This audio documentary will briefly go over the history of the internet, when it first started and how it reached the Arab world, particularly Egypt. We will also discuss some of the advantages of having access to a strong internet connection while shedding light on some of the unintended consequences associated with internet consumption.

MUSIC: FADE IN: Moby – Everglowing (0-540 seconds from the start of the song)

The Internet is by far the most decisive discovery of the 21st century, it has taken us one step further in our quest for knowledge and has helped us safely transition into the digital age. But if we go back to the sixties, you'll find that the internet was nothing but an idea proposed by Joseph Robnett Licklider, an American psychologist and computer scientist who is considered one of the most important figures in computer science. Another man by the name of Leonard Kleinrock would go on to develop the theory of packet switching, which was to form the basis of Internet connections everywhere. These visionaries and many more left unnamed are the real founders of the Internet. Although, they saw great potential value in allowing computers to share information, they had no idea that they were on the verge of a digital revolution.

Professor Rasha Abdallah is one of the very few Egyptians who have had the privilege of experiencing the internet during its earlier stages. She currently resides in Cairo where she teaches an online communication course at the American University in Cairo.

> Rasha Abdallah (RA): "My first experience with the internet goes before there was an internet in Egypt. I was an undergraduate student at the time and I was working for the caravan and my editor told me to go figure out what was happening at the hill house building at the time in Tahrir square, because there was some new technological development being introduced and we weren't exactly sure what it was. So I went over there and I found a huge reception and people are very excited with something and I couldn't really figure out what they were talking about so I waited till the buzz was over and I went over to one of the lab engineers and I asked if he would explain to me what was going on and I learnt that there was a new network being introduced to AUC and the network was called BITNET and I learnt that that stands for Because It's Time Network

and BITNET was basically a network of electronic mail and at the time of course that was very new this was in 1989. So you know we had never heard about anything similar at that time the closest thing we had was to send a mail, snail mail in the mail which you know would take like a couple of months to go to the states and back if you're lucky, if it doesn't get lost and so all of a sudden this guy was telling me that I can know send the message and receive an immediate answer, within seconds and so naturally people were very excited about it and I asked if this would be available to students he said no its very expensive and its very scarce for now so it will only be available to professors who can use it to sort of benefit from collaboration with other universities and so I pulled my caravan card and I said you know I'm a caravan reporter and we need to try this, and so the guy was nice enough to give me an account and that actually that account was Rasha @ BITNET at the time and it became my email address to this day. So when AUC migrated to the new network which was the internet years later 1993 and on when the internet was introduced to Egypt I managed to maintain a very special email address which I've had since 1989 basically." (:164)

As the commands for e-mail and file transfer protocol were standardized, it became a lot easier

for non-technical people to learn to use the internet. It was not easy by today's standards, but it

did open up use of the Internet to many more people particularly those in universities.

RA: "It changed a lot of course because the content has increased exponentially so you know at the time there were very few websites of course Arabic content is still a problem because we have very minimal content compared to other languages online but still the internationally the content that we have access to now is nothing compared to what we had at the time, at the time it was I mean it was a very nice toy for techie geeks so if you were a technology geek and you really wanted something you might be able to find something close to it now anybody can google anything literally and you find a huge deal of information on the topic so I mean from the plethora of websites from the just the sheer amount of information online to all the different platforms at the time you needed to know HTML language to be able to make any addition to the internet now we have you know all these websites we have social media we have basically you can build anything you want using a template online so it's become so much easier to generate information for the end users and the technology keeps developing of course and keeps making it easier for people to include more information and come up with new technologies themselves." (:94)

That being said we must recognize the growing influence the internet exercises over our lives

and how this may manifest itself into our relationships with others.

Manal Sabry (MS): "Its cutting the relationship between the people in one house, the people of the family the brothers and the sisters actually I'm having four kids and we are spending a good time with each other laughing and playing and talking only when the WIFI is not working. When we have a good internet in the house everyone is busy in his

own world. Either studying through the internet or spending time on the social media or doing whatever he is doing but everyone is busy and we are all living in one house." (:40)

With great internet access comes great responsibility. Don't you wish we had superheroes browsing the world-wide-web keeping us safe from cyberbullies? Well I'm afraid I'm going to have to burst your bubble the internet has only made bullying easier. Today, bullies are no longer confined to a physical space. In fact, many bullies are refraining from physical bullying, instead they are using e-mail, social media and instant messages to spread fear, pain and suffering.

RA: "The internet is a tool just like any other tool so you know I mean if you the very classic example is if you have a knife you know you can use that to slice your bread and to make sandwiches and to carve out art out of wood or you can use it to kill somebody that's up to you. The knife is a knife it's a neutral device and the internet is a neutral device it depends on what you do with it a lot of good things happen on the internet as I was just saying the more information you have the more access to information you have the more enlightened you're supposed to be but what you do with it really depends on you. How you use it depends on the individual person so if you use it to spread hate speech well you know that's bad obviously if you use it to threaten somebody or to bully somebody that's bad if you use it for you know invasion of privacy that's bad. But if you use it to spread information and to acquire information that's obviously a very powerful thing. We've seen you know all over the world and in the last few years including in Egypt, how the internet has helped spring about things that we never knew existed in the people, we've seen the internet help carry out a revolution we've seen the internet help people become more aware of political problems and societal problems and health issues and so really what you chose to do with it depends on you more than anything else." (:94)

The internet has brought about enormous change, the impact of which is still unfolding. So when the Internet stops being something that supplements your life, perhaps the best course of action is to take a break. The Internet is a great thing, but like all things, it is best in moderation.

This audio documentary was produced by Mohamed Hatem Idris for the audio production course at the American University in Cairo taught by Professor Kim Fox in spring 2017.

MUSIC: FADE OUT: Moby – Everglowing

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