BBC, 2008, para 2).

Even though activists have found a new way to dissent, government is still using traditional sources of responses to those who outrage, such as detention (Carr, 2008). Facebook activists are being easily "targeted by government-based media campaigns defaming the website and the youth activists who use it." The state also hushes the media and warns it against talking about the Facebook activism phenomenon (Mansour, 2008, para 6).

Conclusion

After conducting extensive research on the role of Facebook in facilitating a collective identity for social change in third world developing countries, I have come to the following conclusions. I was really amazed by the new technologies' ability to change the world, to change our understandings, traditions, customs, what is taken-for-granted and what seemed un questioned. I was also stunned by people's ability to invest these technologies to serve their special needs and the public interest as well. Throughout the whole paper, I tried to clarify the important role that Facebook plays in Egypt as a poor and monarch country. I never imagined that my online search of related articles about my topic would reveal so much coverage. Almost every international and national newspaper and other media sources mentioned something about April 6, 2008 strike that occurred in Egypt. Facebook shed the light for an era marked by the hope of change after it was almost lost with the restless life routine.

I also never imagined that people in Egypt would be able to perform this collective action, especially since a quite large number of the people in the population are poor. They might not have the access to these technologies due to money issues, and if they were able to access them, they might not have the time to waste browsing online, since a large number of Egyptians work extra shifts in order to be able to feed themselves and their children. Even if they had the time and accessibility, they might not be able to get use of it since most websites are in English and some of those people are still struggling in Arabic.

But all of the previously stated challenges didn't prevent the computer generation, those who are literate enough, to help raise awareness of other population sectors that might not have the time, money or literacy. Facebook for Egyptians was just what they needed. Facebook was capable of waking Egyptians from their long sleep.

Egyptians have longed for change for many years, but they were muted due to their fear of the state's regime. Some of them might have gotten used to keeping silent, others might have forgotten their rights, which evaporated with their dreams, and which again evaporated with the tight-life circumstances that they confront in their daily routine. At the end of the day, a comfy spot to rest one's head and a piece of bread seems to be the best wish for suffering citizens in Egypt, while thinking and mind-fueling seems not their best option after a long restless day of hard working. Even though a large number of Egyptians don't have online access, online activists and others who have access were successfully able to spread their message of dissent and their willingness to strike, which highlights the communication capability of Facebook in spite of its limited number of users from the Egyptian population. To spread their messages as wide as possible, members of the Facebook group all together decided to use only one agreed upon message format and send it to all media sources through using emails. They believed that

quantity of messages sent to every medium was able to clarify the importance of their movement

and which will also helps in breaking people's fear and encouraging them to act. Accordingly,

the Government reacted in many ways that shows the legitimacy of Facebook as a tool for

aggregating dissent. For example, the State had taken some measures to stop this strike before it

even begins, when the Egyptian interior minister appeared on TV and gave his speech urging

people to go to work, pronouncing that no strikes are going to take place on April 6, and he

threatened those who were planning to strike will be punished. "This reaction on the part of the

government authorities is not an indication of their strength, but one of desperation of an ever-

unstable regime" (Duval & Weston, 2008, para3).

On the night before the strike took place, a group of activists got detained in a coffee

shop where they were having their meeting. It has been said that "the government takes the

challenge seriously, pointing out that Egyptian security forces arrested a young girl called Israa

Abdel Fatah, after she formed a group on Facebook to promote for April strike in protest of

financial inflation" (Egypt News, 2008). Also, on the day of the strike, Egyptian security forces

occupied almost everywhere in large numbers that even exceeded the number of strikers, and

they were prepared to detain anyone who causes riots (Duval & Weston, 2008). So, the State not

only made the people suffer of tight-life circumstances, living in an era that is marked by a hike

in prices of their most basic needs, but the State also killed their citizens' political awareness, by

growing and increasing their sense of fear and dictatorship. Thus, internet was the activists

perfect medium to threatens and shake some of the state's control, through empowering citizens

as well.

This strike might not have been successful as expected, but one other outcome that could

be judged as positive is that Egyptians now know that they are capable of doing something big

when they unite and that the limited technology access doesn't prevent them from reaching their main goal one day. This strike may have been viewed as a failure from the point of view of some people, but it did confirm that Facebook is capable of fueling more strikers to dissent their life circumstances. It is not just a matter of developing countries, but Facebook is also used in many developed countries as a tool of expression and opinion-generation, which highlights the Facebook communication ability to unite a lot of people from different countries, cultures, ethnics, language for the sake of one main interest. This paper emphasizes the increasing significance of Facebook as a public communication tool and a platform for freedom of speaking. It comes of no surprise to find young Egyptian activists addicted to this new social networking site that gave power to their voices and that freed them from being muted due to their limited access to other media sources that are controlled by dominant groups.

Study limitations and future research

The Facebook clearly provides developing nations with what has become a new tool for organizing a collective action along with making use of other available technologies in spreading information. A confusing question will always remain significant when talking about the Facebook capability of social change. It is not clear yet if Facebook was capable of doing this change alone without the help of other available sources of message spreading. Thus, it will be useful to look at the use of Facebook in Third World nations but for a longer period of time that will help yielding better supported findings.

As it has been noted before, Egypt is considered to be a monarchy regime, which usually oppresses people's ability to express themselves and mutes their voices. People are used to acting according to what they take-for granted and they are aware that any behavior that might threaten the regime threatens them as well. As a result, many news articles, websites and/or

videos were deleted and/or not accessible to me and probably have been shut down by the State, which made my research harder since a lot of important information was missing or hidden for some reason, but fortunately there were other independent new sources and news articles that were available for me and that had full coverage of what happened in the strike, and which enabled me to elaborate my case study.

This paper has showed that Facebook is a social tool that is capable of producing a substantial face-to-face impact. Internet users in Egypt might not be a lot by they are also increasing significantly every day, not just in business offices, corporations, educational institutions and organizations but also at the grassroots level. Internet use in Egypt is moving from early pioneers adopters to local and dispersed users through time (Anderson, 2000). Facebook is on its way to becoming part of what Egyptians can take-for-granted as a tool of social influence in their country.

References

Ahead of strike, Mubarak raises some salaries: Egyptian leader acts after Muslim Brotherhood

    joins May 4 protest. (2008, April 30). *Associated Press.* Retrieved October 20, 2008 from

    http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/24390035/

Al-Hussaini, A. (2008, April 9). Egypt: bloggers on the frontline. *Global Voices Online.*

    Retrieved November 4, 2008 from http://globalvoicesonline.org/2008/04/09/egypt-

    bloggers-on-the-frontline/

Allam, H. (2007). Middle East censors seek to limit web access. *Human Rights Watch, 17,* 1-27.

Althusser, L. (1970). *Ideology and ideological state apparatuses' in Lenin and Philosophy and*

    other Essays. (B. Brewster, Trans.). London: New Left Books. (Original work published

    1971).

Anderson, J., W. (2000). Producers and Middle East Internet technology: Getting beyond

    "impacts." *Middle East Journal, 54*, p. 419-431.

April 6 youth diary. (2008, June, 6). *April 6 Youth Movement.* Retrieved November 6, 2008 from

    http://shabab6april.wordpress.com/

Bennett, W. L. & Entman, R. M. (2001). *Mediated Politics.* New York: Cambridge University

    Press.

Blumler, J. & Katz, E. (1974). *The Uses of Mass Communication.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Boogart, M. R. (2006). *Uncovering the social impacts of Facebook on a college campus.*

    Unpublished master's thesis, Kansas State University, Kansas.

Brouwer, D. 2001. 'Communication as Counter Public' in R. Asen and D. Brouwer (eds),

    Counterpublics and the State. New York: State University of New York Press.

Cappella, J. N. & Jamieson, K. H. (1997). *Spiral of Cynicism: The Press and the Public Good.*

New York: Oxford University Press.

Carr, S. (2008, June 2). Is it time to sign out of Facebook? *Daily News.* Retrieved November 11,

2008 from http://www.dailystaregypt.com/article.aspx?articleid=14149

Clashes break out in Egypt town. (2008, April 08). *Al-Jazeera.* Retrieved September 06, 2008,

from http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2008/04/200852513381016508.html

Clashes in Egypt strike stand-off. (2008, April 6). *BBC News.* Retrieved November 4, 2008 from

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7332929.stm

D'Amico, M. L. (1998). Internet has become a Necessity, U.S. Poll Shows. *CNN Interactive.*

Retrieved 20, 1999, from http://cnn.com/tech/computing/9812/07/neednet.idg/index.htm

Derlega, V. J., & Chaikin, A. L. (1977). *Sharing Intimacy: What we Reveal to Others and Why.*

New York: Prentice Hall

Down with the Facebook. (2008, May 8). *Egyptian Chronicles.* Retrieved November 20, 2008

from http://egyptianchronicles.blogspot.com/2008/05/down-with-facebook.html

Duval, J. & Weston, F. (2008, April 7). Egyptian April 6 - a dress rehearsal for bigger events in

the future. *In Defense of Marxisim.* Retrieved December 11, 2008 from

http://www.marxist.com/egyptian-april-6-dress-rehearsal.htm

Egypt frees Facebook activist. (2008, April 23). *Agence France Presse.* Retrieved August 11,

2008, from http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5i0fUBuQavwXZt1Et7k6JGFLbePKA

Egypt to raise wages after unrest. (2008, May, 1). *International Herald Tribune.* Retrieved

November 4, 2008 from http://www.iht.com/articles/2008/05/01/business/egyptecon.php

Egypt: Investigate Beating of 'Facebook' Activist: Authorities Use Intimidation, Violence to

    Suppress Online Advocacy. (2008, May 10). *Human Rights News.* Retrieved August 11,

    2008, from http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2008/05/10/egypt18800.htm

Egypt: Political parties law stifles opposition: Current law allows ruling party to exclude and

    suspend opposition. (2008, Jan 3). *Human Rights Watch.* Retrieved September 29, 2008

    from http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2007/01/03/egypt-political-parties-law-stifles-

    opposition

Eltahawy, M. (2008). Generation Facebook. *Agence Global.* Retrieved 26, 2008, from

    http://www.agenceglobal.com/Article.asp?Id=1555

False freedom, online censorship in the Middle East and North Africa. (2005). *Human Rights*

    News. Retrieved November 4, 2008 from

    http://www.hrw.org/reports/2005/mena1105/4.htm

Fam, M. (2008, May 1). Facebook becomes tool for activists in Egypt. *The Wall Street Journal.*

    Retrieved November 4, 2008 from http://news.egypt.com/en/200805042449/news/-egypt-

    news/facebook-becomes-tool-for-activists-in-egypt-wsj.html

Follow up: the pre-Sunday strike updates. (2008, April 4). *Egyptian Chronicles.* Retrieved

    October 20, 2008 from http://egyptianchronicles.blogspot.com/2008/04/follow-up-pre-

    sunday-strike-updates.html

Foucault, M. (1978). *The History of Sexuality* (R. Hurley, Trans.). New York: Vintage. (Original

    work published 1976).

Gates, B. (1996). The Road Ahead (rev. ed.). New York: Penguin, 1-2.

Ghareeb, E. (2000). New media and the Information Revolution in the Arab World. *Middle East Journal, 54,* 395-418.

Ghariba, S. (2008, April 30). Egypt: Facebooking the struggle. *Global Voices Advocacy: Defending Free Speech Online.* Retrieved October 15, 2008 from http://advocacy.globalvoicesonline.org/2008/04/30/egypt-facebooking-the-struggle/

Ghitany, M. E. (2008). Facing Facebook. *Al-Ahram Weekly Online.* Retrieved August 19, 2008, from http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2008/895/eg5.htm

Ghori, F. (2007). Facebook and the Middle East. *Zawya.* Retrieved August 14, 2008, from http://meventures.com/2007/11/25/facebook-and-the-middle-east/

Gulati, G. J. & Williams, C. B. (2007). Social networks in political campaigns: Facebook and the 2006 Midterm elections. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, IL.

Habermas, J. (1989). *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere.* Cambridge MA: MIT Press.

Hamzawy, A. (2008). Egyptians unrest rises with inflation. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.* Reterieved November 5, 2008 from http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=20181&prog=z gp&proj=zme

Hash, B. (2007). *The Facebook Frenzy: A Social Platform and the Society that Deems it Important.* Retrieved August 19, 2008, from http://www.bobbyhash.com/facebook/facebook.pdf

Jasinski, J. (2001). *Sourcebook on Rhetoric: Key Concepts in Contemporary Rhetorical Studies*.

    Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Kalathil, S. & Boas, T. (2003). *Open Networks, Closed Regimes: The impact of the Internet on*

    Authoritarian Rule. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Kasinof, L. (2008, April, 29). Egyptians use Facebook to deter censorship. *Middle East Times.*

    Retrieved November 4, 2008 from

    http://www.metimes.com//2008/04/29/egyptians_use_facebook_to_deter_censorship/209

    4/

Knickmeyer, E. (2008, May 8). Fledging rebilion on Facebook is struck down by force in Egypt.

    Washington Post. Retrieve November 20, 2008 from

    http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-

    dyn/content/story/2008/05/17/ST2008051702711.html?hpid=topnews

Kofman, S. and Muller, S. (2006, April 17). *Effects of Virtual Communities (Facebook/Myspace)*

    on Young Adults. Retrieved November 12, 2008 from

    www.eden.rutgers.edu/~skofman/myspace.doc

Lasica, J. D. (1998). "Goodbye, Gutenberg?" *American Journalism Review/News*, from

    www.newslink.org/ajrjd4.html

Littlejohn, S. W. & Foss, K. A. (2005). *Theories of Human Communication,* 8th ed. Blackwell,

    Oxford.

Lu, H. (2008). Sensation-Seeking, Internet Dependency, and Online Interpersonal Deception.

    CyberPsychology and Behavior, 11, 227-231.

Mansour, S. (2008, June 8). Egypt's Facebook showdown: The online gathering place for young people poses a challenge to authorities. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved November 14, 2008 from http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/la-oe-mansour2-2008jun02,0,323158.story

Marmura, S. (2008). A net advantage? The Internet, grassroots activism and American Middle-Eastern policy. *New Media and Society, 10*, 247-271.

McAdam, D. & Snow, D. A. (1997). *Social Movement: Readings on their Emergence, Mobilization, and Dynamics.* Roxbury Publishing Company.

McKenna, K. Y., & Bargh, J. A. (1999). Causes and consequences of social interaction on the Internet: A conceptual framework. *Media Psychology, I*, 249-269.

McKenna, K. Y., Green, A. S. & Gleason, M. E. (2002). Relationship formation on the Internet: What's the big attraction? *Journal of Social Issues, 58*, 9-31.

Mckerrow, R. E. (1989). Critical rhetoric: Theory and praxis. *Communication Monographs, 56*, 91-111.

Mueller, M., Kuerbis, B. & Pagé, C. (2004). *Reinventing media activism: Public interest advocacy in the making of U.S. communication-information policy, 1960-2002*. Report prepared for the Ford Foundation.

Mukkaled, D. (2008, April 2). Egypt's Facebook girl. *Asharq Alawsat*. Retrieved November 4, 2008 from http://www.asharqalawsat.com/english/news.asp?section=2&id=12582

Nabil, S. (2008, April 5). Egyptian political oppositional powers call for April 6 nationwide strike on Sunday (Arabic version). *Elaph*. Retrieved November 4, 2008 from http://65.17.227.80/ElaphWeb/Politics/2008/4/318792.htm

Nashwa, E. (2008, April 4). April 6 campaign against prices hike unites Egyptians and the

Facebook supports it (Arabic version). *Asharaq Alawsat.* Retrieved November 4, 2008

from

http://www.asharqalawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&issueno=10720&article=465531&f

eature

Nkrumah, G. and El-Sayed, M. (2008). Politicizing the Internet. Retrieved November 20, 2008

from http://www.weekly.ahram.org.eg/2008/894/prl.html/

Pezzullo, P. C. (2003). Resisting 'National Breast Cancer Awareness Month': The rhetoric of

counterpublics and their cultural performances. *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 89,* 345-

365.

Radsch, C. (2008). April 6th general strike in Egypt draws together diverse groups using newest

technologies. Retrieved November 5, 2008, from http://arab-

media.blogspot.com/2008/04/using-facebook-blogs-sms-independent.html

Rodan, G. (1998). The international political control in Singapore. *Political Science Quarterly,*

113, 63-89.

Shaban, M. (2006). An Important public topic. *El-Shabab, 350,* 6-8.

Shahine, A. (2008, April 9). Refile-analysis-riots shake Egypt's rulers, but no change in sig.

Reuters Africa. Retrieved November 18, 2008 from

http://africa.reuters.com/wire/news/usnL08511321.html

Shapiro, A. L. (1999). *The Control Revolution: How the Internet is Putting Individuals in*

Charge and Changing the World We Know. New York: Century Found.

Slackman, M. (2008, April 6). Day of angry protest stuns Egypt. *International Herald Tribune*.

Retrieved October 10, 2008 from

http://www.iht.com/articles/2008/04/06/africa/egypt.php

Stake, R. E. (1995). *The Art of Case Study Research: Perspectives on Practice*. Thousand Oaks,

CA: Sage.

Stone, B. (2007, Decmber 7). Facebook. The New York Times. Retrieved November 30, 2008

from

http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/business/companies/facebook_inc/index.html?inline=

nyt-org

The world Factbook: Egypt. (Updated 2008, September 04). *CIA.* Retrieved August 11, 2008,

from https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/print/eg.html

Tool: Egypt activists rely on Facebbok-what if it's blocked? (2008, June 3). *DigiActive: An*

World of Digital Activists. Retrieved November 18, 2008 from

http://www.digiactive.org/2008/04/06/tactic-egyptians-use-facebook-to-organize-strike/

Traffic history graph for Facebook. (n.d.). *Alexa.* Retrieved September 24, 2008, from

http://www.alexa.com/data/details/traffic_details/facebook.com

Vogelstein, F. (2007, September 6). How Mark Zuckerberg turned Facebook into the Web's

hottest platform. *Wired: Tech Biz.* Retrieved August 11, 2008, from

http://www.wired.com/techbiz/startups/news/2007/09/ff_facebook

Warner, M. (2002). *Publics and Counter Publics.* New York: Zone Books.

Westling, M. (2007). Expanding the Public Sphere: The Impact of Facebook on Political

Communication. *The New Vernacular*.

www.thenewvernacular.com/projects/facebook_and_political

What to make of the "general strike." (2008, April 5). *The Arabist.* Retrieved October 15, 2008

    from http://arabist.net/archives/2008/04/07/what-to-make-of-the-general-strike/

Yadav, Y. (2007). Facebook-The Complete Biography. *Mashable: All that's New on the Web.*

    Retrieved August 11. 2008, from http://mashable.com/2006/08/25/facebook-profile/