EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF MASS MEDIA ON EGYPTIAN YOUTH POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

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ABSTRACT

The idea behind this topic came about simply because of the constant, and slightly, sudden changes in the citizens' political behaviour in Egypt as a whole after the 2011 revolution. The aim of this study was to explore the impact of mass media on citizens' political participation, both conventional and unconventional acts. Interviews were conducted in order to gain various holistic insights - gathering information from different sources in addition to interacting with the people and receiving primary based information. 19 interviews were conducted. The qualitative outcomes showed that people, especially the youth of the nation, did not want to be mere observers of how their country can fall into ruins thus the uprising took place and began to be proactive citizens. Further, the analysis showed that mass media helped people understand the operations of government, participate in political decisions, and hold government officials accountable.

KEYWORDS: Political Behaviour, Mass Media, Political Participation

INTRODUCTION

In the past decades political participation has been a center of attention of many scholars and a reason for debates in social science and political science due to its importance for the society and its democratic developments (Dalton, 2007; Lamprianou, 2013; Putnam, 2000). Political participation as the diverse activities used by people to influence government and political decisions (Bourne, 2010). There are different modes of political participation: conventional and unconventional political behaviours (Settle *et al.,* 2011). Proactive citizens usually anticipate conventional acts during an election period. These acts take the form of serving the public in enhancing the community; making financial donations or voluntarily supporting political campaigns; and voting during election period (Putnam, 2000). Conversely, unconventional acts comprise other forms of civil activities, such as protests, demonstrations, boycotts, political strikes, and petition signing (Bourne, 2010).

Riley *et al.* (2010) suggested that societies are currently experiencing a period of alienation from traditional politics; and beginning to partake in informal political acts, like rallies and marches. This decline of traditional political acts is part of the rapid transformation of the political landscape worldwide (Lamprianou, 2013) and is worth studying (Dalton, 2007). This change in behaviour is especially visible among young people (Riley *et al.,* 2010). Thus, this research focuses on youth in the Egyptian society.

The idea behind this topic came about simply because of the constant, and slightly, sudden changes regarding Egyptian citizens' political activities after the 2011 revolution. After the 2011 political transition, citizens began to participate in various political activities, both conventional and unconventional (Bassioney, 2011). Before the 2011

Revolution, political activities were not common among Egyptians. According to a public survey by the Population Council (2010), youth participation in politics was weak (whether conventional or unconventional). 16 percent of young Egyptians (aged 18 to 29) had never voted. During the 2005 presidential elections, there were 31,826,284 registered electorates. However, only 23 percent of registered voters went to voice their choice (total of 7,305,036 citizens voted). These voters made up 10 percent of the total population (European forum for Democracy and solidarity, 2011). Concerning community and unconventional political involvement, only 2.3 percent of the youth (aged 10–29) contributed in social issues by providing assistance (cash or in-kind) to the poor (Population Council, 2010).

The researcher saw that the "political behaviour transformation" of young citizens as an opportunity to better comprehend and obtain a good grasp of the phenomenon and advance the awareness through subsequent theory. The interviews in this study explored and gathered data, allowing young citizens to express their opinions, thoughts, and behaviours concerning how WOM impacted their attitudes and intentions to participate in unconventional political activities.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

The following paragraphs reviews prior studies' research discoveries and literature. The topic regarding mass media and its impact on citizens' political participation is recognized, evaluated, reconsidered and clarified.

Mass Media and Political Participation

In the 21st Century, mass media is classified into various mass media industries: books, newspapers, magazines, recordings, radio, movies, television and the Internet. It constitutes diversified media technologies that are intended to reach a large audience by mass communication (Kotler and Armstrong, 2012). Media organisations are assumed to play an important role in democracies (Negm *et al.,* 2013). Established countries could not be imagined without mass communication (Solomon, 2013).

Television, newspapers, the radio, and the Internet are the main sources of information for citizens all around the world (Kotler and Armstrong, 2012). Prior studies supported the "Mobilization" approach, suggesting that the more people use mass media for political information, the more they tend to participate in different forms of political actions (Floss, 2008). Explaining the cognitive effects of mass media in a transitional society, earlier studies declared that citizens learn from the media about the efficacy and integrity of political institutions in their country, thus gaining an in-depth understanding of their general performance (Shaker, 2010). Consequently, the information acquired through news media becomes an important dimension of attitude formation towards those political institutions (Shah and Scheufele, 2006).

Media sources provide enough information for citizens to recognise when their interests are in danger, and that media consumption actually increases civic engagement (Floss, 2008). This is what the current research study attempts to explore. Prior studies indicated that countries with a higher degree of media performance show higher levels of political participation and less corruption (Lamprianou, 2013). They also tend to have a more lively civil society, and elected representatives seem to reflect the preferences of citizens more adequately (Dalton, 2007). In conclusion, media performance is clearly related to at least some aspects of the functioning of a democratic regime.

Youth Political Participation

According to earlier researchers, young adults had the capability to progress and develop a nation through their

civic engagements and political participations (Bassiony, 2011; Sugita, 2011). The younger generation was believed to foster a sense of civic spirits and political efficacy (Dalton, 2007; Sugita, 2011). The young population had moved away from traditional political activities, such as voting, participating in campaigns, and communal activities towards more indirect forms of political participation, taking part in demonstrations, protests, and boycotts (Bourne, 2010; Riley *et al.,* 2010). Accordingly, these declarations from prior studies were exemplified during Egypt's 2011 Revolution. Throughout the upheaval, youth and young adults showed a sense of political responsibility to transform their society in a positive manner (Bassiony, 2011).

RESEARCH METHOD

It was not essential to collect data from everyone in a community in order to get valid discoveries and outcomes (Bryman, 2012). In undertaking the interviews, the researcher selected only a subset sample of the population, following the **nonprobability sampling** technique (selected respondents based on subjective judgments rather than through calculations and statistical records). In this study, the researcher decided to focus on **youth and young adults** who lived in Egypt during the 2011 revolution. The selection of youth and young adults was based on **purposive sampling** (**judgmental sampling**). The chosen interviewees exposed the characteristic necessary to answer questions about a certain matter. Furthermore, the interviewees possessed various socio-demographic traits (ages, gender, income, and city of residence) and personal qualities. The researcher pursued maximum variation in order to seek the widest variety of perspectives possible when it came to the citizens' political participations. Purposive sampling was beneficial to the researcher because it was a dominant way for tracking groups of people that were needed in this particular study in a less time consuming manner.

QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

The interviews detected the interviewees' level of involvement in both conventional (voting and campaign support involvement) and unconventional (protesting, demonstrations, marches, strikes, and boycotts) political activities. The researcher asked about the interviewees' participation in governmental elections, political campaigns, protests (peaceful march), organized strikes, and boycotts (products, services, or ideas). The researcher also asked about whether the media impacted their choice in participating in politics.

As the interviewees became interactive in the discussions (answering the questions and articulating their views and opinions about the examined topic), patterns of experiences were identified from the direct quotes and the paraphrasing of common ideas from the participants. The following paragraphs outlined the major issues and reoccurring ideas and arguments that were found under each examined question.

Question One: Have you Voted in Governmental Elections before?

The majority of the interviewees began to participate in elections (parliamentary and presidential) after the 2011 revolution. They gave their voice during the polls in order to help promote a democracy in the country and to create a pleasant life for them in the future. Some supporting quotes from the interviews that aided this declaration were: "*I felt that after the revolution, the elections will not be frolicked around with and the results will be accurate and fair";* "*I participated in the election in order to build a better future for Egypt"; "I felt a moral obligation to vote in order to encourage democracy in Egypt".*

According to the researcher's assessment concerning the replies and the subjective evidence provided by the interviewees, most of the young adults voted during the governmental elections after the revolution. Voting was a right given to the citizens after the political transition took place. It was up to the people if they wanted to vote or not. The majority decided to claim that right. Egyptians contributed in the elections in order to maintain democracy and improve the country.

The new government (chosen by the citizens) determined the progressiveness and the liberal change to the nation. Thus, the **1ˢᵗ** theme that emerged was: **"Egyptians participated in elections only after the 2011 revolution"**.

Question Two: Have you Worked in Support of a Political Campaign?

The researcher wanted to clarify if the Egyptians braced different conventional political activities other than voting during elections. Most of the interviewees did not participate in political campaigns. The non-active participants claimed: *"they were not aware or convinced with the politician's political position and plans for the country"*. The few interviewees who joined in this political affair indirectly helped by hanging posters on their cars and writing Facebook and Twitter statuses.

According to the researcher's assessment concerning the replies and the subjective evidence provided by the interviewees, most youth did not support a definite political campaign. Currently, the political status of the country supported and encouraged people to exercise their civic rights to participate as individuals in the political process. However, people did not feel inspired to assist campaigns for any elective public office or political initiative. They did not endorse a candidate or ballot proposal; nor provide financial or other support for political establishments. Their inactive role was due to the surplus of diverse political candidates running for presidency during the first stage in the elections. The citizens were not familiar with their diplomatic history, political position, and their agendas for improving the country. During the second round of the election, they were demotivated because they were not in favour of them. Thus, the **2ⁿᵈ** theme was: **"young Egyptians do not participate in political campaigns"**.

Question There: Have you Participated in a Protest (Peaceful March)?

The researcher asked about the interviewees' participation in protests (peaceful marches). The majority of the interviewees contributed in rallies and peaceful marches. Some supporting quotes from the interviews that aided this declaration were: *"I participated in demonstrations to stop the unfair and corrupt government"; "protesting gave me a sense of democracy"; "the uprisings were to express and create awareness to the government regarding the citizens' disapprovals"; "I feel the responsibility to express scepticism about the government, political parties, and politicians because in the past they did not prove otherwise"*. Those interviewees who did not contribute in protesting did encourage its existence. Due to these citations, the **3ʳᵈ** theme was emerged: **"young Egyptians joined protests and peaceful marches out of their sense of duty"**.

Question Four: Have you Participated in an Organized Strike?

The majority of the interviewees were not fond of organized strikes. Some supporting quotes from the interviews that aided this declaration were: *"people do not want to sacrifice their jobs, their means for earning money because people are replaceable in their job positions"; "there are other effective political activities to join, which are not personally risky"; "organized strike can harmfully and destructively impact people directly, through numerous negative reinforcements"*. Thus, the **4ᵗʰ** theme was generated: **"organized strike are not popular among young Egyptian"**.

Question Five: Have you Boycotted a Product, Service or Idea?

The interviewees were aware of various incidents that encouraged them to go against and boycott certain matters. Many interviewees boycotted a product or service because they felt offended by the organization's offensive, insulting, and rude criticisms regarding various sensitive topics (like religion, personal sanctified beliefs, or butcheries of innocent people). Condemnations towards these issues created controversy among Egyptians. Some supporting quotes from the interviews that aided this declaration were: *"there are some topics that should not be joked around with"; "I cannot tolerate people disapproving or criticizing my religion"; "I do not like to support any products, services, or ideas that reflects ignorance towards Islam"; "I boycott to show disapproval with entities' actions and beliefs"; "I refuse to consume products or deal with organizations that are anti-Arabs"; "I cannot support people who are content with the situation and the tragic events that are occurring in Palestine."* As a result, the **5**th theme developed: **"Egyptians boycott establishments that offend matters that are perceive as sensitive and spiritual."**

Question Six: Do you have Future Intentions to Participate in these Political Acts?

The interviewees planed to participate in forthcoming political events. The interviewees were enthusiastic to join in progressive political doings. They were passionate about the involvement. They believed that: *"citizens in a democratic country have the right to show their feelings publicly if it is for the improvement and progress of their nation"*. The interviewees believed it was their duty as citizens to participate in different political activities and events to enhance their society.

Some supporting quotes from the interviews that aided this declaration were: *"I will participate in various political activities in order for me to feel good about myself. Participating in activities in order to enhance my country will make me feel better that I'm a proactive citizen that is trying to do something positive rather than sitting and watching a beautiful country deteriorate"; "The system of democracy arose from having citizens joining political acts"; "I love my country and I want to help it by establishing a democratic society that is open to freedom of speech and the practice of justice among citizens"; "if all the citizens participate in these political activities, the government system will improve. Government will fear the occurrence of any up-rises so they will think twice before making any major decision that concerns its citizens"; "demonstrations help get voices heard to the government"*. Because of these citations during the interviews, the **6**th theme was established: **"Egyptians have intentions to participate in future unconventional political acts."**

Question Seven: Does the Media Influence your Political Participation?

The interviewees believed that the media is a significant source of information, which provides them the opportunity to collect the needed information about what is going on in their society, socially, economically, and politically. The participants felt that mass media created a background in which citizens are not blindly passive and trusting but neither totally distrustful of the political institutions in their country. This, in turn, leads to a more political participation from citizens who feel that their influence on political authorities is necessary but also possible. Some supporting quotes are: *"rather than persuading opinion change, media effect in a transitional society are more likely to crystallize previous predispositions"; the media can play an important role in building partisan loyalties and stabilizing the unstable electorate, characteristic for societies"*. Because of these citations during the interviews, the **7**th theme was established: **"Mass media impact citizens political participations."**

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study is investigate the role of mass media in democratization processes in Egypt, a transitional society. The rationale for the overarching theoretical and empirical approach of this study derives from the lively debate on the role of mass media in promoting and sustaining political information, which motivates political participation. This study conducted qualitative research approach in order to gain rich and descriptive insights to this research topic.

According to the researcher's assessment concerning the replies and the subjective evidence provided by the interviewees, most Egyptians after the revolution became active in numerous political activities. These doings challenged existing power structures and brought about progressive change. Concurring to the interviewees, low assurance and confidence in an administration indicated melancholy and irritation toward government and its related entities. Citizens' dissatisfaction was shown in the form of unconventional political acts, such as protests, demonstrations, marches, strikes, petition signing, and revolts. While their conventional political activities showed their sense of duty as proactive citizens to inspire democracy in their society.

According to the interviews, mass media impacts citizens' political participation. Mass media can help people understand the operations of government, participate in political decisions, and hold government officials accountable. Nowadays, democratic governments and politicians may find it useful to simulate the political virtues of transparency through verbal and visual media operations.

This study had several limitations. The first was the small size of the sample and the fact that participants were in certain area of Cairo and Alexandria. Hence, the results may not be generalized or accurate regarding other cities in Egypt. The present study needs to be supported by quantitative research that assesses the relationship between mass media and political participation. Finally, this study only focused on the receivers' viewpoints not the influencer.

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