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The American University in Cairo  
The School of Global Affairs and Public Policy

**An Ethnographic Study of the Re-conceptualization of  
Opinion Leadership via Twitter amongst Egyptian Revolutionaries  
in The Post-Jan25 Revolution Era**

A Thesis Submitted to The Department of Journalism and Mass Communication  
In partial Fulfillment of  
The Requirements for the Degree  
of  
Master of Journalism and Mass Communication

By  
Hend AbdAlrahman AbdAlmotagally  
BA in Mass Communication

Cairo  
May 2012

# OPINION LEADERSHIP VIA TWITTER IN POST-JAN25 ERA

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**ABSTRACT**

This study applied the two-step-flow-of-information model within an ethnographic approach to explore the two-step-flow of information model for re-conceptualizing opinion leadership via Twitter in the post-Jan25 revolution era. The study is inspired by the 25th of January revolution that shackled many of the taken-for-granted thoughts and perceptions.

The study belongs to the new trend in media-audience studies claiming that with media convergence, 'the user is the tool,' and 'the sender becomes the message.' The data collection tools are (a) seven months of participant-observation conducted on a purposive sample of approximately 400 Egyptian tweeps, (b) online semi-structured interviews conducted with a purposive sub-sample of eighteen tweeps, and (c) seventy online questionnaires.

Four major concepts were examined; opinion leaders, leaders-followers relationship, linear versus circular flow-of-information, and the role of Twitter in the flow-of-information in post-Jan25 revolution era. Analysis found that Twitter is distinguished for its users' characteristics more than its technological features. Within Twitter, there are more of opinion-organizers, recommenders, analyzers, more than leaders.

Data imply that traditional media outstanding position in the flow-of-information model is challenged; it needs to go beyond having an online URL, Facebook page, or Twitter account, to upgrade its old rules and regulations, and the mentality guiding its performance, as well as to focus more on service and informational roles than publicity and manipulation. Indications suggest that Egyptian tweeps have a mutually equal leader-follower relationship.



*Alhamdulillah*

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**GLOSSARY**

<b>Tweet</b>	A Twitter post containing up to 140 characters in length
<b>@</b>	a) Reply b) When you're speaking to someone, a tweet directing to certain one. It is used in front of their username
<b>Dm/dm</b>	Direct message (when speaking to someone privately on twitter)
<b>timeline</b>	Display of successive tweets of your own, your friends, replies to you, or everybody on twitter
<b>tweeps</b>	a) People who tweet b) Twitter users. (There are also: fweebs, tweeters, and peeps, but this study applies the term Tweeps)
<b>RT</b>	Retweet . A tweet repeating another Twitter user's original post usually preceded by RT@twitteruser
<b>unfollow</b>	When a Twitter user decides to stop following other users

**GLOSSARY**

<b>#hashtag</b>	A marker using the pound sign, #, that prefixes a word or phrase to organize, track, or filter topics; hashtags often are in response to trending topics. Also, hashtags used in virtual campaigns and raising the awareness towards certain issue.
<b>twitpic</b>	A picture posted on Twitter
<b>Lists</b>	Timelines or groups twitter users create, consisting of people or organizations the users follows according to a certain category defined by the user.
<b>#FF</b>	#FollowFriday, every Friday, tweeps use this hashtag to suggest to suggest whom to follow on Twitter.

## **Introduction**

### **I. Background to the Study**

The 25<sup>th</sup> of January Egyptian revolution provides a culture-in-the-making context. The incomplete moment is worth documentation. As the whole Egyptian society's constant concepts are challenged, media studies are facing the challenge of dealing with the sophisticated sphere of communication; the empowered fragmented audience, new media tools including the social networks, and most importantly updating media-audience relationship theories. Among the cultural changes is the appearance of the so-called, the "Global Generation;" as stated by Addel A. Shah and Sheheryar T. Sardar in their recently published book "Sandstorm: a leaderless revolution in the digital age." Shah and Sadar expressed the notion of a "Global Generation;" who changed the concept of Revolution; "...the answer was more complex than just social media: it was a Global Generation that found its voice" (Sardar, Shah & Shah, 2011). This generation left Tahrir Square packed with the Tahririan spirit and style of communication which is based on equality, freedom of expression, objectivity, transparency, and the collective actions.

Thomas L.Friedman, the 'Foreign affairs' columnists for *The New York Times*, said, referring to the Egyptian uprisings, "... whenever you see elephants flying, shut up and take notes." (Friedman, 2012). Till the moment, the Egyptian young revolutionaries are struggling to continue their revolution at every square, school, university, factory, political and religious institution, and even at their homes, at the time in which there are large percentage of Egyptian Internet users who sign in to their virtual accounts for entertainment, relaxing, and social interaction, seek help or

purchasing advice, or any other activity that have nothing to do with political participation or self-expression regarding Egyptian public affairs. This asserts what W. Lance Bennett mentioned; "we must move beyond the distinction between on-and-offline relationships" (Bennett, 2005, p.217), because at the end, it is about the user not the tool. Besides, many of the online discussions directed mainly to the call for an offline move, and as well as that, many of the offline relationships have online extensions. It is as simple as saying 'whatever you do offline is going to form the majority of what you are doing online and vice versa.' The user of the tool is the leader of his own actions. This can be partially explained within the notion expressed regarding the power of the new media; according to Livingstone, new media has blurred the distinctions between the "long-established and traditionally-significant boundaries between distinct spheres...[including] the boundary between work and leisure, between entertainment and education, between the local and the global, between the producer and the consumer, between the adult and child, and between citizen and consumer" (Livingstone, 2005, p. 163). It makes sense now to state that new media has blurred the distinction between on-and-offline relationships.

The challenge between the people and the traditional legitimacies is the core of the revolution. Mainstream media is facing the new complicated rapidly changing and audience-automated context within which it performs. New active segment of the audience seek benefit from online social networks, as well as interpersonal communication, not only as alternatives lessening traditional media effects, but also as a parallel power countering traditional media manipulation. The revolution resulted from a gap across generations and caused a gap within the same generation, as well as, it reordered the society's relations, among them, is media-audience relationship.

All these aspects among other features characterizing the post-Jan25 era and require research.

## **II. Statement of the Study**

Twitter launched in 2006, the official website states that Twitter is "a real-time information network that connects you to the latest stories, ideas, opinions and news about what you find interesting" (Twitter, 2012). There were an estimated 131,204 Twitter users in Egypt between 1 January and 30 March, 2011 (Arab Social Report, 2011).

The development of new communication strategies among young Egyptians provides a rich context for analyzing the various types and the different directions of relationships connecting the varied means of communication and the fragmented audience in Egypt in the post-Jan25 era. As media audience *"is becoming increasingly fragmented, individualized, dispersed, no longer addressable as a mass or as a single market, no longer comprehensible as a social entity, collectively engaged and involved in a well-defined act of viewing"* (Stephens, 2007).

The fragmentation of audience at the beginning of the 90s due to the diversity of the available media means was the first phase of reforming mass communication-audience dynamics in Egypt, and it led the people to withdraw traditional mainstream media as their main source of information. Secondly, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century more private newspapers and satellite dishes widely spread, which led the audience to compare their content to what old media means used to provide. This caused suspicious among audience towards state-owned media as well as private media and its owners' interests that affect their agenda. Then the third phase was the

flourish of Internet usage among the young generation creating alternative user-generated news sources that led to having overdoes of information, then interpersonal information became a guider recommending sources and organizing the process of information absorbing. The online social networks gathered a huge spectrum of the Egyptians for various uses and gratifications, however, after the revolution; the whole concentration has been placed on the 'political-mobilization' ability for these tools. The current study raises the question about the interface between these online networks and the traditional media on one hand and the interpersonal communication including the opinion leaders, on the other hand. As stated in the recently published, the second Arab Social Media Report, 2012; "Egypt's [Internet] blackout lasted for five days, from January 28 – February 2" (Arab Social Media Report, 2011. p. 2). It is not only as stated by Dean Takahashi that by shutting down the internet, the government spurred "...at almost 60% of the sample (126 Egyptian and 105 Tunisian Facebook users) to be more active, decisive and to find ways to be more creative about communicating and organizing" (Arab Social Media Report, 2011, p. 7).

The paper explores the communication strategies in the post-Jan25 era in Egypt amongst Egyptian revolutionary tweeps. By revolutionary tweeps, the study refers to the heavily concentration on tweeting about the current affairs and the revolution. The study aims at examining the role played by the social networks, represented in Twitter, the online micro-blogging tool, in the flow-of-information in the light of the new context gradually emerging after the revolution. The so-called 'Tahririan' style of discussion has clear effects on the old form of conversations between Egyptians both across generations and within the same generation due to the division in the political



and ideological perspectives, regardless to age, the socioeconomic, and/or educational differences.

The theoretical framework for the study is Paul Lazarsfeld model (1948) the two-step-flow of information. The study is conducted within the ethnographic approach, a qualitative methodology focus on the people's own perceptions and perspectives. The complicated sphere of communication requires this approach that give a meaning to the chaos of 'audiencehood' and bring a zoomed-in image for media-audience dynamics.

The goal of 'ethnographic studies' could be as simple as 'conducting the study.' Ethnography in itself is a goal; describing a small-scale sub-culture within a community is the core essence motivating the ethnographer; "the ethnographer, [like an] explorer is seeking to describe a wilderness area rather than trying to 'find' something" (Spradley, 1980. p. 26).

Accordingly, the study ethnographically and within the two-step-flow of information model, is contextualizing the flow-of-information via Twitter amongst Egyptian revolutionary tweeps in the post-Jan25 era in order to:

(1) figure out the position of the 'online social networks' in the converged sphere of micro- and macro-means of communication, and (2) provide indications on to what extent does Twitter support the cultural change which is challenging the traditional opinion leaders-followers relationship on one hand, and audience-media on the other hand.

## **II. Theoretical Framework & Literature Review**

The current study aims at exploring the post-Jan25-revolution media-audience dynamics; the interrelationship between traditional mainstream media and social networks in one hand, and the relationship between these tools and their audience/users, on the other hand, in order to determine where exactly the social networks exist in the chain of the micro- and macro-media means of communication surrounding the people, as well as re-conceptualizing 'opinion leadership.'

As discussed in detail in the 'study design,' the study applies the 'ethnographic approach.' Ethnography is distinguished with the sense of exploratory and descriptive studies. In ethnography, it is preferable not to start with certain questions or hypothesis; rather, to extract both the questions and the answers from the social context studied, and to define and judge the familiar terms and concepts according to the people's own language and from the people's own point of view, as well as to describe the strange behaviors and phenomena within the people's own frame of reference and perspectives. However, for both time constraint and structure requirements, the ethnographer narrowed the ethnographic analysis to a fixed theoretical framework combining the two-step-flow of information model with the previous literature applied the model to Twitter. This chapter, therefore, provides a solid base for the analysis categorizing and data interpretation, however, without impeding the ethnographer from observing and exploring the macro-context within which the information flows and opinion leadership is practiced.

The chapter is classified into two major sections; the theoretical framework and the literature review. The two sections are discussed under seven sub-sections as following:

### **Two-Step-Flow of information**

In 1948, Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet published *The People's Choice*, a paper analyzing the voters' decision-making processes during a 1940 presidential election campaign. Lazarsfeld et al suggested that "ideas seem to flow from radio and print to opinion leaders and from them to the less active sections of the population" (Lazarsfeld and Katz, 1964, p. 32). It was described as the "decisive end of the hypodermic needle model... [The two-step-flow of information] implied that the mass media neither were as powerful nor directly influential as had previously been thought" (Rogers, 2003, p. 304).

Explaining the evolving of the two-step-flow model; Shaomei Wu and Jake M. Hofman, 2011, state that the division between mass-media-centered theories and interpersonal-communication-centered theories turns back to a more-than 60 years strive for answering Lasswell's maxim "who says what to whom in what channel with what effect." The two-step-flow of information model challenged the "Hypodermic Needle model" arguing that "the mass media influenced the public only indirectly... [as] the critical intermediate layer was occupied by a category of media-savvy individuals called opinion leaders" (Wu & Hofman, 2011, p. 705).

This two-step-flow of information equation has been transferred year after year with one little change in the means from radio and print to include television, then to use the general term media. The two-step-flow of information model in the Egyptian

literature is mainly applied in issues of social and cultural awareness campaigns, and making electoral voting decisions.

In 2003, when Rogers discussed the two-step-flow of information model as a widely tested model in diffusion of innovation studies, he stated that "the communication process does not necessarily consist of just two steps... In some instances, there may be only one step, as when the media have direct impact on an individual... In other instances, multistage communication process may occur" (Rogers, 2003, p.304).

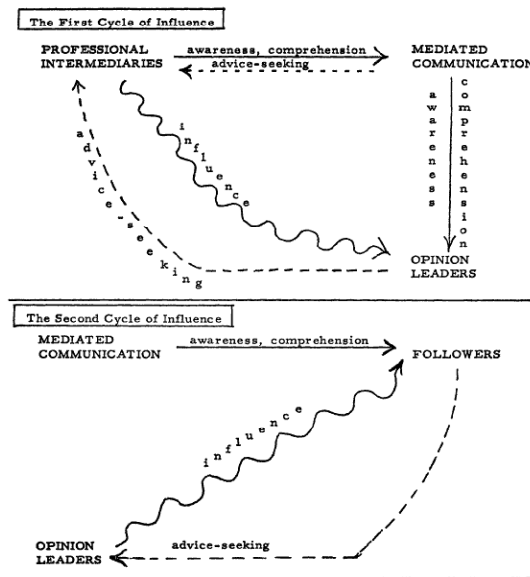
Phase one is a flow of information from the mass media to the members of the society which is assumed to be a one-step process of the communication models the flow of influence on beliefs and behavior which is assumed to be a two-step process. In a first step opinion leaders form their own opinion based on additional information provided by experts, such as academics, while in a subsequent second step they try to influence the behavior of their followers" (Brink, Rusinowska & Steffen, 2011, pp. 162-163). According to Troidahl hypothesis, the two-step flow is expected to operate only when a person is exposed to mass media content that is inconsistent with his present predispositions.. [Thus] opinion leaders are expected to seek out professional intermediaries for advice more often than followers will" (Troidahl, 1959, p. 613), but this hypothesis was not confirmed by the study's results.

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VERLING C. TROLDAHL.

1. Among opinion leaders and followers, exposure to mediated communication alone will induce awareness of message content.
2. Among opinion leaders, exposure to mediated communication alone will induce belief change. (This is not expected for followers.)
3. Followers whose present beliefs are inconsistent with observations and beliefs in a message are induced by exposure to mediated communication to ask for advice on the message topic. (This also holds for opinion leaders when they are performing in their role as followers.)
4. Opinion leaders who seek advice talk to "professional intermediaries" more frequently than followers do.
5. Opinion leaders seek advice for intimates less often than followers.
6. Opinion leaders and followers who ask for advice about the message topic after being exposed to mediated communication will exhibit more belief change than persons who do not ask for advice.

CYCLES OF INFLUENCE



**Figure I** Trol Dahl model: The "Two-Cycle flow of Communication Model (Trol Dahl, 1959)

Trol Dahl's contribution "provided a strong body of knowledge of how and why opinion leaders influence followers' choices" Brink, Rusinowska & Steffen, 2011, p. 163). Trol Dahl stated that "...reinforcement effects are expected unless the opinion leaders sought out by a follower has already completed an influence cycle that led to changes in his own predispositions" (Trol Dahl, 1959, p.613).

Six studies concerned with the diffusion of information about major news events concluded that "initial mass media information on important events goes directly to people on the whole and is not relayed to any great extent" (Troidahl, 1960, p. 610).

Applied to the two-step flow of communication, balance theory suggests that a person exposed to mass media content that is inconsistent with his present attitudes or behavioral patterns will experience imbalance... [and] one means of reducing this imbalance is to seek advice from his opinion leaders... [Accordingly] the second-step flow of communication will be initiated only by followers whose present predispositions are in conflict with media messages to which they expose themselves directly" (Troidahl, 1960, p. 612).

In 2008, the Washington Post website published a report titled the "Opinion Leaders: the circle of influence." The report defined opinion leaders as "the filters of ideas and information" (Washington Post, 2008). The report used the term 'opinion leaders' and 'agents of change' as synonyms. The unique point in the report is describing the relationship between media (represented in their website) and opinion leaders in the community as 'circular.' The report considered 'opinion leaders' as one of many other mediated channels between media (represented in their website) and the audience; it classified their website's tasks to four sequenced phases (1) shaping business and industries, (2) influence study and debate, (3) spreading ideas and expanding the conversation, and (4) influencing and setting policy. According to the report, opinion leaders exist within the sphere of the third phase; "[opinion leaders] rely on journalists and media to spread opinion and add to the debate" (Washington Post, 2008). The report, however, goes beyond the circular relationship to saying that journalists themselves are considered 'opinion leaders.' All these new perspectives

widen the sphere within which the whole traditional tools for sending and receiving information interact; mass media, interpersonal communication, opinion leaders, and recently the online social networks.

The model, undoubtedly, faces various challenges in the new context within which major technological changes challenging the “validity of the mass [versus] interpersonal dichotomy” (Wu & Hofman, 2011, p.705). In Egypt, as well as globally, the 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges include the innovative information and communication technology that allowed various new media means; “cable television, satellite radio, specialist book and magazine publishers, web-based media such as sponsored blogs, online communities, and social news sites [affording content to even larger-audience than mass media]” (Wu & Hofman, 2011.p.705), and with media convergence, all these changes lead to audience fragmentation, the generational gap, the within-generations gap, and have complicated the relationship between media, opinion leaders, and fragmented segments of the audience, as well as lessening, and mostly canceling, the myth of manipulating the masses' minds, and bringing new concept; “masspersonal communication” (Wu & Hofman, 2011, p.706).

Rogers expressed a similar notion; "the time sequence involved in an individual's innovation decision-making process [knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, confirmation] was ignored [in the original state of the two-step model]... such source/channel differences in the knowledge versus the persuasion stage usually exist for *both* opinion leaders and followers" (Roger, 2003, p. 305). However, Rogers' modifications remain stuck in the *direct linear flow* of information. It is a simplified explanation of the dynamics of media-audience relationship.

Regardless the length and number of steps in the flow-of-information path, the literatures follow a similar 'sequence number-step-flow of information model'.

No doubt, the post-Jan25 era is witnessing a situation in which the people formed a parallel power to the 'fourth power,' the mass media. A large portion of the Egyptian revolutionaries are not only 'indirectly' affected by media, or 'interchangeably affecting media,' but also, and most importantly, became a parallel power challenging media. This makes it urgent to reconsider the part about 'following' in the two-step 'flow' of information model; shedding the light on the mediated means of communication that connect the two edges of the model 'mass media and audience,' basically the 'online social networks.'

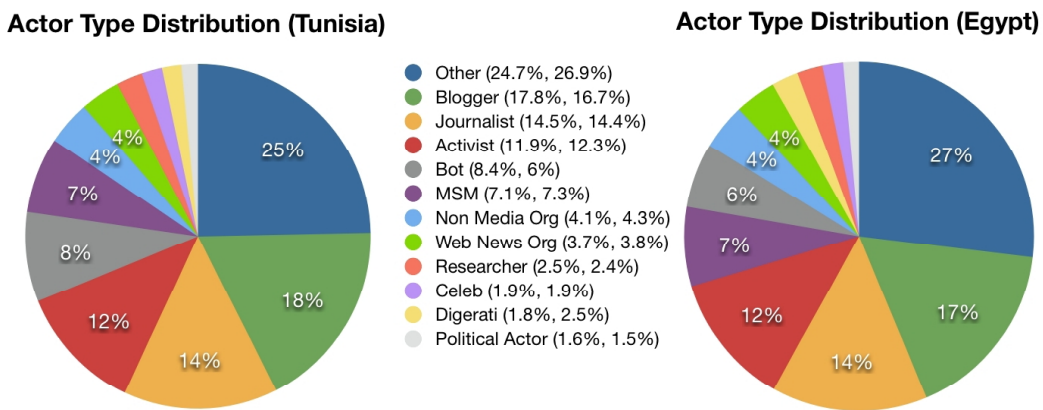
### **Twitter Users**

In general, Twitter users are seen as "less established, more dispersed groups" (O'Leary, 2011), who consists of "brightest minds, and business professionals [who knows] how to see the future use of a tool and become first in their field to use it" (Scoble, 2009, p.4).

Lotan, Graeff, Annany, Gaffney, Pearce & Boyd, 2011 classified them into 12 categories. They worked on two databases of Egyptian and Tunisian Twitter users; the first dataset includes 168,663 tweets posted January 12–19, 2011, containing the keywords “#Sidibouzid” or “Tunisia,” and the second includes 230,270 tweets posted January 24–29, 2011, containing the keywords “Egypt” or “#Jan25.” Then, 963 users total selected, from both the Egypt and Tunisia datasets, from those first to post in a flow, or were retweeted or mentioned at least 15 times, of these 963, 774 were part of our Tunisia dataset, and 888 were present in our Egyptian dataset; 699 (or 73%) of the



actors we coded were involved to some extent in both datasets. Finally, they categorized actors (bloggers, journalists, and activists) from each database into 12 distinct types (Figure. II). In the Egyptian pie chart, the 12 categories are divided as following: Bloggers (16.7%), Journalist (14.4%), Activist (12.3%), Bot (6%), Mainstream Media (MSM, 7.3%), Non-Media Organizations (4.3%), Web News Organization (4.3%), Researcher (2.4%), Celebrities (1.9%), Digerati (2.5%), Political Actor (1.5%), and Other (27%).



**Figure II** Actor Type Distributions for Tunisia (left) and Egypt (right)

Twitter users are classified in Wu and Hofman, 2011, study into two broad categories, “[1] elite-users: media, celebrities, organizations, and bloggers, and [2] ordinary users” (Wu & Hofman, 2011, p.707) encourages non-reciprocal sharing enabling rapid information flow which tailor the tool to be a more of a news-media and sharing-information network than a social network. Twitter represents "the full spectrum of communications from personal and private to ‘masspersonal’ to traditional media” (Wu & Hofman, 2011, p.706).

Applying Lotan, *et al* classification to Wu and Hofman study, it is implied that the so-called elite-users category contributed with the major percentage of tweets (73%)

during the revolution in Egypt, the category of “Other” representing the “ordinary users” contributed with 27% which is less than the elite-users collective contribution but more than any of the elite-users category’s single component; for instance, bloggers contributed with only (16.7%), and activists contributed with only (12.3%).

Information ‘cascades’ is a way of the flow-of-information. One definition for ‘information cascades’ is that they are “situations where it is optimal for an individual, having observed the actions of others ahead of him, to follow the behavior of the preceding individual without regard to his own information” (Lotan, 2011, p.23). Twitter provides three major features representing the ‘Information cascades;’ (1) **Retweeting**, reposting the content while referencing either the source of the content or the last person who shared it (Lotan, 2011, p.23), (2) the **Hashtags**, makes it easier for participants to follow content on a particular topic, and (3) **Trends**, feature highlights content that is collectively on a topic that is statistically outstanding within the data (Lotan, 2011, p.23).

When it comes to how to quantify influence on Twitter, Meeyoung Cha, Hamed Haddadi, Fabricio Benevenuto, Krishna P. Gummadi (2010) study implies that influence on Twitter is indicated by the direct links shared among Twitter users. The literature highlights three main measures: in-degree (number of followers), retweets, mentions, and TunkRank (takes into account followers of followers) (Lotan, Graeff, Annany, Gaffney, Pearce & Boyd, 2011, p. 8). However, it is worth noting that these features reflect different meanings which result in little overlap between the top users on every measure; the ‘in-degree’ represents popularity of a user; the ‘retweets’ represent the content value of one’s

tweets; and the ‘mentions’ represent the name value of a user” (Cha, Haddadi, Benevenuto & Gummadi, 2010).

Twitter, without requiring reciprocity, enables its users to “follow” other users. The study of Lotan, Graeff, et al, defines ‘information flow’ as “an ordered set of near-duplicate tweets” (Lotan, Graeff, Annany, Gaffney, Pearce & Boyd, 2011, p.7), and applying this definition implied that “[only] a handful of users with millions of followers [broadcasting messages that are widely received], while the majority of users only have dozens of followers [with smaller spheres of influence]” (Lotan, Graeff, Annany, Gaffney, Pearce & Boyd, 2011, p.4).

### **Twitter and Flow-of-Information**

According to Twitter official website; Twitter is “a real-time information network that connects you to the latest stories, ideas, opinions and news about what you find interesting” (Twitter, 2012).

The second edition of the “Arab Social Media Report, 2011” conducted by Dubai School of Government’s Governance, analyzed data on Twitter and Facebook users in Egypt among other 25 countries. The report states that both the governments and their people made use of the social media, each for different reasons; “the first three months of 2011 saw what can only be termed a substantial shift in the Arab world’s usage of social media towards online social and civil mobilization online, whether by citizens — to organize demonstrations (both pro- and anti-government), disseminate information within their networks, and raise awareness of ongoing events locally and globally – or by governments, in some cases to engage with citizens and encourage their participation in government processes, while in other cases to block access to

websites and monitor and control information on these sites” (Arab Social Media Report, 2011, p.2).

In Wu and Hofman study, answering the question ‘who says what to whom in Twitter,’ the result supports the two-step-flow of information model as stating that “almost half the information that originates from the media passes to the masses indirectly via a diffuse intermediate layer of opinion leaders, who although classified as ordinary users, are more connected and more exposed to the media than their followers” (Wu & Hofman, 2011, p.714). The results implied that “[1] Twitter is primarily made up of many millions of users who seem to be ordinary individuals communicating with their friends and acquaintances...[2] the top ten most-followed users on Twitter are not corporations or media organizations, but individual people, mostly celebrities, [3] a new class of “semi-public” individuals like bloggers, authors, journalists, and subject matter experts has come to occupy [on Twitter, a more prominent] niche [, at least in terms of number of followers,] than traditional public figures such as entertainers and elected officials” (Wu & Hofman, 2011, p. 706). The study results show that “only about 15% of tweets received by ordinary users are received directly from the media” (Wu & Hofman, 2011, p.709).

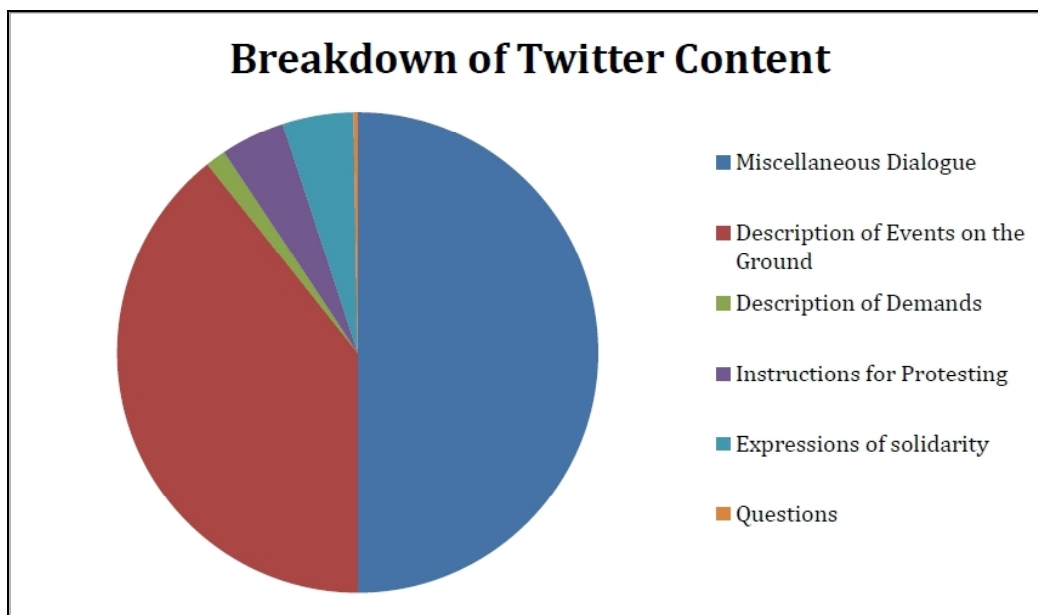
Katrin Weller, Evelyn Droge, and Cornelius Puschmann (2011) stated that Twitter users are “with various backgrounds and different motivations” (Weller, Droge & Puschmann, 2011). According to the study, the main types of Twitter usage intentions and motives are: “daily chatter, conversations, sharing information and reporting news” (Weller, Droge & Puschmann, 2011, p.1). The study implies, as well, that ‘users play different roles of information source, friends or information seeker in different communities’ (Weller, Droge & Puschmann, 2011, p.1). Regarding Twitter

users intentions, the literature results state that there is a difference in Twitter's usage across various periods of time, such as "in politics and elections, in organizational informal communication scenarios, during natural disasters, and within scientific contexts" (Weller, Droge & Puschmann, 2011, p.1).

One of the very recent studies related to 'political mobilization' via social networks during the 25<sup>th</sup> of January revolution, the results prove that social networks go beyond mobilization classifying their roles to three trends; first, social networks organizational tool; stating that "successful politically driven social movements must be based on grassroots organization that are started offline and use offline tactics of organization in conjunction with online tactics...social media were important mostly as a tool for accelerating and facilitating" (Storck, 2011, pp.26-27). Secondly, social networks as alternative press and an outlet for citizen journalism (Storck, 2011, p.24). This shows that the accessibility of these tools enabled their users to report real-time coverage to their contacts and even directly to media outlets. Finally, the third trend is (3) social networks as a tool for generating awareness both regionally and internationally referring to the term 'cyber-activism' by which Internet users "advance political cause [in order] to create intellectually and emotionally compelling digital artefacts [advocating] for a particular political outcome." (Storck, 2011, p. 33)

The study tested social networks as platforms for spreading information. A content analysis for 1,091 tweets is conducted (collected by Egyptian activists Alex Nunns and Nadia Idle and published on a book title Tweets from Tahrir). The tweets, as stated by both the book authors and Storck, are not representing a comprehensive sample of Twitter users as they 'focus on those in Cairo as well as some Egyptians outside the country [and] the authors only included those who tweeted in English

[which indicates that] the sample is biased towards the more affluent and educated in Egypt." (Storck, 2011. p. 29) The study categorized the sample of tweets into six categories based on the purpose on their message showing that the priority was given to 'Miscellaneous Dialogue.' (see Figure. III )



**Figure III:** Content analysis of tweets based on the purpose of their message (Storck, 2011. p. 30)

The role of social networks as citizen-journalism platforms for spreading information is supported in Lotan, et al, study; “there is an evolving and dynamic relationship between the traditional, mainstream press organizations that have historically broadcasted news to audiences, and the emerging networked actors who consume mainstream news stories, remix and interpret them, and sometimes conduct original, high-quality reporting that stands alongside professionally produced content (Lotan, Graeff, Annany, Gaffney, Pearce & Boyd, 2011, p.5). The study, as well, states that twitter is “less of a permanent site of conversation among users who know

each other, and more of an ad-hoc place where people gather to discover others with similar interests” (Lotan, Graeff, Annany, Gaffney, Pearce & Boyd, 2011, p.23). Regarding, the relationship between traditional media and social networks, the study states that "mainstream media applied Twitter as a means of engaging with and enlarging audiences, strengthening their reach and influence while also changing how they rely on and republish sources, as well as, during unplanned or critical international events such as the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings, mainstream media turn to Twitter, both to learn from on-the-ground sources, and to rapidly distribute updates” (Lotan, Graeff, Annany, Gaffney, Pearce & Boyd, 2011, p.5).

### **Opinion Leaders: Egyptian perspective**

The literatures on 'opinion leaders' within the Egyptian context are:

- Focusing on the "social" role played by the opinion leaders. By 'social,' it is referred to the domestic issues related to the community as a social structure that have ethical, economic, and cultural threats. The studies, (Youssof, 1987), (Arrafah, 1992), (Youssof, 1993), (Ghobashy, 1996), ( Saa'd, 1993), and (Othman, 2007) discussed opinion leaders within limited types of issues represented in: youth, family planning, forming the image of police men, national issues "drugs, family breakdown, unemployment," Social Marketing Campaigns, and Internet usage risks, respectively.
- The majority of the context of these studies is mainly Egyptian "rural areas." The opinion leaders as summarized in Mahmoud Youssof's study are: informal religious leaders, media workers regardless of their characteristics and media means they work for, Writers, poets, and artists, political parties leaders, The members of the 'People's assembly,' and 'Shoura Council,' The

leaders of 'Workers' Syndicates,' and 'Unions,' as well as 'Lobbies,' 'Local councils' chairs, Sports Clubs chairs, workers in the educational institutions, such as university professors and teachers at all educational stages, formal employees who have social networks with the people in their communities. (Othman, 2007. p.94) The major point is that the examples mentioned reflect a mix in the concepts between opinion leaders, public figures, and formal officials. This is not to say that the results are invalid, it is about the 'operational definitions,' as well as the wording of the survey questions themselves cause widening in who is an opinion leader, who is definitely not every 'opinion offer-er.' (see Appendix I. p.103)

- Regarding the 'political' role played by opinion leaders, it is confined in "electoral voting decision-making." In addition, the results of the majority of these studies stated that opinion leaders confirmed and supported what media called for.

- The majority of the studies conducted on the "social" role played by the opinion leaders have not provided a connection between "seeking the opinion leaders' advice" and making an action in the direction of the advice. In addition to that, the studies provided a simplified relationship between the opinion leaders and the followers which ignores clarifying the point regarding any other intervening variables affecting (whether negatively or positively) the opinion leaders' effect.

- Most importantly, the literature does not clarify the "online social networks" position, influence, and interaction with the other two main



channels of communication, the mainstream media and the interpersonal communication.

### **The Ethnographic Approach: *Being There***

In this section, a description of the 'ethnographic approach' applied in this study, pointing to its attributes and explaining 'media ethnography' suitability to the study's main aspects; the complex social context under observation, Twitter, and the nature of the research foreshadowed problem, the flow-of-information and opinion leadership on Twitter. It is worth mentioning that the complexity in Twitter stems not from the size of the context studied but from the diversity of media means available for this context's member to use as sources for sending and receiving information and opinions. As discussed later, the 21<sup>st</sup> century in general and the 25<sup>th</sup> of January revolution era in particular impose new challenges in front of the methods applied in media-audience studies.

The 'information revolution' is not only about "the newness of technology and tools" (Scoble, 2009, p. 9), rather, and most importantly, it is the cultural transformation enabled by the new media; "it's about returning to what drives us as human beings" (Scoble, 2009, p. 9). This brings the shifts in 'media audience' and questions the methods applied in researching this 'new' audience; "it could be argued that some mass communication research methods constrain the audience to an entity that is empowered by the media, and not something that is actually enriching it" (Stephens, 2007). A Review for Phillip M. Napoli's book "Audience evolution," following from the proposition that media are evolving as a result of technological change, Napoli posits that the conceptualization of audience is evolving as a consequence of "the technological changes that are transforming how, when, and

where audiences consume media,” and that two key phenomena are produced: (1) media and audience fragmentation, and (2) audience autonomy (AEJMC, 2011, pp. 4-5). These two phenomena, according to Napoli, are key to the fading away of the “mass” audience ideal and the evolution of audience conceptualization based on “long tail” scenarios, “in which audience attention is clustered around a select few content options, followed by a long tail, in which the remaining multitude of content options each attract very small audiences” (AEJMC, 2011, p. 5). The cumulative number of smaller audiences in the long tail eventually may outnumber the size of the aggregate “hits” or audience at the head. Furthermore, Napoli makes a case that media stakeholder resistance and negotiation of the latter phenomena lead to an evolving social construction of 'audience.'

Therefore, answering the question "*what if social media were without people, will it have been a good invention?*" (Gemyhood, 2012) (see Figure 1 p. 106), leads to the point that with media convergence and the complexity of the sphere of communication, the utmost importance becomes the user who tailors the tool as well as influences its original features so as to control the rapid multi-sourced flow-of-information. Adding to that, ethnography cares for the culture within which media and audience interaction occur, and in doing so, ethnographic studies deal with the audience as "producers, [and] interpret the two-way identity formed by media consumption, and [how] media [is] influenced by that consumption" (Stephens, 2007).

Media ethnography 'was born out of a general interest in qualitative media studies and a particular interest in what Stuart Hall has termed 'the decoding' part of the mass-communicative process' (Drotner, 2000, p. 186). This notion is similar to what is described as "seeing life as media related rather than media centered" (Hagen, Wasko,

2000, p. 143). Drotner defines 'media ethnography' as "an epistemological alternative to other forms of qualitative media studies and not as their extension" (Drotner, 2000, p. 172), which, according to Ang, helps in making "the chaos of media audiencehood manageable" (Ang, 1996, p. 77).

"Ethnography is not just a set of methods but rather a particular mode of looking, listening, and thinking about social phenomena." (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2010, p. 230) The 'ethnographic' perspectives offer an alternative to two paradigms dominating the arts and social sciences, namely what the British sociologist Antony Giddans terms the structure and the action paradigm... [which] has materialized under theoretical headings such as positivism versus naturalism, administrative versus critical science, structuralism versus culturalism" (Drotner, 2000, pp. 1820-183). As stated by Shaun Moores; "'ethnography' a method departs and differs from other approaches, in both academic and industry-led research, which have failed to deal adequately with the dynamics and diversity of media reception" (Moores, 1993, p. 1). One main strength in 'ethnography' as a method applied in 'media-audience' studies is that, as Moores stated in 1993, it focuses on a sub-culture 'mapping' its complicated sphere of communication; including the different types of characteristics among the media audience, as well as the different kinds of issues communicated. The importance of ethnography "lies in the possibility of assessing the different elements involved in the reception process and how these elements interact within the context of the locality in which the observation is taking place, along with the culture and identity of the community members" (La Pastina, 2005). This is similar to what Ien Ang expressed; "... what ethnographic work entails is a form of 'methodological situationism,' underscoring the thoroughly situated, always context-bound ways in

which people encounter, use, interpret, enjoy, think, and talk about television and other media every day" (Ang, 1996, p. 71).

"One tension [in ethnography] is between ... participant and analytic perspectives.. [As] ethnographers insist on the value, for the purpose of inquiry, of suspending their own immediate inferences, common sense assumptions and theoretical presuppositions, as far as possible, so as to try to take full account of what people say about their world and what they do... [emphasizing on] understanding people's own perspectives" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2010, p. 230), and "simultaneously concerned to make the strange familiar, so as to understand it, and to make the familiar strange, so as to avoid misunderstanding it" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2010, p. 231). In this study, this ethnographic technique is taken into consideration, and the study applies both the participant and analytical perspectives so as to understand comprehensively the context of Twitter.

### **Digital Ethnography**

As Nelson (2009) describes it; "with the introduction of new technologies, how and where we tell our stories has changed. But they are still the same stories." The current study, although conducted online, applies the 'traditional-offline' ethnographic methods; as this study does not deal with Twitter as a 'virtual' social situation, rather as a 'digital' sphere, so as "not to consider digital lives separate from real life as they both belong to the same life and can only be holistically understood when approached as one" (Diana, 2011). Adding to that, the digital ethnography is distinguished with an important advantage that "researchers are less obtrusive and less likely to affect the behavior of the people they are studying" (Nelson, 2009).

Ethnographies corpus on digital media is divided into three broad but overlapping categories: "the cultural politics of digital media, the vernacular cultures of digital media, and the prosaic of digital media" (Coleman, 2003). Accordingly, and through applying these categories, "ethnographies are exploring the complex relationships between the local practices and global implications of digital media, their materiality and politics, and their banal, as well as profound, presence in cultural life and modes of communication" (Coleman, 2003).

The study differs from the earlier work which shed the light on ranking Twitter individual users in terms of various quantitative influence measures, and those studies tracking the flow of information between different categories of users (Lotan, Graeff, Annany, Gaffney, Pearce & Boyd, 2011), to qualitatively observing the flow-of-information within a semi-homogenous category keeping the individuality of users represented in the Egyptian revolutionary tweeks.

The study is not about supporting versus rejecting the two-step-flow of information,; it is a re-conceptualizing for the '*who*,' the '*whom*' influenced, and the '*how*,' within the 'Online Social Networks' interconnected sphere of communication.

The literature highlighted competing thoughts regarding the two-step-flow of information model within the new networked world, however, there are four major points representing shifts in conceptualizing the model traditional hypotheses: (1) "opinion leaders are not 'leaders' in the usual sense—they do not head formal organizations nor are they public figures such as newspaper columnists, critics, or media personalities, whose influence is exerted indirectly via organized media or authority structures. Rather their influence is direct and derives from their informal

status as individuals who are highly informed, respected, or simply connected” (Watts & Dodds, 2007), (2) people in the new information age make their choices depending on the opinions of peers, friends, and stranger who express their feedback on products or ideas online, rather than by influentials (Domingos and Richardson, 2001), (3) opinion leaders are “less important than is generally supposed, either as initiators of large cascades or as early adopters...[under most conditions] cascades do not succeed because of a few highly influential individuals influencing everyone else but rather on account of a critical mass of easily influenced individuals influencing other easy-to-influence people” (Watts & Dodds, 2007), (4) the quantitative ways of Twitter users’ influence measuring provide incomplete indications reflecting the challenge in applying the model in the new networked means of communication; for instances, as proved in the previous quantitative literature, “counting retweets automatically may lead to some loss of information [as well as] not all RTs start with the characteristic “RT @user”-label at the beginning of a tweet [Also, some RTs may] be indicated with “via @user”, others simply copy a message without standardized identification mark” (Weller, Droge & Puschmann, 2011). Also, the three major ways for measuring influence on Twitter: in-degree [number of followers], retweet, mentions, and out-degree [e.g., The number of people a user follows], provide different indications for the same user influence; as a previous study results imply, “popular users who have high indegree are not necessarily influential in terms of spawning retweets or mentions” (Cha, Haddadi, Benevenuto & Gummadi, 2010).

### **The Post-Jan25 Era**

The current study argues that the post-Jan25 era is an evolving cultural context that affects almost all life aspects in Egypt, including spheres of communications and

media-audience dynamics. Accordingly, the study examines Twitter flow-of-information so as to provide exploratory and descriptive indications. However, the study is based on key arguments representing a macro-theoretical framework within which the ethnographer conducted the analysis and interpreted the data related to the micro-theoretical frame of two-step-flow of information model and the literature review.

As discussed in Ezzedine Choukri Fishere, an Egyptian novelist, diplomat and academic, series of articles; a deep cultural change resulted from the 25th of January revolution and is touching the Egyptians relationship with modernization. The theme of Fishere's articles evolves around the notion that one of the major features of the 25th of January revolution is "the collapse of the walls of intimidation, holiness, and veneration surrounding the ideas, the persons, and the institutions," as stated in one of Fishere's articles titled 'Walls of Holiness' (Fishere, 2012). In another article titled "The new Egypt," Fishere stated that "the revolution reinforced the 'individualism' as an acceptable and even desirable form for the social organization, as well as, freedom, equality, and elevating the role of reason in understanding and dealing with the material matters" (Fishere, 2012). The essence notion in Fishere's articles is that "the leader is not absent, it is dead." Under the title "Farewell to the leader," Fishere clearly expressed that "the notion of the leader died in the souls of the majority of the Egyptians [who] neither accept to give unconditional endorsement to anyone, listen to anyone, nor to believe in anyone's vision any more, [and] although this majority says they need a leader, they in reality need someone who do for them what they want, they want to lead the leader not to be led by him" (Fishere, 2012). The substitute to the leader, as Fishere stated, is the team work "in which men and women are equal respecting the independency of the visions and the motives and the interests of each

others, [and] they agreed together on working for a group of organized-in-priorities common goals, [and] they pledge not to fight on what sets them apart" (Feshere, 2012).

The 'leaderless' revolution representing the context within which the study examines opinion 'leadership' amongst Egyptian revolutionary tweeps has, with no doubt, an effect on the perceptions and perspectives expressed by the tweeps, as well as, it enriches the interpretation. A similar notion is discussed differentiating between 'opinion leadership' and 'Fatherhood.' "Fatherhood is the absolute believe in the rightness of what "fathers" thought...Fatherhood, [does not] only refer to fathers or grandfather, but everything else an individual takes it in consideration when making a judgment, whether it was a father, grandfather, community tradition, ruler/president, or anything else. We need a generation who has self-confidence, believe in its abilities, reserve friendliness to his fathers and grandfathers, respects them, without preventing them from thinking out-of-the-box, and without moving from the phase of respect to sacredness that one of its symptoms is canceling their mind...[and] then the individual can think without lubricity or hypocrisy" (AlKhateeb, 2012).

It is vital to refer to a description provided for the post-Jan25 revolution generation including the Egyptian tweeps observed, interviewed, and surveyed in this study; "I calculate the gains of the revolution by 'individuals,' the 'human beings,' the 'amazing human discoveries,' those are the real gain so far... Thousands, or may be millions whom we don't know, behind the scene but they are present with ultimate strength and magnificence...impressive youth with impressive ideas and conscious maturity [who] has determined vision and plans for building and upgrading this country, [they are] training themselves on their own and by their own style on the concept of democracy, dialogue, and on how to the dialogue, whatever the doctrines and the differences"



(Fawzy, 2012). Adding to these characteristics, the 'generational gap' appeared obviously in many articles describing the revolutionaries; "young revolutionaries believe that the preceded generations do not see things the right way...They suspect the analysis of those who are older, because their biggest experience was that the older said 'what you want is impossible,' and if they did not disobey the older, the young revolutionaries would have achieved their victory, they would not have left their homes, and they would not have gone to the square to celebrate anything but a winning football team." (Youssof, 2012) This partially true; as the results of the study shows in detail that there is a gap within generations, which somehow excludes 'age' as a major criterion for describing this gap.

One major factor is Egyptian traditional media status in the post-Jan25 revolution era. Traditional media unprofessional performance pushed Egyptian revolutionaries to search for an alternative means for keeping their voice heard. Hanan Badr, Egyptian media academician, described the media situation in Egypt after the revolution saying; "the current structure led to three [media] content revolves in three axes; first, 'media of crisis' that creates citizens of crisis who can't see a way out the subsequent problems, and this turns to media desire in competition and capturing the lion's share in advertising and viewership rates. Secondly, [there is] media of opinion and publicity instead of information and analysis, and the evidence is the spread of the TalkShows which show different points of view leaving citizens with premature vision who should be exposed to all the attitudes till they have a complete picture for the reality. Finally, there is media of partisanship and extremism which resulted in limited-horizon restless citizens with the opposite opinions" (Badr, 2012).

### **III. Methodology**

The core essence in the ethnographic approach is to examine the experiences of a segment of Egyptian media-audience in action and within the nature context of communication represented in Twitter through applying the methods in collecting the data. "[In the ethnographic approach,] instead of studying people, the ethnographer learns from them" (Spradley & McCurdy, 1972, p. 12). Accordingly, the ethnographer built the solid base for the analysis, the conceptual categories and terms, the assumptions for the sample and the questions depending on conducting a get-acquainted period of research. The get-acquainted period in ethnography is the counter for the pilot study in the other quantitative and qualitative data. During this period, the ethnographer explore the social situation, determine the major factors and attributed of the place, time, and people within this social situation.

The current study is a topic-oriented ethnography aiming at involving in the Egyptian revolutionaries' natural interactions on Twitter as to explore the process of developing thoughts related to mass media, social networks, interpersonal communication, and opinion leaders. In doing so, the study aims at discovering both the *emic* (insider's view) and the *etic* (external view) of the cultural behavior and the cultural knowledge within which the social situation observed. The symbolic ingredients included in tweeps online interaction are part and parcel of the analysis; such as: Twitter's biographies and avatars, tweeted blog-posts and online notes, in addition to any other available details related, directly or indirectly, to the theoretical framework of the study.

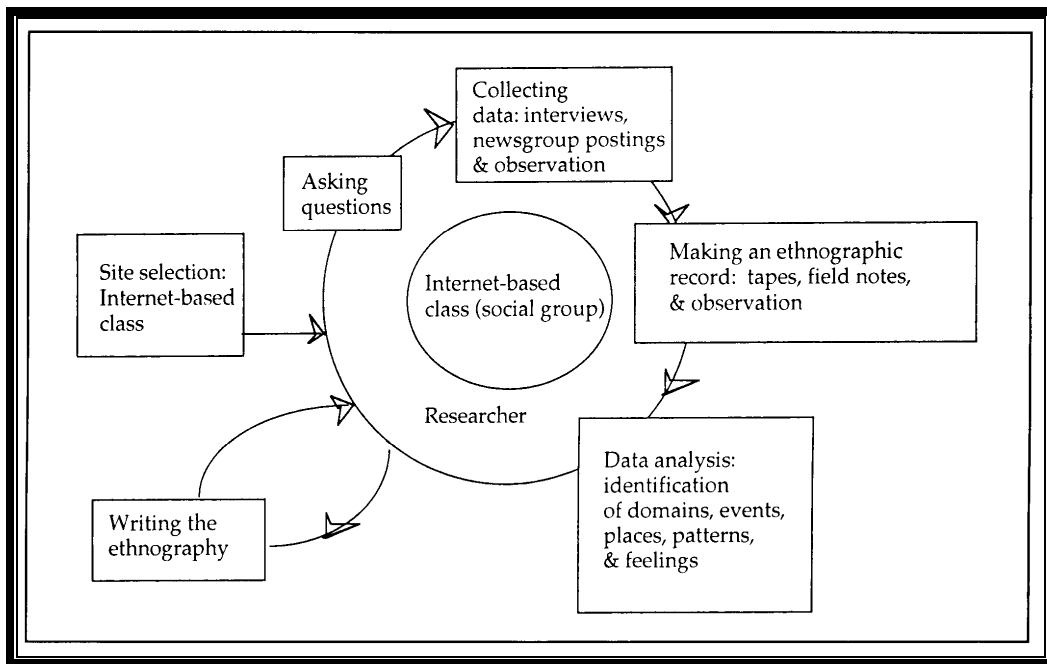
Throughout the development of contemporary ethnographic, there was a main concern that although the term "informants" implies that these individual play a more active role in guiding and shaping the researcher process as teachers than the terms "subjects" or "respondents," it "carries connotations that make it very similar to the idea of informer who aids the government or the police." (Murchison, 2010. p. 17) For referring to the sample, this study applies the term 'Egyptian Revolutionary tweeps.'

### **I.1 Study Design**

The study is an exploratory effort. Although, previous researches have been conducted on the two-step-flow of information model via Twitter, these researches are quantitative and focus on the social networks mainly pre- and during the 25<sup>th</sup> of January Egyptian revolution. The current study, qualitative ethnographic indications are provided for the post-Jan25 revolution.

The ethnographic approach is applied through seven months of participant observation (November 18, 2011- May 21, 2012), 18 semi-structured online interviews. Other quantitative and qualitative data is provided through 70 online questionnaires representing a method-triangulation so as to support or reject the qualitative data resulted from the participant-observation and the interviews.

The study design follows the 'cyclical pattern' showed in Figure IV (Spradley, 1980, p.26) and by which the ethnographer conducts five major steps and "repeat them over and over again" (Spradley, 1980, p.28); (1) site selection, asking questions, (3) collecting data, (4) making an ethnographic record, (5) data analysis, writing an ethnography, then repeating the cycle.



**Figure IV** The Cyclical Pattern of Ethnographic Research (Spradley, 1980. p.28)

### III. 2 Sample of Twitter users (tweeps)

The participant-observation is conducted on a non-probability purposive sample of approximately 400 tweeps (this excludes the tweeps appear in the social situation under observation, the ethnographer's timeline, due to any type of interaction; including retweet, reply, mentions, or #FF. Building this social situation is based on five major overlapping starting-off-points classified in the following categories; (a) the top twenty Egyptian tweeps according to number of followers in 2012 (tweepar, 2012), and twenty other tweeps with high influence rates as measured by 'Klout.com' (this website is chosen due to wide apply in the literature. The topics chosen were Egypt and politics), (b) Famous Egyptian tweeps in the pre-Jan25 era, and (c) other tweeps were theoretically-sampled according to their fame on Twitter (by fame, the ethnographer is not referring to the number of followers, but the high rate of retweets

they get and/or simply many tweeps mention their thoughts repeatedly in different occasions and during various events), with one related condition to fame; their heavily tweeting about the current events (as the study limits the sample to Egyptian active revolutionary tweeps), (d) famous politician and public figures. Finally, but most importantly, the fifth category, (e) representing the normal tweeps who are heavily tweeting about the current events, with the majority attracted to Twitter after the 25<sup>th</sup> of January revolution. The purposive sample is chosen following a snowball technique which does not have any stop points within the previous categories; the ethnographer does not include any subjects, such as age, gender, socio-economic status. Due to the open sphere on Twitter, the ethnographer followed as many tweeps as possible within a range balancing the horizontal with the vertical participant-observation. The 400 tweeps represented a rich social situation. These three categories include, among others (ordered alphabetically), @ElBaradei, @Nawaraegm, @Alaa Abd Al-Fattah, Wael @Ghoneim, @belalfadl, @Amrwaked, @HamzaNamira, @alaaaswany, Egyptocracy, @GameelaIsmail, @ahmadesseily, @AymanNour, @bothainakamel1, @YousriFouda, @Dr\_Heba\_Raouf, @omartaher, @gamaleid, @monaeltahawy, Hossam El-Hamalawy @3arabawy, @waelabbas, and Wael Kahlil @wael, Mohamed Yousry Salama @MYousrySalama, @nabilelhalafawy, @Ibrahim\_Elgarhi, Mohamed G. Beshir @Gemyhood, @SamiraIbrahim4, @Anas7asan, @kamalkhalil, @a\_sayyad, @MohamedDiab678, @amrsalama, @DrBassemYoussef, @khaleddiab, @AmrEzzat, Mahmoud Salem @Sandmonkey, @tarekshalaby, @LoaiNagati, @AsmaaMahfouz, and Khaled Abol Naga @kalnaga.

The online semi-structured interviews (see appendix IV. p. 130) are conducted with 19 tweeps represent a sub-theoretical-sample; @MWahab, @AgainstNokhba,

@3bdrabo25, @alienzero, @Bassem\_Sabr, @Dr\_Mokka, @Elma7roossa, @emadarab, @esraa2008, @gr33ndata, @IM\_Sultan, @ircpresident, @M\_Khalafawy, @MohAbdElHamid, @msheshtawy, @Raafatology, @RamyMahrous, @RamyRaouf, and @ZenaAmina. There were no specific criteria for each of the interviewees. The ethnographer contacted many tweeps representing, in a way or another, the previously mentioned five categories, due to time constraint; the ethnographer could not meet more tweeps. The 19 tweeps interviewed are a rich sub-sample that clarified many concepts and explained various points of the participant-observation data. @Bassem\_Sabry, @RamyRaouf, and @Elma7roossa were chosen mainly for their high rank in influence according to Klout.com. @ircpresident, @Raafatology, @RamyMahrous, @gr33ndata, and @msheshtawy were chosen, mainly, for their interest in social networks, blogging, reporting, and technology. @esraa2008 is interviewed as a famous Egyptian political activist. @3bdrabo25 is a reporter and a former member of the 'Egyptian revolutionary youth coalition.' On the other hand, @alienzero, @emadarab, M\_Khalafawy, @MohAbdElHamid, @Dr\_Mokka, @msheshtawy, @MWahab, @AgainstNokhba, and @IM\_Sultan were chosen representing their own individuality and providing the vertical dimension of the analysis, each tweep has his/her own perceptions and views as the analysis chapter shows, as well as, those tweeps are equally important with, if not more than, the key famous tweeps. Also, as a participant observer, I had to act similarly to the tweeps who do not, by any means, limit themselves to the famous public figures on Twitter; even many tweeps do not follow them at all. One of the unique dimensions on Twitter is normality and this simple sphere of communication in which you have access to thousands of thousands of normal people with various

interests and personalities. It is worth noting, as well, that the famous tweeps, at the end, are on Twitter for this majority; the effectively-aware segment of the Egyptian community.

The 70 online questionnaires (see appendix I. p.103) that represent a method-triangulation are distributed based on snowball sample. The starting-off point was one criterion; being a normal tweep who is interested in serious discussions most of the time. Accordingly, the ethnographer applied two different ways in delivering the online link; (1) monitoring the hashtags; #Tahrir, #Jan25, and #Egypt, as well as (2) conveniently tweeting the online link for the survey to some of the tweeps in the participant-observation sample.

### **III.3 Data collection tools**

The Ethnographer is a 'research instrument;' "the ethnographer's five senses become principle avenue for collection information" (Murchison, 2010, p.13). The main instruments applied in ethnography are: (a) informal conversations, (b) ethnographer's notes, and (c) Documents/tweeted links for blog-posts or online notes.

The questions asked throughout the ethnographic work are classified in the literature in three major complementary types, (1) "Grand Tour questions;" they are descriptive questions aiming at drawing basic dimensions or a background, (2) the "structured" questions by which the ethnographer builds the "taxonomies" representing the "way knowledge is organized in the cultural scene" (Spradley & McCurdey, 1972, p.62), and clarifying the similarities between the various categories and concepts, and (3) the "attribute" questions which in contrast to the "structured" questions aim at searching for the differences between the related categories. In this

study and across all the data collection tools, the three types were asked. (see appendix I. p. 103)

In ethnography, the rule is that "both questions and answers must be discovered in the social situations being studied" (Spradley, 1980, p.32). The point, as stated in the literature, is that the ethnographer is the 'student' and the sample members are the 'teachers,' and therefore, instead of imposing his own perspectives, the ethnographer's task is to "discover questions that seek the relationships among the entities that are conceptually meaningful to the people under investigation," as stated by Metzger (1964) (Spradley, 1980, p.32). This was done during the get-acquainted period (from November, 2011 to January, 2012). Five concepts are considered; (1) opinion leadership, (2) the relationship between opinion leaders and non-leaders/followers, (3) the *linearity* of the model, (4) the nature of the *flow*, and (5) the position of Twitter in the two-step-flow of information equation.

### **Participant-Observation**

According to the degree of involvement, there are five major types of participation: (1) non-participant, (2) passive, (3) moderate, (4) active, and (5) complete. The current study applies the fourth type; the 'complete participation,' "the highest level of involvement for ethnographers... [as it] comes when they study a situation in which they are already ordinary participants" (Spradley, 1980, p.61). The field in Ethnography is "everywhere and nowhere at the same time" (Murchison, 2010, p.14).

There are six features distinguishing the participant-observer role from the ordinary participant: (1) maintaining a dual purpose; to participate and watch yourself and others at the same time, (2) making yourself explicitly aware of things that others take



for granted, (3) taking mental pictures with a wide-angle lens, (4) being both insider and an outsider simultaneously, (5) engaging in introspection to more fully understand your experience, and (6) keeping record of what you see and experience (Spradley, 1981, p.58).

The field in Ethnography is “everywhere and nowhere at the same time” (Murchison, 2010, p.14). This reflects the hardship determining ‘*where*’ do the borders within which the observed social situation expand. In the digital ethnography, although, it is much controlled, the factor related to ‘*when*’ to conduct the participant observation. The get-acquainted period revealed the point that Twitter is awake 24/7, the ‘prime-time’ is proven relative and differs from one tweep to the other. Therefore, another criterion affected the observation; in addition to being there around the clock; the nature of the motive behind using Twitter is taken into consideration. As mentioned in details later, the classification for the tweeps interaction is a basic factor through which the ethnographer conducts the participant-observation; as there are four major motives for which tweep use Twitter; live-tweeting and/or tweeting during television live coverage, tweeting for discussion, tweeting for mobilization, tweeting for self-expression, getting the up-to-date news from whom the tweep is following.

According to the original definition presented in the model, “leadership at its simplest is casually exercised, sometimes unwitting and unbeknown, within the smallest groupings of friends, family members, and neighbors. It is not leadership on the high level of Churchill, nor of a local politico; it is the almost invisible, certainly inconspicuous form of leadership at the person-to-person level of ordinary, intimate, informal, everyday contact” (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). The participant-observation, therefore, was a chance to illuminate aspects and perceptions about opinion leadership

that the previously surveys and interviews have not explicitly stated. Accordingly, the participant-observation was the fundamental method and the base for building the forms of the other two tools combined in this study; online interviews and survey.

### **Online Interviews**

Interviews, in ethnography, as generally speaking, include four major types: structured, semi-structured, informal, and retrospective interviews... [But] in practice, these types overlap and blend" (Fetterman, 2010. p.40). The current study applies the structured, semi-structured, and informal interviews. The ethnographer, in the current study, depends on 'online' interviews so as to be conducted within the social situation observed.

### **Questions**

In general and across the three major data collection tools; participant-observation, online interviews, and online questionnaires, both grand-tour and mini-tour questions were asked covering four dimensions of the social situation under observation; actors, goals, activities, time, feelings.

### **Online Questionnaires**

As stated earlier in this chapter, the online questionnaires were applied as 'method triangulation.' A non-probability purposive sample of seventy tweeps received the online link allowing the snowball technique via 'retweeting' the link. (see Appendix I. p. 103)

### **III. 4 Access**

The social situation observed has no 'gatekeepers." It is a public zone and opened for, almost, everyone. As well as, being an insider ethnographer helps in shortening the time required for reaching the point of being familiar with the patterns of behaviors observed.

### **Overt versus Covert Participant Observation**

The social situation under observation is vulnerable to observation and monitoring from various bodies, therefore, a covert participant observation is not considered a deceiving behavior. People are open to talk and answer your questions, as well as, they have the right not to go through the discussion. It is better to make use of being an ordinary participant and have, as much as, possible informal conversations. When it comes to personal details, in-depth interviews, or conducting more following-up discussions, the tweep has the right to know more about being part of an ethnographic study.

### **III. 5 Ethical Considerations**

#### **Ethnocentrism**

The ethnographer's role as a research instrument raises questions of objectivity. Although it is scientifically acceptable for researchers, especially ethnographers, to begin the study with "biases and preconceived notions about how people behave and what they think" (Fetterman, 2010, p.1), they have to recognize "the problem of selective observation and interpretation, and to be aware of their own personal and cultural prejudices" (Spradley & McCurdy, 1972, p.15). In order to reduce the

subjectivity and maximize the reliability and validity for the ethnographic research, the following procedures are considered in this study:

### **III. 6 Reliability and Validity**

"While quantitative researchers use devices like margins of error and sample size to vouch for their claims, ethnographers rely on what James Clifford identified as 'ethnographic authority'--- a researcher's claim that 'I was there' and so can represent, even partially, the culture in question." (Boellstorff, 2008, p. 84) Other techniques applied in this study are:

- § In ethnographic writing, vignettes, italicized foreign terms, and long quotations often serve the problematic function of attempting to render the researcher transparent; so that the 'real voice' of those studied can be 'heard.' (Boellstorff, 2008, p. 84)
- § Comparing the research results with other studies conducted on similar concerns, and/or answered similar questions. This point also is close to the concept "contextualizing," by which the ethnographer analyzes the results in relation to the wider context in which the study is conducted.
- § Showing the results to the informants themselves and get their feedback on the ethnographer's interpretations to their words and behaviors. The ethnographer applies this technique regularly throughout the informal conversations with the observed tweeps.
- § Method triangulation is one of the ways through which the ethnographer can control the negative influence of bias. Method triangulation refers to applying

more than one tool for collecting data and information. This study combined a quantitative data collection tool, an online questionnaire, with the qualitative data given by the qualitative tools.

### **III. 7 Limitation of the study**

This study applies non-probability, purposive, snowball sample technique aiming at providing exploratory vertical indications for a small-scale, but horizontally spread, sub-category of Egyptian community. A large-size-snowball purposive sample guarantees homogeneity within the sample allowing generalization over the sub-group studied; the Egyptian revolutionaries. The study, thus, does not aim at generalizing the results to the whole 'Twitter Egyptian users' nor the whole Egyptian community.

It is worth referring to what Margaret Mead (1901-1978) stated, "never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." Mead, as described by the 'Institute for Intercultural Studies,' "was the most famous anthropologist in the world. Indeed, it was through her work that many people learned about anthropology and its holistic vision of the human species" (The Institute for Intercultural Studies, 2009).

#### **IV. Data Analysis**

In ethnography, studying the observed social situations' members has two complementary ways; "first, they can be read for what they tell us about the phenomena to which they refer. Second, we can analyze them in terms of the perspectives they imply, the discursive strategies they employ, and even the psychosocial dynamics they suggest" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2010, p.97). For Egyptian revolutionary tweeps, the study applies the two ways concentrating on the aspects related to the theoretical framework; flow-of-tweets, opinion leaders, and Twitter relationship with traditional media. The study deals with Twitter as a context gathering segment of media audience in Egypt, and aims at providing indications for media-audience dynamics in post-Jan25 revolution era. The bordered paragraphs represent parts of the 'ethnographer's notes' describing and documenting some indications taken throughout the participant-observation.

In the following sections, the two views applied in 'ethnography literature' are applied; the view considering 'ethnography' as a 'discovery,' and the vision treating it "as necessarily a matter of construction" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2010, p.235). The analysis section represents the 'documentation' aspect, and in the chapter showing the results, the data reflects a macro-view providing cultural 'interpretation,' within the theoretical framework of the study and the post-Jan25 era.

The chapter presents the analysis of seven months of participant-observation, nineteen semi-structured interviews, and seventy open-ended questionnaires (applied as method triangulation). The analysis is classified under six interrelated overlapping

sections classified according to the major quantitatively- and ethnographically-addressed concepts. The sections are:

- 1- **#Tahrir Taught Me: The link between Tahrir and Twitter.** An introduction for the context and an overall description summarizing the sphere of communication, the spirit, the policies and rules, the major themes for discussions, and background for the tweeps.
- 2- **#Flow-Of-Tweets: Re-conceptualizing the two-step-flow of information model via Twitter.** It provides a re-conceptualization for opinion leadership phenomenon depending on both the ethnographer's observations and the tweeps' answers in the interviews and the questionnaires. In addition, the section contains detailed data related to whom to follow on Twitter or whom not to follow clarifying the relationships between the tweeps and their followers and those whom they follow reflecting indications to the networked flow-of-information.
- 3- **#Media is tweeting: Traditional Media Accounts on Twitter: The weeps perspective.** In this section, the ethnographer is rethinking the media as a term and as a tool for spreading news and opinions in comparison to social networks, specifically Twitter. Data is provided regarding whether or not the tweeps 'trust' traditional media, whether they consider Twitter as a substitute or a complementary tool to traditional media, and discussing the reasons for following traditional media accounts on twitter.
- 4- **The 'Why' of the #140 characters: Major motives for tweeting.** It is a section for describing the various goals in writing the 140 letters allowed for

each tweet. It is not a uses and gratifications section; it is mainly a rephrased question aiming at understating clearly and in-depth the connection between the tweeps and Twitter as a social network integrated in their daily life activities including dealing with traditional media. The section reveals the different uses for Twitter including, among other uses, self-expression, emotions-release , ideas-sharing, live coverage, news filtering, and discussion.

5- **#The Republic of Twitter: A Utopian Balloon or a Parallel Media.** This section is dedicated to explain the uniqueness of Twitter at the levels of the sphere of communication, the types and styles of discussions, the tweeps' priorities and interests, and the users' characteristics, and their relationship with the wider context, the Egyptian community.

6- **#Tweetbook: A comparative look on Twitter and Facebook.** The first-hand purpose for this section is exploring the differences between Twitter and Facebook from the loyal tweeps point of view. However, the section reflects deeper meanings related to the tweeps understanding to Twitter's unique and distinguished features, as well as, their understanding to their own usage, motivations, interactions, and efforts on twitter. Besides, the section analyzes the aspect 'social' in the 'social networks' in the post-Jan25 revolution era.



**@Section One: #Twitter Taught Me**

In his article describing his 'First Visit' to Twitter, David Pogue, the Times's technology columnist says "you're supposed to persuade your friends and admirers to become your audience by subscribing to your utterances (called tweets) But it's also a brilliant channel for breaking news, asking questions, and attaining one step of separation from public figures you admire. No other communications channel can match its capacity for real-time, person-to-person broadcasting" (Pogue, 2009). Pogue summarized the '*what*' on Twitter as an online social network and micro-blogging tool. The ethnographic approach provides the ability to answer, as well, the '*who*,' '*how*,' and '*why*.'

The majority of tweeps use Twitter almost around the clock. Twitter is basically for mobile devices usage, and therefore, tweeps are always there; "*I use Twitter each hour in every day*" @MohAbdElHamid. (Online interview, April 21, 2012) These long hours of usage build rapport and loyalty between the tweeps and Twitter, as well as, among the tweeps.

*#GoodNight, and #GoodMorning are some of the tweeted greetings among tweeps keeping the friendly atmosphere, as well as, #OnTwitter by which the tweeps announce that 'they are on board,' and available for interaction, as well as, #OffTwitter to say #GoodBye when leaving. This is important so as not to seem 'not replying' to the followers' mentions, questions, or discussions.*

The Egyptian revolutionary tweeps are considered a distinguished segment of the community with their alertness and interest in public affairs. In general, Twitter users are seen as "less established, more dispersed groups" (O'Leary, 2011), who consist the

"brightest minds, and business professionals [who knows] how to see the future use of a tool and become first in their field to use it" (Scoble, 2009, p. 4). You are welcomed to follow whosoever, but it is not equally easy for joining the discussion. The sample of tweeps bios, avatars, and discussions reflect that many Egyptians left Tahrir square packed with [#Jan25](#) spirit:

- @Ola\_Eltaliawi: *"I miss Utopia! Miss sitting w/complete strangers having the best conversations & feeling safe despite events [#Tahrir #jan25](#)."* (Ola\_Eltaliawi, February 23, 2012) (see Figure. 3 .p. 107 )
- @HalaLoca: *"I will never return the person I used to be, I am a new one."* (HalaLoca, February 25, 2012). (see Figure. 4. p. 107)
- @gr33ndata: *"After the 25<sup>th</sup> of January, I have become much courageous."* (Online interview, April 19, 2012)

Alann Woods, one of the leading cadres of international Marxist and political editor of 'In Defence of Marxism' website, describes Egyptians experience during the revolution saying; "people learn from experience, and in the revolution, they learn much faster. The Egyptian workers and youth have learned in few days of struggling and fighting much more than what they learned through out 30 years of their natural normal existence" (Woods, 2011, p.50). One of the experiences is 'how media works.'

During the 25<sup>th</sup> of January, many Egyptians were the news-makers; therefore, reading the newspaper and watching Television coverage about the events have another meaning for them; they are the key-actors being covered. It was much easier for them to notice media manipulation, bias, and truth distorting. This new segment of

the audience shakes the old media-audience relationship in Egypt. This new segment is threatening and challenging the traditional media, as it becomes a parallel power who presents a counter content to traditional media coverage.

*Once you are there among tweeps, you feel surrounded by different layers of the Egyptian community, they are not socially, politically, nor economically homogeneous, but they share the same spirit, the revolutionarily spirit, the sphere challenges any partisan discussion; it is an attempt to keep the unity as it was at Tahrir square. The tweeps are not searching for a leader nor they are practicing leadership, however, they believe that the current era has empowered every single citizen and has given the chance to each person to freely express his/her own views, and, therefore, this era forces them to apply the collective thinking; @Mtolba, the founder of a moderate religious group 'Salafio Costa' described himself on Twitter bio as 'bridging gaps.' (Mtolba, 2012) The tweeps are flexible enough to admit their differences but to focus on building a common ground for discussion. Twitter's sphere of communication is a simulation to a democratic lawless country, in which the rules are emerged through the practice. Twitter can not be seen, at least not only, as a new media tool or a social network for online interaction; Twitter is an independent complete scene in which the sequence of media exposure is single part of the total unconscious experience of the tweeps. One of the sarcastic but real actions limit the democratic sphere, is exclusion, or to 'block' a tweep from seeing your tweets (unless retweeted) and will not be able to mention or reply to them. @Waelabbas described it in a funny manner saying that "Block is the mice's room on Twitter." (Waelabbas, February 29, 2012) (see Figure. 5. p. 108)*

#If\_there\_was\_no\_revolution, an Arabic hashtag initiated a discussion on Twitter, and among the various tweets, @mahmoud\_Ezzat tweeted: "*Then, no one would have known about Twitter*" (mahmoud\_Ezzat, 2012) (see Figure 2. p. 106). Many tweeps value the opportunity provided to them via Twitter after the revolution to meet together reviving Tahrir spirit. Another sarcastic Arabic hashtag honoring Twitter; #Any\_Role\_for\_Twitter, in which the tweeps suggested roles for Twitter to play, @TamerMnGhmra tweeted: "*When the revolution succeeds, Twitter must play a role; to be the vice president*" (TamerMnGhmra, April 28, 2012) (see Figure 6. p. 108).

The cyclic networked dynamics of communication on Twitter is shaped as various overlapped circles of connections. Therefore, you always can cross your own cycle of communication through 'retweeting' and 'hashtags.' By this feature, you can tweet asking about a certain issue, or create a hashtag for your concern, this connects you to endless number of tweeps outside your Twitter's corner (using multiple languages, of course, expands the potential responds). @ShreifKEISaid1 tweeted seeking medical advice; "*Isn't there any orthopedic doctor, I need consultation, retweet*" (ShriefKEISaid1, April 1, 2012) (see Figure 7. p. 109).

Hashtags also give the sense of gathering around the table. One of these hashtags is the type in which the tweep 'complete a sentence' and monitor the others' tweets regarding any issue including a light hashtag such as #When\_Activists\_get\_Older, (see Figure. 8. p. 110):

- @sayed3s: "*#WhenActivistsGetOlder, what is the meaning of an activist? Does everyone participate in a march or appear on Television becomes an activists. Why this term has lost its meaning?*" (sayed3s, April 25, 2012)

- @IsraaElsakka: *"#WhenActivistsGetolder, they will find out that all their memories are tweets and statuses."* (IsraaElsakka, April 25, 2012)
- @Shalabytak3eb: *"#WhenActivistsGetOlder will be turned to elites."* (Shalabytarek3eb, April 25, 2012)
- @metooli: *"Our activists have new mentalities, and different and independent visions, of course #WhenActivistsGetOlder they will look like no one but themselves."* (metooli, April 25, 2012)
- @Ahmadhatem: *"Well, but I don't know the difference between the activists, the blogger, and the famous tweep. #WhenActivistsGetOlder."* (Ahmedhatem, April 25, 2012)
- @Asmasamy: *"Ahmed Doma will be Guevara. #WhenActivistsGetOlder."* (Asmasamy, April 25, 2012)

Another type is the hashtags by which a grass-root effort exerted to trend certain notion in order to raise the awareness regarding it among tweeps followed by the offline community. One of the various hashtags observed throughout the study is related to trending the Egyptian Nubian heritage (see Figure. 9. p. 111):

- @fatmaemam: *"Two hours left for the marathon of [blogging and tweeting] about Nubia. Hope we have changed your view about Nubians and your heritage, and hope you remain aware that Nubia is the case of all of us #Nubia."* (fatmaemam, April 18, 2012)

The hashtag #Free followed by the name of a detained revolutionary is widely used among tweeps. This hashtag is, not only, a pressure on the authorities representing the

people's power, but also, as stated by one tweep, supports the feeling of being 'one man' (see Figure 10. p. 111):

- @Sheikha\_Magda *I like in #Twitter that in calamities, we're all one.*  
 @NohaAtef: *"Me too! I like the hashtags of 'Free someone.' RT @asser91:  
 "@NohaAtef @Sheikha\_Magda Twitter is a friend in need."* (NohaAtef, May 1, 2012)

*The peaceful surface seen by the new visitors hide much complicated sphere seen by the heavy users, the permanent residents. Most of the tweeps counter the extremist tones and opinions. However, this does not prevent agitators who are aiming at stirring up discord and unrest within Twitter, as well as the infiltrators who aim at attacking the tweeps, shaking their confidence, provoking them, and even threatening them against mentioning some issues or expressing certain views. The tweeps warn each other regarding some of these accounts, especially the fake accounts that belong to the so-called, the 'electronic committee.' These accounts belong to security system in Egypt and intruders who belong to the so-called "electronic committees" aiming at spreading suspicious, rumors, and causing division among tweeps. This gradually pulls out one of the basic attributes of Twitter; the up-to-date honest tweets.*

Tweeps pressure is a real effect you experience throughout your Twitter daily usage; as showed in (Figure.11. p. 112), @negadelborai, "attorney-at-Law, Human Rights trainer, researcher, and writer," tweeted complaining from the opponent tweeps who attack his opinions; *"Sometimes I decide to be careful in expressing my thoughts, but I feel it is a betrayal for me and my mind. I advice whoever refuse listing to me to unfollow me"* (negadelborai, April 29, 2012)

- In order to fortify himself against Twitter hassles and/or bickering with with any of his 61.358 followers, **Wael Khalil**, an Egyptian political activist, wrote in his Twitter bio: *My family, politics and technology... note: if I tweet too much, too little, u don't like me; u can unfollow me at your will, no questions asked.*"
- @3amo\_Shehab, a photographer, wrote in his Twitter bio "Twitter is not for collecting followers; say your opinion and whoever does not like it [, can] unfollow. You do not force anyone to follow."

Another problem within Twitter sphere of communication, especially if you are famous and known to the public, is when some media means, who lack the knowledge about Twitter's features and different symbols, mistakenly copy what you retweeted as if it was your own tweets. As showed in (see Figure. 12. 112) @nabilelhalafawy, an Egyptian actor tweeted to news website wondering *"isn't there any chance that the admin differentiates between the tweets and the retweets? He ascribes to me what I retweet. This makes me a thief. @Egytwit\_Net."* (nabilelhalafawy, April 27, 2012)

**@Section Two: #Flow-of-Tweets**

When it comes to the field of studying influence on Twitter, and as discussed in the literature, the quantitative measures dominate. One of the widely spreading websites in measuring influence on Twitter is 'Klout.com.' The Egyptian poet and blogger Marwa Ma'moun, @Elma7roossa on Twitter, was chosen as one of the one hundred influencing Arab Women by Klout.com in 2011. She commented saying: "*I would have never known that I'm an opinion leader [for my followers] if my name hasn't appeared in this list.*" (online interview, April 25, 2012) As proven in the previous researches (reviewed in chapter two), the quantitative measures provide a solid inaccurate. For understanding clearly this confusion between what percents say and what the tweeps believe about themselves and about others, the tweeps were asked to define "who is considered as an opinion leader for them?" and whether or not they consider themselves as opinion leaders to their followers on Twitter?

"*We are all here partners, we are all here leaders.*" One tweep described opinion leadership on Twitter (March, 2012). The definition provided by most of the Tweeps regarding "who is an opinion leader?" mingled 'opinion leaders' with 'public figures' and 'politicians;' one tweep identified opinion leaders as "*famous people [who] appear regularly in mainstream media, have huge number of followers on Twitter, even if some refused their opinions as far as their opinions are [widely] heard, they are opinion leaders.*" Another definition for opinion leaders, "[opinion leaders are] *those who adopt big thoughts with all their details, and write about and spread them with all the possible means.*" @RamyMahrous when asked to give an example to his opinion leaders, Mahrous says: "[It is] '*No to Military Trials for Civilians' Group.*" Mahrous states that he listens to some persons around, but rarely depend on their



opinions; as he mainly depend on doing readings, and he follows his own perspective regarding any issue. Mahrous referred to Dr.Mohammed ELbaradei as a person whom 'many people' consider as an opinion leader. (online interview, April 21, 2012) While @MohAbdElHamid was among many tweeps who dealt with the term 'opinion leaders' as it refers to 'champions of resistance and peaceful struggle;' “[*opinion leaders are*] those who can challenge the status-quo pushing their society to follow their opinion.” (online interview, April 21, 2012)

Although 'leadership' is continuously exerted effort by those who act as opinion leaders, the study indicates that the 'followership' is discontinuous relationship; most of the Tweeps expressed the point that their trust and respect to some opinion leaders face ups and downs as a result to those leaders' inconsistent views. @MohAbdElHamid stated that when it comes to nominating one of the tweeps he follows as an opinion leader, “*there are many great opinions on Twitter but I am not admired by someone's all opinions.*” (online interview, April 21, 2012)

Although, 'expert' is proven in the literature as an important criterion in judging an opinion leader, some tweeps referred to the point that trustworthiness in opinion leaders is affected if those opinion leaders crossed their field of expert to other issues; “*I admired some personalities as academicians, religious leaders, [however,] after the revolution they started discussing politics, therefore, I don't trust their opinions any more.*” For @emadarab, honesty and objectivity are major criteria; as he explained, “[*an opinion leader should*] be transparent regarding his ideology and political attitude, publishes his personal photo and an e-mail or any contact information for his followers.”

Regarding the question about whether or not the tweep considers him/herself as an opinion leader to their followers, with some answers of "*I don't care,*" "*I don't know,*" "*this is a very hard question,*" "*sometimes,*" "*for some not all of my followers,*" "*not yet,*" and "*I hope so,*" the majority did not consider themselves as "opinion leaders" to their thousands of followers; 80.3% said 'no,' and only 19.7% said 'yes.'

One tweep with 6000 followers said "*I don't think so,* however, from time to time, I stimulate the thoughts of my followers." This definition reflects an understanding to opinion leaders as '*discussion stimulators,*' who push others to think, form views, and make decisions, not literal leaders.

The fact that the majority do not consider themselves as 'opinion leaders' can be explained within their previously mentioned definitions for opinion leaders. Some referred to the ability of this leader to put his words into action; this clearly reflects how some Tweeps mistakenly translate "opinion leaders." @ZenaAmina described herself as "*[I'm an] indirect opinion leader [as] I feel I am unintentionally leading [my followers].*" For @ZenaAmina, an opinion leader is the one *who is "always at the heart of the events."*

There is another dimension implied from the percents reflecting a negative perspective towards the term 'opinion leaders;' "*it is [silly] to believe that your followers are a bunch of dogmatic persons who know nothing except what you are [tweeting].*" @MWahab stated rejecting considering himself as an opinion leader, and making a general comment on anyone thinks so. Similarly, another tweep said "*I hope my followers have their own perspectives; and that they do not need being led... [at the end] I am only expressing my own perception.*" Another tweep said "*I do not like*

*if someone agrees with me all the time...[On Twitter] we all benefit from each other."*

(online interview, April 21, 2012) One tweep answered the question regarding opinion leaders saying: "*long live my mind, free and independent.*"

The open context in Twitter with its diversity, and the domination of the idea on its owner, welcomed @MWahab, a 15 years old tweep, with whom I exchanged many informal conversations. @MWahab presents an example supporting the notion implied in this study about the within generational gap proving that the new segment of media audience; the revolutionary generation is more of an ideological sphere that gather diverse age groups. @MWahab is one of the founder of a Facebook group titled "Revolution without ID," gathering revolutionaries under 18 years old. His pure thoughts as a blogger, and comfortable tweets posted among experienced political activists, professional bloggers, and key-revolutionaries represent the participatory, equal, friendly sphere of communication on Twitter (still, it depends on the tweeps you are following, and on how you tailor your timeline). You deal for months with a tweep, favorite and retweet his/her tweets, praising his ideas and thoughts, before you discover more about his age, socio-economic status, religion, or career.

Although many tweeps stated that it's due to sphere itself; "*Twitter is a participatory community, there are no opinion leaders,*" and expressed the notion of having no opinion leaders; "*we're independent [on Twitter], no one is leading us,*" others referred to some of the tweeps they follow considering them as opinion leaders whom they trust their opinions and agree with their views. Most of the opinion leaders are young revolutionaries who are active tweeps, few of them are political activists. Many other tweeps expressed their preference to expose to different opinions in order

to form their own view towards certain issues. This, in a way or another, recalls the one-side message versus two-sided messages.

The Tweeps who considered themselves as opinion leaders among their followers mentioned many explanations. @IM\_Sultan said that he measures his influence through: the retweets, direct feedback praising their opinions, as well as through the #FF he gets, and accordingly, he considers himself an opinion leader to his followers. (online interview, April 22, 2012) @3bdrabo25 pointed to the “*exclusive news, information, and analytical views*” he brings to his followers depending on his wide networks with politicians and decision-makers in Egypt that supports him as an 'opinion leader' to his followers. (online interview, April 23, 2012) One tweep said “*yes, I believe I'm an opinion leader to my followers. Monitoring the different views [On twitter] helps me form a complete picture and have solid base for my own view [which] I then tweet it to my followers.*”

It is implied that 'the number of followers' is a major criteria, however, for @emadarab it is not enough; he considered himself as an opinion leader to his 10,000 followers whom he described as including many “*effective key players.*” This refers to a vital point which is that for an effective leadership, the opinion leader need effective fellowship by effective followers. This gives the honor to the followers as well as to opinion leaders in the flow-of-information process, representing a new follower-leader contract; mutually equal relationship. @esraa2008 said “*yes, most of the time, I notice it in mobilization and during [discussions] in important issues. Some change their views when I clarify [some points] to them*” (Online interview, May 3, 2012).

*"We're friends on Ttwitter...A lovely sentence I hear from smiley faces all over Egypt and the world.. Thank you all on Twitter planet." @Arahmanyusuf, an Egyptian poet (arahmanyusuf, April 28, 2012) (see Figure 43. p.129). If you are a public figure who is seeking engagement with tweeps, you have to notice that your account is a responsibility that force you to reply and to have a solid arguments to persuade the Tweeps who are full of counter thoughts, as well as, it is vital to know that you won't be under the spot as you think so. "I deal with public figures as any other Tweep I am following." @M\_\_khalafawy (online interview, April 19, 2012)*

The ethnographer explored the criteria for following and un-following certain tweeps on Twitter. The questions aim at understanding how tweeps translate the context on communication on Twitter, and the answers match what have been proven in the literature as opinion leaders characteristics. This indicates the point that on Twitter, there are multi-layers of opinion leaders; or as if there are opinion leaders and sub-leaders. This needs more research, however, it is clearly observed that the tweeps discussions mediate the relationship between opinion leaders and their followers on Twitter adding a third step to the original two-step-flow of information model. What mainly distinguish the sub-leaders is that they are not acting as leaders, not aiming at persuasion, and that they are mutually following their followers. On other words, it can put like that, 'in order to be an opinion leader, you should be your first follower.' Those on Twitter freely and objectively expressing consistent points of view are considered 'indirect' opinion leaders. Those leaders, as well, do not literally lead the opinions but they are more of forming the frame of references within which the followers think about a certain issue; as they tweet recommended articles, blog-posts, and any other content that is not representing their own words, thoughts, but no doubt,

it reflects their own perceptions and perspectives. This also implies how the importance is shifted from the message to the sender. The rapid endless flow of information supported and strengthened the role of the sub-leaders.

*The parody accounts on Twitter are fake accounts representing famous public figures are funny and interesting. These accounts, as well, attract large number of followers who know that they are not real and administered by normal tweeps, but enjoy the idea and even participate in the simulation by retweeting and replying to these fake tweets. The primary effect is to destroy the prestige of the characters represented in the accounts and reducing the impact of their real rhetoric directed to the public. As showed in the observation, most of these accounts represent persons belong to the old regime, as well as the characters proven to be against the revolution. The simulation depends on tweeting sarcastic tweets showing the positions of the represented characters regarding the various issues which are built on those characters' previous attitudes, and are quoting the famous phrases, terms, and expressions repeated by them. These parody accounts confuse the visitors and the new tweeps, as well as, the reporters who lack the skills and knowledge in dealing with Twitter; to the extent that they quote some of these accounts as if they were real statements made by the public figure represented in the account. Other parody Twitter accounts are dedicated to famous characters who died; quoting their thoughts and opinions. Such accounts are considered part of the multiple-layers of opinion forming on Twitter.*

The sentences below represent the most repeated answers to the Question: **Kindly, specify some reasons for following a Tweep on Twitter** (Ranked according to importance):

- Objectivity not neutrality, but to mention the two-sided messages.
- Trustworthiness in the Tweep who re-tweeted one this person's tweets.
- If he is an active Tweep whose Tweets are up-to-date. To be tweeting live.
- The quality of the news tweeted, and the seriousness of the discussion.
- Sharing the same interests.
- The sense of humor.
- I check his/her tweets first, and I care for his/her views. Tweet original thoughts.
- Not to be biased to one view without revision.
- His/her degree of effect on the community of Twitter and/or the public opinion.
- #FF (Friday Follow. Every Friday, the tweeps recommend and/or receive suggestions for new tweeps to follow) (see Figure 15. p.114). (Ramibash, April 27, 2012) (BentMasr2, April 27, 2012) (TheMichaelMoran, April 27, 2012)<sup>i</sup>
- Interact with his followers and follow back.
- If the Tweep from different governorate than Cairo to provide local news.
- Have a revolutionary spirit and/or modern civilized thoughts.
- Expert in public affairs.
- Tweeting Scoop and exclusive information.

- Having a network with other bloggers and activists.
- Intellectuals.
- His/her deep analysis and wealth of information.
- Decision-makers.
- Having a network of connections with news sources.

The tweeps assert always on the notion that Twitter as an equal sphere of communication; @AmrMMohamed tweeted saying: *"P.S. This is Twitter not Hollywood. Those are followers not fans. Don't be arrogant"* (see Figure 13. p. 113). @Gemyhood: *"The biggest fault is to think that those who are following you on Twitter are 'followers' or 'fans' and build electoral plans and ambitions on them.. or to limit your activism to Twitter."* @maishams : *"Yes, and followers, as well, need to understand that those they are following are not 'customer service,' because it upset me a little bit ☺"* (Gemyhood & maishams, April 25, 2012) (see Figure 14. p.113).

The sentences below represent the most repeated answers to the question: **Kindly, specify some reasons for un-following a Tweep on Twitter** (Ranked according to importance):

- Spreading rumors and/or false and misleading stories.
- Cursing and using bad words.
- Criticizing persons without evidence.
- Arguing without scientifically proving the rightness of his/her opinion, even if s/he a public figure.
- Arrogance.
- Inconsistent doubled views.



- Rational unemotional person.
- Exaggerates and/or underestimates events.
- To be on Twitter only for getting more followers. (This represents tweeting too much and tweeting unimportant tweets).
- Do not reply to his/her followers.
- Do not update his/her Tweet accounts regularly or tweet too much
- Religious extremists.
- Do not respect the opposite point of view.
- When the Tweep gives up his/her rebellion spirit.
- Tweets thieves.
- Fiddling and petty tweets.
- Coercive persuasion. The dictator.
- Focusing on personal information that has nothing to do with the important current events.
- If s/he is dealing with the followers as herd of followers.

*Egyptian female tweeps' interactions with their male counterparts on Twitter show the fact that Egyptian women have gotten their position back as equal partners in the Egyptian society. Their well-deserved status came after their privileged participation in the Egyptian revolution and their effective contribution and positive support at the squares. This change is basically due to women gaining self-confidence. Both unconsciously and intentionally, male tweeps exchange thoughts and ideas, have discussions and serious conversations with their revolution-mates. Many male tweeps referred to having more respectful perspectives and grateful feelings towards women after their experience side-by-side at Tahrir square. Many Egyptian females initiated civilian movements and revolutionary efforts and were followed both online and offline by men. The new generation values woman's role and exert effort for putting an end to her suffers, stereotypes, and social underestimation. Recently, there was a day for blogging and tweeting about 'sexual harassment,' and the efforts, the echo of the event, the scale of participation clearly were larger and more effective than before #Jan25 revolution.*

**@Section Three: #Media is tweeting**

@beleidy: "*Twitter is my TV*" (beleidy, April 23, 2012) (see Figure 16. p.114). During the get-acquainted period, it was revealed that for the majority of the tweeps the term "mass media" only recalls the 'public media tools,' 'citizen journalism,' 'new media and social networks which they consider as tools of 'media of the masses.' That is why the term is replaced with 'traditional media' in the survey and the interviews.

The question 'do you trust traditional media in comparison to Twitter,' revealed that the majority do not trust mainstream media; as 87.9% said 'no' while only 21.1% said 'yes' (see Appendix II. pp. 104-105). This result returns to many reasons; mainly the tweeps believe that these channels have their agendas, and are under the control of the ruling authorities, and accordingly do not represent the people's voice:

- @Zeinobia: "*The Egyptian national tv edits and mutes parts of the presidential candidates in 'who is the president?' tv show #Egypt*" (Zeinobia, May 1, 2012) (see Figure 17. p.115).
- @\_TarekologY\_: "*Media at any country is a strong light aiming at raising the awareness of the people and telling them facts. Our media is a black cloud that blocks the Sun shine!! #Egyptian\_Media*" (\_TarekologY\_, April 28, 2012) (see Figure 18. p.115).
- @maysaashujaa: "*If I were the president of a democratic country, I would have banned using television, the most authoritarian tool ever. As Chomsky says, media in democracies do the job of sticks in Fascism*" (maysaashujaa, April 27, 2012) (see Figure 19. p. 116).

- @RamyMahrous: "*Media is like...I don't know, but it belongs to who pays more...*" (RamyMahrous, April 19, 2012) (see Figure 20. p. 116).

Many tweeps expressed an ultimate trust in Twitter; @MohAbdElHamid said "*I'd rather trust those who are living the news than those who are covering it*" (online interview, April 21, 2012). Another Tweep said "*I don't trust traditional media and I wait till the news is confirmed on Facebook or Twitter.*"

It is recommended always among tweeps to follow those at the events; @\_maisabri\_ : "*Follow @Agendaty from Tahrir Square*" (\_maisabri\_, April 27, 2012) (see Figure 21. p. 117): @shimopurple: "*#FF @Mad\_Darsh, when there is a march or any event, he tweets exactly what's happening, and has nothing to do with exaggeration*" (shimopurple, April 27, 2012) (see Figure 22. p.117).

Other Tweeps, however, mentioned a prior condition for trusting Twitter; the importance of personally 'knowing' the Tweet's owner or at least having a 'previous long experience' of trustworthiness in his/her tweets:

- @Fadiito: "*@AmrRodriguez, by the way, I check Al-Shrouk and Al-Masry Al-Youm newspaper for knowing what happened in the country, and check your profile to know what will happen*" (Fadiito, April 2, 2012) (see Figure 23. p.118).

@Bassem\_Sabry explained: "*There are trusted people on Twitter who can be considered as acceptable news sources; much like traditional media. So, if you choose the right [tweeps], they can be very credible news sources.*" (Online interview, April 26, 2012) @emadarab has another point; "*[the content of] both traditional media and*

*Twitter represents its makers' interests, [the difference] is just that it is easier in Twitter to figure out the maker (tweep) ideology and political attitude [to judge his tweets." One tweep simply said that "Twitter users have no reason to lie, but mainstream media seek the government's satisfaction and high rates of [viewership, readership,.. etc.]."* Another tweep put it in different words; *"traditional media seek profits and finance, while Twitter only reflect its users' thoughts."*

It is worth mentioning that 'traditional media' as a term raised questions among the tweeps; many of them asserted on differentiating between state-owned media and private media. The state-owned media faced the worst criticism regarding objectivity and honesty, while private media, according to some tweeps, is much representative to truth, and much trusted by them. One tweep accused traditional media stating that *"[traditional media] represent their owners' interest. State-owned media, specifically, seek presenting shining image for the government, and most of the content is opposite to the revolution."*

In his sarcastic blog post about a simulating book titled 'Revolution for Dummies,' @msheshtawy was inspired by the "extensive series of instructional / reference books which are intended to present non-intimidating guides for readers new to the various topics covered" with the title 'for dummies' (Wikipedia, 2012). Supposedly, the book contains three chapters; 'Power to the People,' 'Why to revolt,' and most importantly, 'Never Trust the Media.' In the third chapter, @msheshtawy explains to the readers that "media is the government's best "unarmed" weapon," and they should *"never trust them; especially TV"* (Sheshtawy, 2011). Then, he explains in details; "the media will start with accusations about rebels, calling them foreigners. Then later will start mentioning foreign finance provided to those rebels (maybe from big "dangerous"

countries). The media will bend over backwards to make you hate those rebels and have no sympathy for them and that my friend is the green light for governments to kill those rebels or lock them up and torture them" (Sheshtawy, 2011). Although, it is a personal blog post representing the blogger's own point of view, it summarizes the overall image formed about Egyptian media performance during the 18th days of Tahrir square sit-in. This content shared among tweeps is part of the equation of understanding new media usage and its relationship with traditional media, it is vital to discuss these issues within the larger context, the frame of reference and the previous experiences, otherwise, the study results provide isolated-from-reality image based on theoretical in-complete data leading to impractical recommendations.

*Social networks are seen as mediated-channels for the powerless to coordinate and collaborate and make their voice heard. That is partially true; it is ignored or not noticed by outsider researcher, however, that the people after the revolution are not normal audience seeking delivering suggestions to the authority, instead, the people rule, the people make orders, because the people are the authority. Tweeps are not only venting their anger and sharing complain; but they are discussing their own future and they feel responsible for their country. Losing trust in media is not only a financial aspect of decreasing readership or viewership, but a sign for a parallel effort exerted to replace media. Twitter is not in itself a substitute, Twitter is a zone for brainstorming, and tweeps understand that their targeted audiences are out there, outside their comfort zone in Twitter; they are offline. Twitter is the closest scene to Tahrir square during the 18<sup>th</sup> days of the sit-in, few but effective.*

The question regarding Twitter as a substitute versus a complementary tool to mainstream media has the major responses considering Twitter as a substitute; 63.6% said yes, and 36.4% said no. (see Appendix II. pp. 104-105)

By the term “substitution”, the Tweepers meant two different meanings. First, Twitter as a real substitute provides news, opinions, analysis, and any other content published and broadcasted through mainstream media. Many Tweepers mentioned similar impression which is that on Twitter there are many intellectual people who are much more aware about the public affairs. Another Tweep stated that *"traditional media focus on shining news for which elite and public care, unlike Twitter."* It means that those on Twitter are neither elite nor public. @ZenaAmina described Twitter's context as *"mainly political,"* and the majority of the Tweepers are young revolutionaries. @MWahab described the segment of the Egyptian society who are using Twitter as consisting of *"intellectuals, teenagers and, [middle class] young people who [are attracted] to the thoughts of anarchism and the communist theories."* (online interview, April 21, 2012) One tweek says *"I care for truth regardless the source.. [and] I believe Twitter is a technical substitute for Mainstream media."* @Dr\_Mokka said *"well, not only Twitter; in general, the Internet and citizen journalism are substitutes to traditional media."* (online interview, April 21, 2012)

The second view related to the notion that almost all the mainstream media have their accounts on Twitter which makes Twitter a substitute that gathers all news sources. One of the tweekers said that Twitter can't be a substitute to traditional mainstream media; *"Twitter is to quickly reach the recent news, however, it lacks discussion, chatting features, and TalkShows."* Another agreed that Twitter is not a substitute to traditional media; *"the ultimate source for the majority of the tweets is*

*mainstream media, simply because the Tweeps neither have the facilities nor the capabilities [of these organizations]. Tweeps only suppress traditional media in the rebellion news; they cover it better and faster."*

Traditional media use Twitter content since the tweeps are faster and always on the spot. However, as showed in (see Figure 24. p. 118), @Marcoo72 tweeted accusing daily newspaper with publishing his photo without permission, and attached two links for the original photo and the copy. (Marcoo72, April 23, 2012)

It is worth mentioning that the substitution point means, as well, an opportunity to these traditional media reach wider audience among the Tweeps. Many traditional media have Twitter accounts, the percentage of those who are following some accounts of traditional media are 80.3%. They mainly do so in order to save time, keep up-to-date, and as a substitute for exposing to the original content published in newspaper or broadcasted in Radio or Television. However, with the networked type of relations within Twitter, this percentage can be doubled or tripled with the feature of retweets, which means that often, traditional media content reaches some tweeps who neither are using the traditional media offline, nor following their online versions.

On the other hand, those who supported the complementary idea have their point; some referred to rumors, and how Twitter became a zone for ground battle of damaging reputation, and how it became an arena for settling accounts. @emadarab, one among many tweeps who, neither considered Twitter as a substitute nor a complementary, instead, he expressed the relationship between Twitter and the traditional media saying "*twitter can be considered as a channel for the collection and*



*the marketing of the traditional media content, with a small but an effective role of news-making which is diminished whenever traditional media means become stronger and have much freedom.*" This point is supported, some how, with what another Tweep stated; *"Twitter tells me what to watch on Television."* This reflects the 'recommendation' process taking place among Tweeps, whether directly or indirectly from tweeting about certain article, talkshow episode, or any traditional media content. @I\_BenMoheyII believes that Twitter is a *temporary* substitute; *"when the process [of media performance] is reorganized, and media return to spreading right news,"* then, traditional media will return as a major source for the people to get news. (online interview, May 12, 2012) One of the tweeps who agreed on this point said *"Twitter is currently a substitute, however, this does not mean not to call for more freedom and independency for traditional media so as to guarantee more transparency, honest, objectivity, and professionalism."*

Another question about considering traditional media the main source for news has provided similar views; the majority replied with 'no.' *"We [the Tweeps] know news faster and with much accuracy than traditional media."* said @MohAbdElHamid. (online interview, April 21, 2012) @AnaTa7riry: *"Most of news agencies copy from us on twitter #I\_Swear\_to\_God. XD"* (AnaTa7riry, March 31, 2012) (see Figure 25. p.119).

The majority of the tweeps (75.5%) expressed that they follow traditional media Twitter accounts; some Television channels, TalkShows, and Newspapers. It is worth noting that many Tweeps follow international media twitter accounts for international news. This global thinking matches the previously mentioned expression, "Global Generation."

*During the semi-structured interviews, @M\_Khalafawy was very excited about Twitter; he said “Twitter is freedom.” He explained how he enjoys expressing his views without having to argue against the counter views, he also prefers following the tweeps who have similar interests to his own, in order to be surrounded by people sharing with him the same spirit, unlike traditional media which broadcast and publish a mass message with a persuading tone that is not favorable for many tweeps. @M\_Khalafawy even considered ‘mobilization’ as a kind of “opinion imposing, and views forcing,” that does not match Twitter; “it’s a democratic sphere.” (Interview, April 19, 2012)*

It is noting that the comparison between online social networks generally and Twitter specifically in one hand, and traditional media generally and the Egyptian state-owned media specifically on the other hand, is not based only on the different means, quality of the service, or the shape of the relationship between the means and the user; the comparison goes beyond that; the online social networks, if not perfect, they remain more 'impartial and uncontrolled spheres.' Tweeps's relationship with traditional media has an ideological dimension, as well as, the overall laws and rules guiding media performance in Egypt. Many tweeps expressed the lack of trust in Egyptian state-owned media because instead of representing its real owners, the Egyptian people, it works for the authorities. The tweeps' evaluation for Egyptian state-owned media ranged from "*they are liars,*" to what stated by @ircpresident, "*it's not about the means itself, whether traditional or new [media]; it's about the source [/sender] of the information.*" (online interview, May 1, 2012) @RamyRaof supports the importance of the 'source' of the message more than the medium; "*Twitter is one of the [varied] platforms for information exchange, we can't consider*

*one platform as a substitute to the other; every means has advantages and disadvantages. For me, the degree of trust does not depend on the nature of the means, electronic versus non-electronic; but on accuracy and honesty."* (Online interview, May 15, 2012)

*Throughout the study, a clear point is revealed. The difference in the tone and the degree of rationale within the tweets answers are affected by the data collection tool; in informal conversations and during the participant-observation, things were real, direct, and spontaneous, while in surveys and interviews, it seemed as if the tweeps prepare themselves for saying analytical and knowledgeable sentences and expressions. Also, the proficiency of the tweeps in dealing with social networks matters; as for the normal tweeps the gap between the answers in an informal conversation and a survey is much narrower.*

In their book titled 'Media Equation,' Byron Reeves & Clifford Nass shows that "when a picture threatens, we don't think about who made it, what they intended, and what it all means; we often think only about what we should do" (Reeves & Nass, 1994, p.11). And that is what social networks and the interpersonal communication do, not through opinion leaders who are imposing one option, but the collective thinking providing variety of choices.

One tweep explained saying, "*media is not anymore a source of news and for raising the public awareness; instead, media becomes a tool for brainwashing.. [that's why] we should concentrate and scrutinize the various sources of information in order to read [what's] behind the story.*" Another tweep; @olva expressed his view saying: "*satellite channels dealt with the revolution as if it's the season of the*

*Holy Month of Ramadan but a little bit longer.*" (Olva, April 23, 2012) (see Figure 26. p.119) It means that media mainly aims at reaching high audiences' rate for profits. This supports the call for the service and informational content rather than manipulation and propaganda devices. It supports the point that Egyptian tweeps are not satisfied with media content; it does not represent their views nor provide them with professional coverage.

The new audience knows more, knows enough to feel brain washed in certain direction, instead of having an independent media that professionally work for the people representing different views and showing neutrally the events. One Tweep explained why to trust Twitter rather than traditional media saying "*simply, the Tweeps do not have a reason to lie.*" This is referring to the point that Twitter, as expressed by @ZenaAmina, neither is controlled by a structure, policies and procedures, nor it has gatekeepers and faces ownership pressure. "*It is naturally a non-authoritarian [tool]*" @MWahab. (online interview, April 21, 2012)

As discussed earlier, the direct interaction occurred between many Egyptians, as news-makers during the revolution, and the content published and/or broadcasted via media has changed their taken-for-granted manner in dealing with media. For this new audience, media gatekeepers, owners, and policies are countering their freedom and lessening transparency. One tweet says "*Tweeps are honest, while Television and newspapers correspondences stand beside us during fights and while everything around us is clear, they say totally different information!*"

In addition to misleading information, media ignores sometimes major events for political reasons; as showed in (see Figure 27. p.120), @Adburrahmanezz, the

admin of Rassd, online News Network, tweeted saying, "*Breaking News: a total blackout from all the Satellite channels, State-owned Television, and AlJazeera over fights occurring right now at the sit in [in front of] Ministry of Defense.*" (Abdurrahmanezz, April 2, 2012) Another tweet by @tweetThawra saying "*terrible media blackout over Al-Dostor Party Conference, even from private channels; Al-Jazeera.*" (tweetThawra, April 28, 2012) (see Figure 28. p.120) Traditional media has an agenda, red lines, coverage policies that do not match the tweeps' agenda, priorities, and informational needs and desires. That is why the tweeps consider Twitter accounts as their own independent citizen-journalism platform enabling them to cover what traditional media intentionally or unintentionally has overlooked.

**@Section Four: #140**

@EZXCVC: "What were we doing before Facebook and Twitter" (EZXCVC, April 23, 2012) (see Figure 42. p. 128). *For the majority of the tweeps, Twitter is not an end in itself; it is a bridge connecting the online discussions with the offline actions. Political activities, bloggers, and technology-savvy tweeps put the goal of 'tweeting information to my followers' at the top, followed by both 'mobilization,' and 'monitoring the various opinions.' Expressing their views came late in comparison to the normal revolutionary tweeps.*

How and who they use Twitter are integrated within the Egyptian tweeps text-speak 140-characters-tweet. Answering the multiple-choice question about the major reason for which they use Twitter, almost all the tweeps after picking one choice commented saying "all of them" (see Appendix II. pp. 104-105). The observation revealed the point that 'the tweeps use Twitter for anything, everything, and whatever can be done with it.' The flexibility made Twitter a chatting room, a virtual Tahrir square tweeting chants, statements, and pushing for demands, an open market-place, 24/7 customer service center, library and book shop, food recipes, clinic for emotional and psychological problems, virtual people's assembly, spiritual zone for praying, among endless uses.

Twitter goes beyond new media tool, or social network for relationships, entertainment, and spending spare time, to a complete community tailored as exactly as you need it to be. In the coming lines, a detailed discussion is provided for the major five overlapped motives for which tweeps use Twitter.

*1- Self-views expression*

*It is noticeable that using the Arabic language has been heavily applied among Egyptians, who may have preferred before the revolution to interact in English so as to reach their non-Arabic speakers in twitter and Facebook. During and after the revolution, talking in Arabic is heavily applied. As dealing with a domestic issue and targeting your own people in Egypt and counterparts in other Arab countries. Activists, however, tweet in using English more than normal revolutionary tweeps. The term activist itself is questionable; however, for someone who seeks delivering their countries situation to the whole world challenging the state-view presented in mass media, English is vital. Some other, however, mix between English and Arabic, but the majority of the tweets is written in Arabic reflecting the sphere of informal conversations and local discussions.*

More than 40% said their main goal of using Twitter is to express their own points of view. However, most of the tweeps expressed the fact that they are "*more of receivers than senders on Twitter,*" and that they do not care about the number of followers, and that expressing their own views is an end in itself; as they do not seek impressing other tweeps. Self-expression does not relate only to opinions but, as well, to emotions and feelings. Sharing their emotions regarding certain persons or issues is widely practiced on Twitter. *@bassem\_sabry, one of the interviewee, said that Twitter is mainly for 'spreading' his own articles. (Online interview, April 26, 2012)*

*While moving up and down on the timeline monitoring the tweets, you feel emotionally affected by the mode dominating your timeline. The cyclic networked communication on Twitter as well as the homogeneity resulted from following tweeps with similar interests as you, made it usual to face this situation. This is also due to the point that Twitter is in itself a 'prime time.'* @nermeen9, one tweep who decided to change the timeline mode; *"I brought Balloons to break the boredom and depression dominating the sphere. #Cheer\_Up\_Allah\_Bless\_You =D"* (Nermeen9, April 3, 2012) (see Figure. 29. p. 121). Also, you can simply express it during the furious moments on your timeline; *"I am optimistic."* @Malek (February 25, 2012) (see Figure. 30. p.122)

## 2- Live Coverage

The multi-tasked generation with no doubt tweet a 'live coverage.' By 'live coverage', two main themes are included; first, the live coverage done by Tweeps as eye-witnesses at the heart of the scenes. The second theme is Tweeting during watching a live coverage on Television for a major event (such as press conferences). Regarding the second theme, almost all the Tweeps use Twitter in parallel to watching the live broadcast, and if they do not have access to television set, Twitter became their mainly source of information. @Hananelleithy: *"Why to watch the match when you can have a direct comment on twitter"* (Hananelleithy, April 18, 2012) (see Figure 31. p.122).

During these times, the timeline seemed similar to news-agency breaking news; continuous 140 letters running down describing every single detail in the event; the



persons, the lights, the words and terms, the tone of the voice of the speakers, their body language, the decoration, the camera moves, and above all the information mentioned, which for some tweeps “*makes the event much interesting and exciting to be viewed, and simplifies the information mentioned; clarifying what is right and what is wrong,*” said @alienzero (Interview, April 21, 2012). @raafatology referred to expressing his opinion in the event, and that his last time doing so was ‘during the famous speech of Gaddafi, zanga zanga.’ (Online interview, May 1, 2012)

Most of the Tweeps stated that during the live coverage of major events, Twitter provides simplified summarized information, analyzes the between-the-lines and within-words facts, and reveals some unmentioned sides of the story. One Tweeps agreed on this point explaining; “*the most important this is the smart tweets revealing the origin of both the issue and the speakers.*” For others, this is very important so as to “*complete the picture and provide another side of the coin and explain within lines,*” as expressed by @Elma7roossa, one of the Tweeps who follow journalists and monitor their tweets during the live coverage ‘minute-by-minute’ as a *substitute* to watching the Television. (online interview, April 25, 2012) The Tweep @emadarab referred to another point; “*it gives me an opportunity to tweet counter information and facts in order to lessen the negative effect of the message broadcasted via Television, and to expose the lies, as well.*”

### 3- Filtering news

Twitter doesn’t replace mainstream media, it filters news. If you are following Tweeps with similar attitudes, then what they pick from various mainstream media channels satisfies your desire in having a general look on “*what’s going on around*

today.” Many Tweepers expressed the fact that they do not follow directly traditional media twitter accounts, instead, they depend on what those whom they follow retweet from media twitter accounts. On the other hand, not necessarily that all those who follow traditional media accounts on Twitter retweet the mainstream media tweets; they often follow for checking an overall picture on the image presented about events then they make an analysis or form a solid opinion and tweet it to their followers. The most retweeted pieces of news are mainly the is-not-possibly-caught from somewhere else, such as the official statements, decisions, or laws. One Tweep described it saying *"I collect all [communication means] in one basket, my Timeline on Twitter. This saves time and effort."*

*It is a circle; the tweet goes around. They all on Twitter know what's being tweeted, retweeted, trended, the recent rumor, and fights among tweeps. From long-term observation, you make sure that Twitter is an extension for the offline community, but the persons are much friendly and easy-going, less racist, rejecting stereotyping, more optimistic and open-minded, creative and challengers, alert thinkers, tough self-criticizers, talkative, in-control, and are always there. The diversity among Egyptian revolutionary tweeps enriches the context for the conversations, enhance communication skills, providing 24/7 quick short and for free knowledge supplies, and most importantly, the base of interaction on Twitter is equality.*

Twitter provides the opportunity to monitor more than one source of information at the same time. Following many tweeps each with different interest, your timeline will reflect various media content. It is like moving from channel to another, whether on Television or Radio, and from newspaper to another. The

comparison is much easier, plus, you will have an overall perspective regarding 'what's going on.' Therefore, in case there are more than one talkshow, for instance, any tweep can monitor all of them through their Twitter timeline; each tweep watching one of these shows tweet about it, and the timeline absorbs all the breaking-content, statements, and other exclusive information broadcasted. As one tweep stated "*it is an encyclopedic sphere.*"

As showed in (see Figure 32. p. 123) and (see Figure 33. p. 123), the tweeps recommend media content to their followers:

§ @ahmadesseily: "*Who's the president? [is a TV show] with Tarek Habib daily [at] 8 pm on channel One and the Egyptian Satellite channel*" (ahmadesseily, April 12, 2012) (see Figure 32. p. 123).

§ @apomoment: "*Open Al-Nass channel!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!*" (apomoment, May 1, 2012) (see Figure 33. p. 123).

#### 4- Media on demand

Tweeps have a negative perspective towards traditional media and specifically state-owned media in Egypt. They feel excluded and the goals of their revolution are not well-represented. This exclusion is combined by campaigns for criminalizing their peaceful protests. One of the major reasons for gathering on Twitter is to keep their thoughts alert and their revolutionary spirit ardent. It is one of the few zones where they feel in-control, united, threatening media, and challenging its manipulation

When it comes to following Twitter accounts that belong to traditional media, the Tweeps expressed their interest in gathering various news sources, newspapers,

Television channels, and specific TalkShow, as well as to gather local, national, with international media means. This reflect how traditional so-called mass media is challenged not only through new media or on-the-ground activists and grass-roots journalism, but also by international media that undoubtedly cover issues within different frames. For Tweepers, this is important in order to verify the news, and to understand more about what is being mentioned slightly in the local and national media means. Tweepers consider that international media are more independent from its countries' regimes and authorities, and therefore, they seek clarifications and sometimes opposite views regarding the local events. This is not to say that Tweepers are sinking in locality, over time, and especially when the situation is calm at the domestic level, the Tweepers focus on international news; especially, the Arab revolutions, European and American elections, any political and economic crisis, and above all, their counterparts around the globe; activists, freedom seekers, struggling protester, occupiers, and unfairly detained revolutionaries. The Tweepers deal with their local issue as part and parcel of the global situation, they know that their country is affected and affected by the world around. Twitter, then, provides the two extremes; the decentralized local coverage, and the international coverage (see Figure, 34. p.124 and Figure. 35. p. 124):

- @Dr\_Heba\_Raouf : "*Anyone from Quesna to reassure.*" (Dr\_Heba\_Raouf, April 12, 2012) (see Figure 34. p.124)
- @3effat: "*Follow the tweets of Moatazz for Matroh water crisis and [other] important details. @mOaTaaZ.*" (3effat, April 28, 2012) (see Figure 35. p.124)

When asked why they follow traditional media accounts, many reasons are mentioned; *"to know the headlines," "to comment on the news," and 'to know the schedule and the time of some programs."* Many tweeps mentioned that they are following Twitter accounts for non-Egyptian (Arab and foreign) media channels, news agencies, and newspapers. Some tweeps stated that they follow traditional media to monitor its content. This is similar to media 'watchdog,' the people's surveillance. The grass-roots efforts to compare reality with images provided in media are vital to guarantee representing the people's voice:

- @i3atef: *"RT @beedoall: Al-Shrouk Newspaper published a picture for one of the protesters claiming that he is a thug. The man joined the sit in at Abbasia four days ago"* (i3atef, May 1, 2012) (see Figure 36. p. 125).
- @lilianwagdy: *"We need to move the public media up to another level; to use it as a watchdog tool, to prove that the real power is in the people's hand. That's what @3younElthawra is all about"* (lilianwagdy, May 1, 2012) (see Figure 37. p.126).

Although approximately 75.5% of the tweeps follow traditional media accounts on Twitter, the qualitative answers completed the picture and reflected, even, opposite perspective; one tweep said *"I am following traditional media accounts on Twitter to know what they say for washing the people's brains, and what lies they are trying to pass through spreading half of the truth."* Another tweep expressed similar notion; *"[following traditional media accounts on Twitter] makes me compare the different editing for the same piece of news and by that I can know the ideology controlling each means."*

### 5- Discussion

*Some Tweeps facilitate discussion on Twitter. Whether they are the initiator of the discussion or not, they moderate the discussion; they keep retweeting various replies received from their followers representing different perspectives regarding the issue discussed. The expression stated by @IM\_Sultan, " there's a faster sense of interaction" reflects that the sphere of communication, the characteristics of the users, and the available features are all forming this unique zone of discussion on Twitter. As one tweep described it: "Twitter in Egypt is a bowl containing various perspectives [which] are trying to get close to each other."*

Discussion is a common act related and is combined with all the precious uses. To discuss an issue on Twitter, it is very interesting and an added-value due to the diversity in backgrounds. With the short tweets, it seems challenging to limit your thought to the 140 characters which requires from the tweeps to write their tweet followed with the word 'cont; to be continued,' or to give numbers ordering the tweets to make it easier for the followers to grasp the idea. For those late to the party, you see the tweets referring to them saying 'check my timeline, the last ten tweets.' One tweep expressed the uniqueness of Twitter users saying "*Expressing your own thoughts on Ttwitter and discussing them with strangers reflect powerful personality.*" However, the discussions on Twitter are stressful; as stated by @yaseralzayat, journalist, "why I am joining discussion that cause me high pressure? I am going back to Facebook; much better, they are listening to music, an awesome sphere." (Yaseralzayat, March 4, 2012) (Figure. 38. p. 126)

**@Section Five: #The Republic of Twitter**

Most of the Tweeps agreed on the fact that Twitter is isolated from the mainstream citizens; *“it’s a Virtual balloon”* @RamyMahrous. (online interview, April 21, 2012) Others expressed totally an opposite view; *“Yes, [it’s the republic of Twitter; [as] we have established a parallel political relations and opinions to the government, and we have created many initiations and public campaigns [within and] based on Twitter”* said @MohAbdElHamid. (online interview, April 21, 2012) Other tweeps considered the term ‘the republic of Twitter’ differently; @emadarab commented *“yes, that’s real; the republic of Twitter has an ideological power dominating the speech, but its degree of control is changing with new powers that appear causing either balance or conflict.”* Another Tweep agreed that *“Twitter is a community [as there is] a harmony in the nature and the spirit of the Tweeps.”*

The expression the 'Republic of Twitter' reflects various meanings but one of these meanings is a major dimension asserting on the notion that the networked style of interaction among tweeps imposes the necessity to respect certain rules that facilitate their existence and bring the much benefit from their tweets. One of the major rules widely discussed, even if not under the official name, is the IPRs; the Intellectual Property Rights. Tweeps criticize "stealing" tweets, one tweep. The tweep posted a screen shot to his original tweet and the other copies tweeted without referring to him. Another rule, discussed earlier in details, is respecting the different views; as one tweep expressed it, *"it's not necessarily for my followers to agree with my opinions."* Add to these rules, the point that if you are a public figure and you do not reply to your followers comments, questions, or concerns, this leaves a negative effect.

Regardless the percentage of Egyptian Twitter users, and the percentage of the active accounts, and the ratio of activists and revolutionaries among these active accounts, what truly matters is the fact that Egyptian revolutionaries on Twitter are an effective segment of the Egyptians generally and media audiences particularly.

While stating the differences between Twitter and Facebook, as discussed in details in the following section, one tweep described Twitter saying "*unlike Facebook, Twitter is a closed community [gathering] the political activists, [some] young persons, and some public figures.*" As well as, some tweeps described Twitter as a community for '*activists, rebellions, and journalists,*' while Facebook is for the '*middle-class with average educational and economic status.*' One hashtag asked the tweeps to vote for a famous tweep as the president of Twitter, among many tweeps who made fun of the task and rejected having any top-down authority *#The\_President\_of\_Twitter*"

According to some tweeps, the 'Republic of Twitter' as a term refers to the point that '*it's a homogeneous community,*' that contains '*close layers of users.*' Others believe that '*Twitter gathers various thoughts and ideologies.*' Some tweeps referred to the isolation as a result of '*limited Internet usage*' in Egypt; therefore, they consider that Twitter does not represent the whole Egyptian community; "*Forget about the Utopian world on Twitter, because what's on the street is different*" @itsgamal (Itsgamal, May 1, 2012) (see Figure 39. p. 127) On the other hand, many tweeps focused on the point that in Twitter most of the users are '*much serious*' in their discussions in comparison to other social media tools, particularly Facebook, as explained in detail in the following section.



The term, however, has a negative dimension; @ircpresident said that "*traditional media is responsible for reflecting the image that we're on Twitter a parallel public opinion whose nationality is Twitter. Traditional media] should act with [tweeps] with ultimate individuality.*" (Online interview, May 1, 2012) By doing so, as most of the tweeps believe, traditional media seek minimizing the scale of Egyptian Twitter users in order to reflect an image that they are isolated and do not represent the whole Egyptian community. @esraa2008, as well, asserted on the point that they are not isolated on Twitter, although, it has its 'distinguished and unique' attributes and characteristics but it is integrated in the community. (Online interview, May 3, 2012)

**@Section Six: #Tweetbook**

*“Twitter is my girlfriend whom I tell everything”* @gr33ndata. (online interview, April 19, 2012) This statement was an answer to the question regarding the comparison between Facebook and Twitter at the level of the content the user post. As explained in the following paragraphs, this is due to many other factors, one of them is the type of the list of contacts in both Twitter and Facebook, as well the reciprocity feature.

Twitter is more recent than Facebook in attracting large number of users; the majority of Facebook users were there before the 25<sup>th</sup> of January revolution, while the majority of Twitter users registered mainly searching for the revolutionary spirit, the Tahririan residents.

The comparison between Twitter and Facebook is classified under three interrelated and overlapping categories; (1) the quality of the service and the overall spirit, (2) the type of the contacts and the content posted and received, and (3) what can be achieved through using each tool. Generally speaking, Twitter is easier and faster in getting news, especially with mobile phones devices. Many Tweepers expressed their upset from Facebook as a ‘social’ tool for exchanging ‘personal’ news and updates about ones’ own daily life. This reflects a shift in the original aim for which Facebook and the various Social Networks are created; personal needs, education, entertainment, and so on. The question “*what is happening*” in Twitter becomes more exciting than the Facebook question “*what are you thinking about.*” While in Facebook, you post your own status expressing your own feeling, needs, and achievements seeking other’s attention and comments, like and sharing, in twitter, tweepers care for what is going on which at the end will have an effect on them

discussing their plans to deal with it. Many views expressed the untrustworthiness of Facebook and considering it as a zone for rumors. It is worth mentioning that few tweeps link their Facebook and Twitter accounts so what they post on Twitter appear automatically on their Facebook status. This is not widely applied among loyal tweeps who do use Twitter for its uniqueness, and who do feel a gap between Facebook and Twitter. Some conversations were made, as well, among tweeps criticizing doing so. Some of the famous political activists do this so as to enlarge the probable audience for their tweets.

Many views expressed the notion that while Twitter is faster in transferring up-to-date news, Facebook is easier in having discussions, mainly due to the available space in Facebook in comparison to the 140 letters:

- *"Twitter is the news story, while Facebook is the op-eds"* @3bdrabo25 (online interview, April 23, 2012)
- Others expressed the same notion with different attitude; *"Facebook is very talkative, Twitter is a summarized conclusion."*
- *"Twitter is a bank of ideas.. [it] gathers people who might not have been friends in reality due to social and other blocks and considerations..[also] the problems in Twitter are less than Facebook." One tweep said. Similarly, one tweep expressed one of Twitter's distinguished characteristics; "it provides the ability to interact with different layers of thoughts, religions, and socio-economic levels."*

- Some others asserted on the point that Twitter directly connects the tweeps with '*eye witnesses*' who act as '*correspondences*,' as well as they directly reach '*public figures*' whose fan pages on Facebook are '*moderated by admins*,' while in Twitter '*they personally monitor their accounts and tweet.*'

One tweep stated that "*Facebook is much like MySpace and other social networks; they are for having friendships with people all over the world. Twitter, on the other hand, is mainly for news and micro-blogging.*" This matches what some other tweeps expressed referring to the point that Facebook is a wider context; as it contains many other contents aside from the serious content, and that there are many private and governmental agencies heavily mislead the public opinion on Facebook.

- @91Samara: "#facebooktorture a friend of you added 1500 photo to her album, 'my best memories'" (91Samara, May 1, 2012) (see Figure 40. p. 127).
- @mahmed\_Taha: "Color your profile in three minutes. #facebooktorture" (mahmed\_Taha, May 1, 2012) (see Figure. 40. p. 127).

Facebook list of friends contains mainly friends, co-workers, and family, while Twitter is mainly for ideas-sharing, therefore everyone is welcomed; "*[my twitter is opened for almost anyone [including] my enemies.*" @gr33ndata. Many Tweeps repeated the point regarding the list of contacts; as some tweeps explained the phenomenon of 'cursing' on Twitter; stating that on Facebook, the user is known to almost all his/her contacts therefore, they are more polite.

The language used on Twitter is discussed always, especially among Twitter non-users. By language the meaning goes beyond the shortcuts and Arabic versus English or Arabish (writing Arabic language by Latin letters). The major point is the high tone and curses. Anger is a human feeling, and one of the uses for which users tweet is to release their emotions. Expressing your thoughts as raw as they exist in your mind, thinking out loud and saying your opinions without revision are considered part and parcel of freedom of expression for tweeps. It is to tweet as no one is following. This includes both the famous tweeps whose accounts are under the lights, and media quotes their tweets, as well as, the normal tweeps. For tweeps, any one is welcomed to follow but as well to un-follow.

However, this is not to say that Twitter is not 'social,' in contrast, the friendly relationship connecting tweeps is obvious, the difference is the base on which they build their social relations; the way of thinking and the common interest; @MarianneMagd described it saying "*I feel Twitter establishes stronger social relationship than Facebook, although the scale of the shared personal information is much narrower, right?*" (MarianneMagd, February 21, 2012) (Figure. 41. p.128)

It is not necessarily to compare between Twitter and Facebook as running a one-winner-competition; many tweeps state that there is a complementary relationship between Twitter and Facebook; as two tweeps put it "*while Facebook is to spread news, Twitter is to make it,*" "*Twitter depends on cooking ideas more than Facebook that mainly spread them.*" These two simple sentences support the result implying that "mobilization" is not one of the three top goals for which Tweeps use Twitter. These goals are: self-opinion expression, forming a point of view through reading different

perspectives regarding certain issue, and catching up with news. These major goals are not ranked; they are all in one package forming the priority for Twitter users. Understanding that requires noting that the sphere of communication in Twitter is "*much more rebellion*," as expressed by one of the Tweepers. It is clearly noticeable that Twitter reflects the revolutionary spirit more than Facebook. Twitter is the '*kitchen*' of the thoughts. The most furious discussions and criticism occur there. Then, the Facebook comes as a channel for announcing an event, decision, campaign, or any initiation to the wider community of Facebook; "*Twitter tells me what's going on right now, while Facebook tells what's going on tomorrow; [through] the events and their details.*" @MWahab described it saying, "*Facebook is my micro-context, while Twitter is my macro-context.*" Another tweep considered that "*Facebook is for entertainment and spending spare time with friends, while Twitter is a model for a council of exchanging information, views, and culture.*" As one tweep summarized it, "*Facebook is more social than Twitter.*" (online interview, April 21, 2012)

Many other tweeps considered that the difference between Facebook and Twitter is in the *stage* in which exists each one of these two tools; "*five years ago, the Facebook was like Twitter, every person is considered about discovering it, now, Facebook becomes a market, and the available features allowed everyone to do annoying things. But, not everybody understands Twitter; only those who want the essence of its existence.*" Another Tweep stated that "*[people on Twitter] escaping Facebook crowd and joining revolutionaries and activists in their discussions.*" @AgainstNokhba described it saying "*Twitter is more professional than Facebook*" (online interview, May 12, 2012) Similarly, another tweep said "*Twitter is more sophisticated and has more organization than Facebook.*" In the future, however,

Twitter will not be another crowded social network, in addition, the features and style of connection among the tweeps will be applied, as one tweep suggested, to "*the future decentralized parliament.*"

It is worth noting that Facebook currently became very close to Twitter; reciprocity, one of the basic features distinguished Twitter for years, is now provided in Facebook, it exists under the title 'subscription.' It enables someone to, sort of, follow someone else's posts (status, photos, videos,.. etc.) without forcing this one to host his posts back.

*Egyptian Tweeps always talk about the necessity to stop fighting each other in order to be able to continue their collective effort and effective communication. They say that with smile, most of the time, showing good feelings, and positive attitude. They trust each other, and enjoy the differences. Of course, sometimes, they just get nervous, but the best part is when other tweeps interfere asking for ending this fight; advising the two fighting sides to "block each other," or simply mentioning them in a tweet saying "stop it, I hate my timeline." The tweeps are not avoiding arguing but calling for the concentration on the common points. They learnt the lesson, and are avoiding the previous faults threatening their unity, or slowing down their success.*

## V. Results and Discussion

In the light of the uniqueness of the ethnographic approach in addition to applying it to Twitter, the results of the study are indications pushing for re-conceptualizing the major concepts related to opinion leadership, followers, and the flow-of-information via Twitter. The results, as well, question the 'social' nature of Twitter in the post-Jan25 era. Finally, the results show indications for reconsidering the nature of the relationship between social networks and traditional media on one hand, and media-audience dynamic on the other hand.

Although he was defining the administrative 'leadership', what Traffinder said in 1995 describes the answers provided by the Egyptian revolutionary tweeps for the question 'who is an opinion leader?' As Taffinder described it, 'everyone has a theory' (Taffinder, 1995, p.33).

According to Katz (1957), opinion leaders' influence is related (1) to the personification of certain values (who one is); (2) to competence (what one knows); and (3) to strategic social location (whom one knows). In the case of the Egyptian tweeps, the first and the third points are proven less important than the second point, 'competence.' On Twitter, the 'tweet' surpasses the 'tweep' in importance. On other words, the ideas are proven more important than their owner's Twitter bio or fame (values) and/or followers (strategic social location). On Twitter, and due to the open channel of communication, the tweeps expose themselves to whatsoever opinion offered.



The indications refer to Twitter, not as a new tool of communication, but rather a 'sphere,' 'zone,' or 'platform' of interaction within which mass media content, user-generated content, and interpersonal communication are integrated. These complicated dynamics imply three main changes, (1) that opinion leaders do more of organizing, filtering, summarizing, and analyzing than leading, while the rest of thought-absorbing process is the responsibility of (2) the followers to depend on more than one source for information, including various opinion leaders, and (3) seek exposing to opposite opinions. This point supports what Katz and Lazarsfeld stated in 1955, "it had become obvious that the influence of mass media, are not only paralleled by the influence of people; in addition, influences from the mass media, are, so to say, refracted by the personal environment of the ultimate consumer" (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955, p.7).

Regarding the relationship between leaders and non-leaders/followers, the results show that it is a temporary mutually-equal relationship, and the effectiveness of the relationship depends on the followers as much as on the leaders. The majority of the tweeps do not consider themselves as opinion leaders to their followers without justifying their answer. Those who considered themselves opinion leaders, on the other hand, have solid criteria; they measure indirectly through the number of their followers, mentions and retweet, and directly from the #FF and followers praising their thoughts. Specifying the reasons for following a tweep on Twitter, they provided similar characteristics of opinion leaders proven in the literature. This means that, on Twitter the tweeps do follow the traditional opinion leaders (those with high number of followers, high rate of retweets and mentions, and the politicians and public figures), but at the same time, they follow the sub-opinion leaders who are considered

'original, trustworthiness, at the heart of the events, objective, consistent in their views, and rebellion in their tone and spirit. These are overlapping circles of opinion leadership.

The results are questioning the 'linearity' of the model. The networked innovative communication and information technology empowered the users who became senders as well as receivers; it allowed variety of choices with new tools for self-expression and knowledge-exchanging and experience-sharing among the audience members. It opened the way for many other players, both individual and groups/lobbies, to offer or impose their opinions. Instead, this study argues that the "circular" relationship is closer to reality. As showed in the analysis chapter, ideas, news, information, photos, videos, statements, events, and all types of content are transferred in non-linear flow. The circular style of interaction is obvious and there is no linear two-step-flow of information via Twitter. Media convergence, the diversity of information sources that rapidly run over the tweep's timeline, with the features of Twitter and the rebellion nature of the tweeps among other factors form the interrelated circles that connect the tweeps creating a homogeneous sphere of communication lessening the effects of the traditional media and minimizing the role of traditional opinion leaders. This is also affected by the lack of trust in traditional media, the spread of rumors, and the political and social exclusion for the revolutionary tweeps. They seek, via Twitter, countering media manipulation, providing a parallel content, and

The question about the 'republic of Twitter' aims at describing Twitter from the tweeps point of view. They are isolated with the sense that 'not the whole Egyptian community on Twitter,' but no one can deny the fact that Twitter is a horizontal in its

users' characteristics. The tweeps, also, considered that Twitter is not an end in itself; rather, it is a bridge linking the theory with the practice. The republic of Twitter is a simulation to Tahrir Square in which the 'Tahririan'T style of communication is based on the collective thinking, objective discussions, equality, freedom of expression, and the rebellion spirit they lack in traditional media.

The analysis implies the point that the comparison between Twitter and traditional media is not a comparison based on the advanced technology applied to the means; 'traditional versus new,' 'printed versus electronic,' but it is more or less related to the content, the perceptions and the policies guiding the performance and practice, and most importantly the characteristics of the users and their interests. This is seen obviously in the comparison between Twitter and Facebook, although they belong to social networks. The comparison reflects the point that the uniqueness of Twitter and its attractiveness as a medium for communication are basically due to the sphere of communication. As a new segment of the Egyptian audience is tailoring the social networks to its own needs and demands narrowing the 'social' nature of Twitter and building more serious up-to-date sphere connected to the offline-society. For traditional media, it is not enough to 'be there;' having an online URL, Facebook page, or Twitter account, but it is supposed to go beyond these superficial steps to having new perspectives toward their fragmented audience and the citizen-journalism tools, as well as, to upgrade its policies and procedures, perceptions, guidance of performance, style of writing, and agendas. In order to stay alive, traditional media has to follow their audience not the way round, and not to mirror the authorities' vision any more but to represent its real owners, the people.

Twitter is proven to be a substitute to traditional media and a complementary medium depending on the issue itself. In general, Twitter is much trusted than traditional media among the majority of the tweeps. The major complaints regarding traditional media performance is ignoring events. The centralized coverage, for instance, is criticized among Egyptian tweep who live in other governorates and have no media spot on their local issues. This gives the tweeps the opportunity to act as local correspondences in their governorates and supply their followers with up-to-date coverage.

The participant-observation supported with the results of the interviews and the survey show that the normal tweeps who are attracted to Twitter mainly after the revolution searching for serious discussions with people sharing their interests, are much excited about Twitter as a complete sphere of interaction not only means for tweeting the 140 characters. For others, including journalists, public figures, and famous activists, as supported with the quantitative data, Twitter is a tool for delivering their articles, blog-posts, news, and opinions.

The analysis confirmed that the goal of 'mobilization' is not a priority for social networks' users in the post-Jan25 era. The self-expression, discussions, monitoring the different opinions, updating their followers with the breaking news, and covering live are at the top of the reasons for which the tweeps use Twitter.

The study challenges the two-step-flow of information model in three basic concepts; (1) the opinion leadership as a mediated step between media and audience; as the study considers the 'opinion leadership' itself as overlapped circles of communication, which was not clear in the literature, and (2) the sub-opinion leaders,

represented in the normal tweets you are following, they are major part of the equation of the flow-of-information, not only countering the effects of traditional media but opinion leaders, as well. The third point is (3) the concept opinion 'leader' which turns to be more of opinion 'organizers, analyzers, news-filters, knowledge-provider, and discussion-exchanger, content-recommender, opinion-supporters, than literal leaders, and they are mediating traditional media and the traditional opinion-leaders.

The ethnographic approach widens the probable results, and therefore, the analysis provided indications regarding audience-fragmentation. It is not any more, at least not only, according to age, gender, and socio-economic status; rather, the analysis reflects the fact that audience segments are centered on their way of thinking that determines their interests. This means that the gap is not only cross the subjects but also, and most importantly, within these subjects. The unique about social networks is its flexibility that enables the user to tailor his online-corner of communication. This, however, isolates the people within the same community but amazingly create new connection across countries.

## **VI. Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study is an extension of the previous studies conducting throughout the year 2011 following the Arab Spring. The study concentrates on the context of one of the major social networks for Egyptian revolutionaries in the post-Jan25 revolution era, Twitter. Five major concepts are reconsidered in this study; leadership, leader-followers relationship, linear versus circular flow-of-information, the term 'flow,' and the position of Twitter in the flow-of-information. Ethnography has proven as a very rich scientific technique and, above all, very suitable approach to the complicated sphere of communication within which all the media theoretical concepts are integrated.

Most of the previous studies discussed social networks and the Egyptian revolution: (a) concentrated on 'quantitative measures,' (b) analyzed the on-the-making relationship between the revolutionaries and traditional media without following-up its evolving, and (c) excluded the users' own perceptions towards the role played by these tools. This study, through applying ethnography, brings the tweeps to the front of the picture, entered their comfort zone to learn from them, understand their perceived images about both themselves and their dynamic relationship with media means. The base for this study was a theoretical framework combining the two-step-flow of information, and the literature conducted on influence on Twitter at different periods of time, and within different contexts, as well some few studies conducted on Twitter during the 25<sup>th</sup> of January revolution.

The study comes as a domestic scientific view of the role played by the social networks in the political life in Egypt, specifically among revolutionaries on Twitter

in the post jan25 revolution era. The study avoided as much as possible taking the previous results as starting-points or baseline in designing the study and throughout the analysis; instead, it reconsidered many of the taken-for-granted facts about social networks and opinion leadership. In addition, the study provided indications about the nature of the social networks implying that they are not one package of similar tools, and their 'social' aspect is redefined on Twitter.

Applying the ethnographic approach supports contextualizing the various aspects of the study, tailoring the theoretical framework, and asserting on the point that 'the user is the tool.' Therefore, the ground for both the observation and the analysis was the users themselves; the Egyptian revolutionary tweeps, not the technical facilities or the available features of Twitter. Besides, the study complements the quantitative phenomenon regarding social networks usage in Egypt and its influence on the Egyptian political and social future. The qualitative view provided in this study reveals the incomplete sufficiency in depending on numbers and percentages to describe the in-the-making Egyptian scene.

The study implies a lot of firsthand data representing relatively new context, and the provided results represent a starting-point for future researches. To conclude the study, it is worth asserting on four major indications:

1. The normal tweeps Twitter accounts actively use Twitter with maximum flexibility in comparison to the public figures, bloggers, and/or political activists who mainly use Twitter for spreading the breaking news and their own views. Therefore, noticing the complexity of the flow-of-information proven easier, deeper, and more meaningful through the ordinary tweeps.

2. Opinion leadership indicated as a multi-layers phenomenon; as there are traditional opinion leaders and sub-leaders followed with collective thinking and exposure to contradicted views and opinions. Also, the leader-follower relationship is a mutually equal relationship. The study indications refer to opinion leaders as becoming more of a discussion-facilitators, data-analyzers and summarizers, content-recommenders, and thoughts-stimulators than direct leaders.
3. The tweeps proven to be horizontally spread throughout the Egyptian society. Twitter has proven not to be isolated nor integrated bur rather a zone of communication within which an active segment of the Egyptian audience is tailoring its convergent sphere of communication and practicing its own rules challenging traditional media manipulation.
4. Most importantly, is the point that all the cultural and technological and political changes with the rapid flow-of-information, the tweeps rely more on the sender/source of the information than the means/channel/medium. Personalizing your choice makes it easier to judge the trustworthiness of a shared content.

The recommendation directed to Egyptian traditional media, particularly the state-owned media is it they have to face the fact that propaganda and mass manipulation are not effective any more with the new audience. The route for getting back the people's trust is through honesty, accuracy, representation of the people, and objectivity.



One of the recommendations applied in the current study is for media researchers to upgrade their research designs, methods, and sphere of study according to and within the new trends in media-audience research. Part of the blame directed to traditional media in this study is the responsibility of the scientific field, which is supposed to connect the theoretical with the practical, to upgrade the vision and the mission of media means, and to voice the audience. Recently, researchers revised the term 'audience' claiming that media convergence as well as the advanced technologies generated new media tools have generated new scientific context with new concepts and perceptions regarding media theories explaining media-audience interactions, effects, and uses and gratifications. This is in parallel to the new methodological approach supporting method triangulation and praising the qualitative approaches in studying media audience.

# **APPENDICES**

### Appendix. I Survey Questions

I am Hend AbdAlrahman AbdAlmotagally, a post-graduate student at the American University in Cairo, School of Global Affairs and Public Policy, department of Journalism and Mass Communication. I am conducting my Master's thesis, and I appreciate your help by answering the following questions. Your participation is voluntary and will not take more than few minutes. The study is related to social networks and its relationship with traditional mass media means. The data provided will be used only for scientific purposes, and the answers are anonymous. In case you need any further clarifications or have any comments, please, do not hesitate to contact the researcher at the following e-mail: [hend.abd.alrahman@hotmail.com](mailto:hend.abd.alrahman@hotmail.com)

Thank you very much

1. **Do you trust traditional Media more than what your trust in what the users tweet on Twitter?**  
Yes/No (Kindly, specify.....)
2. **Do you consider Twitter is a substitute to the traditional mainstream media?**  
Yes/No (Kindly, specify.....)
3. **Kindly, explain the difference between Twitter and Facebook. As well as, clarify whether or not you agree with the expression “The Republic of Twitter.”**
4. **Do you consider yourself an opinion leader to your followers on Twitter?**  
Yes/No (Kindly, specify.....)
5. **Kindly, explain the importance of monitoring Twitter during watching alive coverage** (a press conference, live TalkShow,...ect)
6. **What are the characteristics of the person whom you consider as your opinion leader?**
7. **Most of the time, you use Twitter for:**
  - Persuasion
  - Checking the recent news.
  - Mobilizing
  - Expressing my own views.
  - Checking the different views.
  - I have different goal, which is:.....
8. **Kindly, specify some reasons for following a Tweep on Twitter:.....**
9. **Kindly, specify some reasons for unfollowing a tweep on twitter:.....**
10. **Do you follow traditional media accounts on Twitter (such as newspapers, Televison channels, Radio channels, TalkShows,...ect)**  
Yes/No (Kindly, specify the importance of that)

Kindly, confirm that by answering this questionnaire you provide your consent for participating in the study: Yes/No.

## Appendix. II

### Survey Answers Tables

**Table 1**

Do you trust traditional Media more than what your trust in what the users tweet on Twitter?

<b>Answer</b>	<b>Response count</b>	<b>Response percent</b>
Yes	10	14.2%
<b>No</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>85.7%</b>

**Table 2**

Do you consider Twitter as a substitute to traditional media?

<b>Answer</b>	<b>Response count</b>	<b>Response percent</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>62.8%</b>
No	26	37.1%

**Table 3**

Do you consider yourself as an opinion leader to your followers on Twitter?

<b>Answer</b>	<b>Response count</b>	<b>Response percent</b>
Yes	15	21.4%
<b>No</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>78.57</b>

**Table 4**Most of the time, you use Twitter for<sup>1</sup>:

<b>Choices</b>	<b>Response count</b>	<b>Response percent</b>
Persuasion	2	2.85%
Mobilization	2	2.85%
Breaking-News	23	32.85%
Different views	13	18.57%
<b>Self-Expression</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>35.71%</b>
Other	5	7.1%

**Table 5**Are you following traditional media accounts on Twitter (such as, newspaper, Television channels, radio channels, TalkShows, ...etc.)?

<b>Answer</b>	<b>Response count</b>	<b>Response percent</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>75.7%</b>
No	17	24.28%

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<sup>1</sup> This question aims at determining the most important reason for which tweeps use Twitter. Almost all the tweeps answered the survey wrote a comment clarifying that they use Twitter for almost all these goals, but the answers represent the priority or the basic goal. For the choice 'other,' the reason provided by the tweeps was 'sharing my posts, articles, and tweet news for my followers.'

Appendix. III Figures

Figure 1:

Gemyhood. (March 10, 2012).



Figure 2:

Mahmoud\_Ezzat. (April 19, 2012).



**Figure 3:**

Ola\_Eltaliawi. (February 23, 2012).



**Figure 4:**

HalaLoca. (February 25, 2012).



**Figure 5:**

Waelabbas. (February 29, 2012).



**Figure 6:**

TamerMnGhamra. (April 28, 2012).





**Figure 7:**

ShriefKEISaid1. (April 1, 2012).



**Figure 8:**

@sayed3s. (April 25, 2012).

@IsraaElsakka. (April 25, 2012).

@shalabytak3eb (April 25, 2012).

@metooli (April 25, 2012).

@ahmedhatem (April 25, 2012).

@Asmasamy (April 25, 2012).



**Figure 9:**

@fatmaemam (April 18, 2012).



**Figure 10:**

@NohaAtef (May 1, 2012).



**Figure 11:**

@negadelborai (April 29, 2012).

**Figure 12:**

@nabilelhalafawy (April 27, 2012).



**Figure 13:**

@AmrMMohamed (March 8, 2012).



**Figure 14:**

@Gemyhood & @maishams (April 25, 2012).



**Figure 15:**

@RamiBash (April 27, 2012).

@BentMasr2 (April 27, 2012).

@TheMichaelMoran (April 27, 2012).



**Figure 16 :** @beleidy (April 23, 2012).



**Figure 17 :** @Zeinobia (May 1, 2012).



**Figure 18 :** @\_Tarekology\_ (April 28, 2012).



**Figure 19:** @maysaashujaa (April 27, 2012).



**Figure 20 :** @RamyMahrous (April 19, 2012).

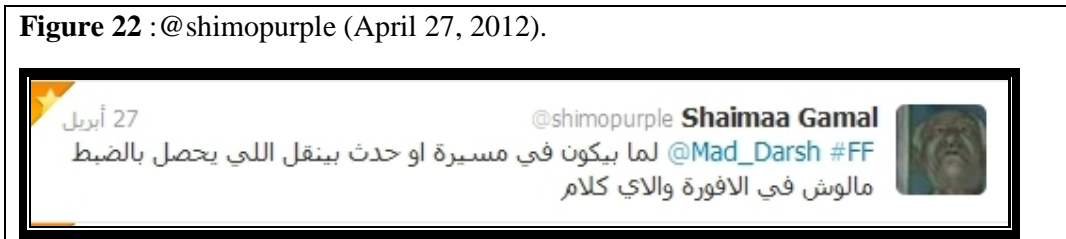




**Figure 21 :** @\_maisabri\_ (April 27, 2012).



**Figure 22 :** @shimopurple (April 27, 2012).



**Figure 23:**

@Fadiito (April 2, 2012).

**Figure 24:**

@Marcoo72 (April 23, 2012).



**Figure 25:**

@AnaTa7riry (March 31, 2012).



**Figure 26:**

@olva (April 23, 2012).



**Figure 27:**

@Abdurrahmanezz (April, 2, 2012).

**Figure 28:**

@tweetThawra (April 28, 2012).





**Figure 30:**

@Malek (February 25, 2012).



**Figure 31:**

@Hananelleithy (April 18, 2012).





**Figure 34:**

@Dr\_Heba\_Raouf (April 12, 2012).



**Figure 35:**

@3effat (April 28, 2012).





**Figure 36:**

@i3atef (May 1, 2012).



**@i3atef** محمد عاطف

23h

Rt @beedoall: جريدة الشروق تنشر صورته لأحد المعتصمين ويقول انه من البلطجية .. الرجل معتصم من 4 أيام في العباسية [pic.twitter.com/gbOACvjE](http://pic.twitter.com/gbOACvjE)

Hide photo
Reply
Retweet
Favorited



image by @beedoall, 1 May

powered by  Photobucket

Flag this media

**27**

RETWEETS

**3**

FAVORITES



2:14 PM - 1 May 12 via Twitter for Android · Details

**Figure 37:**

@lilianwagdy (May 1, 2012).



**Figure 38:**

@yaseralzayat (March 4, 2012)



**Figure 39:**

@itgamal (May 1, 2012).



**Figure 40:**

@91Samara (May 1, 2012).

@mohamed\_taha77 (May 1, 2012).



**Figure 41:**

@MarianneMagd (February 21, 2012).

**Figure 42:**

@EZXCVC (April 23, 2012).



**Figure 43:**

@arahmanyusuf (April 28, 2012).



**Appendix. IV**

**Screenshots of Twitter profiles of the interviewees**

1. [@MWahab](#)



**Screenshot of @MWahab\_\_ Twitter account**

**Followers: 863.**

The 15 years old tweep Mohammed Abd Al-Wahab is one of the founders of the Facebook page "Revolution without ID," which has also Twitter account. The idea is to gather young revolutionaries under 18 years old. Abd Al-Wahab, as well, is an active blogger.

2. [@AgainstNokhba](#)



Screenshot of @AgainstNokhba twitter account

**Followers:** 6.801  
**Bio:** Unity!!! I'm a typical centrist, progressive, reformer, open to different views. I oppose whatever stands for capitalism, conservatism, or classic liberalism.

3. [@3bdrabo25](https://twitter.com/3bdrabo25)

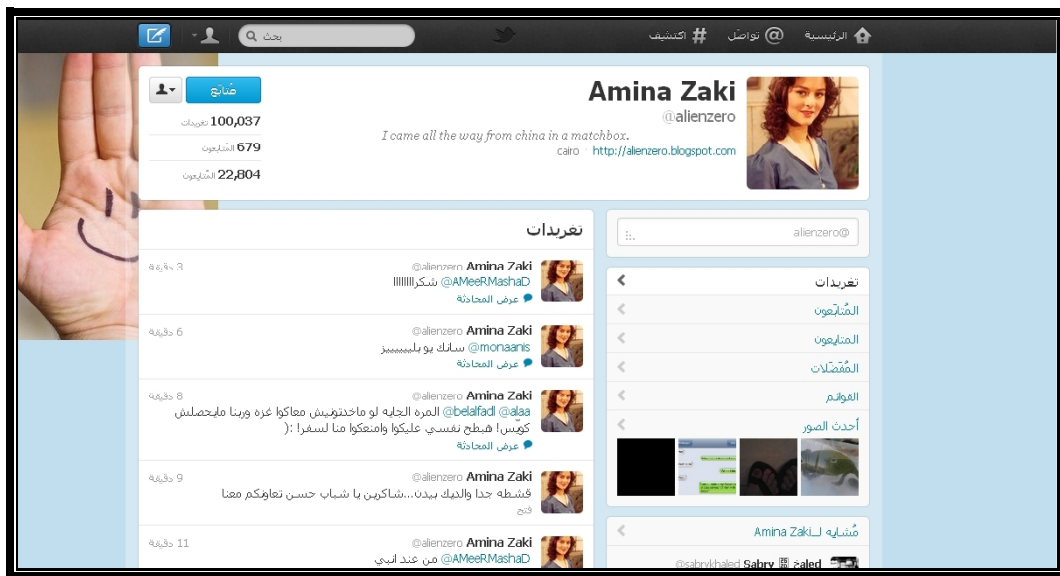


Screenshot of @3abdrabo25 Twitter account

Followers: 1.926



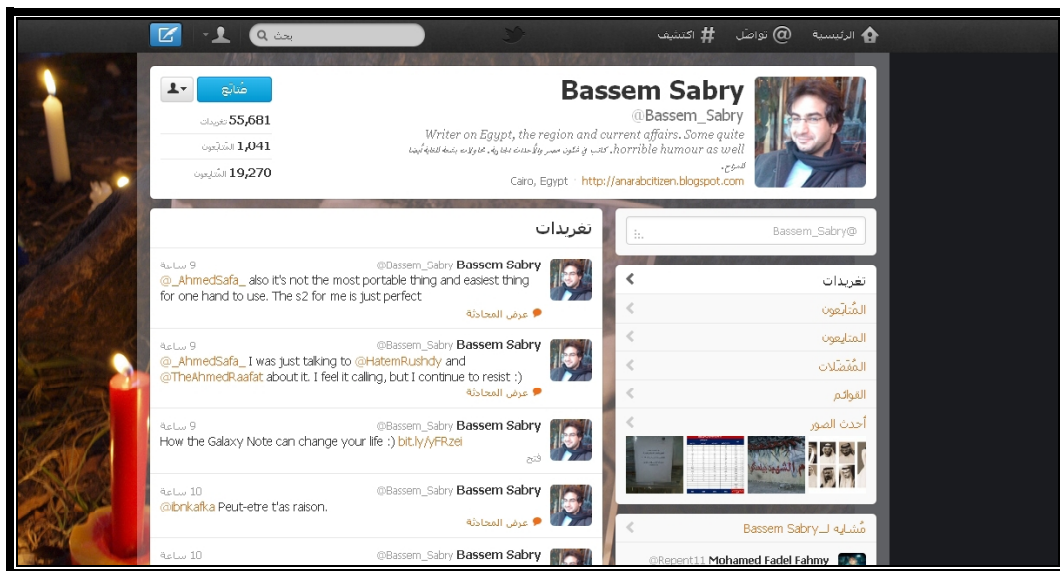
4. [@alienzero](#)



Screenshot of @alienzero Twitter account

Follower: 22.804

5. [@Bassem\\_Sabry](#)



Screenshot of @Bassem\_Sabry Twitter account

**Followers:** 19.270

**Bio:** Writer on Egypt, the region and current affairs. Some quite horrible humour as well.

6. [@Dr\\_Mokka](#)



Screenshot of @Dr\_Mokka Twitter account

Followers: 9.620

7. [@Elma7roossa](#)

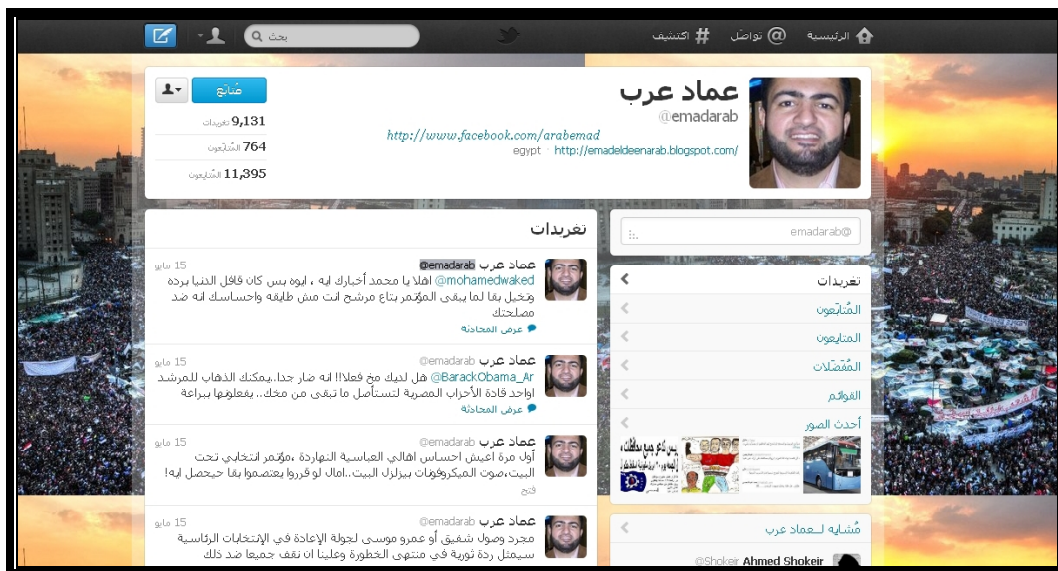


**Screenshot of @Elma7roossa Twitter account**

**Followers: 12.418**

**Online Interview: April 25, 2012**

8. [@emadarab](#)



Screenshot of @emadarab Twitter account

Followers: 11.395

9. [@esraa2008](https://twitter.com/esraa2008)



Screenshot of @esraa2008 Twitter account

**Bio:** One of the Egyptian women.

**Followers:** 93,540

10. [@gr33ndata](#)



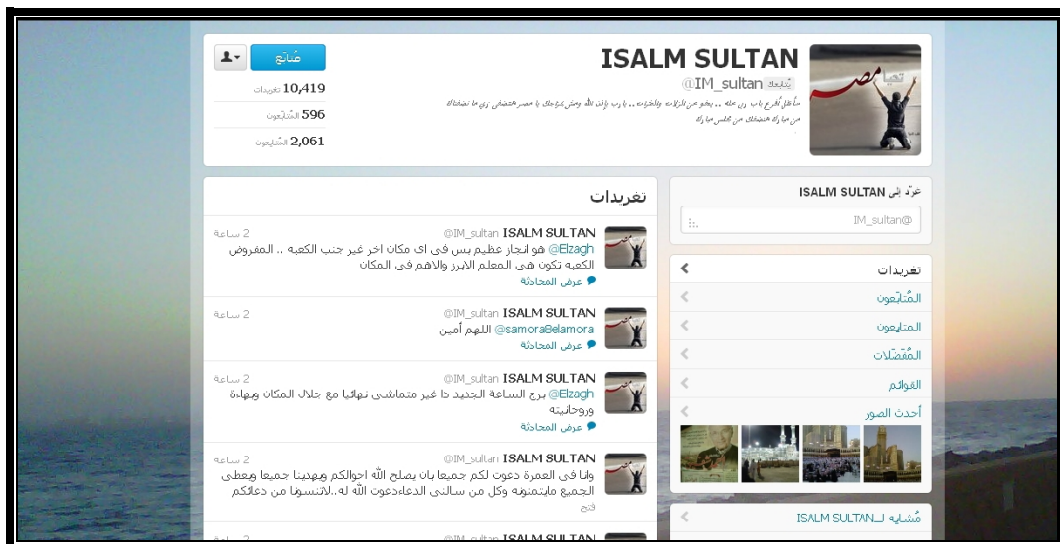
Screenshot of @gr33ndata Twitter account

**Followers:** 14,449

**Bio:** A [@GlobalVoices](#) Author who happen to be a Network Architect at [@SalecEgypt](#). I want to work as a Co-founder some day, yet not sure what to co-found and with who.

**Online Interview:** April 19, 2012

11. [@IM\\_Sultan](#)



Screenshot of @IM\_Sultan Twitter account (May, 22, 2012)

Followers: 2.061



12. [@ircpresident](https://twitter.com/ircpresident)



Screenshot of @ircpresident Twitter account

**Followers:** 12.027

**Bio:** Social Media Consultant. [@GlobalVoices](https://twitter.com/GlobalVoices) Lingua Coordinator, [@Advox](https://twitter.com/Advox) author and [@GVinArabic](https://twitter.com/GVinArabic) Editor. [@Twitter\\_Ar](https://twitter.com/Twitter_Ar) moderator. Known as Gohary. You can also Google Me.

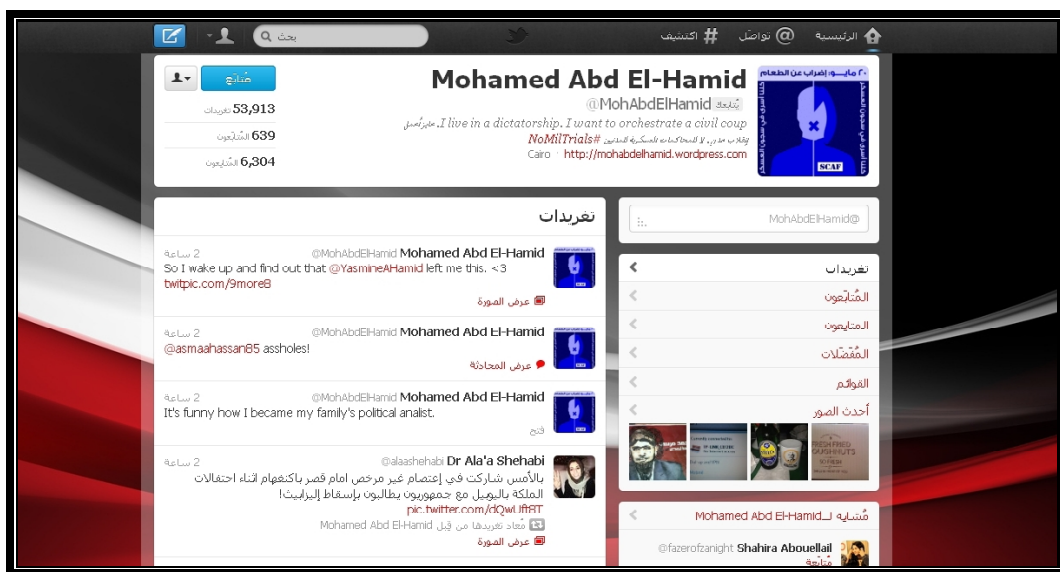
13. [@M\\_Khalafawy](#)



Screenshot of @M\_Khalafawy Twitter account

Followers: 6.514

14. [@MohAbdElHamid](#)



Screenshot of @MohAbdElhamid Twitter account

Followers: 6.304

Online Interview: April 21, 2012

15. [@msheshtawy](#)

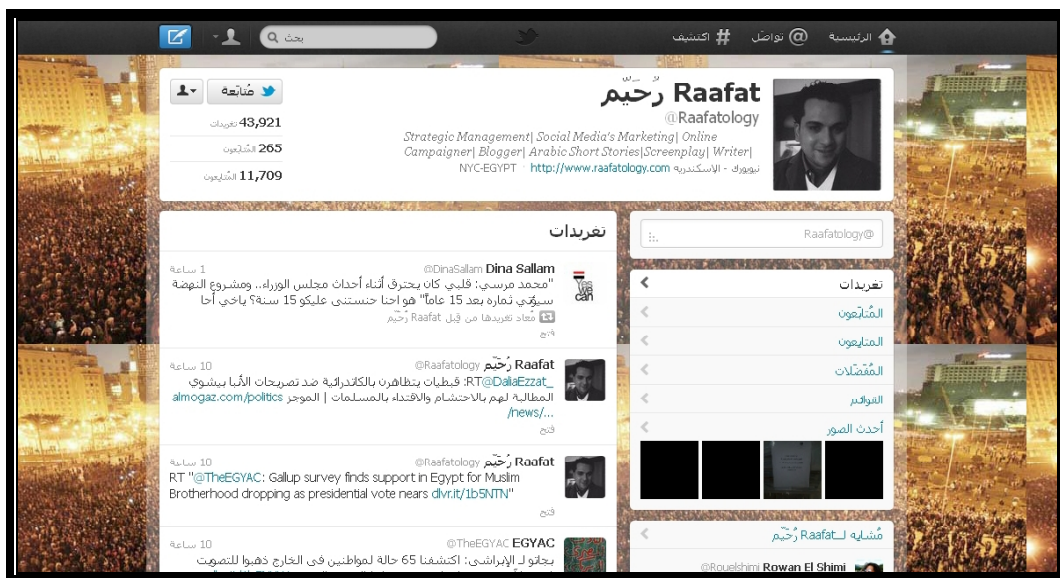


Screenshot of @msheshtawy Twitter account

**Followers:** 11.975

**Bio:** Engineer by profession, Journalist by passion and Photographer by luck. Mind full of Ideas. Freedom Of Speech supporter and a Blogger.

16. [@Raafatology](#)



Screenshot of @Raafatology Twitter account

**Followers:** 11.709

**Bio:** Strategic Management| Social Media's Marketing| Online Campaigner| Blogger| Arabic Short Stories|Screenplay| Writer|

17. [@RamyMahrous](#)

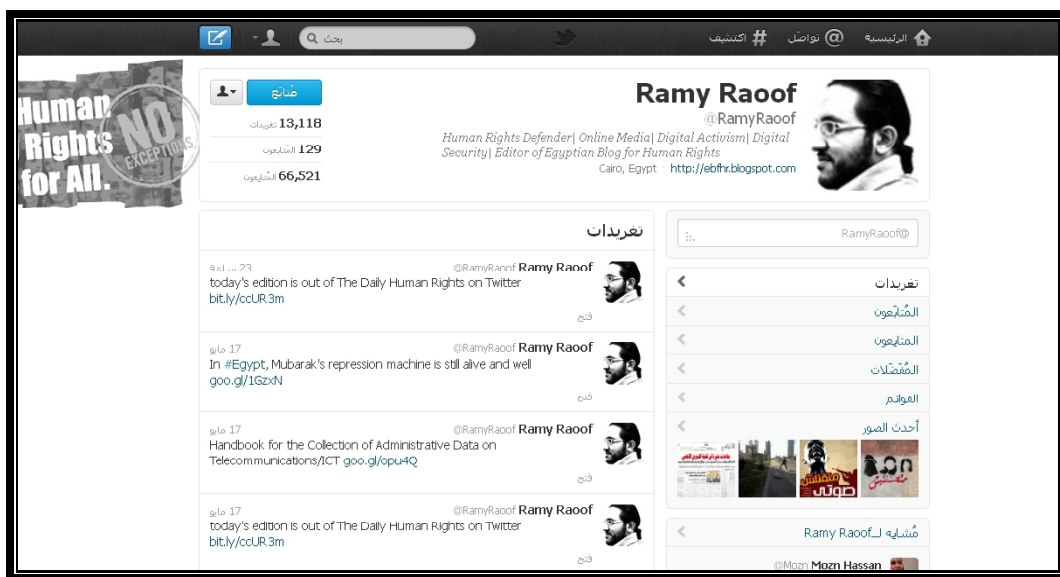


Screenshot of @RamyMahrous Twitter account

**Follower:** 7, 781

**Online Interview:** April 21, 2012

18. [@RamyRaof](https://twitter.com/RamyRaof)



Screenshot of @RamyRaof Twitter account

**Followers:** 66.521  
**Bio:** Human Rights Defender| Online Media| Digital Activism| Digital Security| Editor of Egyptian Blog for Human Rights

19. [@ZenaAmina](#)



Screenshot of @ZenaAmina Twitter account

Followers: 2.469



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<sup>i</sup> Although @TheMichaelMoran does not belong to the sample criteria, one of the tweeps observed retweeted this tweet. The ethnographer, as part of reflecting the real context of interaction, kept this tweet as an example for the networked style of connection on Twitter.