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## Social Media and Politics: Amplification in Arab World (Case study of Egyptian Revolution)

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Social media is a shift or a transfer of how individuals read, discover and share information and news. It is a combination between technology and sociology transforming monologue or a broadcast mechanism into dialogue or in other words many-to-many model where all people share the information and give their feedback at the same time. While traditional media, such as TV, radio and newspapers were a one-way broadcast medium, social media is a two-way communication. The dynamics of people interactions have changed greatly that having an online presence is no longer an option (Social Media Toolkit.)

In addition, Social media is beneficial as it helps people to reach each other wherever they are. People use social media and spend most of their time in these spaces learning, sharing, and interacting. Besides, social media takes various forms, such as images, text, video and audio. It facilitates the interaction among people worldwide since people use social media to share profiles, experiences and opinions (The Definition of Social Media.) Social media has captivated some, empowered others and is feared by many other individuals. Social media includes Face Book, Twitter, YouTube, blogs, podcasts, wikis, and message boards. However, most well-known sites for social media in Egypt are the following:

- Networking: [Face Book](#), [MySpace](#), [LinkedIn](#) and YouTube
- Blogging: WordPress and Blogger

- Micro-blogging: Twitter

Furthermore, social media surpasses time and space and opens up the world to all people worldwide (What is Social Media.) The capability to communicate, discuss issues and get people's feedback has become extremely easy. People all over the world have witnessed the importance and credibility of social media. For instance, Twitter has reported the recent earthquake that where in China before it was reported even in CNN (Green Marketing TV.)

Moreover, Social media is a growing phenomenon that has drastically grabbed people's attention during these past recent years and, to a great extent, nowadays. Furthermore, social media have brought together people with common ideas and objectives and have offered as well "a medium for planning" (Social Media Sparks Egyptian revolution.)

According to the book "The Media of Mass Communication", it states Lasswell model which is: "who says what? In which channel? To whom? With what effect? this model is extremely valid and happens very quickly within social media, especially Face Book and its relation to the Egyptian revolution. For instance, when someone posts to the public of Face Book a video about Tahrir square about the Egyptian revolution, this individual's friends will post comments and explain how they feel toward this video. Hence, through social networking, people can immediately know others' feedback in a transparent and credible way more than any other form of media including TV talk shows and radio programs.

Modern social tools, such as social networking, Twitter, Face Book and YouTube are the spark for the Egyptian revolution. These social tools have also played a pivotal

role in changing Egypt's autocratic regime and have helped the Egyptian protestors to organize the Jan 25 revolution (New World Order.) Social media became the most efficient and influential way "in grassroots socio-political mobilization" all over the world (Social Media Sparks Egyptian revolution.) Since state TV and satellite channels were not transparent with their audience during the revolution days, Egyptians have shifted to social media, such as Face book, YouTube and Twitter to see all what were occurring in Tahrir square.

Face Book is no longer used as a tool for uploading photos and posting comments on walls, yet it has been expanded to a wider scale which is socio-political movements. No one can deny that social organization and protests became easier only through social media. One reason for proving the validity of the importance of social media is when the Egyptian government shut down the Internet for 5 days hoping that protestors will not be able to connect or arrange for any revolution (Social Media Sparks Egyptian revolution.)

In addition, these social networking sites for political and social activism have been an obstacle for the former Egyptian regime and TV channels to hide the truth from the Egyptians as information seekers or "popular Egyptian truth seekers" were able to acquire all information needed from social media. Therefore, this shows that people's desire for gaining information is insatiable.

During professor Todd Giltin lecture at American University in Cario, which was titled "Media and Revolution", he was asked on whether social media, such as Face book and Twitter are the cause of the Egyptian revolution or not. Giltin answered that the revolution could have taken place without Face book; he added that people could have

possibly communicated through land-phones and mobiles, yet Face book helped the revolution to initiate quickly and to move faster.

According to Face Book reports, it was stated that the average Face Book users have at least 130 friends with whom they can easily contact, share opinions and disseminate information. Therefore, arranging for a revolution in Egypt and spreading the info were rapidly effective through Face Book as a well-known and friendly tool of communications.

Not only Face Book that has hit the Egyptian revolution, but also Twitter has done the same. Twitter is basically a social networking website that provides real-time information, commentary, and descriptions of events. Twitter as well was very effective in posting videos and photos for people who were being beat by the police in Tahrir square.

Moving on to explain how the Egyptian revolution was arranged via social media; a group of friends decided to do different groups on Face Book calling for equality and stepping down Mubarak's autocratic regime. High unemployment rate, high illiteracy rate and unfair distribution of economic resources were the major reasons behind the Egyptian revolution. Egyptians who were deprived from all their rights were all able to connect together via social media.

After connecting with some of these youth who formed the groups on Face Book, they said that they were not able to communicate with each others and reach each others' ideas and thoughts without the help of Face Book. According to Marwa Ali, one of the Face book groups founder for protesting in Egypt, mentioned that Face book has opened the doors for the youth to confidently express their opinions and gain their rights.

Therefore, this shows that Face Book, as mentioned earlier, was the spark of the Egyptian revolution according to Thomas Morrison in his article “Social Media Sparks Egyptian Revolution.”

Women before the Egyptian revolution were having a very minor role in the political field. They were seen as second-class citizens especially in politics. For instance, the numbers of females who won seats in the 2005 parliament elections were only four (The Feminists in the Middle of Tahrir Square.) However, women have succeeded in this struggle of the Egyptian revolution to prove that they were the core stone of the success of the revolution through social media (Women and the Egyptian Revolution.)

Women from different social and economic class have participated in the revolution. The majority of these women were using social media, such as Face Book and Twitter to keep updated on the news and the places of demonstrations (Women and the Egyptian Revolution.)

Moreover, social media have helped women to “made their views heard in public.” During 25 Jan revolution, it was the first time for women either high or low class, rich or poor, educated or uneducated, rural or urban, veiled or unveiled and religious or secular to participate loudly for gaining their rights.

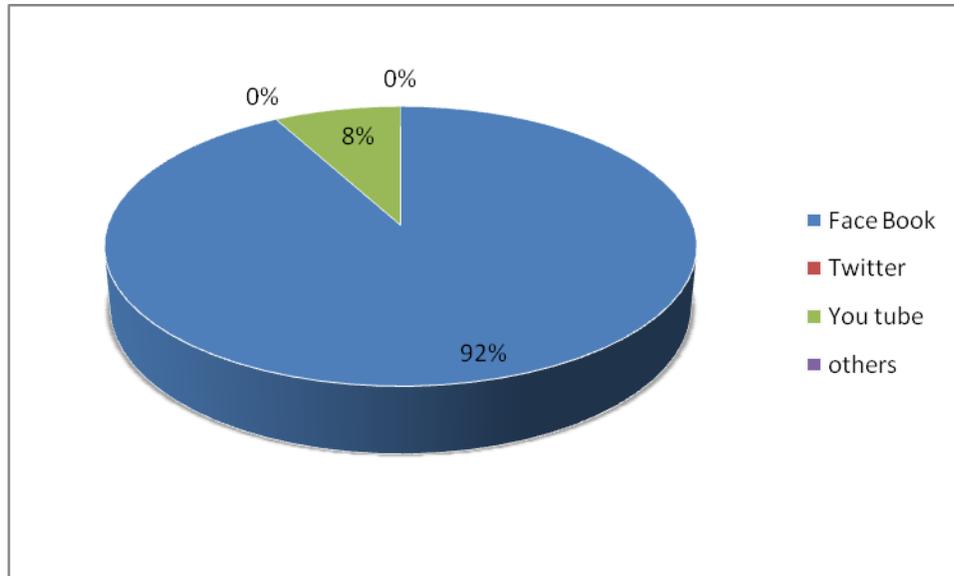
According to Sarah Rifaat, a graphic designer who demonstrated in Tahrir Square, social media have motivated women from poor and rural areas to attend a mixed-gender protest for the first time. Rifaat added that demonstration groups on Face book have showed the class and kind of people who is participating in the revolution, so this

has helped most of the women from different classes and different backgrounds to participate in the revolution (Uprising Energizes Egyptian Women.)

Going more in depth to show how social media have empowered women in Egypt to play a pivotal role in the revolution is the role played by Salma Said who is one of the major activist women for the revolution. Said works in the Egyptian center for Economic and Social Rights and she holds workshops to teach people how to use Twitter. Said adds that she used to form groups on Face book and post videos during the revolution days to show how the police used brutality and violence against protestors, so this provoked people's hatred against the government and it urges them to go down and keep on revolting (The Feminists in the Middle of Tahrir Square.)

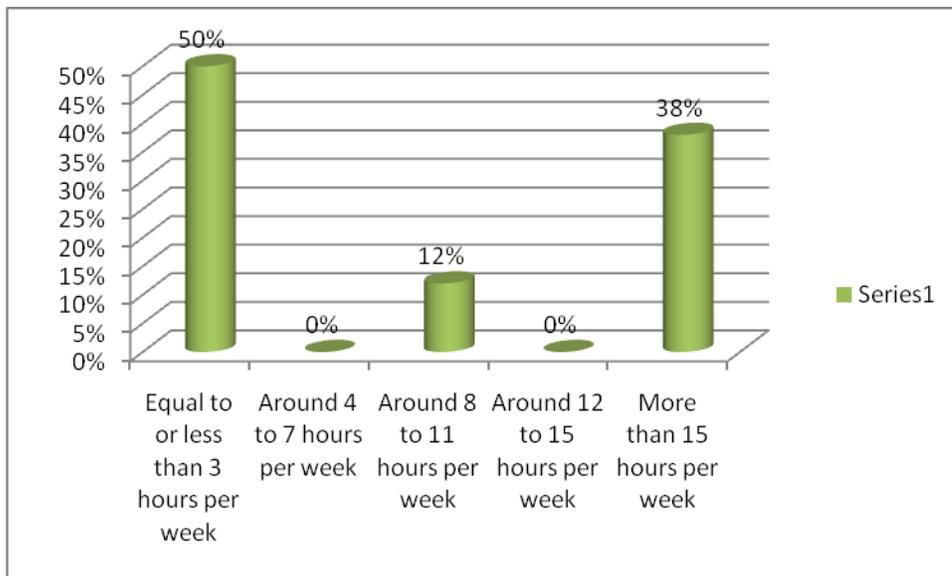
A survey was conducted on Egyptians from various backgrounds, different classes and different education levels to study how Egyptians use social media and to what extent they believe the credibility of these kinds of social media. Both genders males and females with different ages participated in this survey and they were asked the following questions:

- 1) Which kind of social media you use on regular basis?



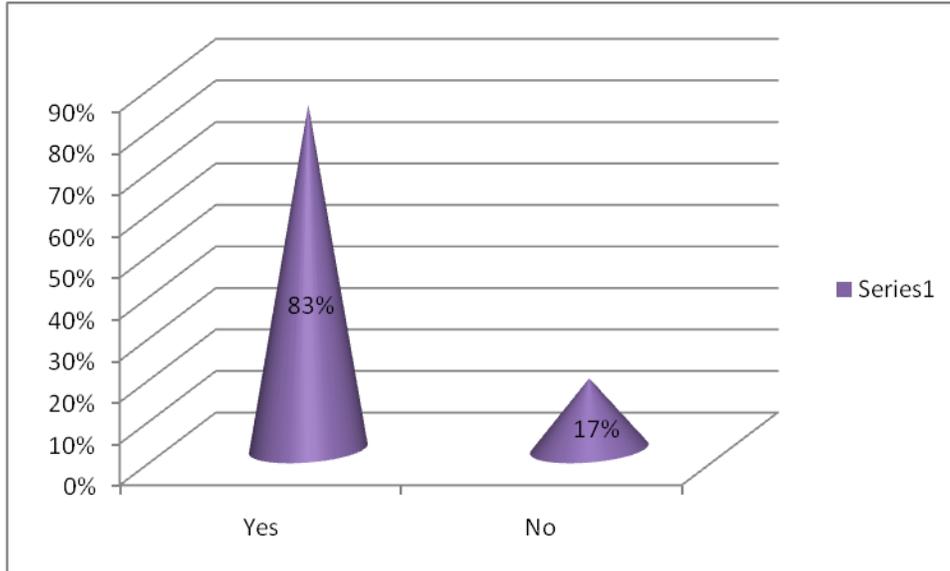
92% of the respondents mentioned that they use Face Book, while only 8% said that they use YouTube, and none of the respondents mentioned that they use Twitter as a social media tool.

2) How many hours you spent on each per week?



50% of the respondents said that they use social media equal to or less than three hours per week, while 12% said that they use social media around eight to 11 hours per week, and 38% mentioned that they use it more than 15 hours per week.

3) Do you think social media was the spark for the Egyptian revolution?



83% of the respondents believe that social media was the spark for the Egyptian revolution, while 17% only who believe that it is not the reason behind the revolution. Accordingly, this shows that even though those who spend fewer hours on Face Book and other social media (50%), believe that social media was the spark of the Egyptian revolution.

4) Why?

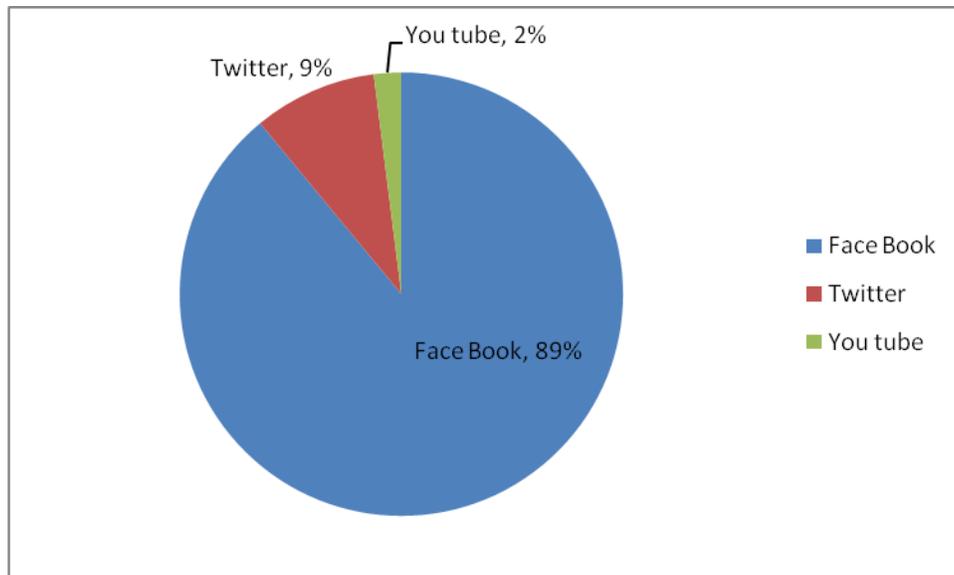
The 83% of the respondents who agreed that social media was the spark of the Egyptian revolution believe that social media eased gathering these great masses of Egyptians all together in one place for one reason. It has also helped large number of people to connect together easily.

Besides, social media helped protestors in Egypt to know that others support their opinions so they were more encouraged to go to streets and speak out. Others believe that groups and events were created on social media as well as messages were sent every single minute to remind people to go to Tahrir square on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January. Yet, this

group of respondents as well believes that may be without Face Book revolution would have taken place but not with this large number of people

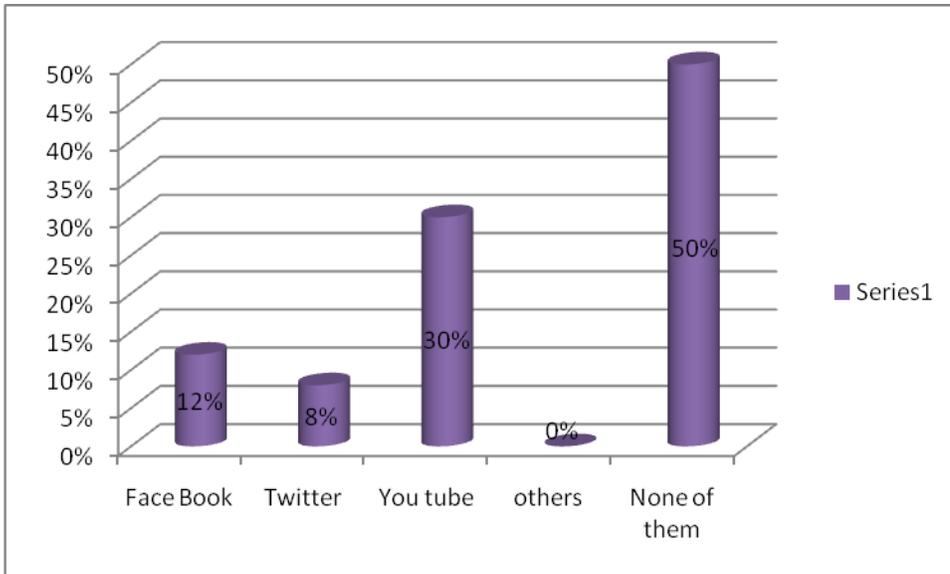
However, the 17% who think that social media did not help the Egyptian revolution by any means believe that protesting in a country needs a better way of thinking and better organizations which cannot be attained via social media.

5) Which of the following social media you think was **spreading** the news very **quickly** during the Egyptian revolution?



89% of the respondents believe that Face Book was the best in spreading news about the Egyptian revolution, whereas 9% mentioned Twitter and only 2% said YouTube. It is obvious that Face Book has the highest percentage because, as mentioned in the first question, 92% of the respondents use Face Book on regular basis, so they used to check all the updates they need through Face Book.

6) Which of the following social media you think was the most **credible** in spreading news about the Egyptian revolution?



Moving on to see which social media was the most credible, it was shown that 50% believe that none of them was a credible source of information, whereas 30% believe that YouTube is the most credible, while 12% though Face Book and only 8% believed Twitter was the most credible.

Social media can help in raising people's awareness, increasing a user's knowledge of a certain topic, changing behaviors and attitudes, and prompting attitude change in personalized, dynamic, and participatory ways.

In conclusion, social media was not only used for the purpose of doing revolution and stepping down Mubarak's regime, but also it has played a vital role in social enhancement in Egypt. For example, After Mubarak's stepped down, many people on Face Book started to do groups calling for "cleaning Egypt" and "improving Egypt's economy." Accordingly, these groups on Face book are seen as online movement for social improvement.

Therefore, social media is the fundamental core behind the Egyptian revolution, so if people cannot declare that social networking was the reason behind the revolution,

yet it has been the spark for it. Even though many people who are not heavy users for social media, they still believe that social media was the spark for the Egyptian revolution as per the questioner distributed on a sample of the Egyptian youth.

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