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Revisiting the spiral of silence in a social media environment: Egypt's 2014 presidential election as a case study

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Revisiting the Spiral of Silence in a Social Media Environment: Egypt's 2014 Presidential Election as a Case Study

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DEDICATION

In The Name of Allah, The Most Beneficent, The Most Merciful

This thesis is dedicated to my father, Engineer Salah Elshahed; you are my role model an endless fountain of love and support. You were the first to encourage me to pursue my MA. Your support and guidance has been a source of motivation and strength during moments of despair. I am what I am because of your guidance; I praise Allah for having you in my life.

This is for you.

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Abstract

    With the advent of the Internet and anonymous features of online media, users have established novel platforms to voice their opinion freely without fear of negative feedback. This thesis explores the application of a long-standing public opinion theory– the spiral of silence by Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann–within the prevalent Social Networking Sites (SNS), particularly Facebook. When applying spiral of silence to online mediated environment, it seems intuitive that the lack of verbal cues and anonymity offered would serve to undermine the fear of isolation and restlessness that results in unwillingness to express minority views. This research contributes to understanding how the spiral of silence might operate in the social media era, and adds a view on how SNS influence opinion-forming variables. This study uses survey and in-depth interviews to assess willingness to speak out on political stands during the Egyptian presidential election of 2014.

    A survey was distributed to query Egyptian SNS users about their willingness to express their political opinion prior to casting votes in the nation's 2014 presidential election. In-depth interviews were also conducted offering interpretations to the perception of the general opinion climate, and expected consequences of expressing views about controversial issues to Facebook's friends. This study considered online negative feedback on the users' profile as the form of fear of isolation, to accommodate new form of isolation in social media environment. Tests of negative evaluation fears showed no relation between sample's apprehension of a negative feedback on facebook and their tendency to express their political opinion on the presidential election, questioning spiral of silence's explanation of compelling social factors. Respondents with higher knowledge level showed higher tendency to express their views on the issue

of the election than those with lower knowledge level regardless of their social belonging status.

The perceived majority's opinion showed no influence on users' inclination to express views, nor did it influence willingness to enter a discussion with holders of opposing views. Willingness to speak out under a minority label was not affected in an online environment. Moreover, no statistical significance was found to indicate that spiral of silence existence is still embedded in a real-life setting. Contrary to literature on the spiral of silence, findings revealed equal attention paid to elements of close circle and community at large, and perceived importance of identifying their opinion on the presidential election prior to evaluating personal opinion.

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"It takes only one person to produce speech, but it requires the cooperation of all to produce silence"

- Robert E. Pittenger et al., the first five minutes

I.   Introduction

In 1994, the internet celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary at an event billed as the 'History of Future' (Hafner & Iyon 2003:260 in Green, 2010 p. 21). Being a technologically unique medium, the internet offers what evolved as a consequence of traditional media deficiency: a two way communication through email, social media, and interactivity (Medoff & Kaye, 2011, p7). Thompson (2011) expounds that digital technologies have transformed the spatial and progressive organization of social life, creating new forms of interaction, novel kinds of social relationship and new ways of relating to others. The technological information revolution has created new communication opportunities in the public sphere, including easy access for the exchange of information and opinions. With the ongoing technological innovations, the internet, and in particular information, have become mainstream even in societies that seem relatively underdeveloped (Naughton, 2011). As of now there are 2,484,915,152 internet users worldwide, with a 35% internet penetration rate (18% Africa, 37% Middle East), 1,856,680,860 from which are active social networks users, with 28% social network penetration, and 6,572,950,124 mobile network subscribers with 93% penetration rate (Global Digital Statistics, 2014).

The social shaping of technology acknowledges the power of users in fashioning technology. "The internet can generally be constructed as the result of a series of choices" (Green, 2010, p.188). Influential opinion leaders, policy makers and individuals within their domestic contexts, all have different personalized ways of relating and using the internet. Internet in its interconnected technological infrastructure that supports the World Wide Web; covers the many ways in which digitally mediated communication has become domesticated and pervasive within

every day action (Green, 2010, p.3). Nowadays novel communication tools mark the way in which the household's members incorporate themselves into audiences/communities that produce and consume the chosen media technologies. Audience participation provides access to opinions that through conversation can be traded in face to face discussions (Hill 2002 as cited in Green, p.160).

Statement of the Problem

Theories of public opinion, like the Spiral of Silence by Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann, have been reevaluated with the introduction of social media. In 1974, Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann introduced the spiral of silence theory in attempt to explicate an individual's conformity to a majority's influence. Neumann's focal point presumed that if individuals perceive their opinions to be a minority, they will not express them in public for isolation fears. In social media context, the word public could be found in a different configuration. Thanks to social media tools like SNS and Blogs, as they collectively congregate different aspects of society forming a virtual public sphere. Hence, the word isolated might simply stand for "a remove" from a friends list or network.

The conception of isolation in Noelle-Neumann's theory implies a sense of disconnection from others, which could be effective as a psychological variable representing a negative emotional condition associated with expressing one's opinion about a particular topic. For that reason, online users will be likely to reconsider posting an opinion if they felt it will not appeal to the majority or -a significant number- of his network/friends list (Neuwirth, Frederick & Mayo, 2007).

This thesis explores the effect of the communicative technologies on the newly formed virtual public sphere. Most of the studies that investigated spiral of

silence were conducted during a period in which traditional media dominated; that is, prior to the development of social networking sites. Facebook and other SNS offer new channels for speaking out, and it is important to evaluate whether willingness to speak out differs online than offline.

The spiral of silence is embedded in traditional media, since the nature of the media environment has changed; accordingly, research scheme must adapt to account for new variables and questions; how does the changing environment amend the evolution of the Spiral of Silence? Notions like majority dominance and prevailing tone of the media environment have always been vital players with in the social exchange process. Social knowledge and information on the other hand, are directly affected by the surrounding, whether it is family members, friends, acquaintances in a traditional means of communication. The evolution of web 2.0, social media has defied the traditional norms of social knowledge and information exchange, creating a new form of public sphere, which is tolerant to more diverse opinion and able to jeopardize the hegemony of a single entity and finally, contains fewer social constraints to consider when abiding by an 'opposing' view. This study examines the role of the acquaintance on personal political stands, and how the perceived majority opinion will impact social media behavior. Facebook and other social networking sites are expected to have a similar effect in moderating individual's fear of isolation.

II.   Literature Review

Background Information

Prior to the new media era, mainstream media provoked audiences to seek a source of news that reflects factual events taking place in society, rather than accepting mainstream media's messages that were reflecting the regime's agenda setting. Today, messages now sent through media are no longer shaped exclusively by the interests of corporate content producers, nor are they one-directional. In addition to being more numerous (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008), messages increasingly are crafted by people who also can be classed as members of the receiving audience (Schulz, 2004).

Nowadays, users determine which types of news stories they want to receive, what types of information is relevant to their lives and field of interest; when and where they want to be exposed to information, and what type of social congregation they prefer to join. They fashion their identities, in part, according to what they do online. They change their daily routine by engaging in voluntary consumption practices in their homes, schools and workplaces (Green, 2010). Green identifies distributed networks of collaborators as it allows recognition of the creative power of 'harnessing the hive' the community of people engaged in a shared activity create. "The domestication of technology is consequently of great significance in understanding its consumption" (Green, 2010 p.9-10).

A major obstacle to adapting existing media theory to the new media environment is the numerous mass communication theories were developed on the basis of television studies (Pitchard, p.10). Schulz (2004) suggests that this focus is too narrow to support a broader term such as "media effects" as a substitute (p. 94 as cited in Pitchard p.10). Chaffee and Metzger (2001) point out how the Internet's main

purpose is to act as a decentralized communication system. Since it has become the paradigm medium, the media environment reflects decentralization of both message production and content selection (as cited in Pitchard, p.12). They also proposed that the term 'media not the 'masses' should be the operative term within media theories. Schulz (2004) suggests that a concept of "mediatization" has the aptitude of merging the study of "old" and "new" media as it focuses on the processes and functions regardless of media format.

Despite its foundation in individual psychological needs, which would be responsive to media landscape of fragmentation and choice. Spiral of silence theory suggests not merely an individual decision but rather a much wider social construction, where individuals' decisions are communicated to other members of society. The spread of this spiraling effect requires that the psychological aspect of the theory along with individual characteristics be inseparably linked with media function.

New Media: Web 2.0

During the 1990's and 2000s, a Wireless World was introduced giving media a whole new meaning. Today, the world is nearly totally wire-less. Information, videos, movies, music, pictures, even people- can be accessed anywhere. With the advent of the internet, people had access to news and information about almost any subject, anytime, anywhere. After the internet gained popularity, a new generation evolved as a natural evolution: Web 2.0 or "new media" is defined by new levels of sociality and collaboration, where users build upon the activities of previous users (Green, 2010 p.90). Kaplan & Haenlein (2010, p.60-61) opine that the term "web 2.0" is used to describe a novel method through which software developers and end users utilize the

'world wide web' as being a platform whereby content and applications were no longer created and published by individuals, but were instead continuously modified by all users in a participatory and collaborative fashion. The definition may vary but the result remains the same: new media innovative tools have reinvented the performance of countless social activities.

New media -also referred to as social media- is applied to digitally based information and communication technologies. It is constantly changing and evolving, has many facets, and applies to many practices (Green, 2010 p.177). According to Mayfield (2008), social media is the grouping of new types of online media which share all or, at least, most of the following five characteristics: participation, openness, conversation, community and connectedness. It is the type of media that incorporates the online technology and methods through which people can share content, personal opinions, exchange different perspectives and simply interact.

New media comes in various forms: Text; used mainly in Weblogs also known as Blogs. WordPress.com, Blogger, and TypePad are considered the most popular free blogging platforms. Micro blogging; which differs from traditional blogging since the content is delivered in short bursts of information e.g. Twitter. Audio forms, Wikis; websites that allow you to create, edit and share information about a subject or topic. Video sharing allows you to upload and share videos with the web community e.g.: YouTube. Photo sharing where users can upload images e.g.: Flickr. News aggregation providing the latest news stories published by users from different websites e.g. Digg. Social bookmarking; are websites that allow users to publicly bookmark web pages they find valuable (Solis, 2007). Finally, Social networking sites (SNS), which are websites that allows you to create a personal profile, chat, discuss and share information with others such as MySpace and Facebook.

Social Networking Sites: SNS

Media scholars Boyd and Ellison (2007) defined Social network sites (SNS) as web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and navigate their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature of these connections may vary from one site to another. Some sites are designed with ethnic, religious, sexual orientation, political, or other specifications; there are even SNSs for dogs (Dogster) and cats (Catster) (p.8). Since their introduction, social network sites have attracted millions of users; many of whom have integrated these sites into their daily practices. Most sites support the maintenance of pre-existing social networks, while others help strangers connect based on shared interests, political views, activities, beliefs and opinions (Mackenzie, 2008).

Social networks are typically used to send email, photos, and videos to "friends" with access to someone's SNS page. These friends may then interact with each other, creating and expanding existing social ties. SNS share similarities like offering news, various viewpoints, promote discussion and a sense of community. However, they differ in structure, purposes and levels of interactivity (Kaye, 2010). SNS can be your own virtual cocoon, where you communicate what you believe, with no direct threat of fear of isolation. As you will not fear the loss of someone who opposes your beliefs and opinions because, arguably, you are not linked to anyone except through your own medium, i.e your page.

Although social network sites hit their stride in the late 2000s, they have been in existence since the late 1990s (Medoff, &Kaye, 2011 p. 81). The first SNS started

in 1995 by Randy Conrads who founded classmates online, which provided the idea of virtual reunion (Fahili 2013, p. 43). According to Boyd and Ellison, SixDegrees (1997, disappeared in 2000) was chronologically the first social network: as it was the first to allow users to create personal profiles and link to friends. Between 1997 and 2001: AsianAvenue, BlackPlanet, and LiveJournal were launched, allowing users to create professional, personal and dating profiles (Magolnick, 2010). The early 2000s brought a huge development in social media in particular social networking. Ryze.com was launched in 2001 to help people leverage their business networks (Chapman, 2010). Friendster (2002) operated by allowing people to discover their friends and then friends-of-friend. Friendster was designed to compete with Match.com, a profitable online dating site (Cohen, 2003).

From 2002 onward, numerous SNS were launched prompting social software analyst Clay Shirky author of *Here Comes Everybody* - term YASNS- "Yet another Social Networking Service". After 2002, social networks launch included: Fotolog (2002), LinkedIn, MySpace, Last.FM, and Hi5 in (2003), Orkut, Flickr, and Facebook in (2004), YouTube, and Bebo in (2005) and Twitter (2006). The most famous mid-2000s web 2.0 social networks were Facebook, Twitter and MySpace. In April 2009, Facebook had 200 million users worldwide: in March 2010 it had reached 400 million. By November 2010, Facebook's estimated audience is more than 547 million users, while Twitter shows igures with 19 million in March 2009 and 75 million in March 2010 (Pérez-Latre, Portilla &Blanco, 2011, p. 64). Pew Research Center statistics (Figure A) shows that by statistical indications, online users are gravitating to facebook making it the most famous online platform to study upon.

Social media sites, 2012-2013
% of online adults who use the following social media websites, by year
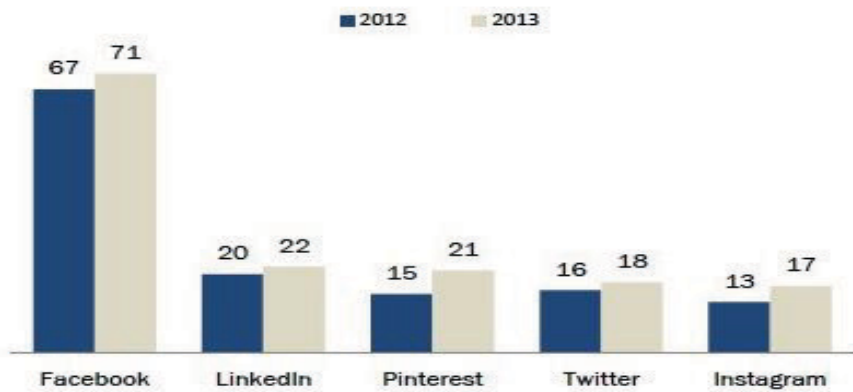
Figure A, Annual Increase of users' (aged 18+) participation to social media (PewResearch.org)

Online Community

In its early beginnings, there was substantial discussion about whether online communication could have the "richness and depth" of physical communities (Green 1999 in Green, 2010, p.140). With the evolution of the internet a new generation appeared under the name of new media, offering a new framework through which a community is constructed. The concept of a community is related to perception rather than grounded in location and images of the surrounding community. The term 'virtual community' was coined by Howard Rheingold in 1993; it refers to the social aggregations that people use to communicate with each other rather than face-to-face communication in a real life setting (Rheingold 2000 in Green, 2010, p.141). Individuals have been exposed to new possibilities for voicing their opinions with the emergence of online venues. The relative anonymous character of online communication is believed to free individuals from social expectations and constraints and thus reduced the threats of social sanctions for their behavior (Neumann, Bimber, & Hindman, 2011 in Oh, 2011, p.3).

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In 2000, Scholars Daniel Miller and Don Slater carried out ethnographic fieldwork in Trinidad West Indies, to examine Trinidadian uses of the internet and insight of a community. Results showed that online community allowed a more spiritual engagement, with greater opportunity to absorb the impact of a communication process. They concluded that online community was not a shadowy substitution for real community, but a method through which users could engage with an existing community in a different approach. The implication of Millar and Slater study ascertained that internet is part of 'real' life; there is nothing virtual about. They restated that communities found on the internet are similarly 'authentic' to the communities operating in a different context from face-to-face communities. Often the two contexts complement each other (Green, 2010, p.141)

Studies have suggested that new online media features, might reduce traditional constrains to openly speak out on controversial topics. For example, those reluctant to express opinions or show their political stand in face to face conversations find it less threatening to express themselves through a computer mediated chat room (Ho & Mcleod, 2008, as cited in Chen, 2011 p.2).

Manuel Castells's network theory is beneficial in aiding to elucidate the proficiency of social media in the creation of weak ties, given the anonymity provided by the internet. He believed that weak ties are useful in providing information and creating opportunity with low cost. To him the internet allowed the forging of weak ties with strangers "in an egalitarian pattern of interaction where social characteristics are less influential in framing or even blocking information" Castell believed social media offered a new form of creative anonymity (as cited in Fihaili 2013, p.31)

Online community is vital in providing context within which technology is acquired, offering a range of supporters in diverse circumstances to supplement,

replace and compensate for interaction, or lack of interaction with people living locally. Such a perspective, of the internet having an incredible social impact, gives credence to the attempts by the minority language speakers and members of numerically smaller cultures to use online resources to support cultural maintenance. Internet access and use is a choice that both expresses and molds individual and community identity, promoting a critical examination of what an individual's usage says about them as social and cultural actors and what constitutes a 'highway' (Green, 2010 p.186).

According to a September Pew poll (2013), a quarter of internet users have posted comments anonymously. As the age of a user decreases, his/her reluctance to link a real name with an online remark increases. 40% of people in 18- 29 years old demographics have posted anonymously. One of the most common critiques of online comments cites a disconnection between the commenter's identity and what he/she is saying, a phenomenon that the psychologist John Suler memorably labeled the 'online disinhibition effect.' Anonymity has also been shown to encourage participation; by promoting a greater sense of community identity, users do not have to worry about standing out individually. 'Shared reality' phenomenon encompasses that our experience of something is affected by whether or not we will share it socially. Take away comments, and you take away some of that shared reality, which is why online users often want to share or comment in the first place; they want to believe that others will read and react to their ideas (Konnikova, 2013).

Social Shaping of Technology

Non electronic social networks have been around for a long time. People form a social relationship because of common interests or values. With the advance of electronic communication, the internet has made SNS an everyday activity for millions of people because of the ease of communicating. Social media offer a wide range of virtual communication rooms in which individuals can enhance communication on an interpersonal level, and to draw conclusions on the climate of opinion for a given issue. Private Homepages and weblogs, as well as websites of interpersonal and group communication political forums, and most importantly social online networks enable individuals to exchange opinions online. Such trend caused the percentage of adult internet users with an SNS profile to quadruple from 8% in 2005 to 35% in the end of 2008, to 43% by mid-2009; Offering a new form of public sphere.

With the existence of SNS, the traditional relationship between authority and publics has changes, making it easier for the powerless to collaborate, coordinate, and convey their voices, opinions and demands. "The online activity produces links between the user's social network and the site that affects the likelihood of other people also finding, accessing and valuing the same material" (Green,2010, p.90). SNS being a type of social publishing tool consists of a unique communication medium framed in the construct of computer-mediated communication, they include consumer-generated content which by their very nature, are subject to a profound lack of traditional social context cues (Griffith, 2009 in Lemin, 2010, p.1) SNS are believed to have upgraded people from interval communication to simultaneous communication (Chen, 2011 p.1).

Formerly, online users spent more time emailing than any other activity, but in 2009, time spent on social networks surpassed email, indicating a shift in the way people use the internet to connect with each other (Medoff & Kaye, 2011, p.280). The assumption that all individuals will select the same objective media tone and thus draw the same conclusions regarding the opinion climate seems rather implausible today. Looking at online environments, selective exposure to information has become very easy and opinion cues of the individual's personal or even unknown social environment have become much more visible. Millions of online users are drawn to SNS as a means of keeping in touch with existing friends and family.

The advances of new media alongside the contributions of social media such as blogs, message boards, podcasts, and wikis have somehow confined the performance and effects of traditional media. It has changed the face of mass communication, giving it the capability to create an effective public sphere that enhanced civic responsibility and political interaction. Social media are increasingly recognized as promising tool to change the form of information, speed information transmission, increase the level of creation, sharing, and utilization of information (Naughton, 2011). Mcquail (2005) points out that currently the mass media are the most readily accessible sources for assessing the climate of opinion. Social media has enabled a place where opinions, with a certain degree of privacy, and accordingly, safety from customary social constrains, making people aware of alternate opinions and eventually facilitating the dispersion of opinions at a rate higher than before.

When a swing in the climate occurs for or against a part, a person, or a particular idea, it seems to be sensed everywhere almost concurrently, by all population, age and occupational groups. "That such process will be possible when the signals are completely 'open and public" (Noelle-Neumann, 1993 p.19). A public

is not created just because everyone individually holds an opinion, but because there is multi-level awareness of other people's views leading to a spiral of actions. The individuals' beliefs are strengthens when they think their opinion matches that widely held by society. This has potential implications for social publishing tools, as the medium fundamentally enables an individual to state their beliefs in a given topic, seek support of followers/friends for that position (Lemin, 2010, p.9). It is in this context the Facebook "likes" of dissident pages related to politics, sharing of videos of regime brutality, online expressions of political anger, and acceptances of Facebook "invitations" all matter (Tufekci, 2011).

Research on social networking sites is beginning to accumulate and indicate that they may be used to bridge online and offline social networks (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). These social ties found in a platform like facebook appear to have some positive benefits along with more perceived social capital. In a study examining social media uses and facebook in particular, Ellison et al. (2007) found that college students used Facebook to bolster existing offline connections rather than to form new relationships. Facebook possesses the technological capacities that bridge online and offline connections, as real life relationships can be further developed online (Fahili, 2013, p.49).

Neuwrith and Frederick (2004) found that assessing the opinion of peers was a crucial predictor of one's attitude toward acts restricting drinking behavior, which displayed a more direct influence on one's decision making process for a controversial issue than social influences overall. Similarly, Salmon and Kline (1985) indicated that people's opinion formation could be determined and strengthened by support from interpersonal relationship rather than the majority point of view (Chen 2011, p10).

Based on aforementioned finding, it seems likely that individuals would value facebook and other SNS more to figure out the climate of opinions among their "friends" and seek supportive opinion from them. After all, such sites offer an easy way to quickly assess what views others are expressing daily.

Facebook Invasion

In 2004, student Mark Zuckerberg commenced a platform which renovated the traditional method of informing freshman about universities, presenting one of the most popular social networking sites, facebook, which in 2010 had more than 500 million active users (Zuckerberg, 2010). Today millions of internet users spend a large portion of their time on similar social networking sites because their multiple functions have broken barriers of time and space for interactivity.

"Facebook's mission is to make the world more open and connected" (Zuckerberg, 2010). Due to its design, facebook is considered the most influential SNS. It is the third biggest "country" on Earth, in terms of population, and if things keep going as they are, it will soon have more users than India has people (Naughton, 2011). Services offered by facebook are outlined as: ability to add friends, send messages, create and update personal profiles, show support and articulate connections with other users. It allows users to have 5,000 friends on their friends list, and unlimited number of followers. Other features like testimonials, ability to join groups of shared interest, ability to post pictures. Facebook users can also form and join virtual groups, develop applications, host content, and learn about each other's' interests, hobbies, and relationship statuses through users' online profiles (Lampe et al. 2007: 167 as cited in Green, p. 90).

According to the Online Competitiveness Intelligence report by eMarketing Egypt, as of July 21st 2013, there are 61 million facebook users in the Arab world, 26% of whom are Egyptian. 48.11% of internet users in Egypt are Facebook users. According to the ministry of communication and information technology, in August 2012 there were 31.33 million internet users in Egypt, 35.81 million in July, and 37.21 million in August 2013 with monthly growth rate of (3.91) and annual growth rate of (18.77). An official release from Facebook stated that the active monthly users of Facebook reached 1.15 billion by 30 June 2013, representing a 21% year-over-year increase. Also, Facebook mobile application users reached 819 million (Farid, 2013) allowing for more interactivity and accessibility among users.

Facebook is the most popular social media network in the Middle East. In a series of reports produced by the governance and innovation program at the Dubai School of government, it has been observed that among Arab countries, Egypt has seen the highest increase in the number of facebook users in the first quarter of 2011. The report, " It's A Social World: Top 10 Need-to-knows about Social Networking and where it is Headed" analyzes the current state of social networking activity around the world. According to the report, facebook reached more than half (55%) of the world global audience and accounted for one in every seven minutes spent online around the world and three in every four social networking minutes (Fahili, 2013, p53).

Due to this heavy usage pattern, facebook constitutes a rich site for researches in the study of social networks (Fahili, 2013 p.52). Facebook is considered to be a social networking phenomenon. It gives space for an explicit political nature among social networks as it contains a clear reference to the user's political views as part of their profiles. SNS are now being used extensively as elements in the political practice

(Ali, 2011). Smith (2009) observed that approximately three-fourth of America's internet users (74%) became involved in the 2008 election campaign because they received information and were able to express opinion through internet channels. The percentage of users was doubled in 2008 compared with the 2000 campaign (as cited in Chen, 2011 p.5).

In a study of 2,000 students, Lampe et al. (2007) found that facebook is used by students for purposes related to "social searching" that is, to learn more about someone they know offline, where students reported using Facebook to "keep in touch with an old friend" (Lampe et al., 2007, p. 168), rather than for "social browsing" which is the use of Facebook to develop new connections. Series of surveys initiated by the Pew Internet and American Life Project found that 97% of SNS users repost using those sites to connect with others (Lenhart, 2007). Uses include maintaining a profile, chatting with friends, initiating group activities, and posting items of common interest. People also exploit these sites to keep track of current events (Chen 2011).

As mentioned in previous chapter, Lampe et al. (2007) study showed that students use Facebook to maintain preexisting close relationships (bonding social capital) and to keep in touch with high school acquaintances and classmates (maintaining social capital). In terms of bonding social capital, facebook serves a sociability function which enables users to maintain relationships with offline connections. Facebook use was motivated primarily by social gratifications, which include maintaining existing social ties and being able to reconnect and share opinion with friends.

Facebook and Political Engagement

Regardless of the deliberations surrounding the framework enabled by online political communication, the dynamics of political expression on online-based platforms has led to a novel 'online public sphere' (Dalhgren, 2005 as cited in Malaspina, 2013 p. 10). This framework offered by the public sphere is useful in examining the dynamics of community's engagement and communication aptitude offered by social media. Facebook is immensely used in political environment thanks to its design and collaborative tools of communication varying from video, audio and photo sharing implements.

According to Chen (2011), almost one third of internet users in the United States declared sharing their political opinion about the American 2008 presidential election in particular and the political process in general. In addition, one in ten internet users reportedly used the internet for political reasons via social networking websites where they discovered friends' political interests and affiliations. Smith pointed out that active young adult users dominated political participation online with (65%) used SNS to seek information about candidates and campaigns or to reveal their voting tendencies (p.7).

According to Lenhart (2007), in the 2008 election 41% of those who used social networking sites discovered which candidate their friends voted for on these sites. Furthermore, 33% posted political content for their friends to see, and 26 % revealed which presidential candidate they voted for. Within each age group, the young adult group, those composed of citizens aged 18 to 24, has the highest penetration of profiles on social networking sites (83%) and used them for political purposes (74%) during the 2008 election (Smith & Rainie, 2008, p. 11). To urge this

young electorate to be more engaged in political activities, public officials and parties have exploited social networking sites as a venue for political news. A successful example was how President Obama's facebook profile alone attracted millions of active supporters (Chen 2011, p.2).

III Theoretical Overview

Public Opinion and Spiral of Silence Analysis

"Climate of opinion depends on who talks, and who keeps silent"

(Noelle-Neumann, 1993, p.4)

Alexander Hamilton, one of the founding fathers of the United States of America, explicates on what is public opinion: "Opinion whether well or ill-founded is the governing principle of human affairs" (as cited in Dafoe, 1933, p. 3). Our attitudes and opinions about issues under public discussion are conditioned by our knowledge of the opinions and behavior of other groups towards such issues. "Result of personal sampling, observation, prior information people are able to locate their own position and the position of the groups to which they belong with regards to an issue" (Christenson & Mcwilliams, 1962).The term public opinion first appeared in France around the 18th century when 'Les Liaisons Dangereuses' by Choderlos de Laclos novel was first published in 1782, Laclos used the term l'opinion Publique as everyday language (Neumann 1993, p. 64).

Though the spiral of silence theory was introduced by Elisabeth Noelle Neumann in 1974, John Locke described the machinery of the theory in the mid-17th century, elucidating that "Individuals are forced to conform to public opinion for fear of social isolation" (Locke, 1894, p. 479, in Noelle-Neumann, 1993, p. 70). He illustrates that this fear of social alienation and tainted reputation is a burden too heavy to bear. This early detection of the law of reputation, and the public conformity that results, represents some of the earliest works to explore opinion expression. Jean Jacque-Rousseau, in 1953 'The Social Contract,' used the term public opinion when writing a letter to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs (Neumann, 1993, p.80).

According to Rousseau, "Man is split into two beings: one of which contains his real nature, inclinations, and interests, and the other of which shapes itself under the yoke of opinion" (Neumann, 1993, p.85). Also, in the theory of *the Leisure Class* (1970, first appeared 1899), Alexis de Tocqueville wrote about the compromise between public opinion and individual nature (Neumann, 1993 p. 88).

In 1965, Walter Lippmann saw public opinion as the picture we have of others, ourselves and our relationship. Neumann comments that Lippmann based all of his observation on the press alone, and how more valid his observations would have come about in the age of television (Neumann, 1993 p.143). According to Lippmann, a great deal of agreement exists concerning what the political world looks like in society's collective heads; this shared agreement of the pictures of the political world created by the news media is what constitutes public opinion. We think about common issues based on coverage of news media. "The equation of 'public opinion' with 'ruling opinion' runs like a common thread through its many definitions" this speaks to the fact that something or other clinging to public opinion sets up conditions that move individuals to act, even against their own wills (Neumann, 1993 p.61). Scholar Flyod Allport offered a definition to public opinion as being an "Action or readiness for action with regard to a given issue from members of a public who are reacting in the expectation that others in the public are similarly oriented towards the same issue" (Christenson & Mcwilliams, 1962, p.18).

Based on statements about public opinion formation by established writers like Allport (1937), Neumann focused on the role of public opinion as social conventions, customs and norms, and pointed out that individual behavior and attitude is intimately associated with the accompanying social environment (Oh, 2011, p.4). Noelle-

Neumann draws upon the observations of Alexis de Tocqueville, Thomas Hobbes, Jean- Jacques Rousseau, Martin Luther, and others to present the spiral of silence theory (Noelle-Neumann, 1984, p. 7). She interpreted the Locke's 1670 "Essay Concerning Human Understanding" as dealing with the silence effect. As Locke wrote in an often-cited quotation: "New opinions are always suspected, and usually opposed, without any other reason but because they are not already common" (Salwen, 1990).

It was not until the results of the 1965 German presidential election, that Noelle- Neumann began formulating what would later become the spiral of silence theory (1974,1984,1993). When Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union convincingly overtook the Social Democratic Party by a margin of nearly 9 percent; these unexpected results witnessing voters swing at the last minute, demonstrated the power of public opinion that Locke, and others, had spoken of centuries earlier. Based on a poll asking voters not who they supported, but who they thought would win, a portion of Germany's voting public sensed a shifting opinion climate, and adjusted their votes accordingly (Noelle-Neumann, 1993, p.3). Drawing upon this electoral observation, she first wrote about the spiral of silence in her 1974 paper The Spiral of silence – A Theory of Public Opinion, and later comprehensively surmised the theory in her 1984 book The Spiral of Silence: Public Opinion – Our Social Skin. Noelle-Neumann believes most people to be driven by a motivation to avoid the social exclusion that awaits those whose opinions deviate from the mainstream: "Public opinion imposes sanctions on individuals who offend against conventions" (Noelle-Neumann, 1973, p. 88). On the other hand, those who do not feel such social pressure to either conform or remain silent are understood to be the "hard-core" group

of individuals who will speak their mind regardless of the pending social consequences (Noelle-Neumann, 1993, p. 170).

In her book, Noelle-Neumann expounds the notion of public climate and how it is defined by who talks and who keeps silent. The term "Social skin" refers to the society, which public opinion protects like a skin. It also denotes individuals, who suffer from the sensitivities of their social skin (Noelle-Neumann, 1993 p.182). Neumann's theory is based on the assumption that most of us would rather keep quiet if we felt our opinion to be a minority, than risk being isolated or rejected by those to whom we wish to feel attached to. This spiral process (Figure B) can eventually gather potential and turn it into a relative silence (1993). That is the more often that people will feel like they are in the minority decide to remain silent, the less we hear those views and the more we tend to believe that most people agree with the majority viewpoint. According to Neumann, this process can lead to views that eventually will die out, and exert little influence even though they are actually held by substantial numbers of people.

Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann's Spiral of Silence
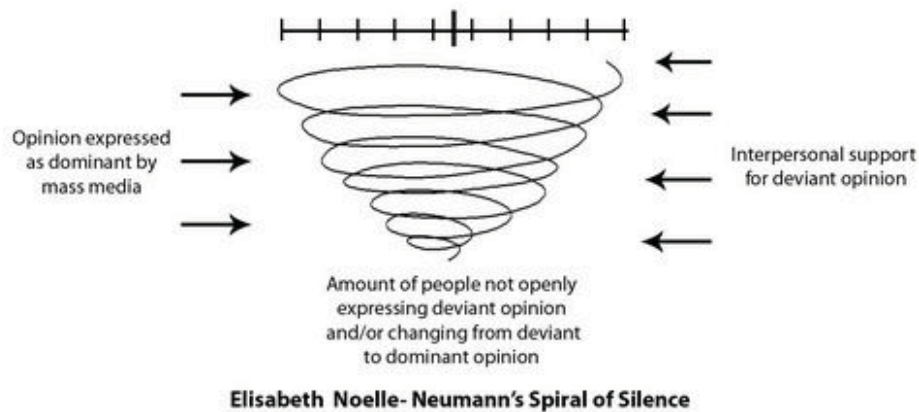
Figure B shows the spiral process as introduced by Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann (communicationtheory.org)

Audience Interaction and Spiral Process

Symbols found in mass communication can be deployed in a variety of ways, aiming to arouse socially acquired intentions, such as group conformity. Individuals use media to observe and monitor the climate of public opinion. They can form impressions of what "everyone" thinks based on personal experience, as soon as the spiral of silence process starts to develop in public; it is this blending with publicity that gives the process its irresistible force (Pritchard, p.6). The element of public attention is brought into the process most effectively and according to the climate they express their voice upon (Neumann 1974, p. 50-51). Public attention can be experienced from two viewpoints; from the individual who is exposed to it, or who is ignored by it; and from the perspective of the collective event, when hundreds of thousands, or millions of people observe their environment and either speak or keep quiet, thereby creating public opinion.

The spiral of silence theory argues that people perceive they are a minority on a given issue, based on how the media environment accelerates the muting of such minority group. Although every human being comes equipped with -as she identifies it "quasi-statistical organ" -to analyze the climate surrounding him, that warning system requires data to process. Direct observation gives us a small proportion of the information we use; still, the print and electronic media provide most of our knowledge about the world around us. Noelle- Neumann regards all media as agents of a hypothetical sixth sense. Nonetheless she was hesitant about media positive provisions; for the reason that opinions supported by the influential media are often overestimated. She suspects that whenever people have a mistaken idea of what the public's opinion really is a condition called 'pluralistic ignorance', it's probably due to the media not being present nor transparent (Griffin, 2011 p.374).

"If people find no current, frequently repeated expressions for their point of view, they lapse into silence; they become effectively mute" (Neumann, 1993 p.173). People customarily have a misguided idea concerning the presentation of viewpoints proportionate to their –views- strength in society. In the past, people expressed their politically oriented opinions through writing letters to the editor, attending political events, and communicating with close friends, among many practices (Chen, 2011, p.3). In this context, the innovative circle of friends created through social media and specifically SNS raises questions about willingness to speak out among a new format of opinion climate. Noelle-Neumann (1993) claims that when willing to speak about controversial issues, individuals tend to ascertain the opinion of the majority first. Studies examining the perceived climate of opinion often measure the respondents' estimation of the current majority opinion along with the predictions of future/

potentials trends of an established opinion. By comparing congruency between the current climate and future trends individuals create their judgment (Chen, 2011 p.9).

The spiral of silence theory assumes that public opinion is equated with the pressure to follow, consequently, threatening those who deviate from the majority. Neumann (1974) described this public opinion as "the dominating opinion which compels compliance of attitudes and behavior in a way that threatens the dissenting individuals with isolation" (p.44). She offers two models of public opinion, first public opinion as rationality, making it an instrumental in the process of opinion formation and decision making in a democracy. Second, identifying public opinion as a social control, aiding to promote social integration and to ensure that there is a sufficient level of consensus on which actions and decisions can be founded (Neumann, 1995, p. 34). The latter model defines 'pubic' as involving everybody; thus public opinion, or rather public pressure, affects all members of society, the spiral of silence theory falls under the model of public opinion as social control.

Agenda Setting & Cultivation Theory

Most of mass communication theory deals with media effects and relation to society. Another theory that tackles social control conveyed through media is cultivation theory, developed by George Gerbner. Both the spiral of silence and cultivation theories examine media influence on public perceptions of social reality through powerful media effects framework. Cultivation analysis explores the independent contribution of television viewing to audiences' conceptions of social reality. It hypothesizes what would happen if everything they knew about some issues were derived from television's dominant portrayals and how that related to reality.

Assuming that individuals who spend more time watching television, controlling other variables, are more likely to perceive the real world in ways that reflect those particular messages (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010, p. 339). At that juncture, applying cultivation to a group of reluctant audience, their perception of what is majority in a public sphere is manipulated.

Shanahan and Scheufele (2013) argue that cultivation variables alongside spiral of silence can postulate whether cultivation can be seen as a "critical" extension of spiral of silence. Conversely, they suggest that the spiral of silence may provide a social psychological account of how cultivation works (p. 363). Through this examination, it has become clear that both theories share important similarities, and has contributed to our understanding of the interaction between public opinion and media effects.

Adding to Cultivation theory's representation to a way a Television can leave out opinions while others are being highlighted; is the Agenda Setting theory. The theory postulates that media can affect what people think about. The theory was introduced by McCombs and Shaw (1972) who attempted to explain how and why people think about and rank different social issues. The researchers found a significant correlation between the amount of media coverage generated and the rankings of importance assigned by media consumers. These findings led to the conclusion that issue salience is greatly influenced by the news media (Roberts, Wanda, Dzwo 2002, p. 452). "The media may not only affect what people think about; they also affect what we think helps to determine public opinion" (G. Sparks p.164). Noelle-Neumann turns to agenda-setting as the theoretical foundation for media effects. Manifestation of agenda setting is needed in Spiral of silence theory,

where it entails one way the media may affect public opinion through sanction to the expression of certain viewpoints (as cited in Gonzenbach 1992).

Major Assumptions of Spiral of Silence

Major assumptions of Spiral of Silence theory according to Neumann (1991) are five: threat of isolation in the social collective cohesion must be constantly ensured by a level of agreement, to guarantee this agreement, society threatens those who violate this consensus.

Fear of isolation, the formation of individual's opinion and actions are characterized by individual's fear of becoming 'social isolates', which derives the notion of social conformity either through accepting information as reality or conforming to other's expectations.

Third a quasi-statistical sense, as a result of fear of isolation. Individuals constantly monitor their environment to check the distribution of opinions and the future trends; such monitoring involves attending media coverage, direct observation of one's environment and interpersonal discussions.

Fourth, willingness to speak out and tendency to remain silent, fifth, the spiral of silence, the interaction of these four factors leads to a process of formation, change, and reinforcement of public opinion (Neumann 1993, p. 202).

Three additional factors need to be taken into consideration to fully understand the process of spiral: the moral component of public opinion: spiral works only with issues of moral component. Time factor, denoting the perceived climate and future implications of what could be minority and verse, and finally, role of the media in conveying these opinion fluctuation trends and future array of possibilities (Scheufele & Moy, 2000).

The notion of expression, for Noelle- Neumann, clearly extends beyond the simple form of speaking out. To her, the term 'public opinion' refers not just to opinion, but also to behavior, the use of the term ''controversial'' appears to imply an argument or dispute involving strife/struggle in which differing views are in opposition or simply a social conflict (Neuwirth, Frederick, & Mayo, 2007, p. 451). Thus, the theory proposes that the psychology of the individual in society is overwhelmingly predisposed to respond to perceptions of which opinions are in the majority or the minority, and which are gaining ascendancy or losing their place in the public sphere. Out of a fundamental desire by the social individual to avoid the deprivation, and danger of isolation, the individual "silences" him/herself from expressing views s/he perceives are unpopular.

In "Social Influence" John C. Turner sheds light on the psychological aspects of influence and idea of conformity. "Group members who conform to norms tend to be socially approved of, whereas those who deviate tend to be disproved of; and may be punished and excluded from the group" (p.3). Such notion explains the mechanism through which the fear of isolation works; expounding that it is the force that sets the spiral of silence in motion. It causes people to constantly check which opinions and modes of behavior are approved or disapproved of in their environment, and which opinions and forms of behavior are gaining or losing strength. "The effort spent in observing the environment is apparently a smaller price to pay than the risk of losing the goodwill of one's fellow human beings of becoming rejected, despised, alone" (Noelle-Neumann, 1993, p. 41).

Studies have shown that different "groups" can differ in their influence on the opinion. Moreover, Moy et al. (2001) indicates that people are prone to abide by the

opinion of those who are closely related to them, often referred to as the "micro-climate" of opinion from immediate circle of relationship (p. 18) members of the inner circle along with general social trends, can both have an influence on personal willingness to speak out. "While facing a controversial issue, people might express their opinions to others differently depending on the interpersonal relationships they have"(as cited in Chen 2011 p.13).

Testing Spiral of Silence

Putting the spiral of silence to test, Noelle- Neumann emphasized that public opinion should be considered in terms of how people view those who surround them as a social control and as well as how individuals actually feel towards the issues tested. She refocused attention to the socially normative aspects of public opinion asking: what is the current climate of opinion on a given issue? How does the public perceive the trend for the issue climate in the future? How willing are individuals to speak out on a given issue? Is there a strong moral component to the issue? And what is the media position on the issue? The majority of empirical investigations to date have actually focused only on the relation of one's perception of majority opinion to one's willingness to speak out (Preiss, et al. 2007, p.416).

Neumann draws heavily on the conformity research of social psychologist Solomon Asch to support her claim. Asch's demonstrated that people will ignore the bare evidence of their senses and yield to perceived group pressure (Griffin, p. 373). Asch's 1951-52 experiment (shown in figure C) on selecting a line of the same length, which hinted at the presence of individual tendency to conform to the majority's decision. The task of the subjects in this experiment was to judge which of three lines

best matches a test line in length. One of the three was equal in length to the test line. The correct match was evident and all subjects identified it easily. Many sessions have been conducted, where eight to ten subjects took part in each session. Then each subject stated his/her judgment as to which line was the best match for the test line. After two rounds of successful identifying of the correct match line by all participants; the experimenter's assistants interfered naming the clearly too short as the correct line. Now, subject's behavior and judgment was examined under pressure. Two out of every ten stuck resolutely to their own impressions, two of the remaining eight agreed with the group once or twice through the procedure, but the remaining six more frequently announced as their own opinion the obviously false judgment made by the majority (Neumann, 1993 p.37).

REFERENCE   A   B   C

A replication of the cards used during the experiment. The card on the left is for reference, the one on the right shows the comparison lines.
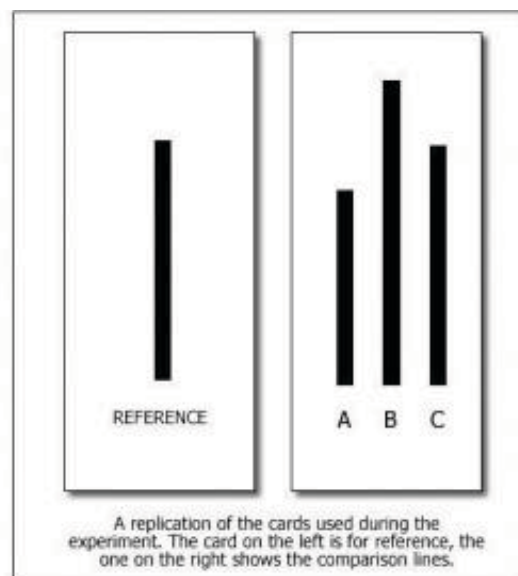
Figure C, Asch experiment on conformity (Explorable.com)

Neumann's first attempt to stimulate dangers of social isolation took place in 1976, where she proposed two tests (threat and train) as a measure for spiral of silence (Neumann. 1993, p.42). In an attempt to simulate dangers of social isolation in a field experiment, the train test asks respondents to imagine himself in a long trip via train,

in a compartment with someone who held an opinion divergent from his own. She used a picture with a sentence-completion test in an interview directed to housewives discussing the issue of child spanking.

The threat test on the other hand, also assuming a contrary opinion; the test (a non-smoker in the presences of a smoker) involved given smokers a sentence-completion test with a radical opponent of smoking in the presence of non-smokers, asking the smokers to complete the sentence. The threat test included strongly worded dialogue as: "It seems to me that smokers are terribly inconsiderate." "They force others to inhale their health-endangering smoke" (Noelle-Neumann, 1993, p. 45). Results suggested that verbal threat affected the tendency to speak out. When smokers felt that opinion climate was unfavorable to them, they tended to avoid expressing views on the issue of smoking in public (Wang et al., 2004). Only 23 percent of smokers are inclined to participate in the conversation (Noelle-Neumann, 1993). In both test, Noelle-Neumann focused on hypothetical situations in order to measure willingness to express opinions. She argues that "many people have the imagination to experience situation described in an interview so vividly that they react to them as if they were reality" (1993, p.47).

In January 1971, Allensbach attempted to study spiral of silence by conducting series of survey questions concerning the Federal Republic and Germany. Subsequently, numerous studies followed, confirming people's apparent ability to perceive surrounding trends of public opinion. To this point, only a few scientists have engaged in the verification of Spiral of Silence assumptions in computer-mediated communication, to mention some; when testing the willingness to speak out in online chat-rooms using a real-life setting (Wanta & Dimitrova, 2000), or an

experimental setting comparing reactions in a face-to-face-discussion versus computer-mediated communication–discussion by Ho & McLeod in 2008. They conducted an experiment by using an online survey aiming to measure respondents' willingness to speak out about the issue of same-sex marriage. Findings suggest that people were more willing to speak out to strangers from their own university in a computer-mediated environment rather than in face-to-face situations.

Liu and Fahmy's (2009) study also adopted the issue of same-sex marriage to test the spiral of silence theory in both online and offline settings, and found that online communication could diminish people's fear of isolation although the sense of being isolated online could still affect people's willingness to speak out, supporting the spiral of silence theory. Liu and Fahmy's research also found that people regarded the internet as more efficient in observing the opinion climate than traditional media.

In McDevitt, Kiousis & Wahl-Jorgensen (2003) study the advent of interactive media providing enhanced access to political content and related effects on civic participation has been observed. They examined a discussion taking place in an online chat-room. Their study differentiated between contributing to the study in a neutral manner or speaking out as a way of representing a minority view point. Authors found out that those in the minority remained silent, suggesting the existence of spiral of silence in anonymous online chat rooms. "Relative lack of social intimidation allows individuals to participate actively and thereby accrue the ego enhancing satisfaction of speaking up even though they are holding back their personal beliefs" (McDevitt et al., 2003, p. 466 as cited in Heney, 2011). The strength of this study is that it is the first spiral research not to ask questions, but rather observe actual conversation via

online chat setting. Findings supported individuals' stand in public, however, their "online" behavior may not match their personal opinions (Lemin, 2010 p.12).

In 1994, impressive and substantial support for the Spiral of Silence was found in Katz and Baldassare examination of the theory at the end of the Bush Administration. They attempted to assess whether or not Bush supporters were willing to express their views publicly in light of declining presidential approval ratings. Bush supporters became less willing to express their opinions especially with the decline of approval ratings, proving evidence to the existence of a Spiral of Silence.

Another study that supports Spiral of silence existence belongs to McLeod, et al. (1995), which found a Spiral of Silence manifestation during the Persian Gulf War since perceived support for the war was significantly higher than in reality, with the media having a strong and somewhat direct influence on these perceptions. Their findings support Noelle- Neumann's assertions that perceptions of the climate of opinion are formed by the constant analysis of the environment, and that support for a particular opinion is often rooted in one's perception of a majority climate of opinion. Gerson Moreno-Riaño (2002) found evidence supporting the spiral of silence when conducting a sample survey on attitudes towards the gulf war back in 1991. In contrast to the strong consensus in favor of the war that the news media reported, the survey revealed that very few people actually expressed strong support in their answers to the question (G. Sparks p.157).

Similarly, using a different interactive tool of social media, Hong and Park (2011) found that students were more willing to use an anonymous chat room to express their views than doing so face-to-face with other students or adults in their county. They examined online opinion expression by observing users' discussions on

a movie rating website in which both the movies and the users receive ratings. Hypothesizing that users would feel less compelled to express majority views because of their online anonymity (Heney, 2011, p10). Results proved to be partially supportive to the theory. When users observed a hostile/negative opinion climate, they were prone to express their minority opinion by offering positive feedback. On the other hand, when users observed a positive opinion climate, they were less likely to express their minority opinion by offering negative feedback. The results of this study confirmed the capacity of online anonymity to -at least- partially offset the fear of isolation, and the continued relevance of the spiral of silence theory as a communication framework in the 21st century.

Spiral of silence theory has been tested in numerous countries Germany (Noelle-Neumann 1993), Japan (ikeda, 1989), Tokinoya (1989, 1996), Korea (yang 1997) and the USA (Scheufele 1999). Scheufele & Moy's research in 2000 suggests that beyond any methodological problem of finding appropriate indicators for concepts in a given culture, there is a substantial difference in personality traits for people living in different cultures. The concept of individualism seems to be a key variable in differentiating social behavior, particularly communicatory behavior across cultures (Scheufele & Moy, 2000). Despite that, spiral of silence has not been tested extensively in the Arab world and particularly in Egypt.

Media Environment

In a report presented to the Center for International Media Assistance by Jeffery Ghannam in 2011, comes a description to the Arab world media, it proposes that it in some Arab countries like Egypt and Tunisia, there has been an awakening of free expression, which helped break down the control of state-owned media and information monopolies. Ghannam states that the Arab world has witnessed the rise of an independent vibrant social media (p4). These social networks beside informing and entertaining, they seek to hold governments accountable.

The Arab Knowledge Report in 2009 placed the number of Arabic-speaking Internet users at 60 million. A Google executive declared that 100 million Arabs are expected to be online by 2015. In the Arab world, advances of communication technologies especially social media are met with considerable limitations and challenges by the authoritarian regimes (Ghannam, 2011, p4). Arab governments' reactions to limit social media attainment have provoked another platform to rise, the blogosphere. Blogs acted as proxies to bypass government firewall. He states that the days of government media monopoly have been eclipsed by the adoption of social media, particularly in countries like Egypt, the leader in social media activism just by sheer numbers alone; followed by Jordan, which has a thriving information and communications technology (ICT) sector; the United Arab Emirates (UAE), with strong commercial adoption of social media; and Lebanon (p6).

Egypt

Egypt is the largest Arab country and has always played a central role in Middle Eastern politics in modern times (BBC News Africa, 2014). Egypt has witnessed a lot of political instability during the last couple of years. After the 2011 revolution; the first presidential election was won by Mohamed Morsi in 2012. Second presidential election is set to take place during 26-27 May 2014. Candidates running for this election are Political Nassarist Hamden Sabahby and previous army chief Field Marshal Abdul Fattah al-Sisi who resigned and announced his candidature a few months before the election. BBC News speculated that al-Sisi is likely to win the presidency, given his popularity and due to lack of serious opponents. If al-Sisi does become president, he will be the latest in a line of presidents drawn from the military; landing the power again to the people 2011 revolution fought against (Manfreda, 2013).

When the spring revolution fever took place in 2011, protests all over Egypt ousted the 30-years regime of President Hosni Mubarak. Later on, presidential election led to a narrow win for the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) candidate -Mohamed Morsi- in 2012. During his first year in office, Morsi was seen by many Egyptians as doing little to tackle economic and social problems. Egypt became polarized between his supporters and his opponents. Morsi was deposed a year later through a combination of mass anti-government protest -organized by the Tamarod (Revolt) movement- and a military coup (BBC, 2013). Since Morsi's overthrow more than 1,000 people have been killed, and more have been detained in a violent crackdown by the interim authorities. Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood (MB) party was designated as a terrorist group (BBC, 2014).

This Political uncertainty has generated ongoing political protests, labor strikes, deep mistrust between political entities, and Muslim-Christian tension in some parts of the country. Violence and criminal activities have been witnessed in various places across the country. According to Manfreda (2013), the current situation has produced two major political camps: Members of the first camp representing a coalition of leftist and liberal political parties as well as grassroots activists involved in the 2011 uprising are opposing military territory again. The other camp is resolute to accept the new phase of stability under the SCAF rule, and is welcoming a military rule in the upcoming presidential election.

There is now a multidimensional polarization in Egyptian society. Reducing the conflict to "pro-Brotherhood" or "anti-Brotherhood" muddles the picture (Osman, 2013) but it is a daily fact in the Egyptian society. At the beginning of 2014, Egypt has no parliament, a fragile economy, and no legally defined rules of the game (Manfreda, 2013).

Egypt remains locked in a prolonged process of political transition after the downfall of both Presidents Morsi in 2013, and Mubarak in 2011. Egypt is currently at cross roads, divided between Islamist and secular groups, with the Egyptian military The SCAF (Supreme Council of Army Forces) as the country's decision-maker. The results of the first democratic election held in 2011/12, which was won overwhelmingly by Islamist parties, were nullified, leaving Egypt with no elected state institutions. This legal vacuum has created "political unrest between the military, the judiciary, and dozens of political parties vying for power" (Manfreda, 2014).

Egyptian Media

Amidst this political turmoil, the Egyptian media showed a great deal of polarization. Human rights groups say the military-backed authorities have displayed increasing hostility to independent media and to political opponents (BBC, 2014). TV stations were either backing ex-President Morsi or the army that removed him. State-owned media and some private TV stations are fiercely anti-Morsi. Whilst Islamists TV or any Muslim Brotherhood affiliated stations reserve their rage for the army, with continuously broadcasting gruesome pictures of casualties from the main points of pro-Morsi demonstrations.

Dr. Amr Hamzawy, an academic and a political science professor, was among the few liberals to speak out calling the military's actions a form of fascism. Hamzawy who has been heavily criticized for raising alarms about the crackdown on Islamists in general and Mors's supporters in particular, stated in a commentary "I am paying the price of being a true liberal (Kirkpatrick, 2014). In conclusion, the current political situation left Egyptians polarized in opinion and in their support to a political affiliation, making it even harder to establish a convincing political opinion on the current situation.

IIIV. Scope of the study

In Egypt, the current political situation is challenging, with the state of frustration facing the Egyptians and the complicated political environs accompanying the presidential election. Revealing a person's opinion will be met with skepticism, critique and hostility. Will online venues ease the proliferation of messages and expression of views or manifest the social cues preserving the willingness to express minority views? Will it differ among face-to-face communication verses computer-mediated platforms?

Media element with reference to spiral of silence has always been vague. "The media aspect of the spiral of silence has not been widely explored in relation to directly measured perceptions of opinion climate" (Preiss, et al, 2007, P. 426). What adds new dimension to the process of opinion expression and evaluating climate is the emergence of online venues: a new designation when it comes to aggregation of networks. In relation to Egypt, with the emergence of online spaces, blogs and social networking sites, Egyptians seem to have been exposed to new platforms for expressing their opinion, and are now capable of exchanging views not only with those around them but with strangers online (Oh, 2011 p.3). Will SNS act as a way out from the media agenda setting? If so, will it abide by the same social constrains? Will Egyptians express their opinions freely or comply to prevailing opinions? Will expressing their opinions differ from a traditional media channel or interpersonal than that of social media?

Longstanding theories about public opinion such as the spiral of silence are challenged by the new media environment and the behaviors associated with individual interaction within it (Chen, 2011). This series of discussions under the new media environment implies that the spiral of silence, which supposed offline

communication situation, needs to be revisited. As aforementioned, Ho & Mcleod (2008) found that students were more willing to use an anonymous chat room to express views than doing so face-to-face with other students or adults in their country. SNS such as facebook, offer users a way to directly assess the climate of opinion of one's friendship network; which includes close friends such as family members and significant others that one interacts with frequently in daily life. Yet it also includes something relatively new – the ability to monitor a broader circle of friends: including former classmates, employees, students, and acquaintances (Chen, 2011 p.3).

Noelle-Neumann introduced basic questions which provide the basic pillar to test the spiral of silence theory:

- Using relevant representative survey methods, the distribution of public opinion on a given issue should be determined.
- The climate of opinion must be assessed; the individual's opinion on "What do you think most people think"
- The willingness to speak out on a particular issue, or the tendency to remain silent, especially in public, should be measured.
- Does this issue in question bears a string emotional or moral component?
- Finally, what is the position of the media on this issue? Which side do the influential media support? (Neumann, 1993 p. 200).

As one of the basic requirements for any test of the Spiral of Silence is that the issue in question "bears a strong emotional importance" (1993, p. 200). This study aims to test the assessment of the climate of opinion and willingness to speak out on an issue of emotional importance to many Egyptians – the 2014 presidential election. Specifically, the study tests Egyptians' willingness to speak out about their political opinions and reflections on the election process. The chosen topic is controversial and

has political, religious and historical significance, making it a perfect choice for research.

The findings may be beneficial to mass media scholars who design, implement and evaluate mass media channels and flow of information. Specifically, results intend to shed light on online communication patterns that can be used to persuade various audience segments, as well as the role of influencing individual decision making regarding controversial political topics.

V. Research Hypotheses and Methodology

Considering the foregoing literature, the following hypotheses and research questions are offered.

H1: Individuals who believe their chosen candidate will lose the election will be less willing to express their voting preference on facebook than individuals who believe their chosen candidate will win the election

H2: Respondents with higher levels of knowledge about the presidential election will be more likely to enter a discussion about the issue regardless of their perception of being in the majority/minority

H3: Individuals will pay more concern to know their close friends' opinion on the presidential election than that of the community

H4: Individuals who perceive themselves as a minority will be more likely to change their privacy settings to exclude some of their friends on facebook

H5: Individuals who perceive themselves to be in a minority stand point concerning the presidential election will be less likely to enter a discussion about the issue

RQ1: Will fear of negative feedback affect individuals' tendency to speak out about the presidential election to their facebook friends?

RQ2: Will individuals perceive themselves as less isolated online than offline?

Access to content via social publishing platforms drives fragmentation in opinion-forming variables and might result in increased outspokenness by those who hold minority opinions. Drawing on the political events that took place these last three years, and given the casualties lost for each "camp", the issue of presidential election tends to be an uncomfortable subject for discussion. Thus suggesting H1, individuals who perceive themselves to be losing momentum in the election process, and perceive themselves as the minority regarding a particular voting decision, will be less likely to voice out such decision and political stand to their facebook friends.

Public opinion expression is related to an individual's perceived local public opinion climate. Depending on the surrounding environment and media tone, an individual constructs his/her own judgment. Similarly, an individual's willingness to speak out about this issue is also a function of the person's perceived national and local media climates. Alongside media, personal quest for information on the issue is related to the extent of willingness to speak out on a controversial issue. Thus suggesting H2, designating that the willingness to enter a discussion regarding the issue of the presidential election will be associated with how much respondents know about the issue. This hypothesis measures how respondents' perceive their knowledge on the issue stands out; their actual level of knowledge was not encountered in this study.

Users' circle of friends consists of those they encounter on a daily basis including work colleagues, family and friends alongside other acquaintances. Those who s/he meets on a daily basis, hence close to the respondents, will be more important to establish their view on the presidential election than those s/he encounters far less frequently, including entities, organizations, and personnel inhibiting the his/her surrounding community at large. The assumption that individuals will pay more concern to know their close friends' opinion on the presidential election than that of the community or state is tested in H3.

A clear manifestation for the fear of isolation will occur, under the condition of voting for the candidate with low chances of winning the presidential election. Expectations regarding the voting process and results were measured in the survey. Research Hypothesis H4 postulates that with the continuous, unfiltered daily conversation, facebook users alter their settings to control who sees, comments,

receives posts or information as a mean to reserve self-image and abide to conformity pressures and approved trends in society. This hypothesis assumes minority as those supporting a particular candidate/political viewpoint and consequently how the individual perceives his standing ground according to the surrounding environment. facebook behavior of individuals perceived to fall into the minority stand point towards their facebook circle of friends is tested in H4.

Noelle-Neumann's cornerstone notion of fear of isolation demanded that the individual falls in to a minority group. With literature found on liberating effect of social media, user is expected not to fear a consequence of being in a minority. Thus, H5 measures respondents' tendency to speak out given a medium like facebook, which due to its design and features offers various means of interactions to show support or opposition towards a certain view-point rather than face-to-face communication. H5 suggests that those who perceive themselves as members of a minority group due to their opinion on the presidential election process -according to the spiral of silence assumption- be less likely to enter a discussion on the topic of the election with their friends on an online venue such as facebook? How will their media behavior differ from that in a real-life setting situation? This assumption is tested in H5 with comparison to real-life setting version of train test.

In an attempt to grasp the presence and magnitude of a virtual version of fear of isolation pressuring factors, this study asks if a negative observation or negatively natured feedback was found on facebook interface, will it alter users' pronouncement in speaking out on the issue, this relation is tested in RQ1. Finally, to grasp difference in behavior among online and offline public spheres, RQ2 asks if Egyptians perceive an online venue as more liberating in opinion expression than offline platforms.

Research Methodology

This study employs both a survey and in-depth interviews to evaluate indications which will evaluate active facebook users' willingness to speak out on their voting preference. Noelle-Neumann, among other researchers, used and acknowledged survey method to study spiral of silence, as it is an appropriate method for measuring individual's willingness to speak out (Scheufele & Moy, 2000 in Oh, 2011 p1). Surveys are generally "excellent methodological tools for identifying what people believe influences their behavior and identifying respondents' attitudes or characteristics" (Keyton, 2001, p. 169). Furthermore, Scheufuel & Moy (2000) have acknowledged that due to the criticism of the weak external validity of most conformity experiments, when it comes to evaluating the willingness to speak out, survey data became the appropriate method for data collection. Interviews will aid to acquire background information and personal take on reasons and factors behind users' media usage, choice, perceptions and judgment.

An issue used to study the spiral of silence should be a "controversial one with clearly identifiable moral aspect attached to it" (Scheufele & Moy, 2000, p. 15). Noelle-Neumann (1993) assumes that the spiral of silence only works for issues with moral or value-laden components. Hence, the chosen political topic has a cultural grounding and is unique which has contemporary media coverage/attention and has two well-established opposing clusters. This study's research topic bears emotional, historical, cultural/social and religious aspects, causing self-consciousness within the sample to abide by social conformity rules. By reviewing the existing media coverage, internet based discussion and commentary, it was established that the majority opinion concerning the voting decision -to be made for the presidential election-

should be in-favor of Al-Sisi. However, this research is focusing on willingness to speak variables regardless of the voting decision of the sample. The minority will be identified based on the individuals' judgment of how they perceive themselves within the surrounding community of acquaintances.

Surveys in this study will serve as indicators of what individuals will do in hypothetical scenarios and under certain climate circumstance. On the other hand, interviews will answer why they would behave in such a manner. As Spencer and Croucher (2008) explicate in their study, survey research explains what people think; however, in-depth interviews add a dimension explaining why respondents feel a particular way" (p149). Moreover, Lee and Taylor expound that "interviews provide greater breadth and depth of information, the opportunity to discover the respondent's experience and access to people's ideas, thoughts and memories" (Blee and Taylor, 2002, p.93 in Fahili, 2013, p. 84).

Neuwrith (2000) uses interviews to measure human behavior and communication traits towards public discussion and conversation. His study evaluated opinion transition trends in Mexico, as a result of presidential officers' move. Also, McCurdy believed interviews when measuring spiral of silence will "articulate the users understanding of the debate with ease." McCurdy's case study in 2010, aimed to explore how activists understand the 'media debate' and how the perceived understanding may influence the associated network activities. This study uses interviews to assess the broader framework of spiral of silence's existence in web 2.0 environment, to estimate how social interactions on these new platforms (SNS) influence the formation of spiral of silence; and finally to analyze the dynamic

characteristics of the process in the aspect of size-dependent and degree of acquaintances.

Variables & Operational Definitions

o *Independent:* General opinion climate/ circle of friends' political stand

o *Dependent*: Willingness to speak out publicly on the issue of the presidential election

o *The discrepancy of opinion*: will be the difference between the users/ individual's private opinion and the individual's perception of the predominant opinion on a specific topic

o *Fear of isolation*: will be any form of negative evaluation by others and especially his/her circle of friends.

o *Act of Speaking out*: In her book, Neumann includes several ways as means of "speaking out" in a broad term like wearing a campaign button, putting a bumper sticker on the car, carrying a newspaper which has a well-known political stand, distributing handbills, putting up posters, though some people are inclined –by nature- to such actions while others are not. Moreover, opinion as a term has a very flexible definition. For the sake of this study "speaking out" about a political stand or opinion, will be merely constrained to posting status to SNS in general or facebook in particular, posting video with clear content and visual context or commenting on other's status or media content shared by the users' circle of friends posted on facebook.

o *Fear of Negative Evaluation Variables*: The complete scale as developed by Watson & Friend (1969) has 30 items. For the purpose of this study, only four selected items that seemed most appropriate to test the fears of social isolation

have been selected. Respondents were asked to choose what first comes to their mind when stating a political statement or stand on facebook.

- 'I worry about what people will think of me even when I know it doesn't make any difference.'
- 'I become nervous if I know someone is sizing me up.'
- 'I often worry that people who are important to me won't think very much of me.'
- 'I rarely worry about what kind of impression I am making on someone'

Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire was divided into three parts, first part aimed to determine demographic background of the respondents, and their social media behavior. Second part composed of items intended to measure how important it is for them to be able to assess the climate of opinion -about political issues with relation to the 2014 presidential election- through various channels of communication and among different social groups including circle of friends, and people in their community. Third part aimed to measure the willingness to speak out based on perceived climate of opinion and consequences of a perceived outcome.

A few questions in the survey are borrowed from Kuan-Ju Chen's (2011) study, which used surveys to" test the spiral of silence theory on young adults' use of social networking sites for political purposes." In addition to that, in 1969, Watson and Friend developed the fear of negative evaluation (FNE) scale. In this survey, some of the questions that aim to assess the willingness to speak out will use selected FNE indications.

Survey results offered an overview of facebook usage amidst a political turmoil and public opinion's trends relating to majority perception and media selectivity. An insight was needed to explore reasons behind users' media choice, and perception of what constitutes fear, and would it differ if they were speaking in an online social network versus real life setting. To accomplish that, 15 in-depth interviews were conducted on those surveyed earlier to examine motivations and causes affecting their choice of action. Interviews were directed at the preferred time and location of the interviewees. Questions (see appendix C) revolved around motives, reasons and fears of expressing opinions with relation to minority and majority perception, and the importance of close friends' feedback on stating a political opinion concerning the presidential election. Interviews presented an insight into the motives behind the reluctance of users to express their political opinions online. Interviewing users have allowed a greater understanding of individuals' motives and inhibitors to speak out, and offered profound analysis on concepts like anonymity, social attachment, and conformity.

VI. Sampling and Data Collection

In an attempt to triangulate results, surveys and in-depth interviews were used in this study. The population of this study composed of Egyptians with on-line access and who are currently active facebook users. A snowball sample survey was distributed on-line targeting "active" Facebook users. The survey was posted online on May 22nd, and continued till the first day of the election, May 26th. Respondents were invited to participate in an online survey that was administered online. First section of the survey entailed the introduction of the research, including the study's purpose and guarantees of confidentiality, alongside their consent declaration.

Based on the predictions of the spiral of silence theory; the questionnaire (see appendix A) aimed to investigate how Egyptians use facebook when it comes to expressing their political stand on a controversial issue; and how important it is for them to be able to assess the climate of opinion about political issues through diverse channels and among different social groups including circle of friends, and public sphere in general. Two major dimensions were measured in the survey: the perceived importance of assessing the climate of opinion of a circle of friends, and their willingness to speak out about their voting decision/political stand via traditional channels, interpersonal communication and Facebook in particular.

VII. Findings and Hypotheses Testing

The questionnaire link was sent out to total of 227 online users. This study is only concerned with Egyptian adults owning a current facebook profile. Hence, for the purpose of this study, those with no facebook account, and non-Egyptians were excluded from the data analysis; leaving out 205 as the valid yielded responses. The results of the current study used Microsoft Excel to code data, manage graphs and tables. Hypothesis testing was processed using SPSS analysis software. Paired sample t-test and analysis of variance were conducted to examine if respondents demographics and psychographics have any influence on their assessment of opinion and their tendency to speak out. Paired T-test was also applied to examine if there is a difference between the independent variable (willingness to speak out) among close circle (inner) versus the community (broader). One-way Anova was conducted to measure variables of results' outcome opportunities, and importance in expressing views, versus that of the respondents' knowledge level. Finally chi square test were conducted to determine whether the assessment of opinion climate of opinion has a bearing on willingness to speak out on Facebook. The section is divided into three parts, first tackles descriptive survey results, second deals with hypotheses testing and the latter deals with results of in-depth interviews.

Results

5.1: Age

Respondents were asked to specify their age category as to measure age difference with relation to facebook usage trend. Literature studying Spiral of silence commonly focused on adult youth category, but since this study used snowball sampling, the age of the respondents was not controlled. Sample was classified according to five age categories listed in the following table.

Table 5.1 Respondents Age Categories

Age Category	Number of Respondents	Percent
18-24	62	28.4%
25-30	99	45.4%
31-39	25	11.5%
40-49	10	4.6%
50 or older	9	4.1%
Total	**205**	**100%**

As shown in table 5.1 most of the sample were among (25-30) representing nearly half the sample (45.5%, n= 99) followed by (18-24) who represent (n=62, 28.4%). Category from (31-39) was represented by (11.5%, n=25) and respondents aging from (40-49) formed (4.6% n=10) of the sample. Whereas group aging from (50 or older) had (4%, n=9). Table shows SNS appeal among Egyptian youth compared to that of adults.

5.2 Gender

The survey was presented to a non-random sample of both males and females. Females had a higher rate of participation, as shown in Figure 5.2 females represented the majority of the sample with (70%, n= 142) while males formed (30%, n=63).

Figure 5.2 Gender
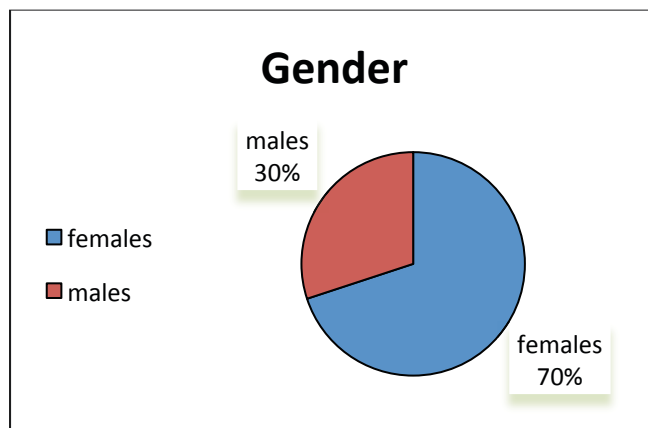
5.3 Social Media Usage

The survey was conducted online targeting those with facebook active profile page, yet information of other social media tools usage was needed to emphasize online activity level, and to acquire information on other SNS's usage used to self-expression beside facebook. Social media consumption values among the sample are presented in the following graph.

Figure 5.3 shows Social media usage distribution among the sample
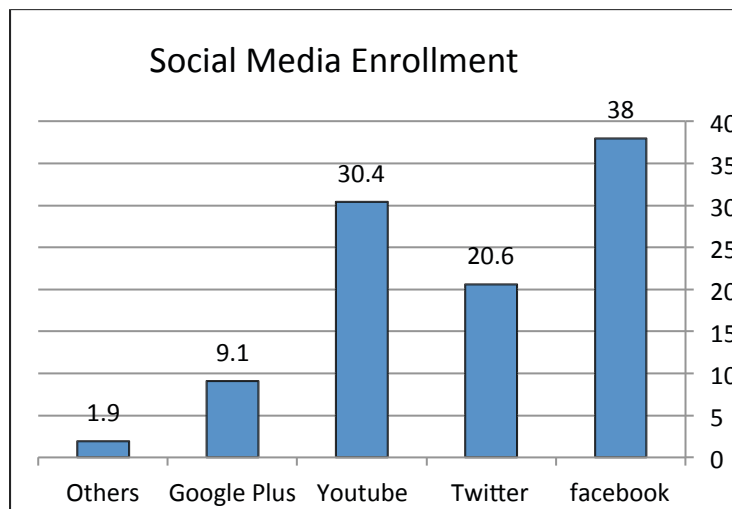
As shown above, clearly facebook came as the majority's frequent used SNS tool with 38%, followed by Youtube with 30%, after that comes Twitter with 21%, although being relatively newly introduced as opposed to facebook and Youtube, Google plus represented (9%) of the sample choice of social media enrollment, Other social media tools constituted only (1.9%) of the responses, including Instgram, Pinterest, Wordpress, linkedin, and blogspot.

5.4 Privacy Settings Concerns

Sample circle of friends contains individuals whom may oppose users in political opinion, with facebook's facility to control those with access to one's profile and status disclosure, have Egyptians ever considered adjusting their privacy settings on facebook, in an attempt to exclude someone they fear to encounter subsequent to an argument with political nature. Figure 5.4 shows how many respondents have, at some point of time, excluded friends from their facebook profile page after engaging in a political argument.

Figure 5.4 Tendency to Change Privacy Settings on facebook
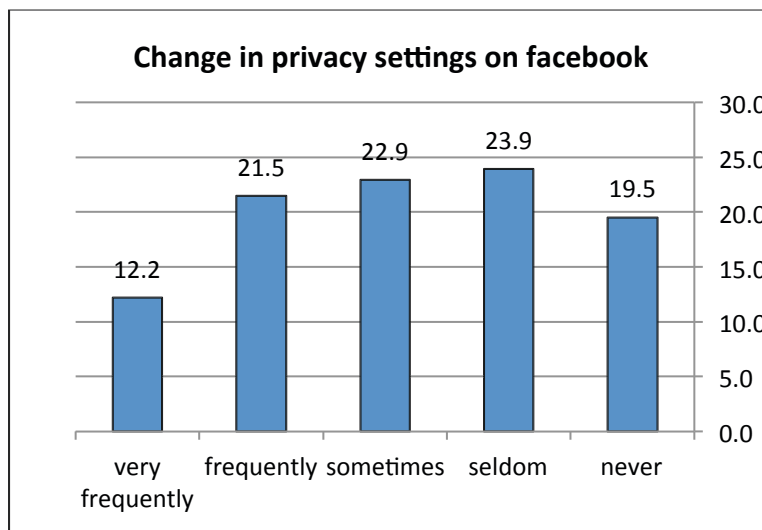
Figure 5.4 reveals that majority of the sample (n=165, 80%) of the sample has at some point in time alter their facebook privacy settings after sharing a political dispute. These 80% have changed their settings in an attempt to avoid social quarrel and pressure resulting afterwards. (22.9% and 23.9%) have either sometime change their settings or seldom felt the need to exclude someone from their list. A percentage of 19.5% (n=40) however, have never faced an obligation to alter their settings.

5.5 Concern over facebook Activities

Previous question showed that the sample showed no significant concern in changing any settings to exclude someone after a political argument. Yet, would users show concern to how their circle of friends might react to their activities on facebook. Figure 5.5 shows how many respondents are conscious of their actions on facebook, and are afraid of feedback- whether negative or positive in nature- they might encounter. Consequently, compelling them to filter their choice of words and statues they post on their facebook page. Table 5.5 shows that generally speaking the majority of the sample (87.8%, n=180) were concerned with how their friends would

respond to their activities. Assuring the element of observing the surrounding as proposed by Noelle-Neumann, and how the individual will fear negative feedback and social isolation threats established and forced by the surrounding environment's climate of opinion. Those who have frequently or sometimes concerned of their friends' reaction had an equal representation in the sample with (n=55, 26.8). Only (12%, n= 46) have never been apprehensive about their circle of friends' reaction to their activities on facebook.

Figure 5.5 Concerns over facebook Activities
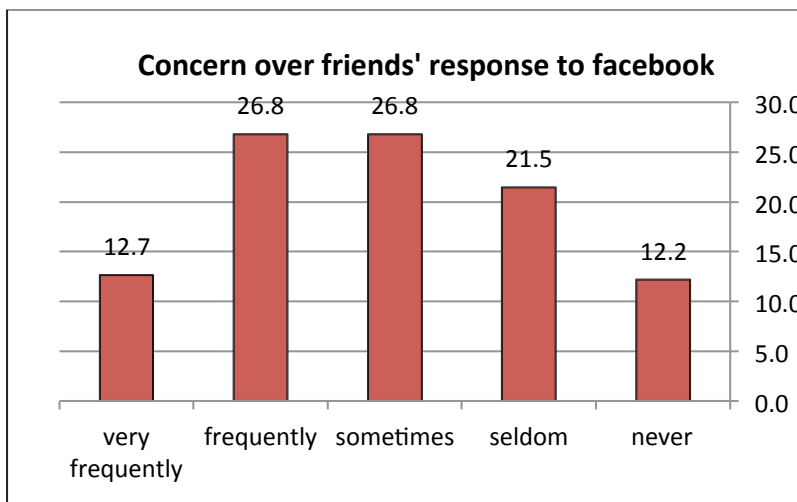
5.6 Fear of Commenting on Other's Profile on Facebook

Previous question dealt with respondents concerns when declaring their opinion on facebook, subsequently, this question measures if there is a difference between respondent tendency to express opinion given it will be declared on someone else's profile and not his own. Figure 5.6 shows the percentage of respondents that have- at some point of time- feared commenting on someone else profile in fear of negative feedback.

Figure 5.6 Fear to Comment on Other's facebook Profile

Fear of commenting on other's profile
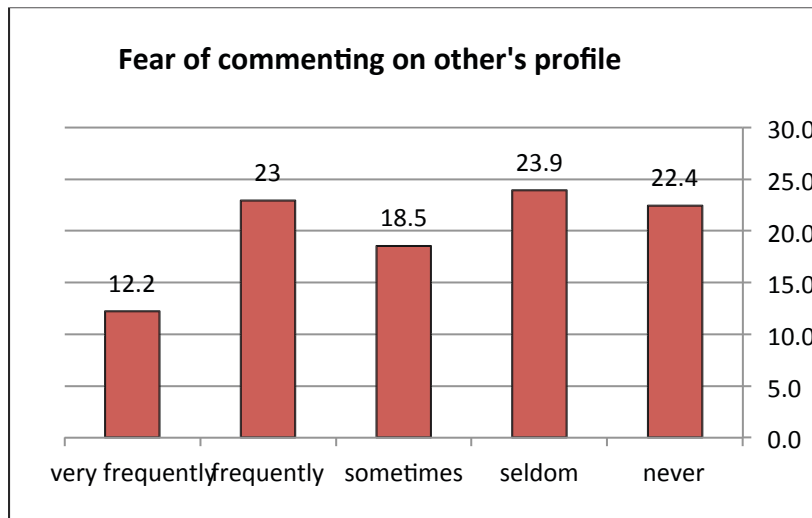
As shown in the above figure, a percentage of (22%, n=46) have never been hesitant in commenting on other's profile. While the majority of the sample – with mild variation- feared to comment on others profile in fear of a negative reaction, those who very frequently feared commenting on others represented (12%, n=25) followed by who frequently worry (23%, n= 47), those who sometimes fear to comment on other's profile represented (18.5%, n=38), and (23.9%, n=49) seldom had to worry about commenting on their friends' profile pages. These findings confirm the existence of social pressure factors exerted by society and the need to sustain social bonds, creating fear of opposing an opinion which might constitute isolation among a given acquaintance.

5.7 Fear of Negative Feedback on facebook

Respondents were asked to reflect on their concerns over their personal actions on facebook profile. This question pertains to measure how often these concerns affect their tendency to speak out their true opinion on a given matter.

Figure 5.7 shows the percentage of those reluctant to express their true opinion of any nature, due to their fear of negative feedback from their facebook friends. When the type of feedback was not determined, discrepancy in responses tackling negative feedback was found. This questions asks if Egyptians had feared negative feedback on facebook, those who never worried about any sort of a negative reaction were (27.3%, n=56), while (72.7%) feared some sort of undesirable feedback on facebook. (8.8%, n=18) expressed their concern of facing negative feedback. A number of (n=40, 19.5%) were frequently worry, and (21%, n=38) were sometimes mindful of negative responses on facebook.

Figure 5.7 Fear of negative feedback on facebook
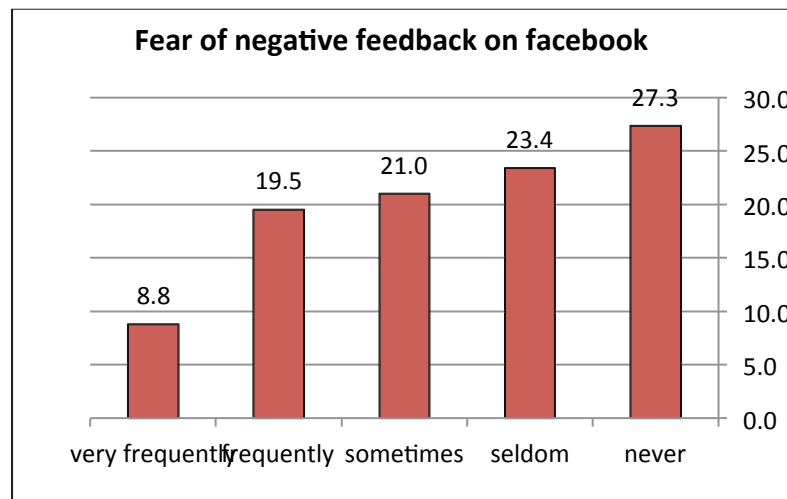
5.8 Level of Knowledge

It was important to find out the level of respondents' knowledge regarding the issue of the presidential election. Assuming that the respondents show no interest in the topic, their representation will flaw the study. To apply spiral of silence, individual must know the topic they are discussing at least with a certain degree. Assuming that s/he has no knowledge on the issue, it will hinder their tendency to

enter a discussion on the topic in the first place. This question measures the perceived sample's knowledge level, on the subject of the presidential election; their actual knowledge and information on the issue were not measured.

Figure 5.8 shows Egyptians' knowledge level on issue of 2014 presidential election. As shown below, the majority of the sample acquires a fair amount of knowledge on the topic. Total of (28%, n= 57) had a very high level knowledge. (25%, n=51) had a high level. (29%, n=59) were neutral on their knowledge on the presidential election. (10%, n=21) believed they did not know the issue well, and approximately 7% of the sample had a very low knowledge level regarding the issue of the presidential election. Findings indicate that the majority of the sample is well aware of the topic, aiding their tendency to enter a discussion on the issue.

Figure 5.8 level of Knowledge towards the Issue of Presidential election
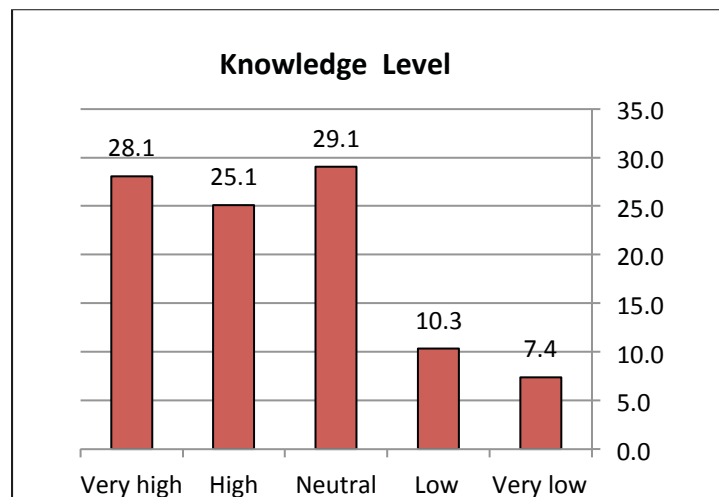
5.9 Importance of Assessing Close Friends' Opinion

One of the basic cornerstones of spiral of silence theory is that the issue addressed holds an importance and emotional 'struggle' to the individuals. Hence it was vital to identify the importance of examining the majority opinion regarding a the

issue of the presidential election. This questions asks the sample to identify- using a 5-point likert scale (1=being not important at all, 5= being extremely important)- how important is it in their personal opinion to assess their close friends' opinion on the issue of the election. If no importance was found then the spiral of silence will not be applicable in such condition.

Figure 5.9 shows the importance of identifying what close friends' think of the presidential election. Equal percentages of (21%, n= 43) believed it is somewhat and a little bit important to know their close friends stand/opinion concerning the election. (22.9%, n=47) believed it is not important at all, whereas (26.8%, n=55) saw it as neutral to them. Only (8%, n=17) believed it to be extremely important. This data support the importance of identifying close friends' opinion. Evaluating an individual acquaintance's opinion depending on the social relation might affect their valuation of which social circle's progression to abide by. Comparing assigned importance of identifying inner/close circle of friend versus that of the community at large (broader circle) is discussed in the following question.

Figure 5.9 Importance of Close Friends' Opinion
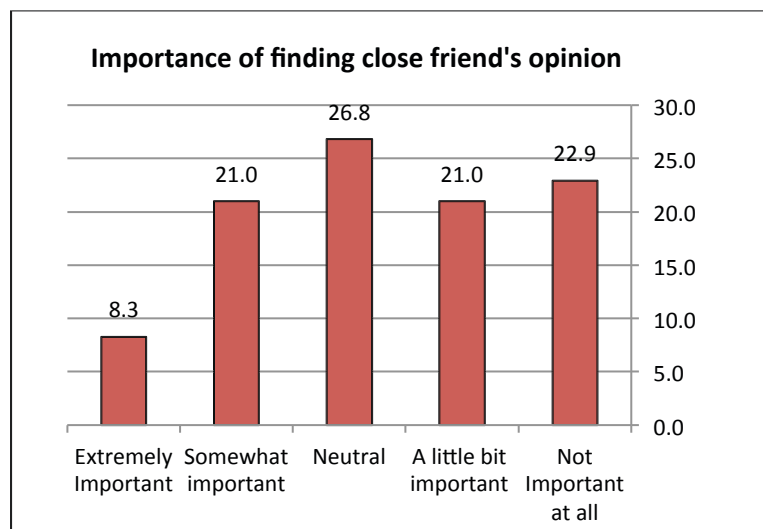
5.10 Importance of Knowing Community's Opinion

This question tried to identify the importance of knowing the community's opinion on the presidential election. Figure 5.10 shows the importance of assessing community/state climate of opinion with regards to the issue of the 2014 presidential election.

Figure 5.10 Importance of determining Community's stand
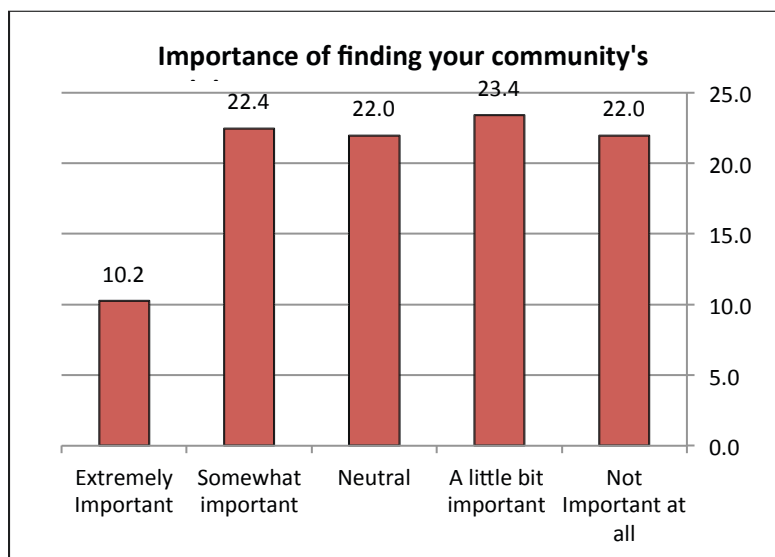
Figure 5.10 shows that only 10% of the sample believed it was extremely important to know what the surrounding community's opinion on the presidential election. Graph shows that for the majority of the sample it is important to a certain degree, (22.4% n= 46) saw it was somewhat important to find out what the community think of the election, equal percentage (22%, n=45) believed it is of neutral importance to determine community's opinion on the issue., a little bit important was (23.4% n=48) and 22% (n=45) believed it was of no importance to know what the broader circle-constituting people with weaker social bonds as opposed to his/her close circle of friends- stand will be during the election process.

These result emphasize existing literature in giving more attention to close friends' views than that of the community as a whole, arguing that the individuals' close circle of friend, will influence his/her opinion formation process and consequently, will have an influence of his/her willingness to speak out on a given issue, aforementioned findings contradict such assumptions. Egyptians showed close if not equal importance in determining both close friends' opinion and that of community on the presidential election.

5.11 Voting Results Expectation

Since this study chose the presidential election as the scope, it is crucial to identify how the respondents expect the result outcome. Their expectations is possible to affect their tendency towards a certain voting decision and might play a role in how they will perceive their political stand (a majority or a minority), consequently molding their willingness to enter a discussion on the presidential election. Figure 5.11 shows how Egyptians expect the results of the voting to turn out, speculating if their preferred candidate is going to win or lose the presidential election of 2014.

Figure 5.11 Sample's Expectation to Voting Results
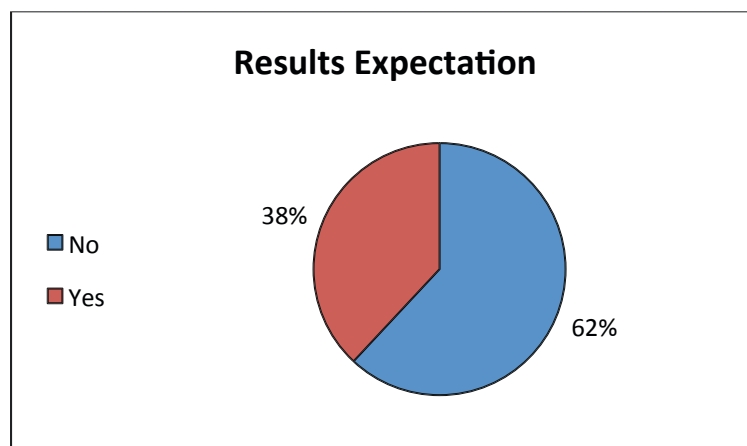
Majority of the sample (62%, n=127) believed their chosen candidate will lose the election, which might have contributed to their lack of participation in the voting process discussed in the following question. A percentage of (38%, n=78) believed their preferred candidate is going to win the election of 2014.

5.12 Voting Decision

As we have already identified the respondent's expectation of the results, it is of equal importance to identify their voting decision/stand for the presidential election. The voting decision will be an indication to whether s/he is among the majority expecting their preferred candidate to win the election, and are privileged with potential support in the future; or a minority and might face social isolation and negative feedback when expressing their voting preference on facebook. Figure 5.12 shows that more than half the sample (55%, n=112) will not take part in this election, despite the clear identification of how the results will turn out to as shown below. Only (45%, n=93) said they are going to cast their vote.

Figure 5.12 Voting Intention
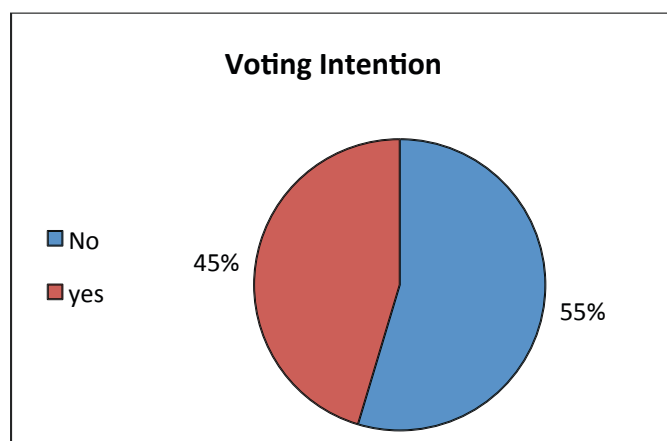
5.13 Media and Opinion Expression

This question relates to the various media channels and their usefulness in expressing sample's opinions/political stands on the presidential election. Media channels options were: facebook, traditional methods of communications like wearing a campaign button or putting a car sticker, and interpersonal communication i.e face-to-face discussions and emails. Table 5.13 shows usage of media channels when expressing a political opinion to friends that relates to the presidential election. Graph 5.13 shows the degree of usefulness sample has assigned to facebook when expressing their political views regarding the issue of the presidential election. Figure 5.13.a shows usefulness assigned to traditional methods of communication, and figure 5.13.b shows usefulness assigned to interpersonal methods of communication.

Table 5.13 Media Tools Usage Frequency

Media Channel	Not useful at all	A little bit useful	Neutral	Somewhat useful	Extremely useful
Facebook	31	36	48	55	35
Traditional methods (wearing a campaign button, bumber sticker,,)	87	47	45	19	7
Interpersonal Comm. (face to face, emails..)	20	26	51	69	39

Figure 5.13 Facebook
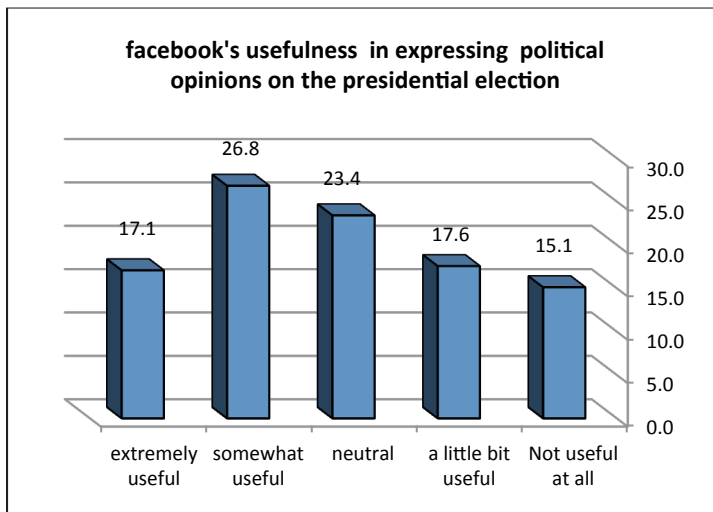
Figure 5.13.a Traditional methods of Communication
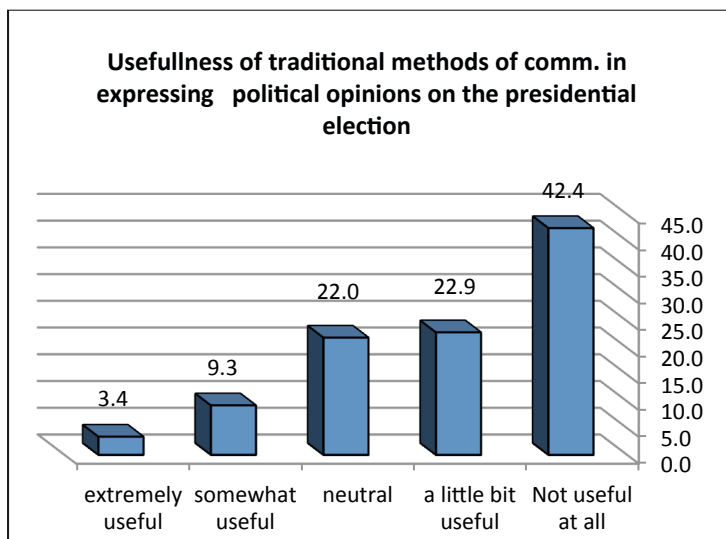
Figure 5.13.b Interpersonal Communication
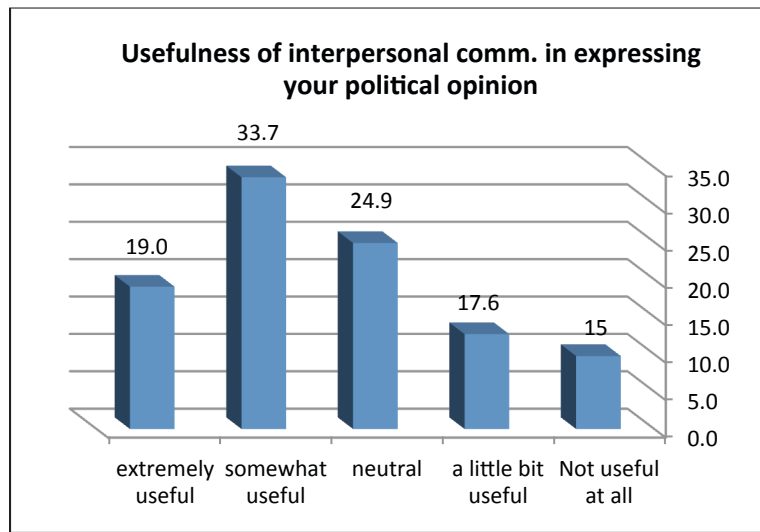
As table 5.13 reveals, facebook usage to express opinion is dispersed, (15%, n= 31) find it the least useful method in expressing political views regarding the presidential election. (17.6%, n=36) find it a little bit useful in expressing views, (24.94%, n=48) find it neutral in expressing opinion on the issue. While (33.7%, n=55) find it somewhat useful to reveal their opinions, and (19%, n=35) find it extremely useful in expressing their political views on the election.

Figure 5.13.a shows that traditional media usage is not as useful as opposed to facebook. (42%, n= 87) find traditional methods of communication to be not useful at all when expressing their views on the presidential election. Almost equal percentages of (42.4%, n= 92) found traditional method either a little bit useful or neutral. (9%, n=19) believe it is somewhat useful, and remaining 3% are those who think traditional method are extremely useful to convey their opinions about the presidential election.

Nevertheless, Interpersonal communication as shown in figure 5.13.b, is the best match to facebook, where (19%, n=39) find it extremely useful when expressing political opinions. (33.7%, n=69) at somewhat useful, (25%, n= 51) are neutral and (12.7%, n= 26) found it a little bit useful and not useful at all comes with (9.8%, n= 20) of the sample.

Discrepancy between facebook and interpersonal communication shows that sample prefer face-to-face communication when expressing opinion especially to the element of their close friends. As discussed later in in-depth data, sample preferred interpersonal communication in expressing opinions to avoid misunderstanding and control verbal and body gestures that frequently are misunderstood in an online platform, which subsequently adds more tension to figure out if the person you are contacting is talking humorously about the issue, or is starting to feel uncomfortable with the course of how the conversation is processing. Virtual atmosphere of facebook and lack of physical existence adds to the notion that individuals fear to convey their opinion in an online environment in fear of confusion and misunderstanding following an online conversation. Table 5.14 presents a paired T-test used to measure usefulness of Facebook, interpersonal communication and traditional method of communication with relation to presidential election of 2014.

Table 5.14 paired T-test of Media Channels usefulness

	Mean	S.D
Facebook & Traditional Methods of Communications	1.0488	1.5171
T= 9.898 df= 204 p=.000		

Facebook and Interpersonal Communication	-.2634	1.4104
T= -2.674 df= 204 p=.008		

Table 5.14 shows a clear significance in media channels usage, when comparing facebook to both interpersonal communication and traditional ones. A significant difference was found in the mean scores for facebook in relation to traditional means of communication (M= 1.04, SD= 1.517) and also a clear significance in scores of facebook with comparison to interpersonal communication tools (M=-2.63, SD= 1.4104). These results suggest that facebook is used by the sample to speak out their opinion views on the issue of the presidential election rather than: traditional media, however, interpersonal communication is found most useful media channel when expressing views on the presidential election, confirming Salmon and Kline (1985) findings indicating that individual's opinion formation could be determined and strengthened by support from interpersonal relationship rather than the dominant perceived majority point of view.

5.15 Importance of Expressing opinion

After questioning the respondents on their voting stand and their expectation of how this stand relates to that of community's and close friends', their tendency to express their own stand given such surrounding is vital to evaluate. Given that facebook is found useful to the sample when expressing their opinion on the presidential election; this question measures how important is it for the sample to express their views of political nature on facebook. Figure 5.15 shows sample's

assigned degree of importance when expressing their opinion/political stand about the issue of presidential election to their close friends on facebook.

Figure 5.15 Importance of expressing opinions on facebook
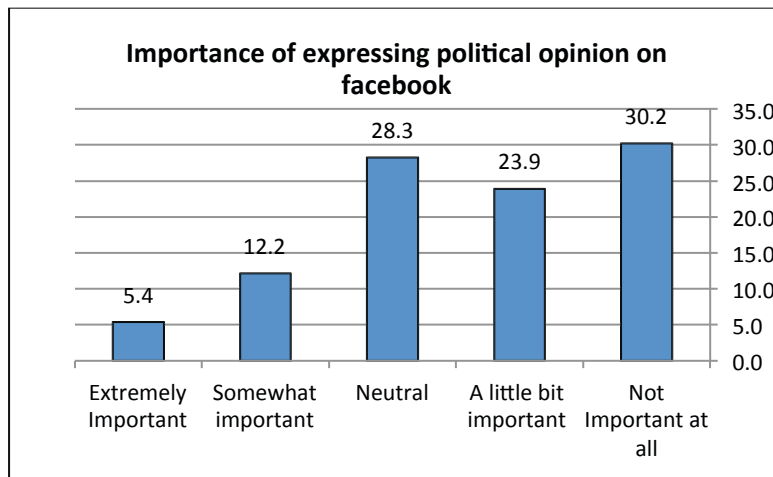
Despite acknowledging that facebook is useful when expressing political stands concerning the presidential election, 30% of the sample believed it was not important at all to express their political opinion on facebook. Most of the sample (28.3,n= 58) considered the importance as neutral. While (23.9%, n=49) considered it was a little bit important to express views on facebook. (12.2%,n=25) saw it as somewhat important and only (5.4%, n= 11) considered it of extreme importance to declare their political views on the presidential election via facebook.

5.16 Respondents' Political Stand (Majority)

Assuming a hypothetical scenario, through which the respondent's close friends hold a political view on the presidential election that is similar to his own. i.e he is in a majority stand, with no fear of negative feedback nor some sort of social isolation, what would be the first thing that comes to the individual's mind. Table 5.16

show that when in majority stand point, (35%, n=76) of the sample preferred to remain silent. A total of 59% (n=129) respondents chose to reveal their coherence with their friends' stand point by sharing links that reflect their views on the subject. This assures that when in a power/majority stand point, the sample tend to gain support, as most of the sample decided to indicate that their agreement and support their circle of friends' stand on the issue of the presidential election. These percentages maintain spiral of silence's necessity to conform to perceived dominant social aggregation found on a given issue.

Table 5.16 Behavior in a Majority Stand

Facebook Action	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Avoid using facebook to express your opinion about the presidential election	76	34.9%
Share links with them that reflect their view of the issue	129	59.2%
Total	**205**	**100%**

Figure 5.16 Media behavior in majority group
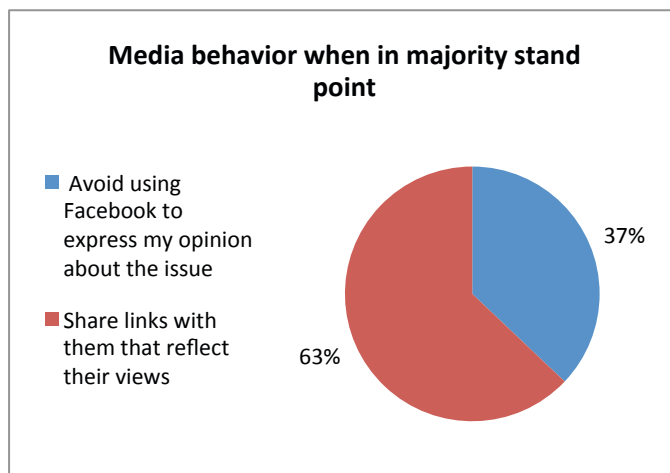
5.17 Respondents' Political Stand (Minority)

  Assuming the contrary situation to the one aforementioned, if the individual belongs to a minority stand point, what would be close to his actions when communicating with his circle of friends on facebook. Table 5.17 lists the possible actions. Supportive to spiral of silence's proposition, the majority of the sample chose to remain silent (60%, n=122) by avoiding facebook, showing a degree of social isolation. This 60% chose to avoid using facebook to dodge interaction with their opposing circle of friends' opinion. Furthermore, a percentage of 40% (n=83) chose to indicate their disagreement in opinion by sharing links that show an opposite view of the issue; with no limitation for fear of confrontation that may lead to some sort of isolation from their facebook circle of friends. These results support spiral of silence threat of isolation, and fear of isolation assumptions, signifying that individuals for fear of becoming social isolates will tend to avoid confrontation with opposing views.

Table 5.17 Behavior in a Minority Stand.

Facebook Action	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Avoid using facebook to express my opinion about the presidential election	122	60%
Share links with them that show an opposite view towards the issue of presidential election	83	40%
Total	205	100%

Figure 5.17 Behavior in a minority stand point

Media behavior when in minorty stand point

■ Avoid using Facebook
to express my opinion
about the issue

■ Share links with them
that show an opposite
view of the issue

40%

60%
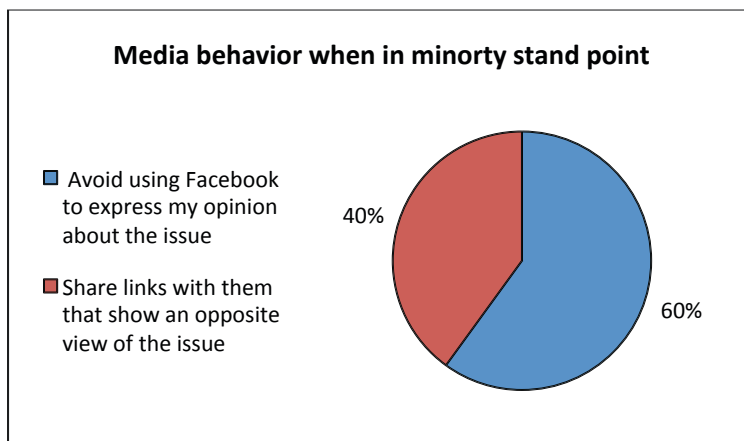
Frequencies and percentages presented above support the existence of spiral of silence theory on facebook, by supporting the assumption that individuals will tend to remain silent when perceived to fall in a minority position for fear of social isolation, which might detach them from their social acquaintance found as facebook circle of friends.

5.18 Minority in Real-life Setting

Aforementioned questions inquired sample's media behavior on facebook if faced with opposing or similar opinions. Yet, social gathering at a real-life setting represents another platform for discussion, and, as such, the likelihood that users with perceptions of being in a minority would enter a discussion was tested. To eliminate prestigious answers, and to avoid easy reactions, choice neutral was removed from this likert scale as to be able to determine the users' tendency to enter a discussion being positive or negative. Table 5.18 shows tendency to enter a discussion in a social gathering surrounded by people, who oppose to him in his opinion regarding the presidential election. Remarkably, results were divided nearly in equal percentages as 33% said they are likely to enter a discussion, while 34% said they are unlikely to enter a discussion when surrounded by opposing views. Also, difference was found in

extreme reaction towards the willingness to enter such discussion. 13% (n= 30) believe they are very likely to enter a discussion, while 12% (n=27) said they would be very unlikely to enter a discussion. Under these circumstances, personality traits might have an impact in reinforcing the willingness to enter a discussion in such setting.

Findings revealed that willingness to enter a discussion on the issue of the election found in a real-life social gathering is higher than that presumed to take place on facebook- given a minority standpoint- for reasons that may be due to the fact that face-to-face contact allows for a degree of transparency and emotional communication that is lacking on facebook as a platform. Nevertheless, sample's fragmentation to nearly equal percentages (likely 33.5%, unlikely 34.4%) with regards to willingness to enter a discussion on the issue of the presidential election given a minority position; substantiate sample's comply to fear of social isolation; acquiescent to previous survey findings, sample's responses comply to social threat.

Table 5.18   Willingness to Speak at a social gathering

Tendency to Enter a Discussion	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Very likely	30	13.8%
Likely	73	33.5%
Unlikely	75	34.4%
Very unlikely	27	12.4%
Total	**205**	**100%**

Figure 5.18 Willingness to enter a discussion

Willingness to enter a discussion with opposing views at a social gatheirng

Category	Value
Likely	35.6
Unlikely	36.6
Very likely	14.6
Very Unlikely	13.2
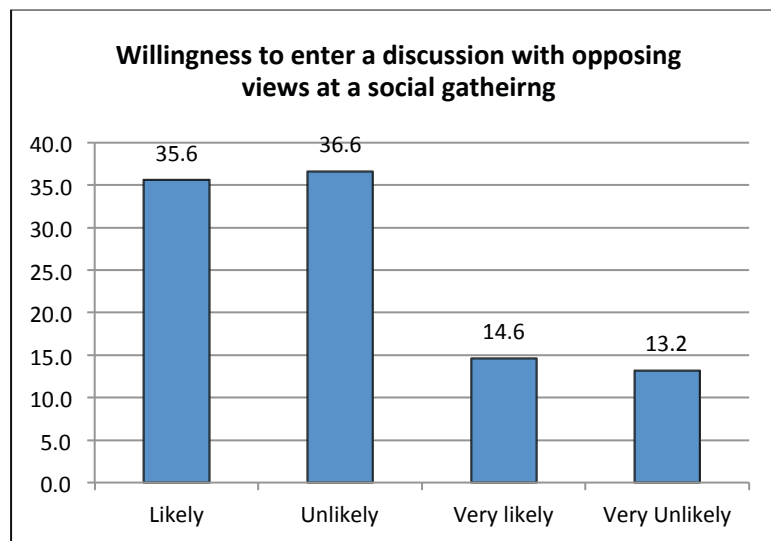
5.19 Perception of Personal Stand

Some of the previously mentioned questions aimed to determine user's perception if belonging to a minority or a majority stand point; deprived of direct observation of how s/he sees his opinion is perceived to be as opposed to those surrounding him. Also, despite the fact that among previous questions the sample's responses showed a great deal of compliance to social compelling factors, the plurality of the respondents (63%) believed people they normally socialize with would share similar opinion towards the issue of the presidential election. With 34% were assured to have a contrary opinion to the people s/he normally socialize with. Table 5.19 shows respondents' perception regarding their social/political stand in reference to the people surrounding him.

Table 5.19 Sample's self-perception with regards to the surrounding's political stand on the presidential election

Family and friends agree with your political stand	Number of Respondents	Percentages
Yes, they agree	129	59.2%
No, they disagree	76	34.9%
Total	**205**	**100%**

Figure 5.19 Personal stand as opposed to society's
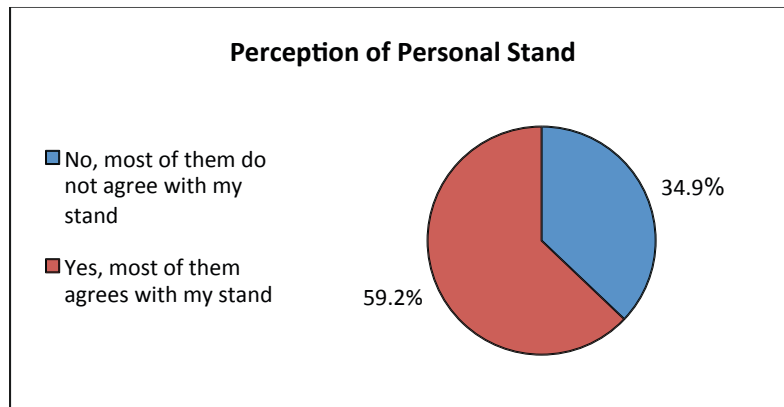
These results adds to Noelle-Neumann's speculation on the self-conscious of the individuals and how minority group members will abide to silence depending on the personal relevance of the issue. Regardless of the fact that most of the respondents (59.2%, n= 129) believed they are privileged with the surrounding support, and share a majority standpoint, sample's responses and media behavior run counter to behaviors expected from a majority group. The sample offered responses which comply to minority behaviors. Thus, in spite of believing they were part of the majority, these respondents showed fear of isolation and generally lacked willingness to speak out.

5.20 Online Vs. offline Expression

Questionnaire used in this study aimed to measure willingness to speak out on a controversial issue on facebook. Online venues are thought to allow for more freedom of expression and release from social constrains. This questions asks if the sample believed there is a difference between self-expression using an online platform versus an offline setting, and if they- in their personal opinion- believe they can speak out more freely using online publishing tools than offline platforms.

Figure 5.20 Perception of Online vs. offline freedom of expression
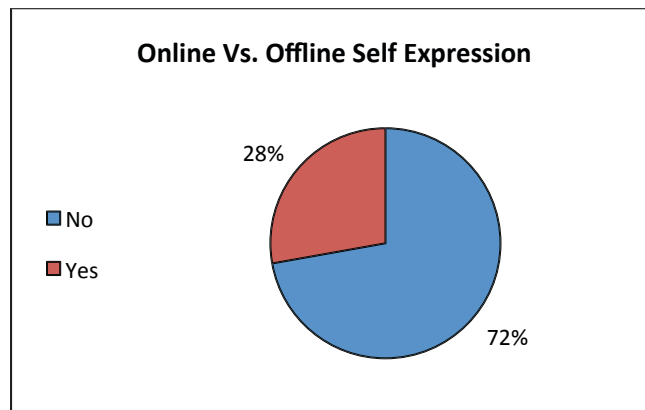
Plurality of the sample with 72% believed that they do not have the liberty to speak more freely on facebook, when compared to a real-life setting venue. The aforementioned graph confirms previous indications of samples' media behavior shaped thru social threat applied by their "online" friends. This majority (72%. n= 148) confirms the existence of similar social constrains online as that found in physical society, pressuring individuals to abide by normally accepted standards and comply with majority rules. With the self-consciousness of the sample to the social isolation threat found online, along with results of sample's behavior when in a

minority position online- the existence of one of spiral of silence's major assumption is confirmed in an online media environment.

5.21 Fear of Negative Evaluation Index

A number of Watson and Friend (FNE) scale index were introduced in this survey, as to assess the willingness to speak out. Leaving the presidential election aside, would users state their political stand on a given controversial issue on facebook profile? Table 5.21 presents some of the FNE indicators as a way to measure what would come closest to mind when users state a political stand on a controversial issue using facebook. Table 5.21 offers different FNE indicators of what sample might think, when stating a political stand on a controversial issue on facebook. Results were unaccommodating to their concern towards a negative feedback.

Also contrary to the element of social isolation raised by Noelle-Neumann where she proclaimed that people will pay attention to the surrounding environment as they want to stay attached to their environments. More than half of the sample rarely worried about what kind of impression they are making on someone. It is true that nearly half the sample showed no concern in others judgment over their opinion. The remaining responses showed significant consideration towards other people's judgment towards their actions. In fact, 24% (n=49) acknowledged the existence of social threat, even when their knowledge that it does not make a difference. Moreover, (22.5%, n= 49) acknowledged being aware of the potential social threat of negative feedback, regardless of their comprehension that it is not something of importance.

Table 5.21 Negative Evaluation Index

FNE Indicators	Number of Respondents	Percentages
I worry about what people will think of me, even when I know it doesn't make any difference	49	24%
I become nervous if i know someone is sizing me up	21	10.2%
I often worry that people who are important to me will not think very much of me	38	18.5%
I rarely worry about what kind of impression i am making on someone	97	47.3%
Total	205	100%

Figure 5.21 Index of Negative Evaluation

Fear of Negative Evaluation Index

- 23.9 — 'I worry about what people will think of me, even when I know it
- 18.5 — 'I often worry that people who are important to me won't think very
- 10.2 — 'I become nervous if I know someone is sizing me up'
- 47.3 — 'I rarely worry about what kind of impression I am making on

50.0 40.0 30.0 20.0 10.0 0.0
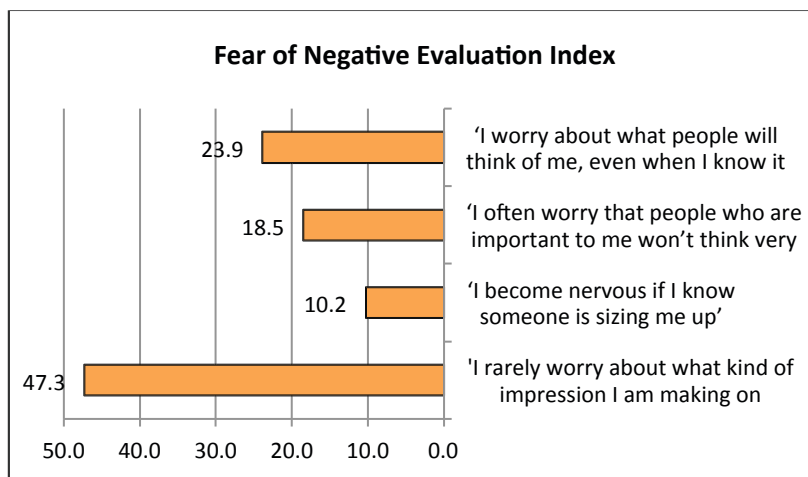
Answering Research Question and Hypothesis Testing

H1: Individuals who believe their chosen candidate will lose the election will be less willing to express their voting preference on facebook than individuals who believe their chosen candidate will win the election.

This hypothesis assumed that those who believe that they are in the minority – measured by assessing whether or not respondents believe their candidate would win or lose the election – will be less likely to express their views on the presidential election. This hypothesis is consistent with the literature on the spiral of silence for if respondents believe their candidate will lose the election, they are essentially acknowledging that they are in the minority. It follows, according to the literature that they may fall into social conformity pressures. This hypothesis was measured using a 5-point likert scale (1= being not useful at all, 5= being extremely useful) asking respondents to indicate how important it is to them to express their views about the election on Facebook.

Table 6.1 presents a chi-square conducted to measure the relationship between the expected election outcome and importance of expressing views on facebook. Results show that respondents who believed their candidate will lose the election were less likely (49.6%) to assign importance to speaking out on facebook than those who believed their candidate would win the election (61.5%). However, a chi-square test showed that these differences were not statistically significant.

Table 6.1.a presents the mean scores for both categories of respondents according to their expectations. The mean score for respondents who believed their candidate would win the election was (2.24), and the mean score for respondents who

believed their candidate would lose the election was (2.47). A T-test showed that this difference was not statistically significant.

Thus, based on both of these tests, it is concluded that there is no relation between the sample's perception of minority/majority status (measured by respondents' assessment of whether or not they believed their candidate would win the election) and importance of expressing views related to the election process on Facebook. Thus, H1 is rejected.

Table 6.1 chi-square measuring importance to speak out according to perceived result's expectation

Results Expectation	Assigned importance to expressing views (1= not important at all, 5= extremely important)			
	Important	Neutral	Not important	Total
Candidate will win	(48) 61.5%	(20) 25.6%	(10) 12.8%	(78) 100%
Candidate will lose	(63) 49.6%	(38) 29.9%	(26) 20.5%	(127) 100%
Total	**(111) 54.1%**	**(58) 28.3%**	**(36) 17.6%**	**(205) 100%**

X^2= 3.195 df= 2 p= 0.202

Table 6.1.a T-test measuring importance to speak out according to perceived result's expectation

Results Expectation	Importance to Express Views		
	N	Mean	S.D
Candidate will win	78	2.24	1.2
Candidate will lose	127	2.47	1.17

T= 1.34 , df=203, p=0.182

Table 6.1.b chi-square relation between results' expectation and perceived facebook usefulness

Results expectations	Perceived Facebook usefulness			
	Low Degrees of Usefulness	Neutral	High Degrees of Usefulness	Total
Candidate will win	(34) 43.6%	(15) 19.2%	(29) 37.2 %	(78) 100%
Candidate will lose	(33) 26%	(33) 26%	(61) 48%	(127) 100%
Total	(67) 32.7%	(48) 23.4%	(90) 43.9%	(205) 100%

X^2= 67.820 df= 2 p= 0.033

Table 6.1.b shows significance in relation between sample's expectation to the result outcome and degree of facebook usefulness. Those who believe their preferred candidate to win the upcoming presidential election shared low degree of perceived facebook usefulness (43.6%, n=34), while those who expect the loss of their preferred candidate showed higher degree for facebook usefulness in expressing their views on the issue of the election (n= 61, 48%).

H2: Respondents with higher level of knowledge about the presidential election will be more likely to enter a discussion about the issue regardless of their perception of being in the majority/minority group.

This hypothesis proposed that the individual's level of knowledge concerning the issue of the presidential election will directly affect his/her willingness to enter a discussion. Assuming that those with higher level of knowledge will be more likely to enter a discussion, due to confidence acquired from the information they have on the topic. A one way ANOVA test (Table 6.2) was conducted to measure variables of results' outcome opportunities, and importance in expressing views, versus that of the respondents' knowledge level.

Table 6.2 One-way Anova

Perceived knowledge	Expectations to preferred candidate	Importance to speak about the election using facebook		
		N	Mean	S.D
High level	Lose	66	2.667	1.1679
	Win	42	2.619	1.3426
Low level	Lose	25	2.040	1.2741
	Win	11	2.00	0.8944

ANOVA 16.258 df= 2 p= 0.003

Table 6.2 shows significance between respondents' level of knowledge towards the issue of the presidential election, and corresponding importance given to the issue; supporting H2. Similar to previous operational definition, this hypothesis measured their perceived knowledge on the subject; sample's actual knowledge level was not encountered. Anova test showed that mean scores for those with higher level of knowledge and expect their preferred candidate to lose assigned higher importance to express their political views on facebook concerning the election (n= 66, m= 2,667). Also, those with lower knowledge level on the issue and expect their preferred candidate to lose, showed higher degree of importance to express political opinions on facebook (n= 23, m=2.040). For Post Hoc Tests comparisons see appendix E.

H3: Individuals will pay more concern to know their close friends' opinion on the presidential election than that of the community's

Willingness to speak is the basis of spiral of silence theory, and hence this study, in order to measure individual's willingness to declare his political stand, individuals-as proposed by Neumann- used his quasi-statistical organ to browse the surrounding climate of opinion. This hypothesis examines how an individual evaluates his own stand as opposed to that of his community and close friends. i.e if the people surrounding him agree or disagree with his political opinion in the issue of the presidential election to estimate the social pressure of conformity through which he might comply. This hypothesis postulates that Egyptians will be more concerned in knowing their close friend's opinion on the issue of the presidential election than that of the broader circle, or that of the surrounding community at large. Understating of what constitutes a close friend and contextual definition of an inner/close acquaintance versus a close one, will be later discussed in the in-depth data analysis. Table 6.3 shows a paired sample T-test was conducted to measure importance of assessing close friend's climate of opinion on the presidential election versus that of the community.

Table 6.3 Social Relations and Importance of Assessing the Climate of Opinion

Acquaintance	N	Mean	S.D
Close Friends	205	2.707	1.261
Community	205	2.756	1.3020

T= -0.608 df= 204 p= 0.544

As table 6.3 presents, the T-test conducted to address this hypothesis showed no significant relation among the scores of importance assigned to identifying close friends' opinion on the issue of the election as opposed to that of the community. In fact mean scores were nearly equal, illustrating that the sample pays equal importance in identifying close friends' opinion and the community correspondingly. Literature found on the element of individuals' assigned importance to close friends' identification that excessed degree they give to towards a broader circle like state or community they live in. Contrary to literature, sample of this study showed concerns of knowing close friends' opinion, whom they want to sustain social bonds with equal importance given to surrounding community. Data conducted from T-test contradicts previous literature on that matter. H3 is rejected.

H4: Individuals who perceive themselves as a minority will be more likely to change their privacy settings to exclude some of their friends on facebook.

In the survey questions, respondents were asked to speculate from their own point of view, their political stand point- regarding the presidential election- among people they normally socialize with. Perception of being in minority in this hypothesis is based on how the individuals' recognize his/her political stand given surrounding climate of opinion. An independent T-test was conducted to measure if those who believe to belong to a minority group, will they be more likely to alter their privacy settings on facebook to exclude someone from their list after engaging in a political argument. Those who are conscious about fear of isolation and social threat may tend to alter some facebook privacy settings, as to avoid some contrary argument on the subject of the election or any controversial subject of political nature. Also, interviews showed that some may perform alteration as a means to avoid a potential

uncomfortable argument in the future based on a friend' background or political affiliation.

Survey asked respondents if they have ever changed their privacy settings after a political argument. This hypothesis asks if the individuals perceiving themselves as a minority tend to exclude friends on their facebook page, as a way of avoiding confrontation with opposite views and lessen social congestion among users' circle of friends. In this study, being in a minority is measured through individuals' perception of themselves towards the surrounding and/or their voting opinions/preferences on the issue of the presidential election. Table 6.4 presents a T-test conducted to measure if individuals who perceive themselves as a minority based on people they usually socialize with, and the likelihood of altering their privacy settings on facebook to escape confrontations with current or potential opposing individuals. Table 6.4.a presents mean scores of social belonging perception and tendency to change facebook settings as a means of dodging social confrontation pressure.

Table 6.4 T-test of perception and change in facebook settings

Social Belonging Perception	*Change in facebook privacy settings (1=Never, 5= Very Frequently)*					
	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Majority	(29) 22.5%	(33) 25.6%	(31) 24%	(21) 16.3%	(15) 11.6%	(129) 100%
Minority	(11) 14.5%	(16) 21.15	(16) 21.1%	(23) 30.3%	(10) 13.2%	(76) 100%
Total	**(40) 19.5%**	**(49) 23.9%**	**(47) 22.9%**	**`(44) 21.5%**	**(25) 12.2%**	**(205) 100%**

T= 2.088 df= 203 p= 0.046

Table 6.4.a Mean scores of social belonging perception and tendency to change facebook settings

Social belonging Perception	N	Mean	S.D
Yes	129	2.690	1.304
No	76	3.066	1.2789

T= 2.088 df= 203 p= 0.046

Test shown above reveals a statistically significant relation between individual's perception of belonging to a minority group and changing privacy settings found on facebook to exclude someone accessing his profile page after participating in a political argument. Discrepancy in minority group mean score toward tendency to change privacy settings was found to be higher than mean score of majority group in changing their settings on facebook after a political argument. Therefore, H4 is supported maintaining Noelle-Neumann's importance given to social confrontation fears and need to evade pressures to confront opposing opinions.

H5: Individuals who perceive them-selves to be a minority will be less likely to enter a discussion on facebook concerning the presidential election

Tables (6.5 and 6.5.a) present Chi-square tests used to measure if there is a relationship between sample's perceptions of one self, and the willingness to enter a discussion on facebook, under a social status position of being a member in a minority group or a majority group. Similar to previous hypothesis testing, perception of individual's status is considered with relation to support of the people s/he usually socializes with. Moreover, to assess existence of spiral of silence within online versus

that in a real-life scenario, table 6.5.b shows Chi-square between tendencies to speak in a real-life setting scenario based on their perception of social stand point.

Table 6.5 chi square tests in a minority stand point

Perception of Social belonging	Media behavior on facebook in a majority position		
	Speak out	Do not speak	Total
Minority	(51) 67.1%	(25) 32.9%	(76) 100%
Majority	(78) 60.5%	(51) 39.5%	(129 100%

X^2 = 0.904 df= 1 p= 0.342

Table 6.5.a Chi square in majority stand point

Perception of Social belonging	Media behavior on facebook in a minority position		
	Speak out	Do not speak	Total
Minority	(25) 32.9%	(51) 67.1%	(76) 100%
Majority	(58) 45%	(71) 55%	(122) 100%

X^2= 2.890 df= 1 p= 0.089

Table 6.5.b chi-square test in real –life setting and tendency to speak

Tendency to speak at a social gathering	Perception of Personal Stand		
	Minority stand point	Majority stand point	Total
Likely	(24) 31.6	(49) 38%	(73) 35.6%
Very likely	(11) 14.5%	(19) 14.7%	(30) 14.6%
Unlikely	(29) 38.2%	(46) 35.7%	(75) 36.6%
Very unlikely	(12) 15.8%	(15) 11.6%	(27) 13.2%
Total	**(76) 100%**	**(129) 100%**	**(205)100%**

X^2= 1.264 df= 3 p= 0.738

Results show no indication that Egyptians who perceived themselves to be in the minority- are less willing to speak out than people who perceived themselves to be in the majority due to their political stand on the presidential election; questioning the existence of the spiral of silence in an online media environment. This is consistent with finding from several previous research (e.g., Salmon & Rucinski, 1988; Taylor, 1982) which found individuals holding the minority often not less willing to speak out, thus role of fear as a minority is unclear (Oh, 2011, p.18) questioning the Noelle-Neumann assumption that considering the factor of conformity as a mean of fear of isolation. Therefore, results conclude that individuals' perception of belonging to a certain group of (minority, or majority) does not affect their tendency to speak out on the issue of the presidential election in a given social gathering (real-life setting) or in an online media environment (facebook). Based on above result, H5 is rejected

RQ1: Will fear of negative feedback affect individuals' level of importance to publicly speak out on the presidential election to his close friends

Fear of negative feedback was addresses in various forms across the questionnaire. From which, was asking if they have ever feared expressing their true opinion in fear of negative feedback on facebook and if they have ever feared commenting on other's people profile also in fear of negative feedback. Moreover, their concern about how friends would react to their activities was measured. In order to answer this research questions cross tabulation was conducted to figure out if each of these manifestations to the threat of negative feedback would affect their willingness to speak out on the issue of the presidential election either offline or via facebook.

Table 6.6 shows a Chi-Square test to see the relation between how individual's fear expressing their true opinion on facebook and importance to express his/her views on facebook. Table 6.6.a also tests if there is a relation between fear of commenting on someone else's profile on facebook and importance in expressing his own opinion on a controversial issue on facebook.

Table 6.6 chi square test fear of negative feedback

Feared negative feedback (1= Never, 5= Very Frequently)	Importance of expressing views on facebook			
	Not Important	Neutral	Important	Total
Never	(33) 29.7%	(15) 25.9%	(8) 22.2%	(56) 27.3%
Seldom	(26) 23.4%	(16) 27.6%	(6) 12.5%	(48) 23.4%
Sometimes	(27) 24.3%	(8) 13.8%	(8) 22.2%	(43) 21%
Frequently	(17) 15.3%	(13) 22.4%	(10) 27.8%	(40) 19.5%
Very Frequently	(8) 7.3%	(6) 10.3%	(4) 11.1%	(18) 8.8%
Total	**(111) 54.1%**	**(58) 28.3%**	**(36) 17.6%**	**(205) 100%**

X^2= 7.011 df= 8 p= 0.535

Table 6.6.a Chi-square test fear of commenting on other's profile page

Feared commenting on other's profile (1= Never, 5= Very Frequently)	Importance to express views on facebook			
	Not Important	Neutral	Important	Total
Never	(25) 22.5%	(14) 24.1%	(7) 19.4%	(46) 22.4%
Seldom	(28) 25.2%	(17) 29.3%	(4) 11.1%	(49) 23.9%
Sometimes	(26) 68.4%	(7) 18.4%	(5) 13.2%	(38) 18.5%
Frequently	(21) 18.9 %	(13) 22.4%	(13) 36.1%	(47) 23%
Very Frequently	(11) 9.9%	(7) 12.2%	(7) 19.4%	(25) 12.2%
Total	**(111) 54.1%**	**(58) 28.3%**	**(36) 17.6%**	**(205) 100%**

X^2= 12.174 df= 8 p= 0.144

As shown in tables 6.6 and 6.6.a, data showed no significance pertaining to importance given to expressing political views on facebook concerning the presidential election and their fear of negative feedback. Results show that regardless of the social threat accompanying the possibility of facing negative feedback their expression to their own political opinion is sustained.

RQ2: Will individuals perceive themselves as less isolated online than offline?

This study's research question attempts to measure online venues capabilities, and see if they affect user's freedom of expression and help them avoid social conformity pressure. This question asks the sample if they believe they can speak in a more liberating manner on facebook versus to the behavior they perform in a real-life setting scenario. Chi square test was conducted to measure discrepancy between individuals' perception of acting in a more liberating manner on facebook and fear of negative index. Test value *(x2= 2.376, df= 3, p=0.498)* showed no statistical significance to indicate a relation between individuals fear of negative incidents or negative feedback manifestation and freedom of expression offered by facebook. Test results show that despite believing and compelling to some of the fear index elements, the sample does not relate that to expression magnitude found on facebook, which corresponds to data yielded earlier in H5, that the Sample showed no indications on remaining silent when perceived to be a minority due to their voting stand on the presidential election.

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In-depth interviews

This section deals with some of the data yielded from the interviews (for full questions check appendix C). Interviews revealed important patterns concerning willingness and motives to entering a discussion. Furthermore, they elaborated on the perception of isolation in an online context, and degree of tolerance toward negative feedback concerning opinion expression on a platform similar to facebook. When examining a respondent's own opinion and the perceived prevailing majority opinion, those who were neutral or inconsiderate to the consequences were equally reluctant to enter a discussion with those with definite opinion on the issue. It appeared that the major cause affecting their willingness to express themselves was no longer the majority prevailing opinion rather than of the "inner circle" or the ones they care about the most, representing those whom they encounter on a daily basis or a frequent manner like work colleagues, best friends, members of a sport club, and friends from college. However, community at large represented entities like district/neighborhood or governance. H3 in this study measured the importance of identifying the importance in assessing each group's climate of opinion (broader= community, inner= close friends) as a step in evaluating personal stand on a controversial issue.

Question: In your own opinion, how similar is your own political stand to that of your community of interest? Would you care about your friends' opinion, family or community at large?

Respondents' identification to their belonging to a minority or a majority groups, has been indecisive. Some respondents showed ambiguity towards the public opinion climates and their correspondent social stand on the issue; which might have contributed to their hesitation to engage in public expression. These findings are

consistent with literature of (Fields & Schuman, 1976; Gunther, 1991; Kennamer, 1990; Rimmer & Howard, 1990; Stevenson & Gozenbac, 1990). Nevertheless, the same is not true for the impact of perceived media coverage. The majority of the sample were capable of identifying the perceived tone of media coverage concerning the prevailing political stand on the presidential election as being positive or "supportive" in nature to a particular candidate, compelling many to abstain from voting. These findings raise a question of distinction between the perceived media coverage and the perceived public opinions reflected in media; a basic assumption behind the spiral of silence hypothesis asserting that an individual's public opinion is perceived as that presented in the media (Lin & Salwen, 2009).

The size of acquaintance and number of friends had an indirect relation with willingness to speak out. Having a large number of friends may imply freedom to voice out own opinion as probably some of the list would share a similar opinion. On the contrary, the majority of the sample interviewed (10 out of 15) showed less inclination to enter a discussion with someone who holds an opposing view. Surveys postulated three different scenarios, (minority standpoint on facebook, majority stand point on facebook, and minority standpoint in a real-life setting), when learning that the close circle of friends hold a political view about the presidential election similar to that of the user.

Question: Implementing train test by Noelle-Neumann. assuming a "real –life" discussion and asking interviews, if they were taking a train for long duration of time, assuming the person next to you disagrees with your political stand on the presidential election how willing will you be to enter a discussion with that person?

Each interviewee had his own interpretation and motivations for entering or escaping the discussion. To ease its measurement, a 5-point likert scale was introduced (1 being the least willing, 5 being the most willing). Only four expressed 5 as their degree of consent to argue with a person with a different opinion on a controversial issue, however, they stressed the fact that the topic must be a religious one, for only then they will be assured they are truthful, and there is a personal belief to defend. 9 out of 15 interviewees, believed they will not enter a discussion, not even with a remote chance. "I need to keep my peace of mind; I could not care less what he thinks." Most of the interviewees decided not to enter a discussion with that person for the following reasons: "I do not know how s/he would react" "what if s/he is a violent person" "it is a long trip, I do not need a headache" "I am not that eager on convincing him with my own stand, probably none of us will change our convictions, then why go through that mess."

However, the inner circle is the one group of people that interviewees indicated as the reasons for being anxious when commenting or stating a post with political nature. At the same time, interviewees revealed that -depending on the subject- arguing with the inner circle makes it more flexible as they are familiar with their discussion habits. However, they can terminate the discussion whenever they desire. One respondent said: "If things "heat" up, I will change the subject, I do not want to feel awkward." Hence, most of the interviewees agreed that they are not keen and unlikely to enter a discussion with someone "less important" to them, whom they cannot predict how they would react, and what constitute to them a border/red lines for discussion.

Question: How do you feel about expressing your opinion, and sharing links on facebook that are political in nature? How do you expect you "list" to response?

Expressing one's true opinion was seen by the majority as an independent act which cannot be pressured by others, yet interviewees expressed their concern not to "lose" someone close when stating such declaration. "It will not stop me from expressing myself, but I will not go into a debate with him, because we will never be the same again if things escalate", "expressing an opinion is important yes, but my friend is more important", "we tend to forgot everything, so I do not have to argue about something like politics" three of the interviewed facebook users, choose religion as the topic with high indication to debate. "If it is a matter of dogma, and it is a right or wrong issue like religion, I am strongly motivated to debate, because I know I am right". Hence, findings showed that the sample cares about self-expression on facebook, but not to the extent to make a close one uncomfortable. For that, they might abstain from expressing a few extreme information, images or videos, and will definitely abstain from direct contact with someone close in a controversial issue.

Question: have you ever reconsidered/deleted a comment that you though would make a friend uncomfortable? What could be the reasons for that?

Comparable to social media tools, facebook allows for some degree of privacy, while for the purpose of this study could be manifested in blocking a user from viewing your profile, or limiting someone from accessing your posts. When tackling privacy settings in an attempt to exclude any of the friends found on facebook after engaging in a political discussion (as shown in figure 5.4); interviewees showed that reasons revolved around the idea of having a "break" from someone with opposing views and "dodging" arguments with them. Those who

refused to exclude or block a user, reported that everyone is free to form a political opinion, and they are not in favor of losing a friend over a political dispute. One interviewee states: ""political arguments never end, I will not spend hours and days arguing with someone I cannot see and might eventually misunderstand me and might turn into a problem than just diverse opinions."

On that note, when reversing roles and asking how would they expect others to comment on their activities on facebook, the following question was presented.

Question: Do you usually worry or have any concerns regarding the consequences of your opinion?

Ten interviewees were concerned and five were not troubled by how others will react to their facebook activities. As mentioned in previous chapters, Noelle-Neumann cited "hard-core" people as those who do not comply easily to majority, with strong personalities. Previous statistics of those who were not troubled by others commenting on their activities, and those who never feared any sort of negative feedback -on their own posts and profiles- falls under the description of hard-core individuals. Asking whether they feared negative feedback when commenting on someone else's profile; results differed from that when expressing personal views on the user's profile.

Question: In your own opinion, how important is it for you to know what your friends and family's opinion on a given issue? What about the issue of the presidential election?

The chosen topic for this study entailed emotional, religious and political unease. Degree of issue importance to the sample was manifested in their quest to

know what their friends and family's stand, regardless of their own degree of knowledge on the issue. 12 out of 15 interviewees said "not that important" Some explanation to lack of interest may be caused by their expectations of the results. They showed a great deal of resentment towards the voting process, believing it was staged and the results are manipulated, therefore, they are not profoundly interested to participate. Additionally the majority (11) abstained from the voting process. One respondent believed that the "whole process is cooked" that is, the voting process is controlled by higher authority "and I do not want to waste my time on something, whose future has been previously determined."

They believed that knowing what the community thinks is important in identifying personal stands and perceptions of belonging to a single entity (minority or majority group), while finding out what their close friends think about the issue is not of much importance, as they will not argue with them if they have opposing viewpoints, and will not be able to convince each other with another political view than that of their own. But the surrounding community's climate implies upcoming media hegemony towards a given agenda setting, which will contribute to the future politics. "I want to know how will the country behave and consequently the media channels, just to know the new agenda of politics and my country, but my friends will not change, we do not talk about politics the whole time. These interpretations of conformity can be regarded as normative societal influence, and fear of isolation functions as the dominant factor eliciting this kind of conformity (Scheufele & Moy, 2000).

VIII. Discussion and Conclusion

When SNS were first introduced, an opportunity to defy rules of "physical" society was created upon allowing everyone to declare his/her own preferences, beliefs, and live among networks of his/her choice. SNS have the aptitude to defy the physical structure of "normal" society, however, SNSs –with mild variations- are still reflections of that physical society. The moment users log off the internet, they are prone to interaction with members of that adjoining society: our family, friends, work colleagues and the acquaintances they usually encounter on a daily basis. While using SNS, they continue to alter their true opinions for the fear of isolating themselves and avoiding the self-conscious feeling when coming together face-to-face.

Entering a discussion on a virtual platform does not eliminate the social context associated with any given discussion. However, congruency with the perceived dominant opinion climate and self-censorship to conform to social aggregations was not supported in this study. Oh's study in 2011 found that online individuals feel less constrained by social pressures and sanctions (p.9). Also, variables of isolation fears were previously found as to be significantly reduced by computer- mediated discussions (Ho & McLeod, 2008). Conversely, findings from this study showed that 72% of the sample believed that online venue don't allow for more degrees of freedom of expression than that existing in a real-life setting. These results support findings from Millar and Slater study, indicating that virtual communities are authentic manifestation of real-life acquaintances. Nevertheless, this study's statistical analysis showed that sample perception of social constrains found online do not affect their media behavior on their facebook profile when expressing political stands.

Spiral of silence theory suggests that people's willingness to speak out about a controversial political issue depends on their assessment of being in the majority or minority. This study investigated Egyptians' willingness to speak out about the issue of presidential election with relation to their political feedback on the issue. Literature studying spiral of silence tackled the relationship between individuals' willingness to speak out about the issue of presidential election and importance in identifying their surrounding friends' and community's climate of opinion (Neuwirth & Frederick, 2004; Neuwirth, et al., 2007; Moy et al., 2001). The study showed that individuals would place much concern to their inner circle of friends than that of the community.

This study, however, revealed significant predictors indicating that the element of close friends is as equal in importance as that of the community at large and that these colliding circles may change the norms of self-expression online. The findings support existing literature in the need pertaining to browse the surrounding public climate with attentiveness regarding their selected "circles" which they indented to sustain social bonds. Nonetheless, it contradicts the suggestion that new conditions offered by online environment; tend to facilitate the willingness of individuals to speak out. Furthermore, human behavior and individual traits: such as one's perception of political stand, level of knowledge, and issue importance were significantly related to willingness to communicate about the issue. As those with high knowledge level on the subject of the election assigned higher importance to express their political views on the presidential election than those with lower knowledge level.

Results showed no relation between sample's expectation to their preferred candidate winning or losing the presidential election and assigned importance of

expressing their views concerning the election. Data acquired from surveys and interviews, challenge the existence of spiral of silence in social media; as minority group showed no tendency to remain silent when arguing with opposing views holders on facebook, challenging Neumann's assumption that individuals seek to conform to majority opinion on a given issue for social attachment needs. (n=122, 55.5%) believed they will not enter a political discussion on facebook when perceived to belong to a minority stand point.

Survey questions responses offered directionality to the manifest existence of spiral of silence among the sample when using facebook to express their political views regarding the issue of the election. A total of (79.6%) showed a high tendency to change their privacy settings to exclude someone from their facebook list after encountering an argument with a political nature as a mean to avoid social confrontation with opposing opinions. Correspondingly, T-test conducted to measure association between tendency to change privacy settings in relation to respondents' social status of being in a minority or a majority, showed a statistical significance with a clear difference in mean scores respondents' tendency to alter their settings on facebook.

Similarly, survey responses towards media behavior on facebook when in a minority position supported the existence of spiral of silence theory. for example: 87.8% of the sample showed concern over how their list of friend would respond to their facebook activities, 77.6% feared commenting on other's profile page as to avoid negative feedback risk. When offering a hypothetical scenario of the respondent being in a minority standpoint, majority of the sample (66%) chose to avoid using facebook and to remain silent, also, supporting spiral of silence cornerstone premise. For that

reason, this confirms- along with in-depth interviews responses- the power of social compelling factors. Nonetheless, statistical tests conducted showed no significance among sample's perception of self and the tendency to speak neither via facebook nor in a real-life setting scenario. Therefore, findings from this study partially support the basic spiral of silence hypothesis. It is possible that, with a larger sample, observed differences supporting spiral of silence would have been born out and statistically significant differences on other measures would have been found.

Limitations & Future Recommendations

Sample size is one of this study's limitations; contributing to lack of representation. This sample was sufficient to provide key indicators about the potential existence of spiral of silence theory within the context of social media networking sites. The scope of the study focused on acquiring voting decision prior to casting votes, extended time span might have cited various alterations in voting decisions and key variables assessing climate of opinion and willingness to speak out.

Amidst Egypt's current turmoil, along with the controversy of the issue of presidential election, Egyptians showed low degree of tolerance to opposing opinions which might have contributed to authenticity problem. Respondents faced social pressure to offer prestigious answers during the course of this study.

Being the most popular platform in SNS, facebook was used for deliberation in this study, as it facilitates further investigation for the impact of the components of the spiral of silence theory on social media. Nonetheless, present SNS might introduce a different context of spiral of silence, drawing different sample of users, henceforth changing the conditions through which this study has operated.

This research attempted to measure some formation of public opinions, which are subject to shaping based on group dynamics. Future studies need to take external validity, and "real"/ physical world setting versus that of online, into consideration. Additionally, future research should pay attention to personality traits, knowledge and media preferences which are highly connected to conformity. More attention needs to be held for elements of behavior towards the inner circle verses that of broader one.

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Appendix A

Survey Questions

1. What is your age?
1. 18-24
 2. 25-30
3. 31-39
4. 40-49
5. 50-or older

2. What is your gender?
1. Male   2. Female

3. Are you Egyptian?
1. Yes   2. No

4. Are you a user in any of these social media tools? (Check all that apply)
1- facebook
2- Twitter
3- YouTube
4- Google plus
5- Tumblr
6- Others:…..

5. Do you currently have a profile on Facebook?
1. Yes   2. No
 [If No, Please terminate the survey, thank you for your time. If yes, please complete the rest of the survey.]

6. How many friends do you have on facebook?
1. less than100
2. 101-200
3. 201-300
4. 301- 400
5. more than 400
6. Other (please specify):……

7. How often do you change your privacy settings to exclude some of your friends on facebook?
1. Never   2. Seldom   3. Sometimes   4. Frequently   5.Very frequently

8. How often do you become concerned about how your circle of friends will reply to your activities on facebook?
1. Never   2. Seldom   3. Sometimes   4. Frequently   5.Very frequently

9. How often do you fear negative feedback on facebook?
1. Never   2. Seldom   3. Sometimes   4. Frequently   5.Very frequently

10. How often do you fear commenting on other peoples' profiles in fear of negative feedback?
1. Never   2. Seldom   3. Sometimes   4. Frequently   5.Very frequently

11. What is your level of knowledge about the 2014 presidential election?
1. Very low   2. Low   3. Moderate   4. High   5. Very high

12. How important is it for you to find out what your close friends are thinking about the presidential election?
1. Not important   2. A little important   3. Somewhat important   4. Important
5. Extremely Important

13. How important is it to you to find out what people in your community or state are thinking about the presidential election?
1. Not important   2. A little important   3. Somewhat important   4. Important
5. Extremely Important

14. Do you plan to vote in the upcoming presidential election?
1. Yes   2. No

15. Do you think your preferred candidate is going to win the election?
1. Yes   2. No

16. Please rate the extent to which each of the following is useful to you in expressing your opinion/political stand on the presidential election

Facebook
1. Not useful at all   2. A little useful   3. Somewhat useful   4. Useful   5. Extremely useful

Traditional methods: (wearing a campaign button, bumper sticker,….)
1. Not useful at all   2. A little useful   3. Somewhat useful   4. Useful   5. Extremely useful

Interpersonal Communication: (Face-to-face communication, text messages, emails,…)
1. Not useful at all   2. A little useful   3. Somewhat useful   4. Useful   5. Extremely useful

17. How important is it for you to express your political stand about the presidential election to your close friends on facebook?
1. Not important   2. A little important   3. Somewhat important   4. Important
5. Extremely Important

18. Let's suppose you have learned that **most of your close friends** hold a political view about the presidential election that is **similar** to your own. Which of the following comes closest to describing what you would do on Facebook?
1. Avoid using Facebook to express my opinion about the issue
2. Share links with them that reflect their view of the issue

19. Let's suppose you have learned that **most of your close friends** hold a political view about the presidential election that is **opposite** to your own. Which of the following comes closest to describing what you would do on Facebook?
1. Avoid using Facebook to express my opinion about the issue
2. Share links with them that show an opposite view of the issue

20. If you were at a social gathering and people were discussing the presidential election, how likely would you be to enter into the conversation if their views were different from yours?
1.Very unlikely   2. Unlikely   3. likely   4.Very likely

21. 'Thinking about the people you normally socialize with, would <u>most</u> of them agree with your political stand on the presidential election?
1. Yes, most of them agree with my stand   2. No, most of them do not agree with my stand

22. Do you think you can speak more freely on facebook than in real-life?
1. Yes   2. No

23. When stating a political stand on a controversial issue on your facebook profile, what comes closest to describing your feeling?
1. 'I worry about what people will think of me, even when I know it doesn't make any difference'
2. 'I become nervous if I know someone is sizing me up'
3. 'I often worry that people who are important to me won't think very much of me'
4. ' it bothers me when people make unfavorable impression of me'
5. ' I rarely worry about what kind of impression I am making on someone'

1 . ما هو عمرك ؟

1. 18 24   2 . 25 30   3 31 39   4 . 40 49   5 . 50 أو أكثر

2 . ما هو جنسك ؟

أ. ذكر   ب. أنثى

3 . هل أنت مصري ؟

أ. نعم   ب.لا

4 هل انت مشترك في أي من هذه الأدوات وسائل الاعلام الاجتماعية ؟ (اختار كل ما ينطبق)

أ   الفيسبوك
ب تويتر
ج يوتيوب
د   جوجل بلس
ه تامبلر
و آخرين: .....

5 . هل لديك حالياحساب شخصي في الفيسبوك ؟

أ. نعم   ب . لا
[إذا لا، الرجاء إنهاء الاستبيان ، وشكرا لك على وقتك . إذا كانت الإجابة بنعم ، يرجى استكمال الاستبيان.]

6. هل غالبا ما تقوم بتغيير إعدادات الخصوصية لاستبعاد بعض أصدقائك علي الفيسبوك ؟

1 . أبدا 2 . نادرا 3 . أحيانا 4 . شائع 5 . كثيرا جدا

7. هل تشعر بالقلق حول كيفية رد دائرة أصدقائك على نشاطاتك علي الفيسبوك ؟

1 . أبدا 2 . نادرا 3 . أحيانا 4 . شائع 5 . كثيرا جدا

8 . هل تخشى ردود الفعل السلبية علي الفيسبوك ؟

1 . أبدا 2 . نادرا 3 . أحيانا 4 . شائع 5 . كثيرا جدا

9 . هل سبق ان خشيت نشر تعليق خاص بك علي الصفحه الشخصية لخوفك من ردود الفعل ؟

1 . أبدا 2 . نادرا 3 . أحيانا 4 . شائع 5 . كثيرا جدا

10 . ما هو مستوي معرفتك بانتخابات الرئاسه لعام 2014 ؟

1 . منخفض جدا 2 . منخفض 3 . معتدل 4 . عالي 5 . عالي جدا

11 . ما مدى أهمية معرفه راي أصدقائك المقربين في الانتخابات الرئاسية ؟

1 . غير مهم 2 . قليل الاهميه 3 . إلى حد ما مهم 4 . هام 5 . هام جدا

12 . ما مدى أهمية معرفة راي مجتمعك في الانتخابات الرئاسية ؟

1 . غير مهم 2 . قليل الاهميه 3 . إلى حد ما مهمة 4 . هام 5 . هام جدا

13 . هل تخطط للتصويت في الانتخابات الرئاسية المقبلة ؟

1 . نعم 2 . لا

14 . هل تعتقد أن المرشح المفضل لديك سيكون الفائز في الانتخابات ؟

1 . نعم 2 . لا

15 . يرجى تقييم مدى فائده كل من الوسائل التالية في التعبير عن رأي/موقف سياسي الخاص بك بخصوص الانتخابات الرئاسية

الفيسبوك

1 . غير مفيد على الإطلاق 2 . مفيد قليلا 3 . مفيد إلى حد ما 4 . مفيد 5 . مفيد جدا

الطرق التقليدية : (ارتداء زر الحملة، ملصق للسياره، ....)

1 . غير مفيدة على الإطلاق 2 . مفيدة قليلا 3 . مفيده إلى حد ما 4 . مفيدة 5 . مفيدة جدا

الاتصالات الشخصية : (التواصل وجها لوجه ، والرسائل النصية ورسائل البريد الإلكتروني ، ...)

1 . غير مفيدة على الإطلاق 2 . مفيدة قليلا 3 . مفيده إلى حد ما 4 . مفيدة 5 . مفيدة جدا

16 . بالنسبة لك ما مدى أهمية التعبير عن موقفك سياسي حول الانتخابات الرئاسية لأصدقائك المقربين عليي الفيسبوك ؟

1 . غير مهم 2 . قليلا الاهميه 3 . إلى حد ما مهم 4 . هام 5 . هام جدا

17 . دعنا نفترض أنك قد علمت أن معظم أصدقائك المقربين عقد رؤيته السياسية حول الانتخابات الرئاسية لتشابه رايك. أي من التالي يأتي الأقرب إلى وصف ما ستفعله علي الفيسبوك ؟

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1 . تجنب استخدام الفيسبوك للتعبير عن رأيي حول هذه القضية

2 . المشاركة معهم باخبار تعكس وجهة نظرهم للقضية

18 . دعنا نفترض أنك قد علمت أن معظم أصدقائك المقربين عقد رؤيته السياسية حول الانتخابات الرئاسية ليخالف رايك . أي من التالي يأتي الأقرب إلى وصف ما ستفعله علي الفيسبوك ؟

1 . تجنب استخدام الفيسبوك للتعبير عن رأيي حول هذه القضية

2 . المشاركة معهم باخبار تبين وجهة النظر الآخري من القضية

19 . إذا كنت في مناسبة اجتماعية و شهدت مناقشة بخصوص الاتخابات الرئاسية ، هل من المرجح أن تدخل في محادثة إذا كانت وجهات النظر المطرحه عنك مختلفة عنك؟

مستبعد جدا 2 . مستبعد 3 . مرجح 4 . من المرجح جدا

20 . عند التفكير في الناس عادة الاختلاط معهم ، هل معظمهم يتفق مع موقفك السياسي الخاص بالانتخابات الرئاسية ؟

1 . نعم، معظمهم يتفق معي 2 . لا، معظمهم لا يتفق معي

21 . هل تعتقد انك تستطيع ان تتحدث بحرية أكبر علي الفيسبوك مقارنه بالحياة الحقيقية ؟

1 . نعم 2 . لا

22 . عند التعليق علي علي مسألة مثيرة للجدل على صفحه الفيسبوك الخاص بك، ما يأتي الأقرب لوصف مشاعرك ؟

1 . " أنا قلق حول ما سوف يظن الناس بي، حتى عند علمي أنه لا يحدث أي فارق "

2 . ' أصبح عصبي لو علمت ان شخص ما يحكم علي '

3 . " أنا غالبا ما اشعر بالقلق من الناس المهمين بالنسبة لي'

4 . ' يزعجني عندما ياخذ الناس انطباعا غير مفضل عني '

5 . " أنا نادرا ما اقلق بشأن الانطباعات التي ياخذها الناس عني '

Appendix C

In-depth Interview Questions

1. Demographics: Name, Age, Occupation, Education, Family Size, Personality type (sociable, shy)

2. How would you describe the credibility of the national/state owned media vs social media? Why is that? Any Personal experience?

3. Describe your relationship with social media? Main usage and purposes?

4. What makes me turn to facebook as a source of news?

5. How do you feel about facebook' virtual community and relationships?

6. How important is it to you, to express yourself/share your thoughts on facebook? Reasons for sharing/ expressing your opinion on facebook? Nature of your posts?

7. In your personal opinion, how important (1-5) is it to know what your circle of friends think concerning a certain issue? How about the majority opinion?

8. Have you ever feared reconsidered/deleted a comment that you thought would make a friend uncomfortable? Reasons for that?

9. Do you usually worry-any concerns on the consequences of your opinion? Introduce fear of index

10. How important would you consider the issue of presidential election to you?

11. Do you mind mentioning your voting decision?

12. What makes you share your political stand knowing that some of your facebook friends list could disagree with you? Aware of the consequences?

13. "Train Test" assume you are in a train trip, person next to your disagrees with your opinion in a certain topic, will you be willing to enter a discussion with this person? Will the issue genre make a difference?

14. Will you comment on someone else's profile if s/he disagrees with your political stand? Will it matter degree of social bond/relationship (work college, close relative)

15. In your opinion, how similar is your own political stand to that of your community of interest? Do you believe you are a minority or majority?

16. In your opinion, do you think your social media exposure had the biggest influence on your decision?

17. Do you think you may use certain words/expression on facebook other than that you will use in "real" life context?

Appendix D

Arabic In-depth Questions

1 التركيبة السكانية : الاسم ، العمر ، المهنة ، ونوع الشخصية (اجتماعيه ، خجولة)

3 . اوصف علاقتك بوسائل الاعلام الاجتماعية ؟ الاستخدام والأغراض الرئيسية؟

4 . ما الذى يجعلك تنتقل إلى الفيسبوك كمصدر للأخبار ؟

5 . كيف تشعر حيال الفيسبوك فى المجتمع والعلاقات الظاهرية "؟

6 . بالنسبة لك ما مدى أهمية التعبير عن نفسك / تبادل الأفكار الخاصة بك في الفيسبوك ؟ أسباب المشاركه / معبرا عن رأيك في الفيسبوك ؟ طبيعة مشاركاتك ؟

7 . في رأيك ، ما مدى أهمية (1 5) هو أن تعرف راي دائرة أصدقائك وكيف يفكرون في قضية معينة ؟ ماذا عن رأي الأغلبية ؟

8 . هل سبق لك أن خشيه إعادة النظر / حذف التعليق الذي تعتقد انه سيشعر صديق بالاستياء؟

9 . هل عادة تقلق ،لديك أية مخاوف بشأن عواقب رأيك ؟

10 . ما مدى أهمية مسألة الانتخابات الرئاسيه بالنسبة لك؟

11 . ما الذي يجعلك تشارك بالموقف السياسي الخاص بك مع العلم أن بعض الاصدقاء ضمن قائمتك يمكن أن تختلف معك؟ هل خائف من العواقب؟

12 افترض أنك في رحلة بالقطار، و الشخص بجانبك يختلف معك في الراي، هل ستكون على استعداد للدخول في نقاش مع هذا الشخص؟ وهل نوع القضية يمكن أن يحدث فرقا ؟

13 . هل التعليق على الملف الشخصي لشخص آخر لا يتفق مع موقف سياسي الخاص بك مرتبط بمدي قربه منك (كلية العمل، قريب ، ....)

14 . في رأيك ، موقفك السياسي الخاص بك مماثل لمجتمعك ؟ هل تعتقد أنك أقلية أو أغلبية في الرأي؟

15 . في رأيك ، هل تعتقد أن عرض وسائل الاعلام الاجتماعية له التأثيرالاكبر على قرارك ؟

16 . هل تعتقد أنك قد تستخدم بعض الكلمات للتعبير علي الفيسبوك بخلاف التي ستستخدمها في سياق الحياة الحقيقى؟

Appendix E

Post Hoc Calculations

Multiple Comparisons

Dependent Variable: knowledge level

(I) q19r 19- social gathering	(J) q19r 19- social gathering	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1 Likely	2 Unlikely	.3467	.1838	.061	-.016-	.709
	3 Very likely	-.9091[*]	.2416	.000	-1.386-	-.433-
	4 Very Unlikely	.8114[*]	.2545	.002	.310	1.313
2 Unlikely	1 Likely	-.3467-	.1838	.061	-.709-	.016
	3 Very likely	-1.2559-[*]	.2412	.000	-1.731-	-.780-
	4 Very Unlikely	.4647	.2540	.069	-.036-	.966
3 Very likely	1 Likely	.9091[*]	.2416	.000	.433	1.386
	2 Unlikely	1.2559[*]	.2412	.000	.780	1.731
	4 Very Unlikely	1.7205[*]	.2985	.000	1.132	2.309
4 Very Unlikely	1 Likely	-.8114-[*]	.2545	.002	-1.313-	-.310-
	2 Unlikely	-.4647-	.2540	.069	-.966-	.036
	3 Very likely	-1.7205-[*]	.2985	.000	-2.309-	-1.132-