Measuring the Impact of Social Media Usage for News and Social Media Usage for Interaction on Social Media Political Persuasion

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to measure the impact of social networking sites and its components on political persuasion in Egypt after the 2011 revolution on young adults. After reviewing the literature, the study hypothesized that: There is a positive significant relationship between social media usage for news and social media political persuasion; there is a positive significant relationship between social media usage for interaction and social media political persuasion. In order to test these hypotheses, a quantitative research approach was used. Data was collected using an administrated questionnaire. A convenience sampling technique was used. The sample included both male and female young adults (18-35), social media users, Educated, and from Alexandria or Cairo, due to highest population. Once the need questionnaires were filled out and collected back, the data were analyze using the SPSS 20.0® (Statistical Package for Social Science) program. Correlation and Regression analyses were done in order to test the hypotheses. Results indicate that social media usage for interaction has a moderate, significant and positive relationship with political persuasion; and social media usage for news has a weak, significant and positive relationship with political persuasion.

Keywords: *Political Participation, Political Persuasion, Social Media Interaction, Social Media News, Social Media Usage, Egyptian Revolution*

INTRODUCTION

The development of new forms of digital media changed the way people communicate or share information (Lee and Myers 2016). People now a days spend their days on Social Networking Sites (SNS) without deeply understanding how it is affecting their lives (Diehl et al., 2015). In the past decade, growth in the size of the Internet and World Wide Web has been largely driven by two "mega trends": online search engines and social media channels (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). Social Networking sites have been globally used nowadays for many purposes. It started as a platform to communicate, to stay in touch with friends or acquaintances, to meet new people, but now it has many other usages. This study will focus on the role of social media and its encouragement to participate in politics in Egypt.

Nowadays, social media platforms have a huge effect on the political behavior and attitudes of citizens (Thelwall, 2008), especially in the Egyptian context. After the Arab Spring in 2011, Facebook and Twitter, or Social Networking Sites in general, proved to have a huge effect on politics and political change (Lin and Lu, 2011). The link between Social media and politics or the use of Social media by politicians was examined in many researches (Diehl et al., 2015; Wang, 2012; Lee and Myers 2016). The research have shown that social media is now a tool to change political behavior, and motivated many people to be more involved or to express their political opinions (Diehl et al., 2015). The Internet and its social media platforms form many political debates, where individuals express their views that alter other people's minds (Lee and Myers 2016). In addition, the Internet and its social media platforms create availability of political information, making it easier for all users to

discuss or to stay informed and aware of news (Diehl et al., 2015). This interface has been demonstrated and acknowledged in Egypt ever since the 2011 revolution (Negm et al., 2012). Thus, the objective of this paper is to: Measure the impact of social networking sites and its components on political persuasion in Egypt after the 2011 revolution on young adults.

BACKGROUND

Although studies have repeatedly found that mass media is a significant predictor of political knowledge, the influences of new media deserve more attention, given the novelty of the phenomenon (Shafi and Vultee, 2016). Scholars have previously studied the impact of Internet use on overall knowledge and political knowledge and explored its different dimensions (Hochschild, 2010; de Vreese and Boomgaarden, 2006; Ripberger et al., 2012). Political socialization represents: "the patterns and processes by which individuals engage in political development and learning, constructing their particular relationships to the political contexts in which they live" (Sapiro, 2004). People's opinions are based on beliefs, which are obtained through socialization. Socialization is a process in which people become aware of their environment, culture, and principles. It helps individuals learn, assimilate, and adopt the customs, norms, and backgrounds of a society (Trusov et al., 2009). In addition, it aids in the development of the acceptable values in the community (Negm et al., 2012).

Social interactions coordinate people's conduct to fit into the nation and provide necessary foundation of behavioral patterns and viewpoints that are suitable for integration into the society (Settle et al., 2011). Conversations about governmental, civil, constitutional, and electoral issues are relevant to the understanding of political practices (Negm et al., 2012). Political discussions are rational conversations where deliberative exchange of arguments and suggestions occur among partakers (Negm et al., 2014). As people converse, they encounter different political views and knowledge. Thus, diverse political talks and expressions allow some issues to arise for reflection (Scheufele, 2000). Regardless of whether a message is received face-to-face, through telephones/ mobiles, and other electronic memos, the same word expressed by various people and methods can have different effects (Negm et al., 2014). Prior research clarified that people with

different social backgrounds and thoughts allow democratic thinking to flourish (Putnam, 2000).
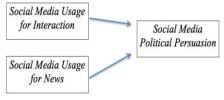
In Egypt's current political context, Egyptians socialize to gain understanding about the contemporary political domain; apprehend the important issues facing society and the critical thinking skills required to evaluate different political views (Negm et al., 2012). Kushin and Kitchener (2009) explore the use of Facebook for online political discussion by citizens. Their results indicate that Facebook is a legitimate location for discussion of political issues and, to some extent, the discussion appears to have succeeded in over-coming polarization of online discussion that has pervaded online political discussion in the past. Recent developments in Arab countries, particularly in the North African countries of Tunisia and Egypt, have shown that new communication channels have facilitated the "organization" of civil society by allowing a timely exchange of opinions and ideas (Kenix, 2009). Figure One illustrates the proposed conceptual framework that was developed in this study.
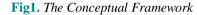
Since social network sites are often used as part of a communicating with friends, who can eventually meet face-to-face, it seems logical to expect that typical topics of discussion would be similar to those normally discussed between friends and would hence perhaps touch on news stories and serious issues. When messages are circulated through the networks based on the need for simple social interaction, persuasion tends to occur (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014). Persuasion is possible when behaviors are purely social because the tendency to maintain relationships leads to diverse networks, and in turn, exposure to political disagreement (Diehl et al., 2015).

Social media offers a shared text, news and other political information, and provide easy opportunities to discuss politics, even if their primary motivation for using these sites is social (Lee & Myers, 2016). Therefore, the first hypothesis is: There is a positive significant relationship between social media usage for interaction & social media political persuasion.

Usage of social media for news has repeatedly been mentioned in previous studies to have a strong impact on political behavior and political persuasion (Diehl et al., 2015). Previous research has shown that while individuals sometimes follow the news for the primary purpose of generating conversation topics

(Blumler and Katz, 1974), this appears to occur significantly in popular social network environments. Social media usage for News also increases the likelihood that one will argue about politics and facilitates exposure to dissimilar views, and can lead to political persuasion (Kim et al., 1999; Mutz and Martin, 2001). There is some research into exploiting social network discussions for wider social gains Individuals tend to go on Social Networking Sites to gain knowledge or read news about topics that interest them, to stay updated about celebrities or even politicians they like. (Mankoff et al., 2007). Accordingly, the second hypothesis is: There is a positive significant relationship between social media usage for news & social media political persuasion.

Fig1. *The Conceptual Framework*

SCOPE OF RESEARCH

The aim of this study is to test whether There is a positive significant relationship between social media usage for news and social media political persuasion; There is a positive significant relationship between social media usage for interaction and social media political persuasion. The effects of social networking sites on political behavior have been studied by many researchers as well as the importance of social media during the Arab spring (Storck, 2011; Patino et al., 2012). However, few studies focused on political behaviors after the Egyptian revolution (Abdelhay, 2012). Political participation online continues till this day. Thus, insufficient amount of research has mentioned it (Abdelhay, 2012). This research intends to fill this gap of knowledge by measuring how social media usage for interaction and news, discussion disagreement and the heterogeneity of an individual's social network, can affect the political persuasion of young adults, in Egypt after the January 2011 revolution.

This study is significant because it contributes to an expansion of the knowledge concerning political persuasion, the effects of social networking sites, and the application thereof. This study will contribute to a better understanding of the insights of social media content, and how this exposure can affect political persuasion and lead to changes in political behavior and will give a unique perspective from the Egyptian environment after the revolution.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A conclusive descriptive research design was deemed appropriate to gather the primary data and attend to these research objectives. A cross-sectional design was used to carry out the study. In order to fulfill the research aim and objectives, a convenience sampling technique was used. The sample included both male and female young Adults (18-35), social media users, and Educated, and from Alexandria or Cairo, due to highest population. The respondents included young adults from different backgrounds, ages, income levels and genders. According to Baumgartner and Morris (2010), 18- to 34-year olds show that SNS are recognized by youth as a possible source of news and that many receive some of their news from these sites. This target sample popularly interacts with one another and spread various messages that are believed credible - a good source of information (Negm et al., 2012). Data was gathered using a structured survey questionnaire. Diehl et al. (2015) developed all the scales that measure the variables in this study. The scale measuring "social media usage for interaction" is a 3 item, 5-point scale to rate how frequently each statement occurs to the respondents while using social media. The scale includes Not at all (1), Once in a while (2), Sometimes (3), fairly often (4), and frequently if not always (5). The items were: I often use social media stay in touch with friends and family; I often use social media to meet new people who share interests; I often use social media to contact people you wouldn't meet otherwise. The scale measuring "social media usage for news" is a 6 item, 5-point likert scale measuring frequency – (1) Not at all and (5) frequently if not always. The items include: I often encounter or come across news when using social networking sites; I often encounter or come across news when using micro-blogging sites; I often use social media to stay informed about current events and public affairs; I often use Social Media to stay informed about my local community; I often get news from Facebook; I often get news from the general news media through social media. Finally, the scale measuring "social media political persuasion" is a composed of 3 items, 1 item is a 5 point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree and 2 items

are 5-point likert scale measuring frequency – (1) Not at all and (5) frequently if not always. The items include: I have changed an opinion based upon what someone influential to me posted on social media; I often take part in changing my mind about political issues because of information or interactions on social media; I often take part in reconsidering my political views because of information or interactions on social media.

Questionnaires were personally administered and collected by the researcher. The questionnaire contained words that were simple and straight forward. The survey was originally created in the English language, and an Arabic version was created too. The back-translation process was conducted in order to ensure that the language conversion was done accurately. Once the need

questionnaires were filled out and collected back, the data were analyze using the SPSS 20.0® (Statistical Package for Social Science) program.

EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

The reliability analysis was conducted to see if the scales that were created by Diehl et al. (2015) were reliable to use in this study. This analysis illustrates whether the scales were consistent, dependable, and steadfast to be used to test in the Egyptian context to measure social networking sites and its components on political persuasion in Egypt after the 2011 revolution on young adults. According to the results, the scales were reliable. Table One illustrates the Cronbach's Alpha of the present study and Diehl et al. (2015) study.

Table1. *Cronbach's Alpha*

Variable	Number of Items	Current Research Cronbach 's Alpha	Prior Study's Cronbach's Alpha (Diehl *et al*., 2015)
Social Media Usage for News	6	0.713	0.89
Social Media Usage for Interaction	3	0.613	0.78
Social Media Political persuasion	3	0.786	0.87

In order to test the hypotheses, the researcher used the correlational analysis. Table two shows that social media usage for interaction has a moderate, significant and positive relationship with political persuasion (r=0.318** and

p=0.01). Therefore, H1 is supported, and that agrees with the literature, When messages are circulated through the networks based on the need for simple social interaction, persuasion tends to occur (Diehl et al., 2015).

Table2. *Social media usage for interaction and social media political persuasion*

	Social Media Usage for interaction	Political persuasion	
Social Media Usage for interaction	Pearson Correlation	1	.318**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	460	460
Political persuasion	Pearson Correlation	.318**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	460	

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table three illustrates the relationship between social media usage for news and social media political persuasion. It shows that social media usage for news has a weak, significant and positive relationship with persuasion (r=0.273** and p=0.01). Therefore, H2 is supported and

Agrees with the literature, social media usage for News increases the likelihood that one will argue about politics and facilitates exposure to dissimilar views and can lead to political persuasion (Kim et al., 1999; Mutz and Martin, 2001).

Table3. *Social media usage for interaction and social media political persuasion*

	Social Media Usage for news	Political persuasion	
Social Media Usage for news	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	460	
Political persuasion	Pearson Correlation	.273**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	460	

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The next analysis that was conducted is the multiple regression analysis. This analysis focused on the variables contribution to the model, the significance of the model, and the strength in the model. The results illustrate that the model was significant with ANOVA of 0.000. The analysis also showed that the variables have standardized regression coefficients of ($\beta = 0.210$, $p < 0.05$) regarding Social media usage for interaction, ($\beta = 0.124$, $p < 0.05$) regarding Social media usage for news as shown in Table Four. This gives way to the conclusion that all of the variables were positively related to political persuasion.

Table4. *Beta Analysis*

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.713	.241		2.951	.003
	SMN	.184	.065	.124	2.820	.005
	SMI	.227	.047	.210	4.807	.000

a. Dependent Variable: SMPP

CONCLUSIONS

Egypt currently is facing much political instability since the January 2011 revolution, the political situation has not been steady. As the country is facing much political, legal and economic instability, After the January revolution and the July revolution, followed by the floatation of the Egyptian currency, it is assumed that the engagement of the citizens is elevated and the news coverage has been more and more important. Since the Revolution, most Egyptians now use social media as a primary source of information, as the traditional media outlets proved to be bias and incredible during the outrage. For this reason, this study focuses in the Egyptian context, specifically on young Adults.

The results of this study show that it is evident that an individual's social media usage for interaction has an important role in the political context in Egypt after the January 2011 Revolution. Social media usage for interaction has a moderate, significant and positive relationship with political persuasion, social media usage for interaction has a positive contribution in the variance of political persuasion. This conforms to the findings of previous studies (Diehl et al., 2015). When messages are circulated through the networks based on the need for simple social interaction, persuasion tends to occur (Diehl et al., 2015). Social interaction on social media can serve as a catalyst for political expression and participation (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2014). Social media offer a shared text, news and other political information, and provide easy opportunities to discuss politics, even if their primary motivation for using these sites is social (Lee and Myers, 2016). Researchers argued that an ideal context for political persuasion to occur is through conversation, according to deliberative theorists, this ideal context would include a shared text, a set of issues to discuss, the opportunity to speak and debate, as well as exposure to diverse opinions (Gastil, 2000; Ryfe, 2005) and some studies have found that those persuasive strategies are applied when using technology to communicate (Moore, 2002).

The results of this study show that social media usage for news has a weak, significant and positive relationship with Political persuasion. The regression analysis shows that social media usage for news contributes positively in the variation of political persuasion. The hypothesis is also supported and conforms to the findings of previous researchers (Kim et al., 1999; Mutz and Martin, 2001; Diehl et al., 2015). News increases the likelihood that one will argue about politics and facilitates exposure to dissimilar views and can lead to political persuasion (Kim et al., 1999; Mutz and Martin, 2001). The concept of "discussing the news" benefits from elaboration, especially in relation to blogs and social network sites. It is known that people do not always passively consume the news for intrinsic enjoyment but may also actively engage with it in order to satisfy one of a number of needs (Blumler and Katz, 1974). Information seeking motivations are one aspect of uses and gratifications that are particularly relevant to political use of SNS individuals need to keep up with information in order to know about public issues, decide their

stance on the issues, or figure out how to involve in political actions, and they tend to pay more attention to political information that is shared or mentioned by people they know to prepare themselves for possible discussion (Eveland, 2013). This study proves that social media did not only impact political behavior during the 2011 revolution, it continues to do so every day.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

First, the sample size for the study was small as the uneducated users within the population were excluded. Secondly, the use of a single social media outlet as the research site is a potential limitation, which makes it difficult to generalize the results. In this study, the only social media outlet that was measured was Facebook. Moreover, the study faced a shortage of relevant studies concerning social media usage in Egypt, after the revolution in particular. This study is conducted in Egypt so it might be important to consider the values and beliefs of Egyptian culture and how it impacted the roles of individuals within their social media usage. Another limitation is the choice of sampling; convenience sampling does not represent the entire population and therefore cannot be generalized. Same goes for the target population as the age and city were limited to 18-35 and Alexandria and Cairo, the results are not representative of the entire population. An important limitation of this research is the time period in which it was conducted. Egypt is currently facing many political and economic issues that make the country somehow unstable. It is not a standard and stable time to establish that the results can be generalized. As the country is facing many political, legal and economic instabilities, After the January revolution and the July revolution, followed by the floatation of the Egyptian currency, we assume that the engagement of the citizens is higher than during a stable period, and that might contaminate the data and results.

As directions for future research, first future researchers should the extend sample size for the study and should include the uneducated users within the population. Secondly, future researchers should include other social media outlets as the research site is a potential limitation, extend the target population. Given the narrow segment used in this study, more studies should be conducted on social media usage and political persuasion across a wider range of social media outlets. Further research could analyze the impacts of national culture on the relationship between social media components and political persuasion. It is recommended that this study should be conducted in a more stable time for the Egyptian people, a time that is less uncertain and more politically and economically stable. Finally, replications of this research can be done in other countries in the Middle East, to gain an understanding of how different cultures within the same region react to these results.

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