

**YOUNG EGYPTIAN ACTIVISTS' PERCEPTIONS
OF THE POTENTIAL OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR
MOBILISATION**

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Thank you for being patient, sweethearts

ABSTRACT

The 25th January uprising has drawn attention to young Egyptians who were able to spark off a revolution in the tightly repressed political environment. The time that led to the uprising was marked by vibrant political mobilisation. It witnessed several endeavours through which Egyptians have expressed their aspirations for social and political reform. Empowered by what new information and communication technologies (ICTs) afford, young Egyptians have arguably managed to mobilise sizable numbers of people to take to the streets and demand change.

This thesis explores the perceptions of a sample of young Egyptian activists about the potential of social media (SM) for mobilising collective action. Themes of media usage, dispositions and actions (online and off-line) that appear to relate to these perceptions are investigated and analysed.

This study aims to enhance original research in three main ways: one, to contribute to a growing body of empirical research about new media potential for mobilisation. Secondly, it deepens academic understanding of young activists' uses of SM and practices in the realm of political activism and social movement construction, especially in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) where the role of social media seems to be developing constantly. Most importantly, thirdly, this study comprises a scholarly and proactive approach that explores evolving political changes that have taken place in Egypt since 2008 from a media perspective and thus provides a qualitative research basis that is beneficial in comparing and contrasting new media roles prior to the 25th January 2011 uprising and in its aftermath. This study will be of value to activists, researchers and social movement organisations (SMOs) in Egypt and the MENA region, and elsewhere, who are considering the opportunities, challenges and complications of this rapidly growing study area.

The thesis begins with a critical literature analysis in two parts: the first explores the socio-political context of the Egyptian polity in the last decade of Mubarak's presidency, and the second discusses issues of social movements' growth and development, predominantly in how new ICTs, particularly SM, may contribute to the organisation of social movements, creating opportunities through which to gain experience and

acquire participatory skills, and finally to practise collective action that forms the skeleton of the second part of the literature review. Empirical data were collected through a variety of research methods and sources.

This thesis builds a moderate case for SM's influence on the mobilisation of collective action. Although young activists purposively use the SM repertoire as instruments through which to mobilise collective action, they believe that the role these media may play varies significantly, depending on the media user, i.e., the contribution of SM to creating favourable dispositions towards the participation and mobilisation of individuals to move from behind their keyboards and to take to the streets differs between activists and non-politicised individuals. The findings suggest that SM are not perceived as a suitable arena for the building of an activist identity, which consequently raises concerns about the commitment to and sustainability of social movements organised on social media platforms.

This thesis is organised to allow these arguments to be made clearly in relation to the data. Findings are discussed and analysed in Chapters Five (young activists' uses of social media), Six (young activists' contextual perceptions and political dispositions) and Seven (the perceived opportunities to link to off-line space). Each chapter considers several dimensions that are related to the theme being investigated. Throughout these chapters, the data are analysed and discussed horizontally in order to delineate the interconnection and interaction of the research themes. In each chapter, data from questionnaires and focus group discussions (FGDs) are presented. Quantitative and qualitative findings around key themes and issues are presented in an integrated fashion. In most cases, general findings begin by displaying participants' questionnaire answers. These findings are subsequently considered within the context of what respondents said in FGDs. Chapter Eight coherently draws together these three dimensions based on findings illuminated in the preceding three chapters. It also presents recommendations for practice and future research.

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DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis I have presented for the PhD degree in communication studies of the University of York is solely the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Other references are acknowledged giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree. Two publications have been made based on this work:

Sayed, N. (2012). Towards the Egyptian Revolution: Activists' Perceptions of Social Media for Mobilisation. *Journal of Arab & Muslim Media Research* , 4 (2-3).

Sayed, N. (2012). New Media and the Opportunities for Democratic Transformation (In Arabic). In *The Egyptian Revolution: Motivations, Attitudes and Challenges*. Doha, Qatar: Arab Centre for Research and Policy Studies.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

When people chanted on January 2011 ‘al sha’ab yoreed iskat al nitham’ (the people demand the fall of the regime), nobody would have expected that Egyptians, who had known almost nothing but authoritarian forms of rule throughout their modern history, would be capable of delivering such a civilised message to the whole world. The eruption of the massive demonstrations throughout the Arab region in late 2010 and early 2011, in what has become known as the Arab Spring, has indeed drawn the attention of journalists, professionals and commentators who have made several attempts to explain this public awakening and have tried to arrive at an understanding of its motivations and mechanisms. Abundant scholarly work has focused on the role that new media might have played in instigating the events of the Arab Spring (e.g., Lim, 2012; Mansour, 2012; Rane & Salem, 2012; Youmans & York, 2012). Elsewhere, connections have been made between new media and political activism. For example, the Iranian post-election protests of 2009 have been termed ‘the Twitter revolution’ (Morozov, 2009). In Egypt, a preoccupation with the two online services, Facebook and Twitter, was by and large witnessed (Rinke & Roder, 2011).

During the time leading up to the first Egyptian uprising in 25th January 2011, several endeavours introduced young Egyptians to the political arena. Resourced mainly by new communication technologies, groups of youths managed to organise many collective actions and to mobilise the public to support change. In particular, references have been made to the Egyptian general strike that erupted in the city of Mahalla in 2008. Although this general strike was initiated by workers of El-Mahalla El-Kubra, it was picked up, promoted and expanded by activists, mainly through the use of the Internet and cellphones. The strike introduced the social networking site Facebook to the public arena of political engagement in Egypt. The April 6th Youth Movement Group was formed on Facebook and then attracted more than 64,000 members. Several initiatives followed. One of the most significant groups that emerged on Facebook was “We are all Khaled Said” which sparked the January uprising and was widely used as a rallying point during the protests.

In this context, the current research primarily seeks to answer questions that relate to its central inquiry into *the perceived role of social media for the mobilisation of collective action in Egypt*. As the connection between media as a means of protest and political change under authoritarian rule has been theoretically established (e.g., Habermas, 1989; Tarrow, 1998) as well as being empirically established (e.g., Howard, 2010; Richter, 2010), and taking the aforementioned incidents into account, one could easily slip into seeing a connection, or even a causal relationship, between the use of social media (SM) and the organisation and materialisation of the public call for social and political change in Egypt and elsewhere. Indeed, the consecutive Arab uprisings, or what has been termed the domino-effect of the Arab Spring, have attracted a profusion of scholarly attention from different perspectives. Researchers and commentators have hastily made their efforts to describe, analyse and explain the Arab Spring and situate media within its incidents. Such “close-to-exclusive focus [has been argued to represent] an undue restriction in our thinking about the role of communication for such events” (Rinke & Roder, 2011, p. 1274).

In terms of size of mobilisation and significance of SM use, it has been argued that the use of SM portals as tools for the dissemination of ideas, ideology, perspective, and calls to action reached a small, yet growing, minority of the technologically-savvy, engaged, and largely middle upper class segment of Egyptian society. It also converged with a disparaged transnational Egyptian diaspora which amplified the messaging beyond the territorial geography of the state's jurisdictional control (Iskandar, 2013). Most importantly, Iskandar asserts, the role that SM have been playing in what Egypt has been witnessing since 25th January 2011 up till now significantly differs from what has existed before,

Few [of Egypt's activists] do not use Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and other portals to disseminate their messages and document their experiences and efforts. *This digitisation of Egypt's protest movement far exceeds that which existed ahead of the eighteen days of protest in January 2011* (emphasis added).

Surprisingly enough, people of Egypt have been able to revolt again more vigorously after less than three years of toppling the Mubarak regime. ‘Tamarod’ (rebellion) managed to mobilise a successful petition campaign to oust, the now former, President Mohamed Morsi from office on the first anniversary of his, and the Muslim Brotherhood's, inauguration. These massive upheavals of 30th June 2013, arguably,

“confirm beyond a shadow of a doubt that the spiral of silence has definitely been broken forever” (Iskandar, 2013).

Having been started in autumn 2009 and completed in autumn 2012, and building on the aforementioned assertions, the current research is well-situated to answer questions about Egypt’s protest movement prior to such significant political change.

1.1. Statement of purpose

This study aims to investigate a sample of young Egyptian activists’ perceptions of the potential of SM for mobilising collective action prior to the Egyptian massive uprising of 25th January, 2011. It sheds light on activists’ stated uses of SM, and the perceived related consequences of their mobilising activism on both online and off-line political arenas that are mediated by young activists’ reported political dispositions. The study is mainly organised around three themes with which it is important for the study to engage: *firstly*, the reasons why young activists utilise SM platforms for political activism. *Secondly*, their attitudes, which may serve as intrinsic incentives for their political activism, both on and off-line, and may also help to introduce several aspects of the context within which young activists operate (i.e., fear of repression and political efficacy); and *thirdly*, the actual outcome of SM mobilisation as reported by young activists. These themes are linked to each other and together shape the current study’s argument.

Broadly stated, the study aimed to:

- Identify and explain the range of uses of SM for political activism, as reported by a sample of young Egyptian activists before the 25th January 2011 uprising.
- Appraise the potential implication of what these media afford, as seen through young activists’ critique of them as the degree to which young activists feel satisfied (or not) with SM’s contribution to their political activism.
- Reveal and analyse young Egyptian activists’ political dispositions that appear to relate to their purposive use of SM and that are expected to contribute to shaping their tendency to engage in different forms and levels of political activism.
- Illuminate ways in which young Egyptian activists utilise SM tools to shape their movement and to mobilise sizable off-line collective action.

In so doing, the study aimed to improve original research in several ways:

- a. To contribute to a growing body of empirical research about new media's potential for mobilisation and democratisation.
- b. To deepen academic understanding of young activists' uses of SM and practices in such a critical phase of new media evolution in the realm of political communication. Although SM are not now a new phenomenon, its utilisation for political activism and social movement construction is still developing constantly, especially in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), thus beginning by understanding why an important cohort, such as young activists, use such communicative platforms as part of their collective action repertoire, would help to better understand new media's contribution to movements' growth and development.
- c. Most importantly, this study comprises a scholarly, proactive approach to the exploration of evolving political changes that have taken place in Egypt since 2008 from a media perspective and, hence, provides a quality research basis that may be beneficial in comparing and contrasting new media's role prior to the January 2011 uprising and in its aftermath. This study would be of value to activists, researchers and social movement organisations (SMOs) in Egypt and the MENA region and elsewhere that are contemplating the opportunities, challenges and complications in this rapidly growing study area.

Research questions

The cornerstone of the main research study was the question:

How do young Egyptian activists' perceive social media's potential for the mobilisation of collective action?

Under this overarching inquiry, I sought to answer the following subsidiary questions and related sub-questions:

RQ1. Why do young activists use social media?

RQ2. How do social media contribute to the creation of opportunities (favourable dispositions) for the practice of collective action off-line?

***RQ2.1.** Does using social media for instrumental purposes relate to young activists' feelings of fear of repression? And if so, in what ways?*

***RQ2.2.** Does using social media for instrumental purposes relate to young activists' feelings of being politically efficacious? And if so, in what ways?*

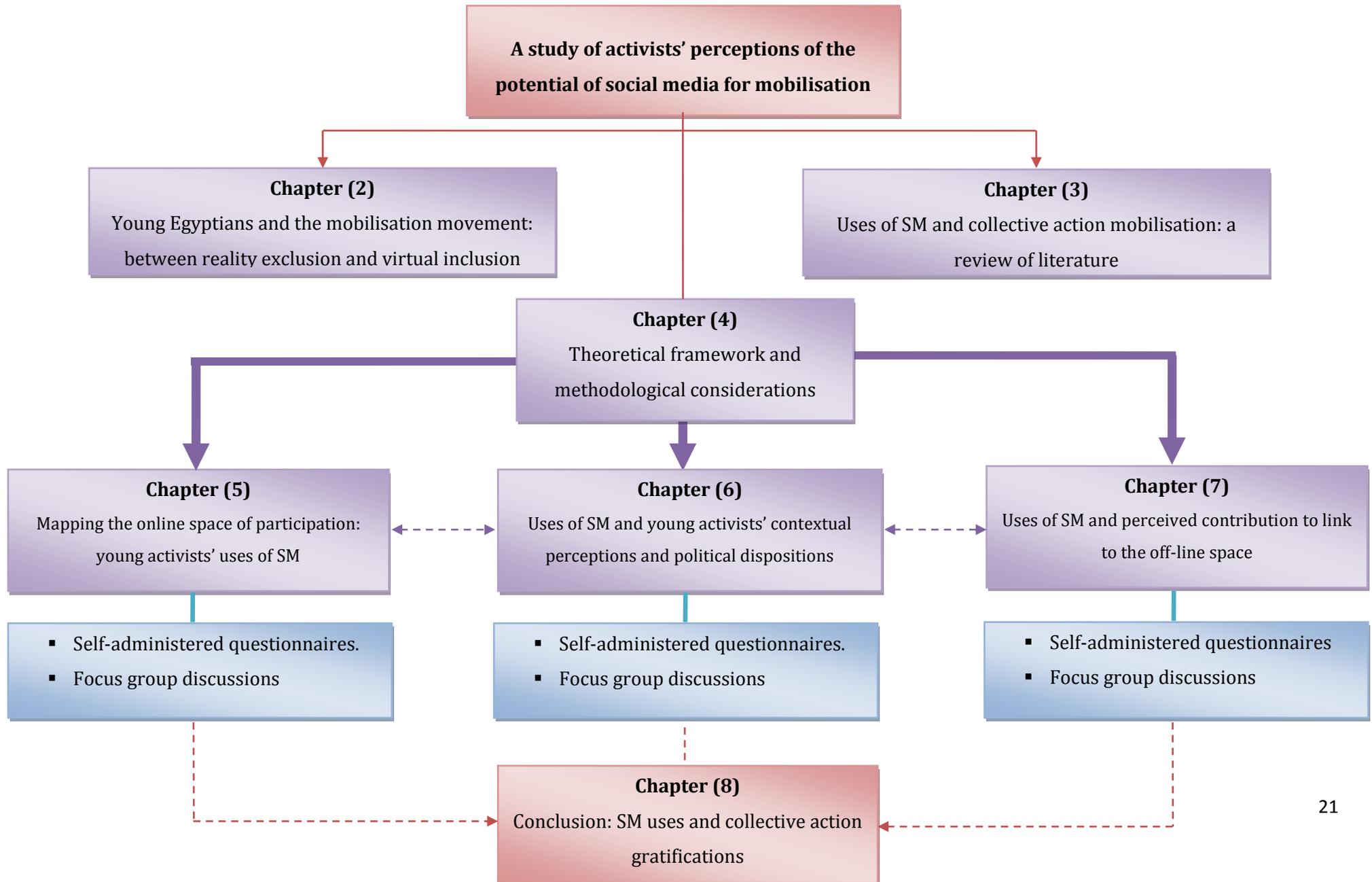
RQ3. How do social media contribute to the mobilisation of collective action practice off-line?

***RQ3.1.** Does using social media for instrumental purposes relate to young activists' tendency to practise politics online? And if so, in what ways?*

***RQ3.2.** Does using social media for instrumental purposes relate to young activists' tendency to practise politics off-line? And if so, in what ways?*

These questions were answered and the results discussed within a broader discussion of the political context of the Egyptian society during Hosni Mubarak's presidency (October, 1981-February, 2011). The thesis' central argument is presented in the order shown in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1: Structure of the thesis



1.2. The study's proposed general structure

The study is organised into two main parts; the *first* begins with an introduction, and the second ends with a conclusion. Part one provides a theoretical foundation for the research and starts with the contextualisation of the research through a discussion of the elements of Egyptian society's political structure. This structure is expected to have implications for media uses as well as for activists' tendency to practise and mobilise off-line political activism. In situating the research in the field and narrowing down the focus, I then moved on to review the relevant literature and to define the possible gaps and areas of tension. The methodology chapter follows, introducing the research design and discussing the research's main theoretical framework.

The theoretical basis presented in part one overarches and readily feeds into the second half of the study, which is comprised of three empirical chapters and a concluding chapter. Each of the empirical chapters aims to address one of the research themes (media uses, dispositions, and actions) and to answer one of the subsidiary research questions on that theme. These themes were analysed horizontally in order to delineate their interconnectedness in order to build up the research's argument. I finally sum up with a concluding chapter that presents and briefly discusses the main research findings and draws together and articulates the study's main argument (see Figures 5.1, 6.1 & 7.3). The limitations of the current research and comments about further research are also discussed in this chapter.

1.2.1. Part one: The study's theoretical foundation

In the first part, the study begins with a review of pertinent literature that continues in Chapters Two and Three. In *Chapter Two: 'Young Egyptians and the mobilisation movement: between reality exclusion and virtual inclusion,'* a brief historical snapshot is presented in order to contextualise the study domestically in the sociopolitical specificities of Egyptian society. This was achieved by adopting a broad, flexible definition of Tarrow's concept of political opportunity.

Some scholars argue that "the presumption of consistent rational behaviour on the part of political actors based on a logical assessment of the contextual constraints is unjustified" (Zaki, 1994). This suggests that solely following structural elements and rational calculations would not help delineate why and how people act. However, it is

argued that mobilisation strategies from which activists may choose are highly dependent on environmental structural restrictions (Zaki, 1994). To avoid contributing to the illusory expansion of the political opportunity concept, this chapter introduced elements of the Egyptian political environment, with a special focus on certain factors clarified by Tarrow (1998). Two main sets of Tarrow's factors were highlighted in regard to the Egyptian polity: 1) The state's modes of repression and social control, and 2) The opening of access to participation for new actors (Tarrow, 1998).

These factors were expected to help explain the emergence of a new cohort of activists and the various strategies they may have been employing in response to - or maybe to enforce - openness in the political environment under which they operate. Such an environment was expected to promote, or inhibit, prospects for the mobilisation of collective action to achieve social and political change in Egypt.

The political opportunity is introduced as an umbrella concept which helped in discussing the context within which the cohort of politically active young Egyptians has emerged and which they have been encountering during the past three decades. In order to understand the role that SM may play in mobilising change in Egypt, as perceived by young Egyptian activists, different strategies from which political actors could choose were also discussed in line with what their sociopolitical environmental structure affords. Amongst these variables is the rise of an educated middle class cohort in Egypt, and the effects of demonstration. These political variables, amongst others, were expected to serve as forces that could challenge and destabilise the authoritarian regime's power.

In *Chapter Three 'Uses of SM and collective action mobilisation,'* I review academic literature that is relevant to this study. The chapter aims to shed light on the main themes and concepts, and introduces the current research's design. I first reviewed literature on media uses with a special focus on instrumental versus habitual uses of media and users' active role in both constructs. The skeleton of the remainder of the chapter was built around media uses in relation to social movement organisation, shaping dispositions and mobilising collective action.

The chapter then concludes by situating the study in the spectrum of the relevant research to show my own position in the field. I demonstrated that although there is a

constant increase in the amount of scholarly work on SM and political engagement, very little has focused on the Arab region, especially prior to the massive protests and revolts that have lately occurred in Egypt and several other Arab countries. I also show how the current research's focus is different from that of existing studies. On the basis of this review, I identified the study's overarching question: how do young Egyptian activists perceive SM's potential for mobilisation? These perceptions were demonstrated by seeking answers to questions about activists' uses of social networking sites (SNSs) for political purposes, their political dispositions, and their online and off-line political practices. These specific themes were also reflected in the literature reviewed in order to form a bridge between the current research and previous scholarly work, as well as with the current study's special environment, which, together, comprise the umbrella for analysis throughout the study.

Chapter Four *'Theoretical framework and methodological considerations'*, discusses the methodology used to obtain and analyse data for this research. The chapter discusses the theoretical framework and the research design's rationale and the ways in which the research variables were expected to relate to each other. The key concepts relating to the aforementioned questions about media uses, political dispositions and political participation, on- and off-line, were operationally defined. The theoretical and practical foundation for the application of the mixed methods approach for data collection is also discussed. Data for the current study came from the combination of a quantitative dataset from survey questionnaires with a set of qualitative comments resulting from follow up focus group discussions (FGDs). The pros and cons of applying a mixed methods approach for data collection are also discussed.

The chapter then continues by introducing the research population that represents the pool from which prospective participants were sampled. The sampling procedures for each selected method are delineated. Users' profiles are presented in this chapter to build up a picture of participants in the current research. This also helped set up a ground from which to better understand any of the differences among activists that could be expected, based on gender, age, income, and/or education.

The data collection instrument and the measures used for each method are thoroughly discussed in this chapter, as well as the statistical tests used to analyse the quantitative

data. The flexible approach used to analyse the qualitative data and identify themes is also explained. The chapter pictures the field work experience by delineating the ethical considerations that guide the research's application and the difficulties I faced in the field with respect to the sensitivity of the topic, given the very special circumstances and incidents that took place prior to, during and even after the research's application.

1.2.2. Part two: The empirical findings and discussion

In the thesis's second part, I introduce and discuss the research's empirical findings. Through Chapters Five, Six and Seven, I seek to answer the research questions that revolve around the main research concepts; media uses, political dispositions, and actions. Data were analysed horizontally so as to provide a homogeneous representation of SM's contribution to the mobilisation of collective action as perceived by the research participants. Each chapter starts by setting the ground by presenting the frequencies of the study's variables. More detailed discussion of young activists' perceptions then follows, based on qualitative data from FGDs.

Based on the assumption that the Internet has a considerable impact on the way in which contemporary movements and individual activists organise, create opportunities and mobilise for collective action (Ayres, 1999; Bennett, 2003a), reasons for using the Internet and SM for participation were expected to influence the reasons that cause people to participate in collective action. Accordingly, the analysis starts by investigating what drives young Egyptian activists to use SNSs for political communication in *Chapter Five 'Mapping the online space of participation: young activists' uses of SM.'* The chapter starts by delineating young activists' most frequent uses of SM. It then begins with a broader discussion of their critique of SM affordances for political activism and the degree to which they are satisfied with SM's contribution in this regard. Participants made a clear distinction between themselves, as politicised citizens, and the non-politicised others in terms of the needs they seek to gratify from their purposive media use and the functions that they believe SM performs for each camp. Differences in SM use that were expected to stem from participants' demographic characteristics are finally discussed in this chapter.

Chapter Six 'Uses of SM and young activists' contextual perceptions and political dispositions,' empirically situates reported uses of SM in the context of the study. In

authoritarian regimes, it is argued that young people need to be mobilised as a citizenry as well as a democracy (Machacek, 2001). Individuals' legal, political and social relationship to the society to which they belong need to be defined to enable an active practice of citizenry (Wallace, 2001). People tend to make their decisions about the actions they are about to take based on their evaluations of the consequences and outcomes of their deeds. Under repressive systems of governance, where taking part in politics, especially unconventional forms of activism, might bring about unwanted results, and as citizenry might be vulnerable to changing circumstances (Helve & Wallace, 2001), young activists were expected to make certain evaluations of their participatory environment before they decided in what forms of actions they would take part, when and how. Previous research has distinguished a welcoming, safe environment and meaningful participation and engagement among several dimensions of critical youth empowerment (Jennings, Parra-Medina, Hilfinger-Messias, & McLoughlin, 2006). On comparison of their political stances and decisions, the perceived patterns and trends of public opinion were also found to affect individuals' political decisions and actions (Dalton, 2002). Individuals' confidence in their ability to participate significantly in politics was also found to relate to a reliance on the Internet, as well as to their perceptions on the utility and comprehensiveness of the medium (Ognyanova & Ball-Rokeach, 2012; Kenski & Stroud, 2006). In the current research, two variables were selected to represent the young activists' perceptions of their participatory environment: the reported fear of repression and the perceived sense of political efficacy.

The chapter starts with the frequencies of participants' reported feelings of fear of repression and political efficacy. The chapter then explores the relationship between the gratifications young activists sought from social networking site use and their perceptions of their broader political context. Those dispositions could be considered to be antecedents which may interfere in the shaping of activists' selections of media platforms as part of the repertoire that they use when practising politics. Conversely, media use could be associated with the way young activists practise politics in reality via their influencing of dispositions. Earlier studies have provided insight into the way different antecedents relate to media incentives. Researchers suggest that communication motives result from the interactions between demographics,

communication needs and social and psychological factors (Rosengren, 1974, in, Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000 and Sheldon, 2008). Researchers have also investigated how political attitudes influence the gratifications sought from media use, reflecting on the gratification obtained and audience behaviour (Kaye & Johnson, 2004).

In addition to delineating young activists' distribution according to their perceived dispositions, hypothesised correlations in research sub-questions were statistically tested to explore the way in which such dispositions may relate to media uses and hence to online/off-line political participation. To build up a picture of activists' personal experiences, and to go beyond quantitative percentages and rigid numbers to discuss and explain how activists perceive their political arena, young activists' repertoires and evaluations of their own experiences with the authorities, were gauged through analysis of data from the FGDs.

For the discussion, I drew on issues that are identified and the concepts discussed in Chapters Two (Young Egyptians and the mobilisation movement) and Three (The literature review) in order to investigate and analyse how those contextual factors may have affected the reasons behind activists' purposive utilisation of SM platforms. Discussion in this chapter paves the way for an exploration of how those dispositions might have bridged young activists' use of SM to more costly and riskier levels of political activism. The chapter also attempts to unpack the reasons for differences amongst activists in regard to their dispositions, e.g., those based on gender, education, income and age.

Chapter Seven *'Uses of SM and the perceived contribution to link to the off-line space'* investigates the question of stated behavioral outcomes and the SM's contribution to the mobilisation of collective off-line action. The chapter starts by testing correlations between different forms of SM use and online political activism. It was contended that instrumental rather than habitual uses of SM correlated with practising politics online. Qualitative data from the FGDs revealed that young Egyptian activists have been using SM to construct social meanings and to frame their movement and to recruit potential supporters for their cause. To explore SM's potential for linking online interaction to off-line action, correlation between on- and off-line political practices was tested before and after the introduction of young activists' reported political dispositions to the

equation. It was found that reported feelings of fear of repression and political efficacy did not deter young Egyptian activists from upgrading their online activism to street politics. However, FGD data revealed that participants were not satisfied with the amount of collective action that SM mobilisation could spur, which suggests that other factors, in addition to SM's contribution, have contributed to encouraging the Egyptian people to take to the streets en masse on the 25th of January 2011.

Chapter Eight brings together the study's main themes and the correlations that emerge throughout the findings chapters and their implications for related political debates and for political communication theory. Each research question answered in one of the analytical chapters is represented in the concluding chapter through one of what I have called 'cycles of mobilisation.' Each cycle summarised activists' perceptions with regard to one of the research's main themes. Together, these cycles of mobilisation integrate data discussed in the preceding three chapters, under three theme headings:

Cycle (1) young Egyptian activists and the instrumentality of social media.

Cycle (2) same media, different opportunities for different actors.

Cycle (3) social media uses and gratifying off-line collective outcomes.

These cycles represent the interrelations and interaction between media uses, dispositions and actions (on- and off-line). As figures 8.1 & 8.2 show, using SM as instruments of mobilisation helps young activists to create favourable dispositions among non-politicised individuals towards the practice of more demanding political activities off-line. Young activists' uses of SM relate positively to their online activism which, in turn, feeds into their off-line political practices. However, they believe that practising politics on SM may impede social movements' development if individuals, especially the non-politicised, become entrapped in the virtual sphere and refrain from linking their online, convenient practices to the off-line, more risky, reality.

Chapter Eight also discusses recommendations and offers scope for future research in the realm of political communication and new media studies. More investigation of the uses of SM for political communication is still needed, especially in the authoritative contexts of governance, in order to better understand the opportunities these media may create for younger generations in a rapidly changing environment. It may also be useful to look at what they afford through a 'civic cultural' lens which, although mainly

applied in democratic contexts, may shed light on novel modalities of political and civic traditions in societies under political and social transformation.

The chapter also introduces several implications for practices relating to social movements. It is suggested that more inclusive frames of social movements could help to develop feelings of belonging among sympathisers and potential supporters and, hence, to ameliorate issues of commitment to, and the sustainability of, social movements. As the role of SM evolves, it also emphasises that conventional institutional organisations still play a crucial role in the promotion and wide diffusion of social movements' frames. They may also create personal incentives for prospective supporters to practise collective action which SM may not be able to provide.

CHAPTER TWO

YOUNG EGYPTIANS AND THE MOBILISATION MOVEMENT: BETWEEN REALITY EXCLUSION AND VIRTUAL INCLUSION

Under U.S pressure to put the freedom agenda into effect (Tisdall, 2011), along with other internal and external stimuli, some Arab countries such as Egypt, Syria and Tunisia have seen the emergence of many new change movements at the beginning of the current decade. A number of these movements, including, for example, the Egyptian Movement for Change (EMC), known as 'Kefaya,' has managed to impose themselves strongly on the political arena, through non-traditional theses and effectiveness among broad and important sectors of the community, which makes these movements an important variable in the political reality in these countries, and a phenomenon worthy of research and study.

This study addresses the perceptions of young Egyptian activists about one of the aspects of the Egyptian environment (new media) that may have contributed to the emergence and development of these movements which led to the eruption of two waves of massive protests. The first wave broke out in 25th January 2011 and led to the toppling of former President Mubarak, and the second erupted on 30th June 2013, leading to the ousting of the elected President, Mohamed Morsi, after only a year in office. This chapter aims to situate this inquiry within the socio-political and media environments that have contributed to shaping young Egyptian activists' perceptions of the opportunities allowed for their participation in Egyptian polity during the last decade of Mubarak's presidency (1982–2011).

Three arguments are put forward in this chapter. *First* is that certain political conditions, as well as social and economic difficulties in Egyptian polity have given room for the emergence of a new political movement and have pushed towards more vibrant mobilisation for reform. As one of the participants in the current study put it, the Egyptian polity has reached a deadlock that requires collective action and holistic changes as:

Demands and efforts for accomplishing any kind of reform under the current political structure have reached the saturation point. We lost trust in the current regime, and no one

can claim that reform and change could be feasible through this structure and its mechanisms; political parties, elections, and so on. In the meantime, Egypt is suffering serious social problems that have almost caused the fall of other regimes, and ours are even worse; people have nothing to lose (A.Y., 2010).

Second, it is argued that young Egyptians are key players in the contemporary political mobilisation that Egypt has been witnessing since 2000. However, Egyptian youth have endured nearly a decade of political demobilisation, coupled with a political culture that is not necessarily favourable to active engagement with public life, whether as a result of authoritarianism and oppression, or due to issues related to social and economic hurdles that influence the geographic availability of a large segment of the population and give priority to everyday life issues at the expense of the practice of political activism. This leads readily to the *third* argument about the new communication technology and the potential it offers for young people to circumvent tight control over state-run media and to create alternative mechanisms of inclusion and political expression. *Fourth*, it is argued that Egyptian youth have been able to challenge their tightly oppressed political environment and use the new repertoires of social media (SM) to voice their aspirations for change.

This chapter is organised into five sections:

2.1. The resurgence of political movements in Egypt.

2.1.1. The reasons for the political mobilisation phenomenon in Egypt.

2.1.2. Key indicators of political mobilisation in Egypt.

2.1.2.1. Reviving the political society.

2.1.2.2. Developments within the opposition camp.

2.1.2.3. The growth of pro-reform demonstrations.

2.1.2.4. The blogger movement.

2.2. Young Egyptians: A flawed political culture and exclusion mechanisms.

2.2.1. Egyptian youth: Alternative mechanisms for inclusion.

2.3. Egypt's dual media environment: Freer communication and limited participation.

2.3.1. The Egyptian press.

2.3.2. Television broadcasting in Egypt.

2.3.3. The Internet in Egypt.

2.3.4. Internet censorship in Egypt.

2.3.5. Creating opportunities via the Internet.

2.4. New media, new publics: Revolting in a repressed environment.

2.4.1. Youth mobilisation since 2000.

2.4.2. April 6th Youth Movement.

2.4.3. The personification of societal problems: 'We are all Khaled Said.'

2.5. Conclusion.

2.1. The resurgence of political movements in Egypt

Although Egypt was among the many developing countries that witnessed waves of reforms towards democracy, Mubarak's first years in power signified a cautious hesitant tolerance rather than a fundamental change towards democracy (Brownlee, 2002, p. 8). Additionally, with this centralisation of authority, the country has managed to escape those changes and to hold to what has been termed the "flexible authoritarian" regime (El-Mahdi, 2009, p. 1011, 1029). Egypt suffered many serious problems under Mubarak's presidency. Since 1967, Egypt lived under a declared "state of emergency", by which the regime legalised the outlawing of demonstrations, the use of indefinite imprisonment without trial, and the donation of presidential decrees by law. The law was terminated by President Sadat in Spring, 1981. Nevertheless, his successor – Mubarak – quickly reactivated the emergency law in the shadow of Sadat's assassination (Brownlee, 2002, pp. 6, 7).

However, at the beginning of the current decade, especially following the incidents of September 11, 2001, in the U.S.A., Egypt, among a number of other Arab countries, witnessed waves of significant political mobilisation. This resulted in the foundation of movements for change that had new political thoughts and their own agendas and action mechanisms that distinguish them from the traditional opposition. While this political mobilisation is the direct cause of the formation of these movements, these movements had an influential role in the activation of this mobilisation process (Mneisy, 2011). In the following pages, I discuss the various dimensions of this phenomenon.

The study of new movements for change in Egypt raises several questions; the most prominent of which focuses on the nature of the environment that produced such movements, their very nature, and finally their influence on the political reality which has witnessed complex interactions during the current phase.

2.1.1. The reasons for the political mobilisation phenomenon in Egypt

Political mobilisation that Egypt has witnessed over the last decade could be ascribed to a binary set of factors; the first set includes internal reasons and the second, external ones which are basically centred on pressures and incentives stemming from the international environment. For the purpose of this study, I will focus on the internal incentives for political mobilisation, i.e., the reasons that stem from the context within which individuals are operating in Egypt.

The political reasons include the deterioration in Egypt's political situation, and the inability to manage the emerging pressing issues, both global and local. During the last decade, the political system seemed incapable of confronting the challenges that beset the region, especially with the U.S. occupation of Iraq in 2003, and the escalation of Israeli aggression against Palestine, in the phase that followed the failure of the Camp David negotiations-2 in summer, 2000, and the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa Intifada in 2001. As well as the rigidity of traditional institutions like the ruling party (the National Democratic Party NDP), and the despair of the masses at the government's credibility and reliability when it promised to bring about the required democratic change. Moreover, the slow rate of the reform that had been promised by the government, and the sense of many sectors of the elite community

that the dominant, governing forces had a tendency to circumvent the promised change, to avoid public pressure without actually seeking to respond to the mass's legitimate demands (Sha'ban, 2005).

In addition, the worsening situation of the political parties and the opposition forces makes it difficult to rely on them as tools to pressurise the regime to achieve democratic transformation. This crisis, according to Ahmed and Mus'ad (2006) is due to a combination of factors that relate, in part, to the restricting mechanisms of political parties' practice. These mechanisms represent the regime's authoritarian nature. Another set of factors is linked to the parties' distorted conceptualisation of party work, and their inability to develop organisational structures and intellectual frameworks, which make them reproduce the same deficits as the ruling elites, such as rejecting the devolution of power, denying the right to dissent and excluding the masses (Ahmed & Mus'ad, 2006).

Economic reasons: have contributed to the creation of a phenomenon of political mobilisation. These reasons include the growing economic pressures that burden the citizen, and the growing realization among broad sectors of the political and economic elites that the absence of democratic traditions from political reality has led to the deterioration of the economic growth index. Unemployment is one of the leading indicators of such a decline, and this has pushed in the direction of political mobilisation. According to the World Bank, unemployment rates (the percentage of the total labour force aged 15-24 who are unemployed at a specific time) have increased from 9.0 percent in 2000 to 11.2 percent in 2005 (The World Bank, 2011). As for poverty rates, data from the same source indicate that the percentage of the Egyptian population who have been living beneath the poverty line (estimates of the percentage of the population falling below the poverty line are based on certain standards of poverty and these vary between poor and rich nations) have also increased from 16.7 in 2000 to 21.6 percent in 2009.

Social reasons: Egypt has witnessed significant developments in the social sphere that have had direct repercussions for political mobilisation. For example, the major development in the field of education and the eradication of illiteracy in the past two decades; the increasing rate of urbanisation; the growing role of women in society; prominent

improvements in the health field, and the media boom. Among the main social factors is the contradiction between Egypt's socio-economic structure and developments arising from the growing sector of the younger generations who have studied abroad. These generations have accumulated a sense of alienation from their society, and desperation at the political elite's inability to achieve the goals of reform. Additionally, corruption in many sectors of the state has reflected on citizens' lives and has pushed them to despair of the possibility of solving their problems at the hands of the ruling regime. (Sha'ban, 2005).

Here, special attention is paid to the two aspects of the social underpinnings of the political mobilisation that are most relevant to the current study. These are: youth's political culture (Section 2.2) and new media environment (Section 2.3). The aim is to better understand how these two factors might have contributed to creating opportunities for, or putting obstacles before, the development and growth of political mobilisation in Egypt over the past decade.

2.1.2. Key indicators of political mobilisation in Egypt

In the last decade, Egypt has witnessed remarkable political mobility. Determinants and indicators of the recent growth of political movement in Egypt are discussed beneath.

2.1.2.1. Reviving the political society

The revival of the Egyptian political community and the establishment of the political movement that produced the new change movements could be attributed to four key developments (Said, 2007). These developments are:

- The growth of the Human Rights Movement: Since the end of the '80s, the Human Rights Movement has challenged the repressive legislative structure around the foundation of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), not only through raising public opinion awareness about partial laws, but also because they considered these laws to be a violation of international conventions, thus the movement gained legitimacy based on the concept of 'right' rather than 'licensing' that underpins the legislation and that pertains to the formation of such organisations. Such a concept was not only responsible for granting the state the jurisdiction to withdraw NGOs' licenses, but also to the ability to *de jure* and *de*

facto fully control all aspects of the space of such association, in addition to the terms of their continuing survival. This development has clearly reflected on the genesis of the new movements for change, the presence of which is based on the principle of 'right', and not on a request for legal legitimacy.

- The mobilisation of the Trade Union Movement in the '80s and '90s. On this development, polarisation between civil intellectual and political trends on the one hand, and the Islamic leanings on the other, has crystallised sharply, when the latter started to gain control on the boards of a number of major trade unions via elections, especially doctors', engineers' and lawyers' unions. However, the most important achievement is the capability of moderate trends in both parties to manage a series of dialogues that began between unions and then moved to the partisan level. That experience has established channels of communication and dialogue that enriched the political environment during the years that followed. Based on this achievement in the trade union field, a general consensus on mutual acceptance and co-existence between all political currents has grown-at that time.

- The development of civil and political struggle in solidarity with national and Arab issues; mainly the issues of Palestine and Iraq. For example, the establishment of the "Egyptian Committee for the Support of the Intifada" has been very significant, *firstly*, as an opportunity to build a coalition of various political currents, although individually. *Secondly*, as a basis for widespread collective work, which has already reached deep into Egyptian society, including the very poor rural areas.

- The results of the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003, when the great frustration caused by this occupation raised "new" awareness that has restored the correlation between national and democratic issues.

This invasion nullified any argument that sought to "prove" the need for an authoritarian state to protect national independence, where it is no longer justified to say that "no voice should be louder than the voice of the battle",¹ not because there is no longer a battle, but because the battle's nature has changed. Hence, there is a growing need for democracy to restore the national struggle for a "second independence."

2.1.2.2. Developments within the opposition camp

The opposition camp has witnessed a number of important developments since 2000 that have had a strong impact in supporting political movements in the Egyptian polity. One of the most significant developments in this regard is the foundation of new opposition parties, such as al-Ghad Party, and its founder, Dr. Ayman Nour, who was the first runner-up in the 2005 presidential election (Mneisy, 2011). In addition to the new role of the opposition parties, other developments in the opposition camp that have had positive repercussions on the political movement on several levels include:

- The formation of coalitions against the governing regime following parliamentary elections in 2000: several attempts have been launched by the opposition forces and parties to form alliances against the ruling regime in order to intensify the pressure on it and to enforce democratic transformation. For example, a number of parties have formed the "parties of national consensus" bloc, which included eight parties; these are al-Tagammu' (*The National Progressive Unionist Party, NPUP*), the Wafd, the Nasserist, the Labour Party, al-Umma (*the Nation*) Party, al-Geel al-Dimocrati (*Democratic Generation Party*), the Egypt 2000 Party and al-Wefak al-Kawmy (*the National Conciliation*) Party. These parties held a conference on 21st September 2004, during which the bloc announced a programme of political reform (Elaph, 2006). Other parties and opposition forces formed the "20th March Movement for Change," which includes civil society organisations such as the "Hesham Mubarak Law Centre," banned groups, such as the "Muslim Brotherhood" and the "Communist Party", and independent intellectuals. This coalition's name refers to the

¹ The slogan "no voice should be louder than the voice of the battle" was invented in Nasser's era, when Egyptians were urged to prioritise fighting against foreign invasion. The slogan is usually revived on occasions when collective action is mobilised and it was echoed during the latest uprisings in Egypt and in other Arab countries.

day Cairo witnessed massive demonstrations to condemn the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. This coalition mobilised against President Mubarak's nomination for a fifth term in office in 2005, and declared its absolute rejection of 'heredity' and Gamal Mubarak's succession to the presidency (Shehata, 2004).

- The '*Kefaya*' Movement: the most prominent amongst these blocs is that enrolled under the umbrella of the "National Front for Change" ahead of the 2005 parliamentary elections, which included al-Wafd Party, al-Tagammu' Party (NPUP), the Labour Party and the Nasserist Party, in addition to a number of new movements for change, e.g., the Egyptian Movement for Change (EMC) (*Kefaya*), and both al-Wasat (*the Centre*) Party and the Karama party (*the Dignity Party*) (both of which were then under construction).

This loose coalition of political groups has used the Internet heavily to meet its overarching goal of opposition to President Hosni Mubarak and the prospective succession of his son, Gamal Mubarak. It is argued (Isherwood, 2008) that most of the currently influential bloggers started their political blogging at this time. The vigorous new opposition that has emerged or evolved around the *Kefaya* opposition group has formed a coalition that also includes the active role of the Muslim Brothers, intellectuals, and civil society activists who have also operated as incentives for reform (Brown, Dunne & Hamzawy, 2007). The group took to the streets for the first time without prior governmental permission. In 2005, constitutional amendments were enacted to allow the choice of the president through multi-candidate elections rather than by the plebiscitary system of presidential elections in a step that aimed to ameliorate one of the major deficits in Egypt's democracy. These deficits also include the state-of-emergency laws that have been enacted since 1981, and human rights violations that are attached to the fight against the Muslim Brothers' swelling force (Harik, 1994).

The 2005 presidential elections and the political activism the elections provoked have forcefully driven Egyptian bloggers "from obscurity to the heart of the new Arab public sphere of transnational media" (Haugbolle, 2007, p. 1). The movement failed to spread beyond intellectuals and the political elite and engage with millions of young Egyptians (Osman, 2010). In February 2005, many Egyptian bloggers who were members of *Kefaya*

decided to form a more organised group; *al-Shabab min Agl al-Taghyeer*, or Youth for Change. Beside their online activities, they particularly participated in the Spring 2003 anti-Iraq war movement. In the shadow of the governmental roundup of protestors in the week following the anti-war demonstrations the movement faded, but it paved the way to criticism of domestic policy on the war (Fahmi, 2009, p. 96).

During 2006 and 2007, the political arena saw continuing attempts at coordination between the different parties and political forces, in order to form common alliances. The most prominent of these attempts was the one launched by al-Wafd Party, al-Tagammu' Party (NPUP), the Nasserist Party, and the Democratic Front in 2007. The four parties agreed to form a committee to develop and document national action to be discussed with political parties and other political groups, to form a new united front of all opposition forces (*al-Gomhouria Newspaper*, 26th September, 2007, in, Mneisy, 2011).

- The initiatives for political reform: In 2004, several political forces and key opposition parties launched significant initiatives for political reform in Egypt. However, introducing these initiatives individually confirms the failure of communication between the, at the time, ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) and other political forces. Nevertheless, these initiatives invigorated political life and provoked public debate on ways out of the stagnant status quo. Among the key initiatives are:

Initiative (1) was introduced by al-Tagammu' Party (NPUP) in May 2004. This initiative stipulated the call for the election of the president from a choice of more than one candidate and that the president should abandon his partisan affiliation throughout his time in office and identify and reduce the powers granted to him by the Constitution. The initiative also called for the abolition of the state of emergency, the release of political prisoners, the guarantee of free and fair elections, the freedom to form political parties, the assurance of the independence of the trade unions, NGOs and civil society institutions, the freedom to publish newspapers and of media ownership, and the liberalisation of the media and the national press from the control of the ruling party (Al-Tagammu' Initiative for Political Reform in Egypt, 2005) .

Initiative (2) was provided by the Muslim Brotherhood in March 2004, and called for the full recognition that the people are the source of all authorities. The initiative similarly stipulated that the powers granted to the state president should be determined, and not include executive responsibilities. A Presidency should not exceed two consecutive terms, and laws with a "bad reputation" should be abolished, especially the Emergency Law and the Trade Unions Act, which led to the political deadlock that ails Egyptian political life (Akef, 2004).

Initiative (3) was posed by the Egyptian Movement for Change (EMC) (*Kefaya*) through a statement it called "a statement to the nation", released in September 2004. This statement made the link between international pressures and plans that aimed to reshape the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) on the one hand, and the prevalence of domestic tyranny on the other, which requires comprehensive reform stemming from the people, rather than being imposed on them. The initiative identified the required reform as being a comprehensive political and constitutional reform that guarantees putting an end to the monopoly of power and the opening of a door for devolution, and the upholding of the rule of law and the judiciary's independence, also putting an end to the monopoly of wealth and the restoration of Egypt's role and position, which has been seriously shaken since the signing of the Camp David Accords with Israel in 1979 (Mneisy, 2011).

These initiatives have arguably created a "laboratory of ideas" (Mneisy, 2011, p. 98) that is much needed for political reform. They have defined the minimum and maximum limits of reform and have embodied the identity of the political change for which they aspire. Additionally, these initiatives have re-affirmed the political programmes for each individual political trend.

2.1.2.3. The growth of pro-reform demonstrations

In the aftermath of the May 2005 amendment of Article 76 regarding the election of the president from a selection of more than one candidate, Egypt has witnessed a significant uptake in the number of pro-reform demonstrations. Interestingly, for the first time in decades, the Muslim Brotherhood have taken to the streets to demonstrate and demand

reform. Despite repression, these demonstrations represented outspoken rebellion in the face of the regime and its large numbers of Central Security Forces. The key feature of these demonstrations is their national character, which has transcended political parties, both in symbols and in the slogans that were chanted to demand reform (Mneisy, 2011).

After the 2005 parliamentary and presidential elections, the protests continued to gain momentum with a shift in the dominant socio-economic incentive rather than demands that were politically based. It is worth mentioning, on this line, that the Egyptian regime, like other authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes, tends “not to coordinate and particularly to keep socio-economic and political demands separate” (Ottaway & Hamzawy, 2011, p. 1). Such tactics, according to Ottaway and Hamzawy have helped the Egyptian regime to remain in power despite the high levels of dissatisfaction.

These demonstrations represented a public awakening and a collective challenge to the regime which refused to allow such forms of opinion expression. As such, collective actions were able to grab the constitutional right to demonstrate, and they contributed to the spread of a culture of objection amongst the ordinary citizens. These demonstrations were also an opportunity to express different theses of political reform. In addition they were an opportunity to expose the regime’s and its various institutions’ excesses, particularly those of the security agencies. Additionally, the demonstrations revealed the shortcomings in the regime's policies and its failure to deal with many issues and problems, including unemployment, high prices and corruption. Such problems were the headlines for many of the demonstrations. Finally, these demonstrations, which actually embodied a direct opposition action to the ruling regime, represented a mechanism for coordination and communication between the opposition forces and parties, and extended the bridges of cooperation between these powers who were seeking for the same purpose, i.e., political reform and an ending to political tyranny.

2.1.2.4. The blogger movement

Political blogging grew significantly in Egypt during 2005 and 2006, and contributed to the development and growth of the political movement. Considering the evolution of blogging

in Egypt reveals a number of important facts; firstly, blogging, which began with writing diaries, soon became a widespread form of citizen journalism. Secondly, it moved to an even more important stage when bloggers began to lead campaigns to condemn corruption and tyranny and to expose torture. Bloggers became the new opinion leaders in the community, as blogging has become a powerful force for pressure on the regime.

By the time blogging arrived in Egypt in 2003-2004 it “accelerated the pace of changes triggered a decade ago by the growth of satellite television and independent press” (Isherwood, 2008, p.2). Blogging, despite its limitations, has heralded a new era of youth participation in political life in Egypt. “Like all Internet-based media, blogs reverse hierarchies of age and empower the language and worldview of the young generation” (Haugbolle, 2007, p. 22).

Blogs have gained wide popularity as one of the pillars of political movements that support democracy in the Arab world. Egyptian bloggers are one of the most prominent exemplars of this connection. Unlike most formal websites, blogs were originally designed as personal diaries, which make them more appealing to youth and easier to use. The first generation of Egyptian bloggers was a handful of the national elite, innovators who were dedicated to freedom of expression. They mainly publish in English, addressing personal audiences of friends internally, and a Western, English speaking audience externally. It was not until bloggers started to post in the Arabic language that blogs started to reach wider circles of the Egyptian audiences (Radsch, 2008). It is argued that one of the reasons behind blogs’ popularity all over the Arab world is their use of Arabic colloquial language, which is closer to the everyday spoken language that people use to communicate with each other, as opposed to the more formal Arabic normally used in the media (Rinnawy, 2011).

Nevertheless, in most Arab countries, it is argued that blogs are still the territory of the middle and upper classes. Blogs may also be less common due to the moderate numbers of Internet users in Egypt and the language barriers. Nevertheless, the blogging impact could actually reach wider circles than the blogosphere’s actual size. Early Egyptian bloggers have multiplied the effects of their activism through building networks of bloggers, activists, ‘techies’ and journalists. For example, techies help to overcome the Language

barriers and to develop Arabic writing. Other bloggers worked as journalists and had links with international news organisations. Through 'cross-fertilisation', blogs helped the new technology to gain momentum (Radsch, 2008). Isherwood (2008) adds that the actual size of the blogosphere, although difficult to assess, belies the impact the blogs may have. He argues that blogs have a "multiplier effect" because they influence the mainstream media which reach larger audiences (p. 4). Blogging in English also allows bloggers to transcend national borders and to reach international human rights groups, media, researchers and, most importantly, a community of other bloggers worldwide (Haugbolle, 2007).

Change and democracy need "freedom fighters" (Amin, 2002, p. 133). Reality today reflects a sincere aspiration –especially in young people- for more freedom to practise a positive role in their society's reform. Although facing problems of access and experience which can affect the efficacy needed to make the best use of the Internet, Egyptian bloggers have managed to build up their capabilities and to represent a very good example in combining cyberpolitical activism with street actions for democratic reforms. They are practising a kind of "citizen journalism" that combines text with pictures of police abuse and assaults in order to build a "contemporary archive of Egypt's battle for democracy" (Fahmi, 2009, p. 91-92).

Empirical evidence shows how Internet activists, especially bloggers and SM users, have managed to draw international attention to security practices against Egyptian citizens. Over the past few years, young activists have succeeded in 'mainstreaming' politicised SM content and so they voice their message to the wider public. Their weblogs and posts on SM platforms on police violations and brutality against citizens have embarrassed the Egyptian media to provide coverage of many stories, which-in some cases-led to the trials of policemen and security agents who were involved in the violations. They also use these platforms for meeting, organising and for gaining solidarity to support their cause.

Through practising political blogging, Egyptian bloggers have succeeded in bringing many sensitive issues and authoritative violations to public attention. For example:

- Blogs exposed violations that took place on 25th May 2005 during the referendum on the amendment of Article 76 of the Constitution. This day witnessed a number of violations by the security forces; notably of the sexual harassment and assault of a group of girls in the demonstration that was organised in front of the Press Syndicate in downtown Cairo. Documenting the events on the weblogs led to the acceptance of the case filed by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR). Egyptian investigative entities considered the evidence insufficient to convict anyone. The Commission found that the Egyptian state had failed to protect four women journalists from violence and in doing so it had violated their human rights, including their rights to equality and non-discrimination, their right to dignity and to protection from cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and their right to express and disseminate opinions within the law (EIPR, 2013).
- Bloggers have also played a significant role in demonstrating and archiving events in solidarity with the Egyptian judges protesting against the fraud that plagued the 2005 elections. In 2006, a number of senior judges have called for an open sit-in to demand the judiciary's independence. A group of activists organised a sit-in next to the Judges' Club in Cairo, which was attended by a number of activists and bloggers, who succeeded in monitoring the details of the crackdown on the sit-in and the detention of protesters by security forces (Human Rights Watch, World Report, 2006).
- A cellphone video of two policemen torturing and humiliating a minibus driver in January 2006 was widely circulated on Egyptian blogs. Posting the cellphone video and tracking the events on the blogs has spread the word widely and has revealed practices that otherwise would have been kept in the dark. Wael Abbas, one of the most prominent and influential Egyptian bloggers, posted the video on his blog *Misr digit@l* (Egyptian Awareness), which created wide dissemination before the story was picked up by the independent newspapers *al-Fagr* and *al-Masry al-Youm*. The minibus driver was then identified and persuaded to pursue the case. The cellphone video was used as evidence against the police officers during the trial, which eventually found the two police officers guilty (Isherwood, 2008; Pintak, 2008).

- A number of blogs have emerged in the Egyptian political arena and have had a clear impact on political movements in Egypt. Including the aforementioned “misrdigital.blogspot.com” by Wael Abbas, “egyworkers.blogspot.com” by Karem El-Behrey, a worker in the Mahalla factory, which provided a vivid picture of the workers’ sit-in at the factory in 2007, and the “Alaa and Manal” blog, which has been remarkably active in uploading news of protests and demonstrations in Egypt during 2005 and 2006.

2.2. Young Egyptians: A flawed political culture and exclusion mechanisms

In a country whose public has always feared government retaliation against dissent and where the national press is rarely critical of the state, few citizens demonstrate active opposition to the regime. They are generally loyal to it, apathetic toward it, or, at most, suspicious of it (Iskandar, 2006, p. 18).

Despite the reforms that have been made, and the liveliness that the Egyptian media environment has witnessed with the Internet’s arrival and the privatisation waves that echoed in Egypt as part of the wider globalisation trend, it has been argued that these reforms did not go beyond being cosmetic changes in a stagnant sociopolitical environment. Amongst all political and economic liberalisation, the dominant fact remains the prevalence of Presidency –even in economic matters. The ‘control’ function is the first role played by the government when compared to the developmental and welfare function, or, as Ayubi (1982b) puts it: “there is too much government where it is least needed, and too little government when it is needed most”. As a presidential state, “the President is the dominant political and governmental authority” (Tripp & Owen, 1989, p. 2). The Egyptian constituency could not find their way in the political arena upon which the government kept its hegemony. Their withdrawal from the political and civic life did not derive from a religious, ethnic, or cultural context (Meital, 2006, p. 258), but, rather, was due to the unsupportive environment, practically buttressed by governmental censorship of the media.

However, ‘Egypt is at a stage in its demographic transition with a marked “youth bulge”, a period in which the proportion of youth in the population increases significantly compared to other age groups’ (Assaad & Barsoum, 2007, p. 5). As shown in Figure 2.1 and Table 2.1 below, more than a quarter of the Egyptian population is youth aged 20 – 34 years-old all

born in Mubarak’s era and raised up in the age of the Internet and open spaces, albeit not all of them have the capacity to enjoy it, as will be discussed in Section 2.3.3.

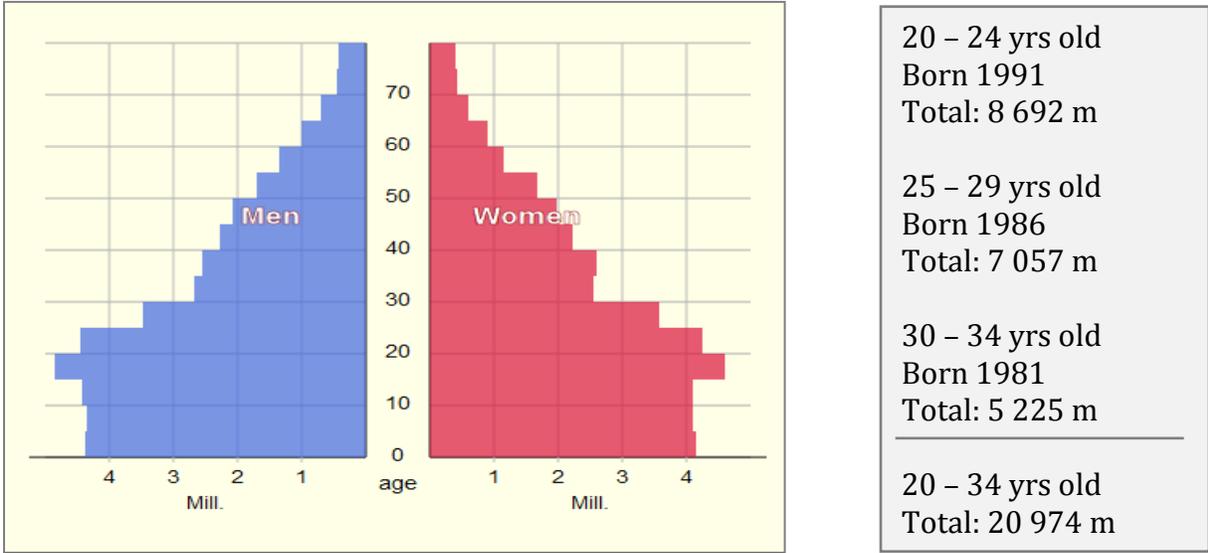


Figure 2.1: The population pyramid, Egypt 2011

Source: CAPMAS, 2012

Table 2.1: Population distribution by age and gender in Egypt in 2011

Source: CAPMAS, 2012

Age	Million	%	% Female	% Male
65+	3.01	3.7	47.9	52.1
20 – 64	42.44	52.8	49.2	50.8
<20	34.96	43.5	48.5	51.5
Total	80.4	100	48.9	51.1

Young Egyptians seem to be alienated from their sociopolitical milieu. They are excluded from public life by hard life conditions that render them hardly free to make their own choices, or are raised within a political culture that does not normally favour civic engagement and political participation. Egypt Human Development Report (EHDR) of 2010 shows that only 7 percent of Egyptian male youth perceive participation as their first priority compared to 42 percent who are preoccupied with sex and its psychological aspects and related physical needs. As for females, only 4 percent prioritised political participation over other concerns (UNDP & INP, 2010). It could be said, then, that Egyptian

youth are geographically unavailable; as they suffer “personal constraints that may increase the costs and risks of movement participation” (McAdam, 1986, p. 70). Expectedly, the youth participation rate in political life is very weak. Only 28 percent participated in the 2005 parliamentary election and 23 percent voted in the 2005 presidential election (UNDP & RBAS, 2009)

Under an authoritarian form of governance, political participation has not been authenticated by tradition in Egyptian society. People have been excluded from public life and marginalised in terms of taking part in the decision making process. They have been disaffected due to being overburdened with daily life problems. Within such a political and social environment, new generations are not expected to be properly “introduced to institutions, mores and practices of democratic governance” (Loader, 2007, p. 1). It is argued that “the blame for modest participation and little civic engagement from youth should be placed on the present cultural and political environment in Egypt rather than on the youth themselves” (UNDP & INP, 2010). About 82 percent of the sample of the World Values Survey (WVS) (2005-2008) stressed the importance of preserving customs and traditions that are embedded in religion and family as characteristics that completely apply to them. Citizens have been brought up to have submissive perceptions and passive notions of political participation, either as being dangerous or inefficient at bringing about any feasible change. Notions like ‘walk beside the wall’ (a phrase usually used in Egypt as advice to avoid getting one’s self into trouble), and ‘mind your own business’, are popular clichés in Egyptian public discourse and are sincere advice from caring parents who do not want their ‘children’ to get into trouble by getting involved in politics. Such negative stereotypes and disaffecting norms, either cultivated by socialising institutions (family and school) or implied and imposed by the regime, may have induced a bitter feeling of alienation among younger generations.

This feeling of alienation and exclusion is fed by the absence of a national project around which Egyptian youth can congregate. In diagnosing and analysing Egypt’s political illnesses, Bishry (2006), Amin (2009) and Abdel Meguid (2005), prominent Egyptian intellectuals and activists, all agree, although from different approaches, that the lack of

such a national project is among the main causes and symptoms of these illnesses. Comparing the eras of Nasser and Sadat with Mubarak's, Bishry and Amin, for example, argue that this very absence of a national project in the latter's time has resulted in the absence of politics along with the national interest; as Mubarak's appointees lacked political competences and skills. Amin discusses how this absence of a national project has resulted in a major shift in the regime's focus, from meeting the expectations of Egyptians to satisfying the Western allies. The result is, of course, higher degrees of corruption in a 'self-centered' state that grew softer while possessing the absolute power of suppression. In fact, Egypt was exhausted by two consecutive national projects: Nasser's socialism and then Sadat's capitalism, which made a pause in the period of recovery necessary (Shorbagy, 2009). However, it seems that Mubarak's regime "turned a needed pause into a process of putting the whole society in the freezer until it has been hard to bring society back to healthy normal status" (Abdel Meguid, 2005, p. 12, cited in, Shorbagy, 2009, p. 524).

In the 'freezer,' and with the dependence relationship that links the society up with the state, Egyptians were found to be more inclined to give away their political rights not to render their individual interests volatile. They seem to prefer the status quo if it guarantees the least level of supplies bestowed on them by the regime. The comparative research conducted by the Pew Global Attitudes Project of the Egyptians' attitudes before and after the 25th January 2011 revolt shows that 53 percent of Egyptian adults preferred a 'strong economy' on a 'good democracy' (The Pew Global Attitudes Project, 2011). 'The potential for the creation of an enabling environment also appears to be undermined by the country's record of democracy and by a security apparatus that is intolerant of any form of public display' (UNDP & INP, 2010). The police institution was found to be unpopular especially among older Egyptians, the poor, the less educated, and urban dwellers according to the Pew research (PewResearchCentre, 2011). Only 39 percent of Egyptians say the police are having a good impact, while 61 percent believe they are having a bad effect. Several political, social and economic indicators show how a significant sector of the Egyptians is either pessimistic or indifferent about the situation in their country and suspect that any change would take place.

The Pew research shows that the majority of the Egyptian adults who took part in the survey (53 %) rank 'lack of democracy' top of their concerns in recent years and 69 percent said they were dissatisfied with the way things were going in Egypt. However, a sizable proportion of the participants were cautious about transformation to democracy as almost a quarter of the research sample (1000 adults) said that a nondemocratic government can be preferable in some circumstances, while 16 percent felt politically inefficacious and excluded themselves totally from the equation believing that the kind of government they have does not concern people 'like them'. This might have resulted in 'inherent forms of apathy' and individualism (PewResearchCentre, 2011). With such set of beliefs, it is expected that generations grow up with notions of inefficiency and indifference.

Younger cohorts showed significant degrees of disaffection and disenchantment with politics. A considerable proportion of Egyptian youth was found to embrace a set of political norms and attitudes that are unfavourable to participation. A survey of 398 politics students conducted in 1998 revealed that more than one third of the students were not interested in politics, although they were reading politics as a subject. Students showed moderate levels of political knowledge and 8.5 percent of them seemed completely isolated from what was happening in the world (Noweir, 2001). Only 41 percent of the students knew the duration of the term of office specified in the Egyptian Institution and, strikingly, 1.8 percent of them said that presidency was a 'lifetime job.' Concerning freedom of thought and expression, conservatism seemed to have leaked into these students' minds. 56 percent of the student participants believed in religious authority and thought that clergy and *sheikhs* (preachers) should be the reference in *every* aspect of life and that traditions and norms are the limits that define freedom of expression and beliefs. Twelve percent of these students believed that their voices were not valuable in influencing politics in the country. As might be expected, dependency values accompanied these beliefs. One in five students thought that it was 'entrusted to God to end the rule of a tyrant' (Noweir, 2001). Similarly, 62 percent of youth surveyed in the WVS 2005-2008 held the state responsible for gratifying their needs and aspirations (UNDP & INP, 2010).

This is not to say that youth apathy from active participation in society is solely imposed by external factors and higher forces. Rather, Egyptian youth could be joining a common generational tendency backwards from public activity, which is argued to be alienating citizens from public activity in many countries worldwide (Loader, 2007, p. 1). It also seems that a generational gap is widening between youth and their political representatives on several levels of political practice. Werdany (2011) ascribes the widening gulf between the political leaders and the young generation to the former's laxity in listening to youth and in addressing their needs. For example, President Mubarak used to have an annual meeting with students from Egyptian universities, nevertheless this habit has been interrupted since 2002. Moreover, Mubarak did not appear at any of the four national youth conferences that were held between 2007 and 2010, and Gamal Mubarak, or the Prime Minister, substituted for his father as Secretary of the Policy Committee of the NDP. Werdany also notes the decrease in youth's significance in the official discourse and adds that the President mentioned the word 'youth' only twice in his speeches before the People's Assembly and the Shura Council in their joint sessions, held between 2005 and 2010. However, Mubarak's annual meeting with students is perceived to be a 'satirical play' in which the students are carefully selected before they rehearse the scenario of the meeting in advance, rather than being a real opportunity for free conversation with the state president (Werdany, 2011).

Arguably, this generational chasm is alienating youth even in the opposition camp. Older, exhausted faces dominate the Egyptian political arena, and they have very little appreciation for youth's achievements, or even an appreciation of and tolerance with their views (Osman, 2010).

In such a milieu, it was expected that Mubarak's initiative, announced on February 2005, to amend Section 76 of the Constitution to allow more than one candidate to run for the Egyptian presidency, would heighten public debate. The initiative was described by local media as "an earthquake" (*zilzal*) and "a new stage" (*marhala jadida*). Hadia Mostafa, a senior writer for the magazine *Egypt Today*, ascribes the cultural shock that accompanied Mubarak's proposal to the Egyptians' blemished political culture.

The source of surprise lies in the local mentality, where no-one ever dreams of the possibility that one day he will become president of the country. 'The 'I want to grow up to be president someday' mentality, common among ambitious young dreamers in Western democracies, is completely alien to us (Meital, 2009, pp. 264, 265).

2.2.1. Egyptian youth: Alternative mechanisms for inclusion

Such internal and external exclusion mechanisms, and the failure to include youth in the community, appear to propel them to seek refuge in substitute bodies where they can find a frame of reference and guidance. It has been argued that young Egyptians, both from the liberal capitalist and Islamic camps, seek refuge in the past in search of their encrypted identity and "their own definition of a twenty-first century Egyptian project. They represented the need of the millions of young Egyptians to rise above their unfortunate situation and to cling to something they could be proud of, some frame of reference, a skeleton of an identity" (Osman, 2010, pp. 211, 213). Bayat (1998) states that Islamist movements provide an "alternative social, cultural and moral community" for disaffected groups that include youth (cited in Assaad & Barsoum, 2009, p. 83). It is argued that youth resort to religious groups and institutions (Christian and Muslim) for several reasons, the most important of which is the widening chasm between political discourse and what political leaders actually do, which makes youth cynical about politicians, while religious groups are seen to be keen about their interests. Youth also blame the 'dysfunctional system of governance' for unemployment and the economic difficulties that they face. Left with time on their hands, little to do and much despair, they either become violent or withdraw into a spiritual space. Growing up with an ongoing discourse of the failure of state and society, while seeing religious movements addressing phenomena like social inequalities, class discrimination, corruption and education, makes them a good source of psychological reassurance (UNDP & INP, 2010)

However, Osman (2010) claims that "the accumulating influence of [this] significant Salafist sway on Egyptian society is making many young Egyptians more anti-secular, anti-liberal and anti-Western" (p. 221). The cultural map of the World Value Survey delineates how traditional (as compared to secular-rational) and survival (versus self-expression) values prevail in Egypt, culturally placing the country in the 'traditional/survival values'

quarter with a potential proximity to the ‘self-expression’ quarter (see Figure 2.2). On the other side of the coin, Egyptian youth who have the opportunity to attain Western-style education, which has more inclination towards democracy, are proportionally still small in number if compared to students enrolled in public educational institutions, which might on the one hand, pose some difficulties in their capability to reach and influence a mass base. On the other hand, it may create sensitivity and cultural and ideological clashes when different groups of youth from different backgrounds work collectively.

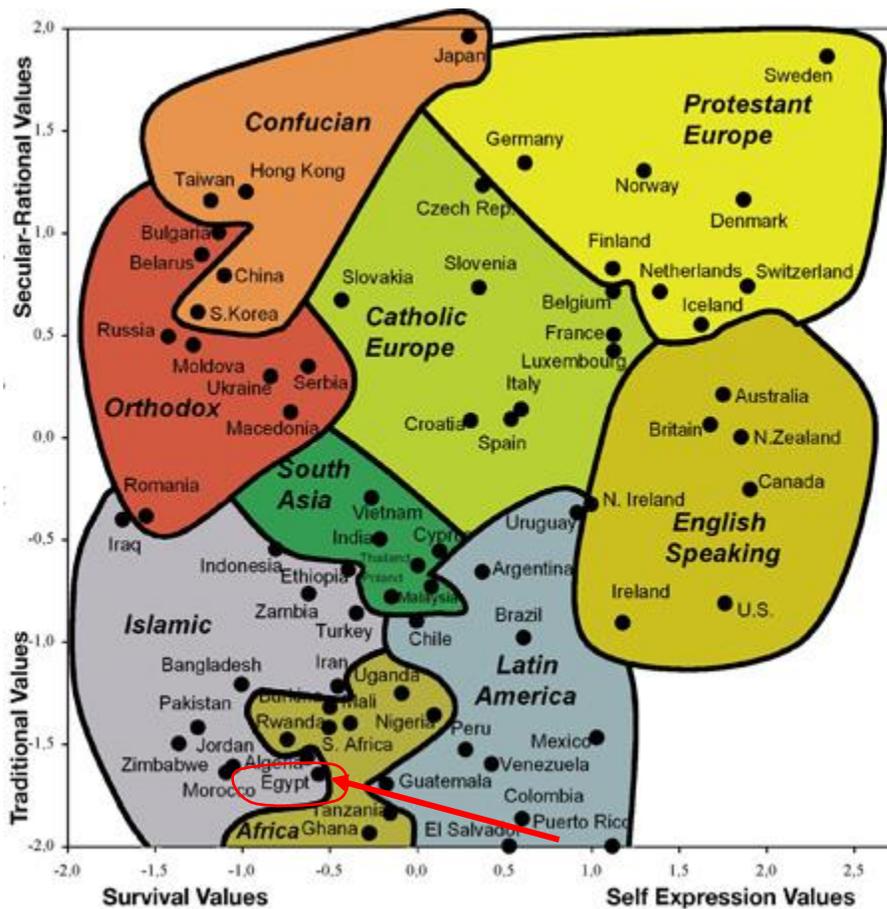


Figure 2.2: The World Value Survey Cultural Map 2005-2008²
 Source: (Inglehart & Welzel, 2010, p. 554)

² This map reflects the fact that a large number of basic values are closely correlated; they can be depicted in just two major dimensions of cross-cultural variation: (1) Traditional/ Secular-rational and (2) Survival/Self-expression values. Each country is positioned according to its people's values and not to its geographical location. To a large extent, the two coincide, but the map measures cultural, not geographical, proximity.

2.3. Egypt's dual media environment: Freer communication and limited participation

Egyptian audiences live in a continuous state of media duality that has long affected their perception of their proximate political milieu and has created a chasm between them and their society that is deepening by engrained feelings of inefficacy and cynicism. Paradoxically, the Egyptian government controls information and acts as a watchdog on the state's performance. The main 'data bank' in Egypt, the Central Agency for Public Mobilisation and Statistics (CAMPAS), is affiliated to the Presidency and is headed by an ex-army general. The Central Auditing Agency (CAA) is responsible for controlling and evaluating the state's public sector and economic activities and is also linked to the Presidency (Ayubi, 1989). Moreover, creating a Ministry of Information reflects the goal of manipulating public opinion by promoting only one viewpoint (Zaki, 1994).

With the deficiency in Egypt's state media liberalisation, it is argued that "a vibrant media system that encourages civil society, civic participation and political empowerment remains a distant mirage" (Iskandar, 2006, p. 17). Indeed, allowing multi-candidate presidential election for the first time in Egypt's political history was an unprecedented step upon which many optimistic aspirations towards political reform in the whole Arab region arose. Vibrant political activism and feverish waves of dissent that condemned the 'automated' succession of Mubarak's presidency, accompanied by growing fears of a hereditary presidency, in addition to international pressure for reform, have all resulted in the announcement of the new legislation. However, despite the fact that the newly announced constitutional reforms marked a great change in Arab history, and invited new faces to the Egyptian polity, it was arguably too early to place hopes on such reforms that would be politically liberalising and transformative (Iskandar, 2006).

The following pages outline various areas in the Egyptian media environment. They aim to shed light on the shortcomings as well as on the new opportunities for participation that may have been created recently by the developments that have been made to the Egyptian media sector.

2.3.1. The Egyptian press

Although freedom of expression is guaranteed *de jure* in Egypt, *de facto*, it is widely suppressed. The government, represented by the Consultative Council (the Shura), owns what is conventionally referred to as the “national press”. Among the three main categories of newspapers in Egypt, national governmental dailies (*kawmiya*), official party dailies (*hezbiya*), and independent and privately-run publications (*mustakila*), the state-owned publications include the biggest daily newspapers *al-Ahram*, *al-Ahkbar* and *al-Gomhouria*, which have huge budgets and prestigious, powerful voices, while the opposition and independent press suffers from limited resources and the constraints of governmental licensing procedures. It is worth mentioning that while state-owned papers have shown consistent loyalty to the governing regime and its policies, some foreign language versions of Egypt’s papers have enjoyed more freedom and have strayed from the straight and sustained path of political loyalty (Iskandar, 2006). These include *al-Ahram Weekly* (English) and *al-Ahram Hebdo* (French). However, these publications do not enjoy wide scale distribution, which might have put the government at ease in terms of worrying about the potential impact they might have had on steering the public opinion.

Most of the *hezbiya* newspapers (official party dailies) are, in fact, incompetent and ineffectual, since they mostly fall into two categories; those that align themselves with the government and compete to gain its blessings, although posing as opposition papers, and those that prioritise scandal material over policy issues and which attack the state on personal rather than objective grounds. These could thus harm the political arena as neither being informative nor as politicising and increasing public awareness. Rather, they could be deceptive, that is, they are perceived to be ‘opposition’ newspapers while not properly performing that role. This code of practice has also left the opposition fragmented and diluted (Iskandar, 2006).

The third type is the *mustakila* newspapers. These are independent, unaffiliated papers with diverse political tendencies. They include *al-Masry al-Youm*, *al-Dostour*, and *al-Maydan* newspapers, which are mostly produced and operated by young, talented practitioners as reporters, editors and cartoonists. These have evolved in the last few years, confirming the

desire for more freedom (Pintak, 2008, p. 2) and gaining growing popularity amongst the increasing numbers of readers who aspire to listen to a third voice. Interestingly, some tend to consume the whole meal of the Egyptian press and read a sample of each of the three types (over optimistic and illusive, over pessimistic and depressive, and more realistic and critical) before they decide to take one side or another.

The press resurgence in Egypt has proved beneficial on the quantitative front. An abundance of opposition and independent publications have been produced. Qualitatively, these publications have either supported the political stance, refraining from directly criticising the regime and its symbols and allies, or resorted to unconstructive political dispute. Despite the opposition press having proliferated after enjoying a relatively large margin of editorial latitude dating back to 1982, and consecutive waves of reforms and openness, this freedom is still operationally defined within the vague parameters of 'state interest'. In practice, journalists have never reached the level of direct criticism of the President or the armed forces, although they have criticised particular government practices and policies (McDermott, 1988; Zaki, 1994). Egypt's penal code includes numerous provisions that violate international law by imposing criminal penalties of imprisonment for "insulting" public officials and institutions, including the president (article 179), public officials (article 185), foreign kings or heads of state (article 180), and foreign diplomats (article 182) (refworld, 2012). 'The preservation of the state' is almost *the* reason behind the government practices of limiting freedom of expression and imposing political pressures on practitioners who breach the boundaries. These pressures vary and can result in dismissal, censorship, restraints on travel, physical assault, threats, arrest, detention, torture, abduction, passport withdrawals and exile. The Emergency Law, the Press Law, and penal code provisions confine the media, despite constitutional assurances of press freedom. Nearly 35 articles in various laws stipulate penalties for the media. Even after amendments to the Press Law in 2006, dissemination of "false news," criticism of the president and foreign leaders, and publication of material that constitutes "an attack against the dignity and honour of individuals" or an "outrage against the reputation of families" remain criminal offences that are prosecuted unscrupulously by the authorities (refworld, 2010). Such a restricted milieu cannot be expected to produce high

standard reporting, when some reporters would even slide into scandalous reporting. In such an oppressive and threatening environment, journalists fear confrontation with the political system and consequently tend to enhance self-censorship and refrain from voicing criticism (Amin, 2002, p. 127).

This is not to say that the Egyptian press is empty of thoughtful criticisms of governmental policies (McDermott, 1988), yet these may possibly do little in terms of enabling vigorous opposition or of informing the public, let alone in educating them civically and politically, a virtue that seems to be more widely served by the duality of the broadcasting media environment.

2.3.2. Television broadcasting in Egypt

Broadcast media is a significant means of reaching and shaping public thought in a country with a total adult illiteracy rate of 34% (UNICEF, 2005-2008). Similarly to the press, the state also owns and has the monopoly on the broadcast media. Strict censorship is exerted over broadcast media outlets to promote the Egyptian state's point of view and to mobilise public thought behind the government's policy and plans that aim to manipulate public opinion and to present the scarce alternative viewpoints via state-owned and state-operated broadcasting media (Zaki, 1994). Consequently, when compared to the Egyptian press, criticising the government is all but absent on Egyptian television, which almost intertwine the government (as an institution) with the National Democratic Party (NDP) (Iskandar, 2006).

However, with the wave of globalisation, the media spectrum has witnessed significant transformations that have altered media roles, not only in terms of media content, but also in the way audiences receive this content. Regional and global television growth has been a main feature of the 1990s in the Arab region (Ayish, 2011). As a result, it is argued that Arab media no longer echo the interests of the manipulative regimes that control media outlets and use them to propagate their development plans. Rather, they serve as a means of information and entertainment. However, this notion is contested, even in established

democracies where big companies control media and “do not, in fact, contribute to the expression of alternative political points of view” (Nasser, 2012, p. 1).

As might be expected, Egypt, among other Arab countries, was reluctant to join the trend to media privatisation, while the Gulf States and Lebanon took the lead. Although the privatisation process of Arab media and telecommunications started in the late 1990s, it was not until the end of 2001 that Egypt's first privately owned satellite network, Dream TV, was launched (Rinnawy, 2011, p. 150). This paradigm shift was basically pushed by the U.S. Bush Administration to incite democratic transformation in the Middle East in the wake of the September 11 attacks. It also went in tandem with introducing Gamal Mubarak to the Egyptian political scene, as private satellite stations backed the hereditary succession project (Nasser, 2012). Cautious steps were taken to emancipate *'the medium of the people'*, apparently to keep tight control on a platform deemed to be the most influential in reaching the public and shaping their consciousness. These private satellite channels have generally abided by the 'red lines' rule and have scarcely strayed from the track defined by the regime and supported by their businessmen allies who owned those channels and made every effort to guarantee that the red lines were clearly understood and that borders would not be breached. These red lines, according to Dr. Mohammed Kamal, then General Secretary of the NDP, “are regarded as the threshold that should not be breached by any form of opinion expression” (Kamal, 2010). That is, when such violations intermittently take place, they were met with decisive measurements that range from warnings to dismissal and suppressing the display of programmes.

Several contemporary examples show the code of conduct that the regime followed when media practitioners, even in the private and/or independent media, violated the limits and harmed the 'prestige of the State' (*haybat addawla*). After the abrupt banning of his TV programme on Egyptian television, the 'Chief Editor' (*Ra'ees al-Tahrir*), for undisclosed reasons, Hamdi Kandil, a veteran journalist and one of Egypt's most prominent media personalities, started his show 'Pencil' (*Kalam Rasas*) which was featured on Dubai TV. In 1962, Kandil's TV show 'Press Releases' (*Akwat Assohuf*) was suspended because he broadcast news about Nasser, then the state president. A consecutive series of programme

prohibition has granted Kandil the title 'banned from the show' (*al-mamnou' men al-ard*). In all cases, the reason for suspension was always implicitly understood but never openly discussed. Another freedom fighter, Ibrahim Essa, editor of the opposition independent newspaper 'The Constitution', (*al-Dustour*), founded in 1995 and revived in 2005 after a government crackdown, was sentenced to two months in prison on the charge of "Propagating false news and rumours causing general security disturbance and harming public interest" and "Intentionally publishing false news that may hurt public safety" (refworld, 2008). Essa faced the charges because he dared to discuss the issue of President Mubarak's health in the press. Ironically, both journalists were given several awards for their distinguished achievements in journalism. The Arabic Media Watch Institute awarded Kandil the prestigious Media Accomplishment Award in London in 2006 (WALEG, 2006), and Essa was granted the International Journalist of the Year Press Award for 2011 (PressGazette, 2011).

The government has long acted to curb freedom of expression and to set limitations that restrict the development of investigative journalism. The turning point occurred with the inception of the Qatar-based Al-Jazeera TV in 1996. With the intention to shake up the media landscape, the channel introduced the region to a diversity of voices and a kind of critical journalism never before seen in the Arab world. With the arrival of Arab satellite television and the so-called "Al-Jazeera Effect", public attitudes started to shift towards the unsteady democracy agenda across the region. A survey of 601 journalists from 14 Arab countries showed that 75 percent of the Arab journalists involved in the survey believed that to "encourage political reform" is the most significant job of an Arab journalist. Almost half of the participants described themselves as "supporters of democratic change". The survey demonstrates that the majority of the Arab journalists fall within the "Change Agent" typology; as setting an agenda based on political and social change is their top priority (Pintak, 2008, p. 1, 2). Since then, several satellite television channels with different affiliations and political leanings have been broadcasting to the Arab region. Different trends and diverse voices have been interplaying in shaping the Egyptian, and Arab, public consciousness. The Al-Arabiya Satellite Television Channel, for example, has been perceived as tilting toward a moderate media discourse and to embracing a less

sensational tone when handling political issues if compared to its rival, Al-Jazeera. Researchers' views have varied between framing the performance of Al-Jazeera channel as being a genuine representation of pluralistic journalism that contributes to cultivating informed public consciousness in the Arab world (Lynch, 2006; El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2002), and depicting the channel as being no more than a mouthpiece for Arab and Islamic radicalism (Ayish, 2011).

Western media influence in the Arab region dates back to the 1930s. Among the justifications for such a growing interest in the region is the competition over disseminating knowledge in an area deemed to be overwhelmingly deprived of information due to state control (Iskandar, 2007, p. 5) as well as depicting this boom as being part of the ongoing political competition between non-Arab governments that were providing the services (Ayish, 2011). Foreign broadcasters, like the U.S.-sponsored al-Hurra and BBC Arabic Television, have been analysed through a public diplomacy lens and are seen as media outlets that aim to fulfill foreign-diplomacy goals (see for example, Gillespie et al., 2008). Arab audiences have also been targeted by escalating television broadcasting services that have been launched by foreign broadcasters, such as RT Russia Today Arabic, France 24 Arabic, and Sky News Arabia, launched in late 2012 (Ayish, 2011).

Ayish (2002) argues that the initiation of Western-style television channels in the Arab world has cultivated new journalism competences that drive challenging and inquisitive debates for the benefit of enlightening public opinion. The openness in the media landscape has also overwhelmingly benefitted the audiences, who are exposed to richer and more diverse content and hence have the choice to navigate the space and select what best suits their taste and better gratifies their needs. This change in the media landscape has, to a significant extent, ameliorated the access and availability issues that may hinder audience activity (Holmes, 2005, p. 58). Audiences are becoming more active in selecting content that fits their preferences and media, especially the broadcast and other electronic media, have to keep up with their expectations. It could be said, then, that with the abundance of media outlets and the growing private and semi-private TV channels, audiences are no

longer at the mercy of state-controlled media outlets. On the contrary, these outlets have to strive to keep their share of audiences in this competitive growing market.

When it comes to content, a good example of the new role that the broadcast media have been playing since the inception of private and semi-private TV channels can be seen in the evolution of talk show programmes and the prominent role that they have been playing in highlighting societal problems and in debating important political issues and occasionally causing public opinion congestion. A glaring example is the *Opposite Direction (al-Ettegah al-Mo'aakes)*, a weekly, live, political, *crossfire*-style talk show which, it has been argued, has been “widening the gap between the governments and the people” (Zayani, 2005, p. 102).

The Egyptian talk show scene is lively and crowded. Programmes like *al-Ashera Masa'an* (10 PM) and *Tes'een Dakika* (90 minutes) and many others have played an essential role in bringing citizens face-to-face with their daily problems, creating political proximity to vital issues and invigorating debate amongst the Egyptian public. However, with diverse codes of practice, modes of address and ways of approach all in one frame, Egyptians, as well as other Arab audiences, are said to be living in a ‘schizophrenic’ media sphere where, comparing the substance and style of services delivered by national, regional, and international providers is far from being favourable to national television. In such a dual milieu, Egyptians are becoming “particularly adept at deciphering political agendas” (Iskandar, 2006, p. 21).

However, while privatisation has bolstered journalistic practices and invited more critical voices to the Egyptian public sphere, political freedom and cultural liberalisation have not followed as a by-product of such transformations. Moreover, competition for audience share seems to hamper the role that the media are supposed to play. Their service as a means of delivering public messages and promoting ideology has diminished in favour of promoting consumer goods and serving the interests of media shareholders. Additionally, freedom of expression is still interrupted either by imposing financial pressure through controlling advertisements, or by largely hindering its efficacy through the strict policies of the regime regarding the dissemination of information (Zaki, 1994, pp. 65,67). Rinnawy

(2011) argues that broadcast media, whether state-run, semi-private, or privately owned, still hold to their traditional role as being the mouthpiece of governments aiming to deceive audiences and to steer their minds towards a certain political and ideological direction. For example, the privately owned television channel, al-Arabiya, abides by Saudi foreign policy and al-Jazeera, which claims to be critical of all Arab regimes, follows double standards when it comes to the Qatari regime or Gulf state allies. Additionally, commercial channels abide by the agendas of their owners, who are, as might be expected, businessmen with interlinked relations and shared interests with the regime (Fandy, 2000). This creates a state of 'differential power' where "the appropriation of knowledge does not happen in a homogeneous fashion, but is often differentially available to those in power positions who are able to place it in the service of sectional interest" (Giddens, 1990, p. 44). Accordingly, while the shift towards privatisation has provided audiences with a more diverse and richer media experience, audiences generally tend to place limited trust in these outlets. Moreover, although audiences are becoming more active, in the sense that they can select to 'consume' their preferred media content, they still have very limited access to these media outlets as platforms where they can spell out their opinions and express their aspirations as 'producers' of content.

When reciprocity is not the fashion, and political views and activities fall outside the borders of the 'accepted' realm or threaten the state's status quo, new media may be perceived as an alternative, more open platform for debating politics and developing a sense of political efficacy, especially in younger, technology-savvy generations.

2.3.3. The Internet in Egypt

Egypt became linked to the Internet in late 1993, two years after the Internet penetrated Tunisian society. The service was first provided by the Information and Decision Making Support Centre (IDMSC), which is affiliated to the Egyptian Cabinet. At the beginning of 1997, Internet services were privatised as the IDMSC started to license Internet Service Providers (ISPs). Since then, the service has grown through its sale to other clients, reaching a total of 16 private ISPs in the same year, 1997. Currently, 211 ISPs deliver the service to Internet users. Link and TEdData are the largest ISPs in the Egyptian

telecommunications field. However, those private providers are connected to each other via the Telecom Egypt web portals, Egypt's main Telephone Company (Rinnawy, 2011).

The government was the first user of the new medium. The regime effectively and impressively used the Internet as an official mouthpiece. Formal governmental portals, like the Egyptian Presidency's, which was launched in 1999, have served as an archive of all the documents relating to the regime. Through the Internet, the regime emphasised speeches, made news articles accessible, as well as all the important documents that the regime wanted to highlight and bring to the public's awareness.

In addition to investing in the Internet for its own interest, the Egyptian government also put remarkable effort into paving the information superhighway for a wider public. The government embraced a promising 'liberalising' Information Communication Technology (ICT). Through collaborative programmes and projects with the private sector, it implemented ongoing strategies to enhance telecommunication services and to expand the development and exploitation of ICTs. For example, the government launched the ADSL service in May 2004 through an initiative established by seven companies. It has also facilitated the emergence of IT clubs to the advantage of public in under-served areas. Furthermore, the initiative 'Egypt PC-2010 Nation Online' was launched to further increase access to the Internet and the ICTs more broadly (Rinnawy, 2011, p. 126).

Additionally to infrastructure and hardware-related initiatives, the Egyptian government has also supported a wide range of ICT capacity-building programs. To this end, the Egyptian-Education Initiative (Learning and Technology Policy Framework, 2011) was launched as a public-private partnership aiming to build a skills-based knowledge society via enhancing the effective use of ICTs and integrating related programmes into all levels of education (Egypt's ICT Strategy 2007-2010). A significant increase in the number of Internet users has accompanied these remarkable efforts. Slightly less than a quarter of the Egyptian population (more than 17 million) are using the Internet with a usage growth of 3,691 percent between 2000 and 2010.

Numbers on Internet usage should, however, be read accompanied by consideration of the medium's nature. For instance, there are fewer Internet users than there are TV viewers in Egypt (Isherwood, 2008, p.3), but the Internet allows users access to abundant and diverse content that is far greater than what they can receive through their TV screens. The interactive nature of the Internet also situates the medium in a distinctive spot on the media spectrum (Chadwick, 2006, p. 11). Moderate numbers of users do not therefore necessarily mean less impact. In the Arab world, statistics on Internet usage should be read along with consideration of some regional specifications. *Firstly*, Internet users in Egypt, Morocco and Lebanon, do not, in fact, follow the common pattern of ADSL usage, which is three people per line. Ten to twelve people use one ADSL line through sub-distributions (Neighbours share the cost of one line and then distribute sub-lines to each other). Such a unique phenomenon has made it harder to precisely determine the number of ADSL service users. *Secondly*, most Internet users in Egypt, as well as in the rest of the Arab world, have access through public computers in universities, Internet cafés, or are collective users, rather than using the Internet through private accounts. Hence, this figure for Internet users (17 million) is likely to be much lower than the actual number. The number of Egyptians online has witnessed an exponential growth, especially in 2007. Egypt ranks among the highest of the developing countries in Internet and mobile phone usage. More than 23 million Egyptians used the Internet by the end of 2010, up from 16.6 million in 2009.

As shown in Table 2.1, ICT indicators reported by the Egyptian Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (2012) increased remarkably after the 25th January 2011 uprising. In the wake of the mass revolt, the number of Egyptians online has been boosted by 29 percent. Users who access the Internet through mobile phones increased from 8 million to 10.7 million, while the number of mobile phone subscribers soared from 91 million to 112 million. Despite the rapid increase in the numbers of Internet users, it could not be said that the Internet is a communication medium for mass audiences. The information superhighway “remains the province of the elites,” and English and French are still the most prevalent languages of interaction (Rinnawy, 2011, pp. 126, 135).

Indicator	Unit	January 2011	January 2012	Annual growth rate (%)
Internet Users	Million user	23.51	29.53	25.61
Internet penetration	%	30.05	36.31	6.27
International Internet bandwidth	Gbps	132.22	181.85	37.54
Proportion of household using Internet from home	%	32.67	38.02	5.26
ADSL Subscription	Million subscription	1.43	1.84	28.99
Mobile Internet users	Million users	8.09	10.71	32.41
Proportion of Internet users to total mobile subscription	%	11.45	12.84	1.39
Proportion of mobile Internet users to total Internet users	%	34.40	36.27	1.87
USB modem subscription	Million subscription	1.58	2.74	72.69
Proportion of broadband Internet users of total Internet users	%	86.83	89.55	2.73
Mobile subscription	Million subscription	71.46	91.32 ³	27.80
Mobile penetration	%	91.32	112.30	20.98

Table 2.1: ICT diffusion indicators in Egypt 2011-2012 (MCIT, ICT Indicators in Brief, 2012)⁴

³ The huge increase in the number of “mobile subscriptions” is due to revision of this indicator definition by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), Then, starting from January 2012, all three NMOs follow the new definition, which states that mobile subscriptions are the subscribers who used the service at least once during the previous three months to make or receive calls or to carry out a non voice activity, such as sending or receiving SMS or accessing the Internet.

⁴ Growth rates are calculated as the difference between penetration rates or proportions in different time intervals.

However, efforts to embrace a digital culture and to implement an ambitious plan to reach citizens with personal computers and keep them connected were begun with strenuous efforts to control the Internet and to lay siege to its potential political and cultural impact. This adds another dimension to the obstacles facing the wide spread of the Internet in Egypt and it is also linked to the evident duality of the Egyptian media spectrum.

2.3.4. Internet censorship in Egypt

Governments who use Western cultural imperialism as a reason for their restrictions take pains to control the information highway: through using filtering and control software, establishing supervision and controlling bodies on Internet use, as well as revising regulations to control access to the Internet. These techniques, which differ from one country to another, turn the Internet, like traditional media, into a public sphere subject to the usual censorship and sanctions (Rinnawy, 2011, p. 123).

Despite the aforementioned governmental initiatives, which were taken to enlarge the scale of Internet access and, more broadly, to enhance the use of telecommunications, ICT diffusion faces serious hurdles that make it very difficult to regard the Internet as a means of communication for the masses. Obstacles to Internet diffusion in Egypt include both government-designed and implemented measures and informal, normative and societal hurdles that work against the boom in the medium.

Although it is difficult to practise censorship over the Internet, because of the nature of the medium as a non-centralised environment of communication, this very absence of self-regulation in much new media apparatuses “can also provide governments with an excuse to step in.” Reporters Without Borders (RWB) lists Egypt amongst the “wider enemies of the Internet” along with other Arab countries, like Saudi Arabia, Syria and Tunisia. While taking several steps to join the information superhighway, the state seems to be cautious in allowing citizens free platforms for the expression of opinion. Precautionary measures were taken to guarantee that what is given with one hand is taken, or at least controlled, by the other. For example, the Egyptian government has established two security units within the Ministry of Interior for on-line surveillance and monitoring purposes. The General Administration for Information and Documentation and the Department for Confronting Computer and Internet Crime were responsible for the detention of some bloggers and the blocking of their blogs by the authorities (Fahmi, 2009, p. 93). However, even with the state’s control over Internet

access, Internet cafés are wide spread and the number of users continues to increase, as shown in Figure 2.1. Internet use has risen putting 26.74 percent of the population online by 2010.

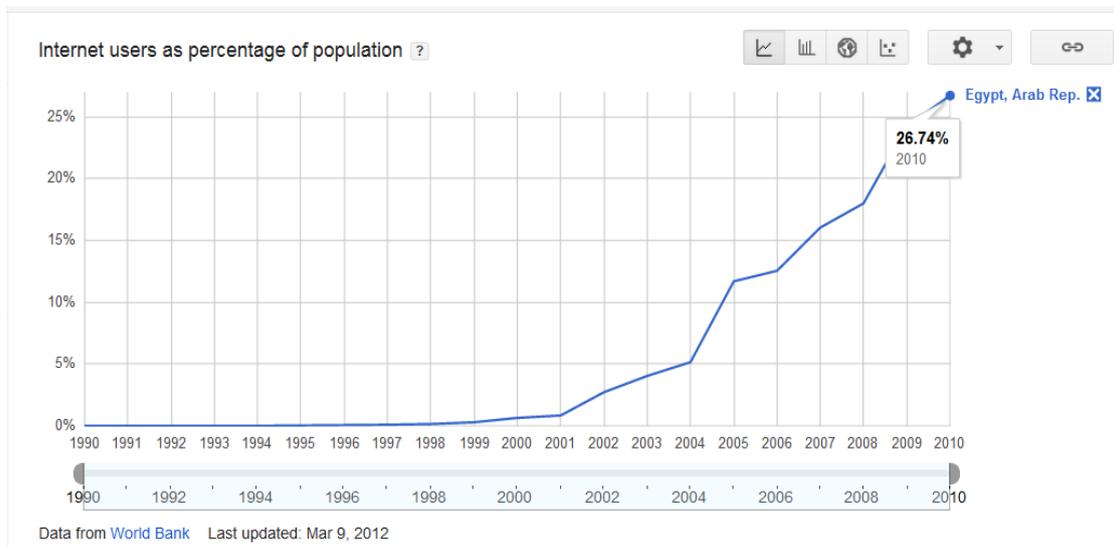


Figure 2.1: Internet use in Egypt

Source: (World Development Indicators, 2012)

Political and cultural censorship might be at the top of a long list of obstacles to Internet diffusion in Egypt. Additionally to formal regulations that prohibit an uncontrolled political public sphere, informal socio-religious rules pose additional limitations on free expression and act to keep traditional values intact (Rinnawy, 2011; Abdulla, 2007). These formal and informal regulations are used by the government to seize control of the Internet in order to minimise the potential impacts of the interactive medium and which might challenge its existence, or might not go along with its policies and interests. Additionally, the high expenses of Internet use are still one of the main barriers to Internet diffusion, especially in rural areas and among less fortunate populations like the 'fellahin' (peasants). This hurdle goes in tandem with, and is even intensified by, high poverty rates. Egypt is one of the Arab countries with a very low Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and very low levels of income. According to the Central Agency for Public Mobilisation and Statistics (CAPMAS), poverty rates in Egypt have increased from 16.7 to 25.2 between 1999/2000 and 2010/2011. With higher and even increasing poverty rates, the government tends to prioritise problems such as food, health care, and accommodation, over taking care of other 'less urgent' needs, such as education, science, and new technology, which recede into the background.

Poverty is joined with illiteracy, which adds another hindrance to Internet diffusion in Egypt. Total adult illiteracy, according to UNICEF, reached 34 percent between 2005 and 2008. Higher rates of illiteracy are found among poor people, which increases the problems. According to CAPMAS, 36.4 percent of the poor population is illiterate, while only 6.5 percent of them hold a university degree. However, although the Internet advantages the wealthy and literate, it is argued that this connection does not hold up once access is afforded and a certain level of literacy is achieved (Isherwood, 2008). For example, the wide spread of Internet cafés has partially ameliorated access problems making the Internet available to the less well-off social classes and not limited to the cosmopolitan elites (Wheeler, 2006).

Additionally, digital efficiency poses further challenges for Internet diffusion, which is expected to exclude a 'functional illiterate' proportion of the 63 percent literate population from the Internet use formula. Even for literate people, English-language proficiency remains a problem that obstructs the way to the wider spread of the Internet in Egypt, as the medium remains dominated by the English-language. Nevertheless, "the World Wide Web and Arabic browsers have ameliorated that problem somewhat, but the text-based areas such as emails remain problematic" (Rinnawy, 2011, p. 136). Finally, problems related to physical infrastructure hinder the scale and quality of Internet diffusion, especially in the rural areas and areas far from the capital city, Cairo.

Despite these obstacles and hurdles, the medium has been effectively utilised by several groups who found it to be an alternative platform for free expression. Marginalised groups and oppressed political, economic, ideological, ethnic, national, cultural, and religious trends have used the Internet as an alternative public sphere. In this virtual arena, they could counter the obstacles that they face in state-run and highly controlled traditional media and circumvent their misrepresentation in mainstream discourse. These groups have become the 'main players' in this public sphere (Rinnawi, 2011, p. 137). They use the Internet as a substitute channel, where they can create opportunities to connect to their supporters, engage in a more open discourse, gain solidarity and, more importantly, become more culturally involved and effectively engaged in their civil society.

2.3.5. Creating opportunities via the Internet

Ever since its inception in Egypt, the country has witnessed the most effective Internet use by different groups in the Arab world. The Internet has allowed them a platform where they can meet and discuss their ideas, convey their messages and gain support and solidarity for their cause. Diverse voices could be spelt out and heard through the Internet. For example, different Islamic groups, ranging from radical Islamist movements to moderate mainstream Islam, use the Internet in parallel, or as an alternative to mainstream media, which is tightly censored by the regime. Rinnawi (2011) argues that the Islamic Fundamentalist groups' presence on the Internet makes them the most effective players on the Web in the Arab region. They use the Internet as the mouthpiece to deliver their message and to build the social and economic capital needed for mobilisation. For example, the Muslim Brothers (MB) (*Ikhwan*) have created their own websites, the most important of which is ikhwanonline.com, which was founded in Egypt in 1995 to promote their own interpretation of Islam and to represent their ideas and activities. Their growth in the digital sphere is exponential to an extent that made Lynch (2007) raises concerns about the 'imbalanced' power of growth of the Egyptian blogosphere upon their entrance, en masse (Lynch, 2007).

Alongside these websites, there is also a huge number of websites that represent a more moderate view of Islam, which is embraced by the mainstream media. These websites set out to face the mainstream representations promoted by the regime and to defy the state monopoly on the public opinion. One of the very important examples of such moderate platforms is the website Islam-online, which operates out of Egypt but is funded by Qatari money. The website allows open discourse with people and reaches them with a moderate version of understanding Islam, or what is called '*al-Wasat*' (the middle), which generally characterises the new generation and appeals to them.

Other who benefit from the Internet in Egypt are the Copts. As a religious minority that represents between 10 and 20 percent of the population (Wagner, 1997), Christian Egyptians find in the Internet a free space in which to express their views and to project the grievances they harbour against the regime's discrimination and persecution. Websites such as coptsunited.com and copts.com are examples of how Christian Egyptians utilise the Internet to monitor, comment on and engage with the social,

cultural and political public sphere in Egypt. They also use it as a reciprocal communication channel between the homeland and Copts in diaspora all over the globe.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and human rights organisations are also among the most prominent players on the Internet in Egypt. The websites of the Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights (EOHR) and the Cairo Centre for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS), both perfectly exemplify the way such entities use the Internet efficiently to engage with society on the local scale and, most importantly, to reach international circles with their cause in order to situate their concerns on the international agenda. Both websites are the most important in the Arab world in terms of exposing human rights violations, discussing and reporting issues relating to democracy.

Women have also gone a long way in the field of political participation through online propagation. Women's organisations have created their own websites to promote their cause and to gain support. The website of the Egyptian Centre for Women's Rights, ecwregypt.com is a good example of how the Internet can be utilised in the field of women's emancipation and political empowerment. The website publishes intensively on the role of Egyptian women in political life and draws attention to their effective role in a patriarchal society where their engagement in public life may be strictly controlled by family, society, and cultural norms. There are also numerous examples of prominent websites that use the Internet as an outlet for traditional media, or as their main medium in and of itself. Websites, such as Masrawy and al-Bawaba, serve as main sources of news, especially on sensitive issues that are hardly covered by traditional, state-run media.

In addition to the organised utilisation of the Internet, whether by the government or by civil society organisations, which is normally buttressed by better human, financial and technical resources and the experience that is needed to build their portals on the web, the Internet is also an open space where individual youth can share their thoughts and discuss issues of interest that range from personal matters to technical tips and, most importantly, political issues. The Internet privileges the young because, unlike their elders, using computers has become part of their habitus. (Isherwood, 2008).

Youth have become the common denominator among those groups who use the Internet to project their grievances and air their aspirations. They are technologically savvy, more educated, and more technologically efficient. To sum up, many of the aforementioned obstacles to Internet diffusion could be ameliorated when it comes to youth. This might nominate youth as one of the most important and influential players in the Egyptian digital sphere. As Shapiro (2009) stated:

[The] flare-up of political activity coincided with the moment Egyptians started to gain access to the Internet in large numbers the new technologies and political movements grew symbiotically (p. 4).

Similarly, Shehata (2008) also argues that one of the characteristics that distinguishes this wave of youth activism is its “extensive use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) as an organisational and mobilisational tool, and also as a means of expressing the view of youth. Given the strict constraints on formal political participation, youth were able to use the World Wide Web to create an alternative or virtual political sphere” (p. 7).

This, however, is not to suggest that free opinion expression is necessarily a by-product of such conditions; as Egyptian youth do not all have access to the Internet, and even if they do they are not all expected to be interested in politics nor inclined to be politically active.

2.4. New media, new publics: Revolting in a repressed environment

Over the past years, a new cohort of Egyptian youth who mainly belong to the upper-middle-class and who have attained a Western-style education has risen. They practised a new type of social movement and this led to the creation of new civic publics in Cairo. Their aim was to draw attention to their role as part of the Egyptian and Arab World (Arvizu, 2009). Education is central to shaping younger generations’ normative perceptions of participatory values and to moulding youth attitudes to civic engagement. Students enrolled in different education systems were found to embrace different forms of political culture. For example, students of the English division of the Faculty of Economic and Political Science at Cairo University were more inclined towards collective action and participation as a means of ending a dictatorship when compared to their colleagues in the Arabic section, who were more passive since they

had less belief in revolutionary action. This difference was ascribed to the education that the former section had gained since in language schools democratic values are more promoted than in public (state-owned) ones (Noweir, 2001).

Outlets for civic participation for youth are very scarce in Egypt and are “permitted only at private, elite universities because these campuses are considered less prone to violence and are less susceptible to the influence of fundamentalist religious groups” (Assaad & Barsoum, 2009, p. 82). However, data from the Survey of Young People in Egypt (SYPE) show that in 2009, 11 percent of youth aged 18-29 have never been to school, 81 percent of them girls, and only 13.2 percent complete university (Survey of Young People in Egypt, 2011). Moreover, only 19.17 percent of students enrolled in higher education joined private institutions in the academic year 2004/2005 (Egyptian Ministry of Higher Education, 2006). This gives insight into the impact this tiny, highly educated cohort –not to mention the even tinier number of privately educated youth– might have on the society given the fact that not all of them would be interested in politics nor engaged in civic activities.

In her research into the role of new media in the emergence of youth publics in Cairo, Arvizu focused on how creative youth could be when developing new communication channels and using them as forms of activism to create alternative public communication networks for critical discussion of the state and society. In doing so, youth are practising what Carroll and Hackett (2006) call ‘democratic media activism’ (DMA) (p. 388). Using new media (in this case, desktop publishing), Egyptian youth practise a new type of social movement and participate in the creation of new civic publics in Cairo. They have used this new media to print a new type of magazine that uses “Arabised English”; Arabic words in English type supplemented by numbers. These magazines focus on issues of concern to Egyptian youth, such as identity, participation, the authoritarian role of the state and democracy. She argues that through the distribution of these magazines among youth, they could “bridge publics in a media-censored field” (Arvizu, 2009, pp. 385-407).

Egypt witnessed 1,000 social protests between 1998 and 2004 in which the protest rate increased by 200 percent after 2003 (Ottaway & Hamzawy, 2011). The eagerness to show discontent and to claim political and socioeconomic reforms was reflected in an

unprecedented number of oppositional demonstrations, rallies and the formation of non-violent dissident groups that Egypt witnessed in 2004-2005 (El-Mahdi, 2009, p. 1011).

Egypt's first competitive presidential elections and the parliamentary elections of 2005 "marked a new departure in the Egyptian political sphere, including a shift in the domestic political balance" accompanied by the emergence of new movements and of the new Arab media space (Meital, 2006, p. 257). Social movements and demonstrations that preceded the constitutional reforms, remarkably attracted new faces to the political arena in Egypt; young people for whom participation in the demonstrations was their "first collective political action" (El-Mahdi, 2009, p. 1018). Several initiatives of citizens' engagement in politics against the autocratic regime have followed.

2.4.1. Youth mobilisation since 2000

Egyptian youth have endured a decade of political demobilisation that began a resurgence with the outbreak of the second Palestinian *intifada* in the autumn of 2000 (Shehata, 2008). For example, in 2000 and 2001, students staged a number of demonstrations in solidarity with the Palestinian *intifada*. Additionally, hundreds of students joined the Egyptian Popular Committee for the Support of the Palestinian Intifada (EPCSPI) in which they strongly participated in a boycott campaign of American and Israeli products, collecting donations and sending aid convoys to the occupied territories. In the aftermath of the American invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq, the younger generations joined hundreds of Egyptians in large demonstrations in Tahrir Square in central Cairo. In 2004-2005, youth activism went in tandem with a national and international shift towards issues of political and constitutional reform. In this context, hundreds of young activists joined the *Kefaya* movement and the al-Ghad Party. Additionally, the Youth for Change Group have emanated from *Kafaya* and became vocal actors during the pro-reform protests of 2004-2006.

Remarkably, these protests, according to Shehata (2008, p. 5), drew national and international attention and broke many of the taboos that had characterised public life in Egypt for several decades. *Firstly*, the protestors focused on domestic rather than foreign policy issues. *Secondly*, they challenged a long standing ban on popular demonstrations outside university campuses and took to the street without official

permission. *Thirdly*, they directly attacked the president and the security establishment in the slogans they raised, breaching the tightly defined 'red lines' about directly criticising these 'sovereign' institutions. *Finally*, youth introduced an innovative repertoire to their protests, such as candle light vigils, which helped to attract attention.

This wave of youth activism that dates back to Autumn 2000 has occurred largely outside existing parties and movements, including the Muslim Brotherhood. This wave is also distinguished by being mainly non-ideological in nature. "Most of the youth that joined contemporary movements seemed to share a general commitment to the values of human rights, pluralism, democracy, and social justice. These activists focused more on consensus building and action, rather than on theoretical, ideological squabbles" (Shehata, 2008).

In 2007-2008, the youth political movement diminished due to a general crackdown on political mobilisation in Egypt. However, another wave of mobilisation began to gain momentum incentivised mainly by the decline in real incomes, as a result of inflation, coupled with economic hardship among large segments of the population due to raising prices. Accordingly, the years 2007-2008 witnessed unprecedented, yet polarised and economically-oriented, levels of strikes and protests by civil servants and factory workers.

In this context, it is worth highlighting two cases that were exceptional to this economic-based, civil servants' led pattern of mobilisation. The first was the strike of 6th April, which saw joint mobilisation by textile workers on the one hand, and by young urban activists who remarkably utilised SM apparatuses to call for a national strike in solidarity with the textile workers on the other. The second is the emergence of 'We are all Kaled Said' group, which was originally created in the virtual sphere of the social networking site, Facebook, to condemn police brutality and to stage protests against corruption. These cases are introduced in more detail below.

2.4.2. April 6th Youth Movement

The April 6th Youth Movement emerged when a group of young activists branched off from the *Kefaya* opposition group and started the new movement on Facebook as a strike group. The new group managed to mobilise a one-day national strike in the Delta

city of Mahalla to support the workers and to condemn low salary rates and deteriorating living conditions (Pintak, 2008). Albeit, the movement has achieved limited success in engaging the masses in consecutive massive scale activism in order to put real pressure on the then governing regime.

Over the past few years, and more evidently since the emergence of the April 6th Youth Movement in 2008, several political coalitions have emerged in the Egyptian political spectrum. A vibrant political environment has been evolving that has coincided with the use of new media technologies like blogs and social networking sites (SNSs) (Howard, 2010). This political evolution has brought together different political trends and ideologies, and has engaged people for whom political participation was happening for the first time in their lives.

In April 2008, a bread crisis evolved and demonstrations took place mainly at a textile mill in the Delta town of Mahalla. Thousands of protesters clashed with government troops and the violence left several dead and hundreds wounded. With the Mahalla riots, dozens of activists were arrested including the bloggers. Esraa' Abdel Fattah, or the so called "Facebook Girl", a 27 year-old woman who created a group on the social networking site that became, according to Saleh (2008), the core for a one day national strike in solidarity with the Mahalla workers (Pintak, 2008). However, although the call for the general strike was in parallel to the El-Mahalla textile workers' strike, there is no evidence of direct co-ordination between the Facebooker's virtual activism and the workers' physical mobilisation (Fahmi, 2009, p. 105). Although this massive strike was the most important among the 400 that took place in 2008 - that is, it brought socioeconomic together with political demands and was led by both workers' groups and networks of young activists, the April 6th Youth Movement usually only mobilise a moderate number of participants in proportion to the claimed number of online members. The general strike was sustained only for one day and efforts by young activists and bloggers to repeat the success on the anniversary of the event in 2009 and 2010 failed. This might suggest a low level of commitment among its members (Ottaway & Hamzawy, 2011).

2.4.3. The personification of societal problems: 'We are all Khaled Said'

On 7th June 2010, a 28-years-old man's death at the hands of two police detectives has become a symbol of the youth movement against the Egyptian police brutality that is viciously practised in the guise of the emergency law. It has been claimed that Khaled Said posted a video on YouTube that shows police handling illegal drugs. The police dragged Khaled outside an Internet café and beat him to death, then threw his corpse onto the street. A mortuary photo of Said's battered face was leaked and went viral when posted on the Internet, causing a national and international turmoil. The now well-known Facebook Page "We are all Khaled Said" was created after Said's murder to condemn the police brutality that has long been practised in Egypt. The page has succeeded in bringing the annals of Egyptian police brutality into public focus (Londono, 2011). Two police officers have been charged with brutality and they were put on trial in July 2010 (Shenker, 2010).

The wide distribution of the leaked photo of Said's fractured face on SNSs has brought the public, almost for the first time, face-to-face with police brutality and made them feel its imminent danger. Violations practised under cover for a long time have been disclosed, provoking a collective feeling of resentment and apprehension. The experience of security usually rests upon a balance of trust and acceptable risk (Giddens, 1990, pp. 35, 36). Bringing such practices to the public's awareness has provocatively alarmed the publics and has drawn their attention to an "environment of risk" that could affect many of them. They are no longer safe, as "a situation in which a specific set of dangers is counteracted or minimised" (Giddens, 1990, pp. 35, 36) is inactive. This deliberate inaction has been legitimised and protected for decades by the state of emergency that Mubarak enacted in the wake of his predecessor's assassination in October 1981.

The Facebook Page 'We are all Khaled Said' has succeeded in mobilising several demonstrations against police brutality and human rights violations. A number of demonstrations have been sparked off in Cairo and Alexandria, the largest had 4,000 protesters on 25th June 2010 and was attended by the former UN nuclear chief Mohamed El-Baradei. This protest was marked by its unprecedented size and scale and the presence of the opposition Muslim Brotherhood group, which suggests that Said's

death “has struck a chord” (Shenker, 2010) and has reified long-denied practices. Nevertheless, the Facebook Page has failed to upgrade these demonstrations to the massive scale necessary to acquire feasible change until the 25th January 2011, when massive demonstrations erupted in response, at least in the beginning, to a call for an uprising posted on the Page. Said’s plight became a rallying point for protesters in the uprising.

With unbiased viewpoints and with a free ‘double-track’ flow of information all but nonexistent, youth and citizens by and large were denied their right to acquire sufficient unhampered information about the government’s performance. Spelling out their opinion on significant issues, especially in regard to politics or in contradiction to authorities’ and elites’ interests was *de facto* oppressed and *de jure* punished. These circumstances have left youth with the feeling that their voices are not heard or even valuable. Furthermore, making these voices heard may cost them their jobs, freedom, safety and dignity. This has caused the accumulation of a feeling of dissent among Egyptians who cannot maintain a state of apathy and indifference. They were left with no choice but to rise up against the regime to make their voices heard. Heater describes the logic behind this: “if newly provided political rights cannot in practice be used to win sorely needed economic rights – which are, after all, most individuals’ prime concern – two outcomes are possible: rebellion or a resigned feeling of inefficacy. The latter reaction leads on to disappointment, turning to despair, and mounting crime” (Heater, 1999, p. 43). On 25th January, young Egyptians, joined later by angry and despairing citizens from both ends of the social spectrum, made their choice and went with Heater’s first proposal.

2.5. Conclusion

This chapter aimed to contextualise the current study by charting the social and political circumstances that prevailed under Mubarak’s presidency with a special focus on the last decade of his time in office. It has been argued throughout the chapter that these ten years witnessed a resurgence in political life where several social and media implications have interacted to shape a new political movement that led to the 25th January 2011 revolt. In a glance through the manifestations of democratic ills, that Egyptian society has suffered over the last three decades, one easily notices that there is

an accumulation of the inefficient performance of weak political parties, along with erroneous election procedures that yield an unreliable parliament and this would result in an authoritarian regime that lacked the prerequisites for the efficient functioning of democracy (Zaki, 1994). The parliamentary election of 28 November – 5 December 2010, that shaped the context for this study, marks the most fraudulent election in the history of the Egyptian parliament. Due to the disappointing results of the elections, feelings of discontent were dominant and the context was very tense, which strongly highlights these elections as one of the immediate incentives for the 25th January 2011 uprising.

As this research sets out to explore young activists' perceptions of the potential of SM for mobilisation, this chapter also sought to situate Egyptian youth within the broader picture of the environment under which they operate. It paves the way for further discussion and a better understanding of young activists' media use, dispositions and on and off-line political practices, which represent the core themes of the current study. The chapter discusses the limitations imposed by the authoritarian regime as well as the openness that may have created potential opportunities for participation. It particularly focuses on the role the Internet and SM may have played in drawing active engagement and in empowering Egyptian youth politically. To set a broader ground for discussion of the main themes of the research (uses of SM, dispositions and actions) and to shed light on the way young Egyptian activists' dispositions might have shaped their tendencies to participation in politics both on and off-line. In the following chapter, I draw together these analytical threads and link them to different perspectives on new media's potential for mobilisation as discussed from different points of view in a variety of contexts in order to develop a framework to help to analyse and understand the role that SM could play in empowering Egyptian youth.

CHAPTER THREE

SOCIAL MEDIA⁵ USES AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

MOBILISATION: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In Chapter Two, the current research has been contextualised geopolitically and literature pertaining to issues specific to youth and political participation in the Egyptian society has been discussed. In this chapter, literature on social media's affordances for mobilisation for collective action is reviewed in order to provide a theoretical context for the current inquiry about the perceived potential of social media (SM) for mobilising collective action in Egypt.

In this chapter, I first lay out the framework within which literature pertinent to the current study is discussed. I then address the 'why' question about media functions, which is usually approached through the uses and gratifications model (U&G) of media effects that distinguishes between instrumental and habitual or ritualistic uses of media and their related effects. Media uses represent the common factor that cements the remaining sections of this chapter. Four main arguments will be put forward in this chapter to validate the need for this research to be conducted. *Firstly*, it is argued that studying the functions of media, rather than measuring the time people spend with a certain medium, better suits the nature of the Internet as an interactive platform of communication that allows active users to play different roles and satisfy different needs. *Secondly*, introducing new information and communication technologies (ICTs) to the realm of contemporary social movements has enabled new forms of organisation that are low in cost, but at the same time are non-centralised, loosely-woven, and leaderless horizontal networks by their nature. Within such movements, forms of flexible identities emerge and develop, fed by goal-directed rather than ideological forms of media use. *Thirdly*, it is argued that the hurdles such loose networks and flexible identities might impose while creating an alternative participatory sphere for individuals may be diluted by creating opportunities for practice with social movements

⁵ The current study mainly focuses on Internet applications that enable users to link to, interact, and collaborate with other users to achieve certain political goals. The acronym SM (social media) is used throughout the chapter to refer to digital networking media that individuals basically use to link to other users, whether through computers or smart phones. Research in this area has used various terms, such as computer-mediated communication (CMC), new information and communication technologies (ICTs), and digital media.

where individuals can gain experience and acquire the identity of an activist. These opportunities include creating a safer environment for practice where non-politicised individuals can breach the fear of the repression barrier and feel more politically efficacious. However, creating such opportunities may also create an area of tension where individuals become captured by the safe, delusional space of interaction, rather than action. *Fourthly*, it is argued that SM have afforded activists new tools for the social construction of their movements and to present alternative frames for their activities that are rarely presented on state-run media outlets. These affordances vary from activists to non-politicised users of SM. However, there is a possibility that the context reinforces the issue if individuals over rely on these media, which may, in reality, harm the practice of collective action. In each of these areas, the pros of SM for the development and growth of social movements are thus attached to a number of cons, which create areas of tension that the current research seeks to tackle. A summary of these arguments and areas of tension is presented in Figure 3.1.

In order to address the objectives of the chapter, I have broken the discussion down into seven sections:

3.1. Framework.

3.2. Social media functions.

3.3. Social media uses for social movement organisation.

3.3.1. Instrumental uses of social media, identification with and commitment to social movements.

3.4. Social media and shaping opportunities in repressive contexts.

3.4.1. Social media and lower-cost/risk opportunities of participation.

3.4.2. Social media and political efficacy as opportunity for participation.

3.5. Social media and mobilising collective action.

3.5.1. Social media and mobilising frames.

3.5.2. Different media uses, different participators: Alternative media for alternative actions.

3.5.3. Social media and the significance of collective performance.

Section (3.2) addresses the ‘uses’ theme of the thesis and directly informs the answer to the research question: *why do young activists use social media?* Although social movement organisation is not one of the main themes of this research, reviewing literature on SM and movement organisations still informs the research enquiry about young activists’ tendency to move their political activism from the on- to the off-line arena. As discussed in Section (3.3), it has been argued that using SM as ‘instruments’ for organising movements could facilitate low cost and flexible forms of organisation. However, instrumental uses of new communication technology were found to develop flexible identities that do not necessarily feed into a commitment to and the sustainability of social movements, which may, then, affect individuals’ tendency to practise off-line, high cost/risk activism. Section (3.4) aims to address this issue by reviewing literature on the role SM may play in creating opportunities for low cost practice that might, in turn, help individuals gain the necessary experience and thus feed into their feelings of political efficacy. By doing so, this section helps answer the research question: *how do SM contribute to creating favourable dispositions towards practising collective action off-line?* Finally, Section (3.5) directly addresses the research question: *how do SM contribute to mobilising collective action practice off-line?* The section covers issues relevant to using SM as platforms that are alternative to traditional media, which are normally biased against activists. Issues of framing, recruiting, free-riding and collective action repertoires and their relation to uses of SM are discussed in this section. Figure 3.1 summarises the research’s main themes and shows how arguments discussed in each section relate to areas of tension and gaps that have been identified in the literature, supporting the need for this research to be conducted.

The remaining sections of the chapter then pull the threads of previous sections together and sum up in a section on the main perspectives discussed throughout the chapter (Section 3.6). The final Section (3.7) particularly situates this study in the literature and addresses the question of the need to ask and to seek to answer its questions.

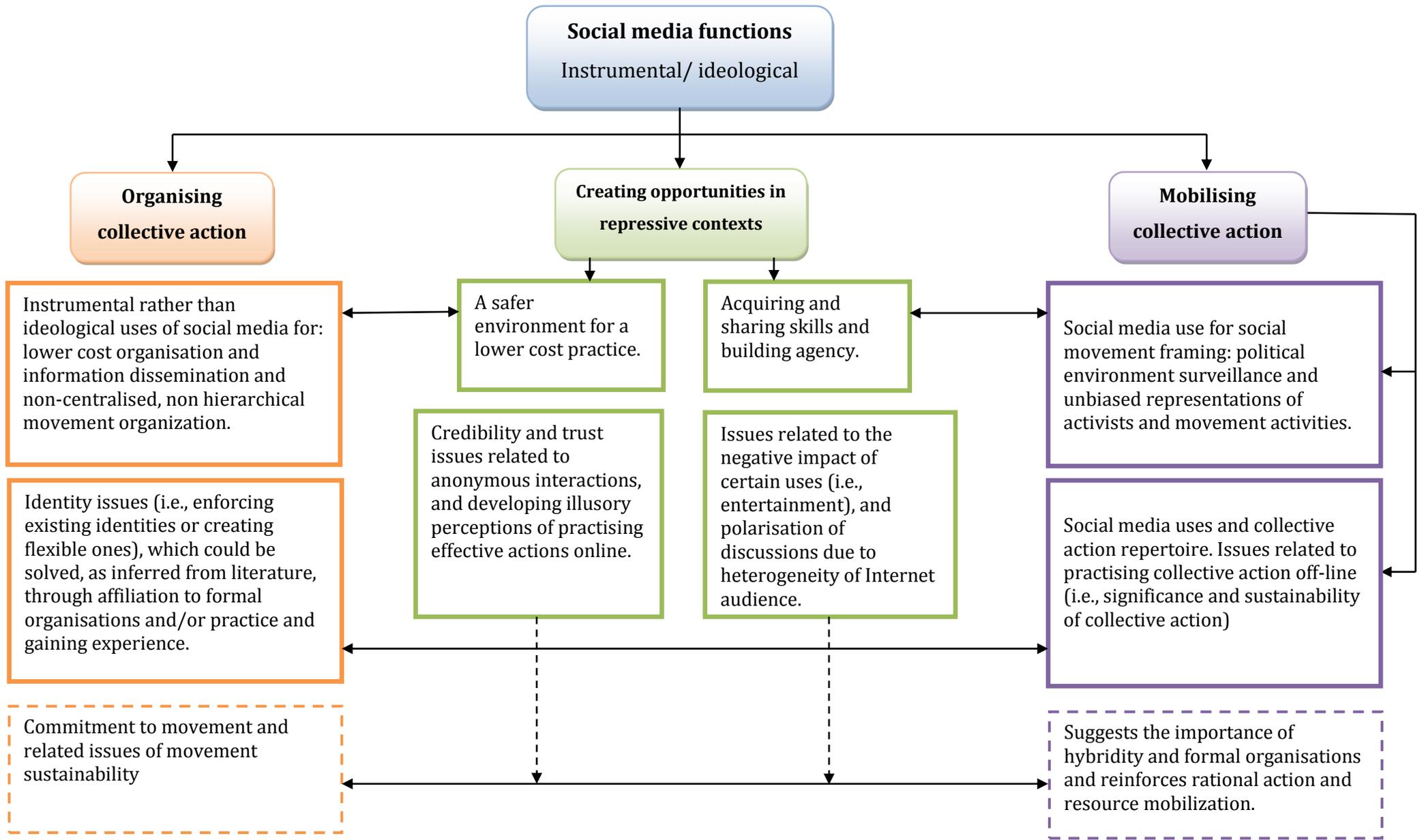


Figure 3.1: Main themes of research and areas of tension identified

3.1. Framework

Claims about new media's affordances for social movements' development and growth often include counterclaims about their inadequacies. Inviting the SM component into a social movement construct has created areas of tension between proponents and opponents of SM's potential for social movements/revolutions. This tension could be situated, for example, in the debate between Shirky (2011) and Gladwell (2010) around the role of SM in the Arab uprisings, or the so called Arab Spring. However, as the events unfolded, it has been argued that both arguments have become inconsequential and irrelevant to the current situation. On the one hand, the Egyptian uprising of 25th January grew in size and expanded in its geographical reach despite the shutdown of the Internet for five days, which negates Shirky's deterministic argument. On the other hand, Egypt's SM platforms, after these five days of disconnection, were imbued with content that documented that whole period, which refutes Gladwell's more sceptical hypothesis (Iskandar, 2013). Looking at the role SM have been, or might have been, playing before the eruption of the Arab uprisings, as seen by young activists in Egypt, before enthusiasm about the massive revolts shades the picture, would also serve a similar purpose as a more objective evaluation of media effect, and to help avoid the naivety of cheerleading for SM as the sole incentive for the uprisings, or from slipping into an overestimated claim about a 'Facebook revolution.'

Movement emergence and development have been examined both theoretically and empirically, based on different theoretical underpinnings. Resource mobilisation theory (McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Jenkins, 1983) focuses on social movement organisations (SMOs) as a force for social change as compared to grievance-based conceptions of social movements. Formal organisations as such have been argued to be valuable for social movements, especially when the cost of organising collective action are high, as they fund and distribute material incentives that are much needed for mobilising action and to limit the so-called 'free-riding' (Earl & Kimport, 2011). In contrast, grievance, or attitude-based approaches, the political process model (Tilly, 1978) suggests that resources are not the only essential condition for a movement to emerge and grow, and that incentives for participation can emerge within disadvantaged grassroots groups who work collectively to facilitate and structure collective action (McAdam, 1982). In the same pool, structural and rational choice accounts of participation also break with

grievance-based conceptions of social movements. The first ascribes activism to structural proximity and network connections, the second to individual cost-benefit calculations. Based on the assumption that structural and rational choice theories are mutually exclusive and that the strength of each position is the weakness of the other (Friedman & McAdam, 1992), it has been suggested that the solution for one of the chronic problems of collective action, that is, free-riding (Olson, 1971), is the fusion between the two concepts (Friedman & McAdam, 1992). Friedman and McAdam suggest that networks mobilise more collective action than rational choice theory and its free-rider problem do because potential actors in a collective action are tied to other actors. These networks draw individuals into activism, thus evading the need for extensive material incentives. These networks, then, draw these embedded individuals into collective action by providing incentives (p. 160, 161).

With the emergence of the Internet and new communication technologies, sociologists, political scientists and media scholars have made their efforts to unpack the components of social movements with regard to structuring new opportunities for collective action by these technologies. In most cases, the networking theory has been widely embedded and expanded to the investigation of new media's influence on the emergence and development of social movements (see, e.g., Castells, 1997; Castells et al., 2007; Bennett, 2003a, 2003b; Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). However, with very few exceptions (Hwang, Schmierbach, Paek, Zuniga, & Shah, 2006; Nah, Veenstra, & Shah, 2006), the vast majority of these studies, as will be shown in the first section of this chapter, have dealt with media use as the measure of time that people spend with a certain medium, rather than asking questions about active media use and consequent influences. These queries have been raised by the U&G perspective of media consumption (Palmgreen, 1984), which addresses questions such as why certain media are selected, the tasks for which they are best suited, and people's perceptions of these media (Flanagin & Metzger, 2001). Moreover, most of these studies have investigated social movements on an *ad hoc* basis and were implemented as a reaction to an eruption of protests. In the aforementioned empirical exceptions that looked at forms of media use, participants were not necessarily activists, but rather were dissenters who held political opinions that differed from what is promoted in mainstream media.

Although not systematically studied through U&G concepts, which basically look at the different functions that media serve for active users, studies on media's influence on social movements have associated certain forms of media uses (i.e., instrumental uses⁶ that usually aim to achieve certain goals, and ideological or symbolic ones that are more normative in nature and aim to establish more solid connections between actors and movements) with certain impacts. For example, reasons that drive people to participate in collective actions (Klandermans, 2004; Klandermans & Oegema, 1987) have been linked to reasons behind media use for participatory purposes to see how motivations for practising political collective action might reflect on reasons for using digital media for the same purpose (van Laer, 2010). Conversely, using digital media to achieve certain political purposes might influence people's tendency to participate in protests. These different media functions seem to create an area of tension for social movement scholars, and they also have their impact on conceptions of movement commitment and sustainability. Some scholars, for example, see that instrumental uses do not contribute to developing an activist identity, nor do they reinforce an existent one (Diani, 2000), while others assert that Internet use by social movement organisations develops a flexible form of identity that positively influences the practice of collective action and allows transnational movements to emerge and thrive (della Porta & Mosca, 2005). To set up such an assumption, this chapter first starts with reviewing previous work on reasons behind the selection and use of SM and how these may relate to fulfilling individuals' participatory needs through different forms of political practices.

Across these theoretical foundations and various perspectives, it is possible to discern a clear outline that transcends the limits of any single theoretical approach to the study of social movements and collective action. Movement scholars from different theoretical traditions usually emphasise the importance of three broad groups of factors in analysing the emergence and development of social movements. McAdam et al. (1996), for example, offered a tripartite framework to enable an understanding of social

⁶ The uses and gratifications approach distinguishes between instrumental and ritualised uses of media. While instrumental uses entail a level of purposive activity that aims to achieve certain goals, ritualistic or habitual use is a mild stimulation of audience activity that is considered one of the limiting factors of media effects (Ruggiero, 2000). Ritualistic use involves the concept of utility, but little intentionality or selectivity (Blumler, 1979). Media functions have been conceptualised differently in social movement study. For example, Diani (2000) distinguished between the instrumental and ideological uses that involve the construction and development of movement identity that is crucial for involvement in the collective action and sustainability of social movements.

movements with a special focus on the meso-level organisational dynamics. They mainly looked at (1) mobilising structures; (2) opportunity structures; and (3) framing processes. Additionally, an overarching factor of media uses is incorporated into the discussion to serve the ultimate aim of the current inquiry: investigating whether SM might create opportunities for practising forms of contentious political activities off-line at the micro-level (with individuals as the unit of analysis) as perceived by a sample of young Egyptian activists. This organising framework has been employed for a similar purpose in previous research that investigates digital media's influence on social movement development (van de Donk, Loader, Nixon, & Rucht, 2004; Garrett, 2006). However, these empirical and theoretical endeavours have primarily investigated the influence of time spent online, rather than asking the 'why' question about media functions.

3.2. Social media functions

With the proliferation of the Internet, many scholars have crossed the line from 'who' and 'what' and have addressed the question about 'why' a certain audience chooses to attend to specific media outlets (Blumler & Katz, 1974; Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974; Swanson, 1987). The last decade has witnessed a digital media boom that has significantly affected interest in the impact that ICTs might have on several domains of life. This information revolution has particular implications on politics (DiMaggio, Hargittai, Neuman, & Robinson, 2001) as it is creating an environment for political practice that is distinguished by being information-rich and communication-intensive (Bimber, 2001).

It has been argued that studying motivation rather than impact (boyd, 2008), and patterns of use rather than gross hours of use (Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001) aids a better understanding of the potentials that certain modalities of media consumption hold for enabling political actions. The U&G perspective reinforces active images of audiences, specifying that individuals select and use media based on needs and on their perceptions of media attributes that might help to satisfy those needs. SM have received a level of U&G attention. Albeit, this attention has by and large been focused on the general audience, usually college students who tend to be heavy users of SM (Cheung, Chiu, & Lee, 2011; Liu, Cheung, & Lee, 2010; Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter,

& Espinoza, 2008; Stoeckl, Rohrmeie, & Hess, 2007). Few studies have applied the U&G rationale to politically interested Internet users (Kaye & Johnson, 2002, 2004), and only a small, yet growing, body of studies have deployed the approach to explain how Internet users utilise social networking sites (SNSs)—in particular—to fulfill political needs (Leung L., 2009; Cozma & Ancu, 2009; Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009; Gary, Paul, & Rekha Sharma, 2008).

Research on different media outlets (print, broadcast and more recently the Internet) has distinguished regular patterns of consumption and related gratifications. Some contrast information and surveillance media use with the entertainment or recreational functions they serve (Norris & Jones, 1998; Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001; Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001). Other studies have categorised media uses and functions under a wider umbrella of instrumental versus ritualised media orientations (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000), or instrumental versus symbolic uses (Diani, 2000).

The applicable studies of new media functions and their influence on individuals' political practices to date fall into two groups. Some researchers have looked at media uses in their relation to conventional political practices and to enhancing democracy that is focused primarily on voting and building social capital. A smaller, yet rapidly growing, body of research has investigated new media's potential for mobilisation and democratic transformation. These clusters are discussed in the following pages.

Media uses and conventional political practice: one of the ways to solve the dilemma of limited participation in collective action and increased numbers of free riders, as Putnam claims, is social capital (Walgrave & Verhulst, 2009, p. 1378). Social capital researchers have found results that support the importance and influence of different media functions for civic practices at the micro-level. This line of research focuses mainly on measuring citizens' levels of resources, their motivation and attitudes, and the knowledge that facilitates their civic participation (Shah, 1998; Brehm & Rahn, 1997).

Studies of the relationship between media consumption and the production of social capital have mainly started with a focus on traditional media with rather doubtful views about media impact. These studies have failed to make a connection between media use and social capital production due to the methodological deficiency of looking at media

use through the measuring of time rather than by exploring the different functions that media serve for individuals. For example, the political scientist Robert Putnam (1995) views television viewership as a barrier to civic participation. He argues that time spent with media have 'displacement effects' on other activities that build the community. Putnam concludes that rising rates of television usage and a decline in newspaper readership are associated with a decline in civic practices and interpersonal trust. Furthermore, it is thought that mass media, particularly television, distortedly depicts social reality and cultivates a perception of the world as a mean place (Uslaner, 1998). However, such arguments, made by political scientists and sociologists about negative media effects on civic participation, have been criticised for being simplistic. They do not count on the varied functions that media serve; as they deal with media use as a measure of the time that individuals spend with a given medium or media. By doing so, they fail to recognise the multiplicity of motives and uses of media. They also propose a single mass communication experience (rather than multiple uses and motives), and one audience (rather than different types of users) (Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001, p. 465). Such generalisations could be misleading, especially with a communication medium like the Internet; where individuals have different experiences that can by no means be regarded as universal (Norris & Jones, 1998).

Nevertheless, this failure to transcend how much people use media, to considering how they use them has been extended to the Internet, yielding ambiguous and oversimplified conclusions. For example, Kraut et al.'s longitudinal analysis (1998) concludes that intensified use of the Internet corrodes domestic communication. As they write: "like watching television, using a home computer and the Internet generally implies physical inactivity and limited face-to-face social interaction" (p. 1019). Likewise, Internet use was argued to detach people from their social environment. Increases in time spent online were associated with decreases in the time people spend socialising and attending events outside the home (Nie & Erbring, 2002). Putnam (2000) also extended his views about television to the Internet. Although he acknowledges that the Internet is an incomparable outlet for free and easily accessed information, he still contends that information alone cannot produce the type of community ties and social capital required for the development and provision of democracy. Moreover, he raises concerns about the absence of important cues in Internet interactions and believes that

anonymity deprives the communication process of the important social cues that are readily present in face-to-face communication.

In order to address the issue of collapsing new media use that includes varied activities into units of measure such as time online, a group of media scholars has made efforts to investigate the relationship between different patterns of media use and civic engagement. Research in this area has yielded dichotomous findings. The general argument is that the informational and surveillance functions of the Internet have pro-civic and political consequences, while entertainment and diversion uses (i.e., chat room participation) associate negatively with civic participation (Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001).

In the early days of diffusion, the Internet was compared with traditional print and broadcast media. Shah, McLeod and Yoon (2001) found that Internet use patterns more strongly influence trust in people and civic participation than do uses of traditional media. They assert that patterns of use, rather than Internet use *per se*, is what matters for the study of media influence. In another study that looked solely at the Internet, Shah and colleagues (2001) corroborated the previous findings. They found that informational uses of the Internet are positively related to individual differences in the production of civic engagement, interpersonal trust, and contentment with life, whereas social-recreational uses are negatively related to these civic indicators. Both studies confirm that the relationship between new media and social capital is dynamic and highly contextual. In a more recent study, Shah and colleagues (2005) compared the role played by the Internet with traditional print and broadcast media and face-to-face communication. They found that online information seeking and interactive civic messaging—uses of the Web as a resource and a forum—both strongly influence civic engagement more than do other media.

With the arrival of Web 2.0 technologies and the more active role individual users can play in the virtual sphere, media scholars have tried to understand these new media potentials for enhancing individuals' social capital. It has been argued that SNSs are well suited to maintaining weak ties cheaply and easily. Hence, these technologies could greatly increase the individual's heterogeneous network of ties. "If this is true, it implies that the technologies that expand one's social network will primarily result in an

increase in available information and opportunities — the benefits of a large, heterogeneous network” (Donath & boyd, 2004, p. 80).

Certain media uses were found to support the production of social capital more than others. Informational uses of the Internet, for example, were found to encourage discussions about political issues and hence, to strengthen people’s tendency to engage in political activities (Nah, Veenstra, & Shah, 2006; Shah, Cho, Eveland, & Kwak, 2005). Political surveillance functions were strongly and positively related to practising certain forms of political activity on this communicative channel, such as watching news, political ads, and direct-to-camera videos (Hanson, Haridakis, & Sharma, 2008). Some theorists link both information seeking and discussion of political issues to a common set of gratifications sought by users. In particular, Greenberg (1975) argues that the “interpersonal utility” function explains that people consume news content so that they can relay that information to others and discuss issues more persuasively” (cited in Nah, Veenstra, & Shah, 2006, p. 231). Cozma and Ancu (2009) found that voters visited the MySpace profiles of primary candidates during the 2008 presidential campaign in the U.S.A. mainly for social interaction with supporters with whom they shared similar interests, followed by the information seeking and entertainment functions.

While information seeking and entertainment were the strongest gratifications sought from the consumption of online political content, they came second after social interaction on MySpace and SNSs more broadly. Ellison et al. (2006), for example, found that information-seekers on Facebook were found to benefit from their online practices more than entertainment-oriented users of SNSs. Although these findings might seem consistent with the nature of SNSs as platforms created mainly for social utility purposes, they may yet seem at odds with SM’s role in maintaining democratic practices or in instigating democratic transformation. That is, it was found that users who rely on SNSs for political information are more likely to practise political activities than others, which might not be the case on SNSs. Facebook group use for recreational gratifications was not found to encourage users’ participation in political events in comparison to practising civic activities (Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009; Zhang, Johnson, Seltzer, & Bichard, 2010). However, it was suggested that the greater use of Facebook for entertainment, rather than for informational purposes, does not necessarily suggest a passive audience’s political role due to level of activity that using SM entails that is not

present when using traditional media. “Entertaining one’s self via Facebook is fundamentally different than doing so watching television, due to the increased activity necessitated by the site and the connectivity-enhancing benefits” (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2006, p. 28). This basic functional difference between new (and more interactive) and old media uses is expected to produce different influences in terms of enhancing (or hindering) political practice (Williams, 2006).

Media uses and protesting: Extra-institutional politics has also had its share of SM influence and consequently of scholarly attention. Social movement organisations and individual activists seem to be ardent adopters of new communication technologies (Bennett, 2003a; van de Donk, Loader, Nixon, and Rucht, 2004). Functional categorisation of media uses, similar to those linked to political participation and civic engagement, has been linked, on a narrower scale, to social movement organisation and the mobilisation of unconventional collective practices. For example, in his critique of the Internet’s and SM’s potential to enhance democracy and undermine authoritarianism, Morozov (2012) distinguishes between the ‘instrumental’ and ‘ecological’ uses of SM. Instrumental uses, according to Morozov, mean that the Internet is just a neutral tool and an amplifier, and all that matters is how people utilise it to achieve good or bad ends. Ecological uses, on the other hand, mean that the Internet transforms both the environment where politics is made, and those who participate in politics (p. 8, 12).

It is inferred from Morozov (2012) and others’ (e.g., Diani, 2000) that instrumental uses of media function differently in the realm of social movements. As instrumental uses imply a more active role of media users and so entail a positive association with political participation, instrumentality may help activists to achieve certain goals that are related to organising their movement and to creating positive dispositions that help the movement thrive. Yet, as compared to symbolic uses of media, using new media as a means to certain ends does not necessarily help to develop and sustain social movements as, compared to symbolic uses, they do not feed into building identities and developing feelings of commitment to movements. These assumptions are specially explored in the following section.

3.3. Social media uses for social movement organisation

An increasing body of research has pointed out that the availability and purposive use of digital media, such as websites, blogs and SNSs, has enabled large-scale collective action to be organised on individual-level networking structures. Assessed by various devices such as computers and mobile phones, such communication affordances lower the cost of mobilisation and participation in ways that seem to be altering the conventional logic of collective action. Besides the convenience of easier and less costly communication, the Internet also seems to have an influence on how movements organise by fostering loose ties and ideologically heterogeneous campaigns (Bennett 2003a). For example, Lupia and Sin (2003) have contested the basic assumptions of collective action theories that associate sustained and coordinated action to requisites such as formal organisation and leadership. Earl and Schussman (2002) argue that the Internet has facilitated faster communication, broader reach, and has expanded mobilisation capacity, allowing for an “entrepreneurial movement infrastructure” (p. 155). Along the same line, Bimber et al. (2005) have suggested a typology of a fluid collective action space in which a type of entrepreneurial, less centralised communication networks emerged among members of conventional (hierarchical, centralised) organisations. The success of several online collective endeavours has been ascribed to such organisational hybrids (Flanagin, Stohl, & Bimber, 2006). Bennett (2005) identifies three properties of what he calls “recent-generation transnational activism.” He argues that emerging transnational protests like global social justice movement and protests against the U.S. war and occupation of Iraq are distinguished for their “*inclusive organisation models* that favour diversity and issue-linking through distributed networks; *social technologies* that facilitate these relatively decentralised, “leaderless” networks and help explain shifts in the scale of coordinated transnational activism; and the *political capacities* of members of these technology-rich networks to communicate their issues and form effective political relationships with targets of protest” (p. 203, emphasis in original). In fact, the Internet theoretically makes polycentric and non-hierarchical forms of movement organisation possible (Gerlach, 2001).

Contrary to Durkeimian thinking on “mass society theory,” Oberschall stresses the importance of prior group coherence to the mobilisation of conflict groups. Starting at

zero-level mobilisation with shared interests but no organisation would significantly raise a group's organising costs. A good solution, Oberschall argues, is to build, both intentionally and unintentionally, on existing group structure (cited in Tilly, 1978, p. 81). The Internet seems to afford less-resourceful activists these less costly, more flexible prior organisation and more participatory structures (Bennett, 2003a). Earl and Kimport (2011) claim that when the costs of organising collective action are lower, the necessity of social movement organisations subsides. More generally, the Internet:

... .. fits with the basic features with the kind of social movements emerging in the information age To build an historical analogy, the constitution of the labour movement in the industrial era cannot be separated from the industrial factory as its organisational setting The Internet is not simply a technology: it is a communication media, and it is the material infrastructure of a given organisational form: the network (Castells, 2001, pp. 135-136).

One of the main parameters of social movements that mediate between individual networks as organisational form and political capacity and outcome achievement is identity building (Tindall, 2002). However, it is worth noting here that I shall not deal with identity issues empirically in this research. I am interested only in the extent to which certain forms of new media use might influence certain forms of identification, and how the latter could influence individual's tendency to participate in unconventional collective action.

It has been argued that playing at being an "activist" is a prerequisite to becoming one (McAdam, 1986, p. 70) and hence, to participating in collective action. Additionally to benefitting social movements at their instrumental level of organisation and supporting collective action towards achieving a common goal, new communication technologies also seem to resonate with social movements at the normative level (della Porta, 2012). Thanks to the Internet, "we are now living in a more selective culture in which people are reflexive about their identities as citizens" (Coleman & Rowe, 2005, p. 5). However, although new media contribute to organising collective action at lower cost and enable forms of organisation that transcend traditional hierarchical models to develop more flexible organising structures, this fluidity still creates areas of tension that may feed into feelings of dissatisfaction about media's contribution. For example, using SM as an organisational tool develops flexible identities, which raises concerns about commitment to, and sustainability of social movements. These speculations are discussed in the following section.

3.3.1. Instrumental uses of social media, identification with and commitment to social movements

Unlike mass media, “social movements not only seek [audience] attention but also support and commitment” (Rucht, 2004, p. 33). Understanding how individuals identify with social movements has been increasingly discussed through the media lens (see, e.g. Castells, 2010; Pini, Brown, & Previte, 2004; van Zoonen, 1992). SM’s influence on developing collective identities is evident in recent research on social movements. Bennett (2005) concluded from his analysis of 705 cases around the February 15th, 2003, antiwar demonstrations in the U.S.A., that participants who relied most on the Internet and other digital media for their political information and communication were more likely to have strong identification with the global justice movement when compared to those who relied less on digital media or more on mass media, like TV, newspapers and radio. della Porta and Mosca (2005) found that activists in the anti-G8 protest in Genoa in July 2001 and the European Social Forum (ESF) in Florence in November 2002 had used computer-mediated-communication (CMC) to develop what they called “non-virtual identities.” That is, using CMC makes activists think about and discuss certain topics both before a protest begins and later. It also helps them to communicate between one (physical) meeting and another. Due to the Internet’s capability to link distant and isolated individuals, it has been argued that the Internet fosters pluralist, open identities. Similarly, in his comparison between what he calls “direct action networks” and a more familiar model of organisationally brokered, ideological and issue-driven coalitions, Bennett (2005) concludes that using digital communication has allowed the diffusion of an organising code, or what is often termed “relationship-building”, based on meta-frames such as diversity, inclusiveness, and social justice. This “relaxed framing”, or what della Porta (2005) terms “tolerant identities”, enables individuals with varied positions to join in remarkably large actions. In fact, the Internet has promoted a form of ‘individualised identities,’ an archetype of a networked society, that can nurture, discover and deploy creative forms of organisation through the Web (Castells, 1997).

Using SM as mobilising structures for social movements thus influences the development of a form of identity that is usually flexible and tolerant in nature. This identification, on the one hand, relates to certain underpinnings that define its nature;

these are affiliations to formal social movement organisations (SMOs) and former experiences with collective action or direct contact with activists. On the other hand, flexibly identifying with social movements raises some concerns about the life cycle of movements and hence creates an area of tension about SM's potential for supporting sustained collective action that is primarily practised off-line. These assumptions are discussed below.

Flexible identification with movements has been valid at the organisational level only. In general, the Internet did not seem to have an influence on the identification process with the analysed movement (della Porta & Mosca, 2005). In fact, Bennett believes that facilitating identity bridging through social technologies has incapacitated "movement with weak collective identity and a relatively weak core political agenda" (Bennett, 2005, p. 225). More recently, Bennett et al. (2008) argued that digital media can redefine the dynamics of social movement organisation in that they may enable "sustainable interpersonal network organisation on a large scale that is (to varying degrees) independent of and in some cases, may act upon conventional institutional organisations." Yet they emphasise that "organisations continue to play important roles in connecting and mobilising activists" (p. 271, 272). This role, according to Earl and Kimport (2011) resides (among other aspects) in facilitating the "collection and strategic deployment of [movement] resources, and in doing so, fund(ing) selective incentives" (p. 68). According to resource mobilization theory, social movements partially use their resources to provide incentives which might be able to outweigh the costs associated with protest and reduce free riding (McCarthy & Zald, 1977).

With the rapid development and increasing influence of "digitally-networked action" (DNA), Bennett and Segerberg (2012) have recently loosened up this organisational affiliation condition for movement identification. They articulated a new form of *connective* action that "invites analytical attention to the network as an organisational structure in itself." They argue that "communication technologies do not change the action dynamics in large-scale networks characterised by the logic of collective action [but] in the networks characterised by connective action, they do" (p. 753). Other researchers have also reached a similar conclusion. For example, Diani (2011) argues that networks are in themselves organisational structures that can surpass the fundamental units of organisations and individuals rather than being just components

of collective action (cited in Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). However, Bennett and Segerberg do not exclude off-line exchanges and actions from the equation of sustained, politically effective organisation and mobilisation. Rather, they argue that “the flexible, recombinant nature of DNA makes these web spheres *and their off-line extensions* more than just communication systems” (emphasis added) (p. 753).

Previous experience with collective participation was also found to be influential in regard to individuals’ identification with social movements. A high percentage of the non-organised who participated in previous demonstrations, were found to identify with movement in general (della Porta & Mosca, 2005). This suggests that, in the absence of formal organising structures and/or prior participatory experience, developing an activist identity merely through SM use might be a tough goal to achieve. Moreover, it has been suggested that instrumental utilisation, as opposed to symbolic, normative or ideologically-oriented use of digital media, might help reinforce existing identities but not to create new ones (Diani, 2000). Bimber (2001) empirically examined an instrumental model of political information and its relationship to political engagement at the individual level. He concluded that instrumental uses of information do not predict political participation. Contrary to instrumental-quantitative perceptions of theories of behaviour, Bimber suggests that “if information technology is to affect political participation, it will likely be through [influencing] attention, salience, affect, schema, and other *cognitive* phenomena involved in the formation of political knowledge rather than through simple reduction in cost or increases in the volume of political information” (emphasis added) (p. 64). Furthermore, van Laer (2010) argues that “using the Internet seems to not be particularly conducive to creating a stronger collective identity or reinforcing the perceived efficacy of the demonstration [online and off-line activists] participated in” (p. 359). Using SM to support the organising and practising of collective action towards the manifestation of a common good thus does not necessarily result in the construction of *new* participatory identities or the turning of non-activists and less-interested citizens into active participants. Rather, SM’s contributions build upon pre-existing identities due to prior experience and/or formal affiliation to social movement organisation(s). In fact, using digital media for identity building might create situations where some participants in protests carry signs with whose sentiments they did not agree and they “didn’t even look at it [but

were] just waving it” (Bennett, 2005, p. 204). Such cases cast doubt on the capacity of political practice and the efficiency of the ultimate outcome of collective action (van Laer & van Aelst, 2010; Bennett, 2005).

As for commitment to movements, it has generally been suggested that research on social movements has raised some normative rather than instrumental constraints that influence different social movements’ use of the media (della Porta, 2012, p. 52). A legitimate question here, then, is how these newly-formed, loose, manifold identities might reflect on social movements and the sustainable practice of collective action⁷. A range of empirical studies indicates that the digital media are unable to serve sustained collective action or to guarantee participants’ commitment to social movement. The abundance of the alternatives of associations that are available online might foster low level of commitment that links individuals to such fluid structures. As Norris writes; “commitments to any particular online group can often be shallow and transient when another is but a mouse click away. Most purely online communities without any physical basis are usually low-cost, ‘easy-entry, easy-exit’ groups” (p. 4). della Porta rang the bells of “depoliticisation” and fragmentation due to social movements’ comprehension as “particularist actors” (della Porta, 2012, p. 42). van Laer (2010) studied motivations to participate in collective action and Internet use by both online and off-line activists. He found that both instrumental motives and collective identity motives to participate in collective action *only slightly* drive activists’ use of the Internet, i.e., the belief that something can be changed and that participation in demonstrations is an effective way to do so (instrumental motives), and participants’ feeling of group belonging and-group solidarity do not significantly differ between off-line and online activists. van Laer has thus conversely suggested that using the Internet does not particularly fertilise stronger collective identity nor the perceived efficacy of collective action. Earl and Schussman (2002) earlier raised the problem of the strength of commitment to social movements. They contended that the rise of “e-activism” has created movement “users” rather than “members.” They argue that while using the Internet has enabled the fast growth and wide spread of protests, this boom is usually followed by a faster decline in commitment. Along the same line, Garrett

⁷ It should be noted that these studies were conducted in the context of transnational protests, where diversity and flexibility are expected to emerge as a consequence of protesters heterogeneity (see also Walgrave & Verhulst, 2009).

(2006) argues that technology-enabled additions to the repertoire of collective action might constrain the set of actions an activist can perform and may eventually formalise the role of activists and limit them. van Laer and van Aelst (2010), although confirming the role of the Internet in creating new opportunities for collective engagement, think that the Internet has made political action too easy, in some cases limiting the final impact of a certain action. As they write “it seems that the new media more fundamentally are unable to create stable ties between activists that are necessary for sustained collective action” (p. 1146). Using the Internet for political purposes might, then, result in a state of *motivational dissonance*; where participants have the motives for participation, yet these motivations might be spurred by ease of use or the lower cost of online practices. Individuals, therefore, may relent on online practices and prefer them to taking to the streets, which could hamper the sustainability of the political process, since it might not support the creation (or reinforcement) of significant participatory parameters such as collective identity and political efficacy.

Scholars also disagree about the potential of new communication technologies for empowering poorer people. While some emphasise a possible equalisation (Myers, 2002), others instead suggest either a neutral impact or the normalisation of political activity (Margolis & Resnick, 2000), or even more concentration of power (McChesney, 1996). CMC seems to favour the elite over the masses, and it tends to reproduce the digital divide and hierarchy, and develops vertical relations instead of interactive, horizontal relationships (Rucht, 2003, p. 28). Rucht further suggests that “online activism could become a low-cost but also a low-effect substitute for off-line protest (p. 31).

Individuals do not make decisions about participation in a social vacuum (Fernandez & McAdam, 1988), hence, there are some aspects that are specific to the participatory context in authoritarian regimes to which it is worth paying attention when discussing collective activism in such contexts. Such contextualisation of understandings sheds new light on structural approaches to movements. From a political process perspective, it has been argued that “societal environments in which aggrieved groups exist both affect their capacities to gather resources, and affect the efficacy of their use of those resources once gathered. (Williams, 2004, p. 95)

3.4. Social media and shaping opportunities in repressive contexts

'Political opportunity' is a general concept that has received hardly any consensus. It has been defined, interpreted and applied differently to a variety of empirical issues in the study of social movements. McAdam (1996) has argued that such variant utilisation of the concept might put its value at stake. For McAdam, variations in the present use of the term stem from three key sources. First, he argues, political opportunities should not be mixed with other 'facilitating conditions.' He blames several scholars (Gamson and Meyer, 1996; Brand, 1990) for example, for mixing cultural factors or processes that may create opportunities for movement activity with the opportunities themselves. Second, McAdam stresses the importance of specifying the dimensions of political opportunity based on the assumption that it is "less a variable than a cluster of variables—some more readily observable than others" (Tarrow, 1988, p. 430). Third, McAdam adds another dimension to the relevant dependant variables used to study political opportunity. He suggests that 'movement form,' along with the 'timing of collective action' and the 'outcome of movement activity,' should be considered as one of the dependent variables that is owed, in part, to variations in the nature of the opportunities that contribute to the emergence of particular movements.

However, as the vague utilisation of the concept of political opportunity is acknowledged, the flexibility suggested by its varied use is useful for this current inquiry. Discussion in this section mainly focuses on the role new digital media have, and still are, playing in shaping the favouring of political dispositions to participation in social movements, rather than focusing on political opportunity structures as systematic changes in polity and shifts in power that render a given regime vulnerable to challenge from different interested actors and groups (some of these changes were previously discussed in Chapter Two). In fact, McAdam (1996) asserts that Gamson and Meyer (1996) are right to emphasise the importance of the framing of political opportunity and the crucial role played by the media in structuring this process. These processes, McAdam argues, are important for a full understanding of movement dynamics. By doing so, it would be possible to link discussion of such processes to the wider political context of the current study, and to gauge whether this context represents "cases in which clearly favourable political shifts do not yield the kinds of empowering interpretations so necessary to collective action", and/or "collective

action develops in the absence of any significant change in the relative power position of the challenging group(s),” (McAdam, 1996, p. 26) and how new communication technologies might have contributed to shaping opportunities for involvement in either case.

From the social psychological perspective of social movements and collective action analysis, variation in personality characteristics, additional to structural or network theories and rational choice theories, may explain participation in collective action. To focus the discussion more, and to avoid confusion that might stem from the abundance of possible opportunities, coupled with the aforementioned varied use of the concept, the discussion builds upon Opp’s (2009) explication of Olson’s (1971) *implicit* micro-macro theory of collective action.⁸ Two parameters of possible opportunities are particularly highlighted: lowering the cost of participation—with special emphasis on fear of repression as a form of high cost/risk normally attached to participation in repressive regimes, and political efficacy that is crucial for participation in such excluding, threatening contexts. In other words:

⁸ Opp (2009, p. 50-51) identified four conditions for individual participation at the micro-level. These conditions are:

- (1) Selective incentives: The stronger the positive incentives for contributing and the stronger the negative selective incentives for not contributing, the more likely individuals are to contribute to the provision of the public good. Individuals tend to evaluate incentives against behaviour and they participate only if they perceive this behaviour to be rewarding.
- (2) Costs: The higher the cost of contributing to the provision of the public good, the less likely is contribution. This proposition entails that individual actors will refrain from being involved in collective actions which they perceive to be costly; whether costly means spending money, time, or suffering risk due to participation in a repressive context. The more new information and communication technology participate in lowering the cost of participation, the more they contribute to the provision of the collective good.
- (3) Public good motivation: The more intense the goal of providing the public good is, the more likely individuals will be to contribute.
- (4) Efficacy: The higher the influence of an individual’s contribution on the provision of a public good is, the more likely an individual will be to contribute.

If individuals have an intense preference for the public good and believe that their contribution will have an impact, then they have a reason to participate in collective action to make this public good materialise. Considered together, the public good motivation and efficacy proposition are argued to have a multiplicative (or interaction) effect. That is, “the effect of the intensity of the motivation to provide the public good depends on the extent to which the contribution makes a difference and vice versa” (p. 51).

In [Western democracies], ample opportunities exist for forming groups, for mobilising new members or personal networks, and for cooperation with other groups. Consequently, communication critical of the incumbent government or political system can be exchanged without fear of severe repression. These conditions are not met in authoritarian societies. Attempts to establish opposition networks are blocked by government agencies and are severely sanctioned. Communicating critical opinions to friends and acquaintances is also risky (Opp & Gern, 1993, p. 659).

3.4.1. Social media and lower-cost/risk opportunities of participation

Recent developments in communication technology have provided easier and safer space where individuals can participate in low-cost (and low risk) actions. Such developments may change the dynamics of collective action by addressing one of the factors that may act as psychological barriers to overt participation in collective action. For example, McAdam (1996) lists the 'state's capacity and propensity for repression' among his synthesised list of the dimensions of political opportunity. It is expected, then, that the higher the oppressive reactions towards (and indeed the cost of) public political activities, the less likely individuals would be to become involved in such actions.

Applying an approach similar to rational choice's costs and benefits, or what they term the 'leveraged affordances approach,' Earl and Kipmort (2011) traced the cost affordance of the web and how cost leveraging impacts both on the organisation of and participation in protests. They argue that innovative uses of the Web for protest add new mechanisms to organisation and the practice of collective action, allowing for more flexibility in structure and exercise. Thanks to the Web, Earl and Kimport argue, protest has become less costly, and meaningful collective action has become possible without the traditional requirement of copresence. As for creating opportunities for the organisers, they were more reserved in assuming the possibility of the existence of organisation-free social movements. For example, they believe that while Web technologies have enabled the organising of events at lower cost, a formal organisational presence seems to be crucial to afford cleaning up in the aftermath of collective events. However, Earl and Kimport believe that accelerating innovations in Web use might allow for movement growth without the aid of formal organisation.

The safer virtual environment of communication and practice could benefit the non-politicised (and soft-core activists) who might not have the competences and prior

experience necessary to identify with social movements and to participate in collective action, especially when their practices fall outside the realm of conventional politics and may bring unwanted consequences. In their empirical study of how context affected individual protesters against the war in Iraq, Walgrave and Verhulst (2009) argue that perceived support from public opinion and the media matters for the inclusion of diverse participants and in broadening the scale of protests. On the governmental side, they argue that “the more governments (political elites) tolerate and even support protest events, the more protest will become further normalised” (p. 1378). It is expected, then, that one’s perception of being in a minority, or the inability to weigh one’s political stances against another’s in the constituency may induce withdrawal from the public realm of political practice; especially for those who are non-politicised or less-interested in politics.

Allowing platforms for the venting of emotions and the shaping and buttressing of ideology (Kwon & Nam, 2009), instigating feelings of being more psychologically empowered through acts of reading, writing, and commenting on other people’s blogs and posting videos on YouTube (Leung, 2009), and raising one’s self-esteem and life satisfaction by the intensive use of Facebook (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2008) all act as catalysts for participation, which may then feed into individuals’ sense of belonging to their community and may even colour their civic identity with a commemorative sense of honour.

As previously discussed, prior social upbringing and governmental repression are expected to alter individuals’ perceptions of themselves as competent agents for change in their societies and hence influence their tendency to take part in collective action. Such negative perceptions may place those who fear repression and feel inefficacious in the “latitude of rejection” rather than the “latitude of acceptance” of collective action participation, i.e., “certain prior attitudes will virtually preclude a segment of the population from participating in even the safest forms of activism” (McAdam, 1986, p. 68). These perceptions might apply to a certain cause for which individuals mobilise (or are being mobilised), and they can also apply to the issue of involvement itself and how meaningful individuals think their participation will be.

Researchers have looked at participation versus non-participation among motivated individuals. Klandermans and Oegema (1987) provide an interesting outline of the size of these respective groups in their study of recruitment to a major peace demonstration in the Netherlands. The authors conclude from their pre and post interviews with a sample of 114 individuals that 26 percent of interviewees fell within the "latitude of rejection" with regard to the demonstration's goals. Nearly three-quarters of the sample thus remained potentially available for recruitment. Yet only four percent actually attended the rally, meaning that a majority of 90 percent of those who are attitudinally available for activism chose not to participate. McAdam (1986) ascribes the difference between attitudinal affinity and actual participation fairly slightly to the role of individual attitudes (and the background factors from which they derive). He assumes that this withdrawal may be due to the lack of prior contact with a recruiting agent who could have highlighted the significant social costs of non-participation to potential participants. However, McAdam's explanation applies for recruitment to low-risk and cost-free forms of activism. Similarly, issue-attitudes did not also seem to drive individuals' tendency to participate in protests following the Three Mile Island (TMI) accident in Pennsylvania. In their empirical comparative study of the mobilisation processes between activists and free riders, Walsh and Warland (1983) found that 87 percent (288 of 330) of the TMI opponents and 98 percent of the TMI supporters were objective free riders. To illustrate the reasons behind this high percentage of free riders, the researchers asked activists to guess why persons who were essentially in agreement with their local social movement organisation's goals did not become actively involved with the group. They also asked the free riders why they, themselves, did not become involved. The activists mentioned "political powerlessness" most frequently, and only four percent gave reasons that could be classified as "overt free riding." Interestingly, none suggested communication or recruitment shortcomings as a possible explanation. The largest number (26 percent) of free riders, on the other hand, said they had never heard of their local protest group. Familial preoccupations were the second most frequently mentioned reason (18 percent) (p. 773).

However, these effects have been widely analysed and discussed in Western democracies, where participatory context differs significantly from that in authoritarian regimes. In such regimes, policing protests and the state's repressive responses to anti-

government activities “have raised the stakes of virtual and physical protest,” (Lim, 2012, p. 557) hence, assessing these influences in regard to specificities of totalitarian regimes might draw different perspectives to the picture.

Starting from McAdam’s (1986) argument that “safe” forays into activism may have longer-range consequences [as] they place the new recruit “at risk” of being drawn into more costly forms of participation through [a] cyclical process of integration and resocialisation,” (p. 69) it is suggested that SM allow an opportunity for *online* safe activism that *might* lead to street participation. However, SM might not be suitable in themselves for inducing high-risk activism that is normally practised off-line. To further clarify this argument, according to McAdam, the gist of high-risk participation is not in providing an opportunity for safe practice *per se*, which could be afforded online. Rather, this safe practice, as shown in the quotation below, needs to involve ongoing processes of activist identity acquisition that eventually raise the appeal of more demanding activism, which requires more direct interaction with *real* activists. In other words:

Each succeeding foray into safe forms of activism increases the recruit's network integration, ideological affinity with the movement, and commitment to an activist identity, as well as his receptivity to more costly forms of participation. It is this type of gradual recruitment process that is likely to foster high-risk/cost activism (McAdam, 1986, p. 70).

Studies such as those of Taylor (1989) on abeyance structures and Melucci’s (1986, 1996) work on networks’ and movements’ latency, suggest that “movements in less repressive societies have ways of perpetuating themselves and biding time during times of low opportunity, in order that they might re-engage when opportunities improve” (cited in Crossley, 2002, p. 112). SM could thus serve as less controlled spaces where activists could safely bide their time and re-organise themselves during times of high risk or polity closed to practice. They can also be spaces where resistance cultures are cultivated and nurtured. Additionally, some studies, e.g., those of Scott (1985, 1990), point to the possibility that subterranean resistance cultures emerge in the context of highly repressive regimes. Such cultures might not engage in overt protest actions to avoid drastic consequences, such as detention or execution, but they generate and produce resistance identities and beliefs. These cultures, Scott argues, embody gestures

and symbols of resistance that are woven into the fabric of everyday life (cited in Tarrow, 2011).

One of the main attributions of SM that benefits activists in repressive regimes is the allowance of anonymous interactions between different media users. Social psychologists suggest that this anonymity may be most important for excluded and marginalised cohorts who are otherwise alienated from interactions outside their group, e.g., single mothers working at home, gay men, or rural poor populations (McKenna & Bargh, 2006). Anonymity may also loosen the ties of social status and allow for a more mutually inclusive environment of interaction. It has been argued that “textual communication via the Internet strips away the standard visual and aural cues of social identity—including those of gender, race, age, and socioeconomic status—plausibly promoting heterogeneity” (Norris, 2004, p. 5).

Nevertheless, communicating anonymously may diminish the locus of the communication process as it polarises debates rather than creating a common ground between the different lines of debated thought and contrasting points of view (Sunstein, 2002). While heterogeneity allows for the inclusion of more diverse populations on the Internet, as Norris (2004) suggests, communicative cues are important for the development of social identity. Putnam (2000), although he has acknowledged the Internet as an incomparable outlet for free and easily accessed information, has still contended that information alone cannot produce the type of community ties and social capital required for the development and provision of active participation. He believes that anonymity deprives the communication process of important social cues that are readily available in face-to-face communication. Anonymity on the Internet may harm the development of social movements as “participants in computer-base groups find it harder to reach consensus and feel less solidarity with one another.” Consequently, they develop “a asense of ‘depersonalisation’ and [become] less satisfied with the group’s accomplishments” (p. 172). Communicating from behind a pseudonym might also shake activists’ credibility and limit their opportunities to meet people off-line to enact their activism in the real, and even more threatening, sphere. Internet resources that are anonymous and lack interpersonal connections among users (e.g., bulletin boards/ mailing lists) are deemed less trustworthy (Johnson & Kaye, 2000). Further, it has been argued that the anonymity and deindividualisation of Internet membership

in numerous groups “may *replace* real world interactions to the detriment of the solidarity and singular purpose associated with social movement” (emphasis added) (Lim, 2012, p. 557).

Moreover, it seems that businesses like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube still conceive of themselves as platforms mainly designed for fulfilling social utility and entertainment purposes. Using pseudonyms may benefit activists in circumventing government censorship and in avoiding authority harassment, but doing so on Facebook is considered a violation of the company’s user agreement. For example, the company actually shut down one of the protest-group pages in December, 2010. Supporters eventually persuaded Facebook to restore the page. While Google has signed the Global Network Initiative—a compact for preventing Web censorship by authoritarian governments—Facebook has refused to do so (Howard & Hussain, 2011, pp. 46-47).

To summarise, anonymity as a parameter of safety in the online sphere is paradoxical for collective activism in authoritarian contexts. On the one hand, it may benefit oppositional groups and allow them safer opportunity for inclusion and practice, yet it may, on the other, cause some difficulties in relation to commitment and the building of mutual trust and credibility, that are much needed in sustaining collective, unconventional practice in reality. For example, Earl and Schussman (2004) found that hostile state reactions to *online* activism increase the potential costs to activists, which propel many activists (or organisers) to stop organising. On the other side of the coin, as time passes, dictators develop adaptation strategies and utilise new communication technologies to crack down on activists on- and off-line. In fact, new communication technologies can afford authoritarian governments what Morozov (2012) called “the post-protest clean up.” Facial recognition technology, voice analysis, and mobile tracking negate the anonymity thesis and could all be used to identify protest participants.

3.4.2. Social media and political efficacy as opportunity for participation

The relationship between political efficacy, media and political participation has been established by different threads of research. Generally, it has been argued that purposive use of media as sources of information and platforms for interaction grants individuals new skills, allows them opportunities to hone their existing ones and share their transferable skills and learn from others (i.e., Gennaro & Dutton, 2006). Feeling politically influential may raise their feelings of being powerful and capable of influencing their political environment, which eventually results in more participation (Zhang, Johnson, Seltzer, & Bichard, 2010). In other words:

Perceived efficacy plays a key role in human functioning because it affects behaviour not only directly, but by its impact on other determinants such as goals and aspirations, outcome expectations, affective proclivities, and perception of impediments and opportunities in the social environment (Bandura, 2000, p. 75).

In a country like Egypt, where the regime suppresses opposition and hinders active political participation, especially when it contradicts the elites' interests, it is expected that individuals may accumulate a feeling of inefficiency; as they tend to believe that exerting change is beyond their capabilities (Abramson & Aldrich, 1982).

Campbell, Gurin, and Miller (1954) have described the concept of political efficacy as "the feeling that political and social change is possible, and that the individual citizen can play a part in bringing about this change" (p. 187, cited in Kenski & Stroud, 2006, p. 174). Political efficacy includes both internal and external aspects. According to Niemi et al. (1991), "beliefs about the responsiveness of governmental authorities and institutions to citizens' demands" define external efficacy whereas citizens' "competence to understand, and to participate effectively in, politics" describes internal efficacy (p. 1407, 1408).

Proponents suggest that SM have the potential to increase individuals' feeling of political efficacy. They can enhance external political efficacy because they enable ordinary citizens to construct their own messages, address and interact with publics, and hold officials accountable. The Internet also makes access to information about politics and discussions of political issues more convenient and much easier for individuals. In that sense, new communication technologies may enhance individuals' internal political efficacy. Internet anonymity is one of the communicative attributes

that helps individuals with less experience in politics to communicate their views more confidently. Cornfield (2003) suggests that the Internet makes people less embarrassed about their political competence, he writes “the anonymity [the Internet] offers may assuage the fear of public embarrassment” (p. 106, cited in Kenski & Stroud, 2006, p. 175). Interacting anonymously provides “structural protection” (Tedesco, 2007, p. 1184) of individuals’ characteristics. This could bolster individuals’ morale to become involved in political issues without necessarily worrying about their safety and their government’s reactions to their *online* activities. Through analysing Internet survey data in the United Kingdom, Gennaro and Dutton (2006) found that Internet experience had a significant impact on political interest, political efficacy and *online* political participation.

These studies mainly found connections between political information-seeking on the Internet and political attitudes and participation. However, another body of research has shown more sceptical views on the Internet’s influence on political attitudes and has leaned more towards supporting the role traditional media (i.e., newspaper and television) use could play in this regard. For example, Scheufele and Nisbet (2002) found that the impact of Web-based forms of communication on political efficacy, knowledge, and participation is limited compared to the impact of traditional communication. They found that particularly those who use the Web for entertainment purposes were less likely to feel efficacious in their potential role in the political process and were also less knowledgeable about current events. In a study they conducted later, Nisbet and Scheufele, (2004) found that Internet campaign exposure only had a modest influence on political efficacy, political knowledge, and campaign participation.

On the other hand, opponents suggest that the Internet might bring about a decline in political efficacy, knowledge, and participation. For example, there are many complications in finding accurate and accessible political information online (Kenski & Stroud, 2006, p. 176). Many believe that Internet campaigns have “inherently weak mechanisms of information quality control,” and that the “Internet is a better medium for disseminating information and opinions than for building trust, developing coherence and resolving controversies” (Clark & Themudo, 2003, p. 114). Further, external efficacy may decrease if individuals attempting to contact their representatives

were discouraged by receiving either a formal letter response or no response at all (Johnson & Kaye, 2003).

Other studies, however, did not find that the Internet was positively related to efficacy (Kaye & Johnson, 2004; Jennings & Zeitner, 2003; Johnson & Kaye, 2003; Lin & Lim, 2002). For example, McCluskey et al. (2004) identified two distinct forms of efficacy: *actual* efficacy and *expected* efficacy. They researched how community integration and media use affect these two distinct perceptions of efficacy. Their community survey study showed that only television news use was a significant predictor of evaluations of actual efficacy. Newspaper reading and Internet information exchange were significant only after community integration was entered into the regression equation. Contrary to expectations, informational Internet use had a negative effect on the evaluations of desired citizen efficacy, suggesting it reduces expectations of political influence. Interestingly, they found that the efficacy gap predicted collaborative and individual participation differently. Individuals were more likely to disengage from collaborative acts when their perceived influence was far from their desired level of influence. Instead, they were more likely to engage in individual modes of political participation when their self-perception of their actual influence failed to meet their expectations (p. 446). Looking at efficacy as a precedent to media use, Kaye and Johnson (1996) found that self-efficacy emerged as a major predictor of how individuals used the Internet for political information. Self-efficacy influenced whether individuals used the Internet for guidance and for information seeking/surveillance needs. However, in 2000, self-efficacy was not a predictor. This finding, Jonson and Kaye suggest, indicates that the Web is no longer viewed as much as a place for those with a strong sense of self-efficacy as it was in 1996, but has become a venue for mainstream users who are less activist in nature (Kaye & Johnson, 2004, p. 219). In 2002, they further examined the associations between Internet motives and political attitudes (trust in the government, interest in politics, likelihood of voting, strength of party affiliation, and self-efficacy). Their study showed that political attitudes were more strongly linked to information-seeking/surveillance and guidance motives than to the entertainment motives of Internet use (Kaye & Johnson, 2002).

High levels of activity in media use have the potential to develop a sense of political efficacy. Advanced information seeking, which requires effort, time and resources,

is necessary to develop efficacy (Bandura, 1986). Differences have been reported between exposure to (or use of) a certain communication medium and reliance on that medium, which involves higher levels of selectivity and activity. Pinkleton, Austin, and Fortman (1998) found that active media use was a significant predictor of external self-efficacy when controlling education and cynicism.

Individuals usually play an active role in SM sphere, which influences their feelings of empowerment and political value. They produce and share media content, rather than playing the passive role of mere receivers. To borrow Bandura's words, they use SM technologies to build their agency as "producers of experiences and shapers of events" (2000, P. 75). Tedesco's (2007) pre-test/post-test experiment on Web interactivity—interaction with the Web (user-to-system), with the content (user-to-document) or with other users (user-to-user)—reveals that increased interactivity opportunities on political websites increase political information which, in turn, increases the likelihood that participants will value activities (such as voting) as an important engagement activity. The level of activity that users exert in e-discussions influences the potential impact that involvement has on their political capacity. For example, some Internet users do not actually participate in discussions but, rather, they are quiet observers, or 'lurkers', who never participate, whereas others frequently participate in discussions (Ha, 1995). Kenski and Stroud (2006) categorised Internet use under the headings: information, entertainment and interaction purposes. They found that Internet access and online exposure to political information are significantly, but rather slightly, associated with political efficacy, knowledge, and participation. Lee (2006) found that using the Internet for information, entertainment, and interactive purposes positively influenced internal, but not external, political efficacy. He proposed that the Internet could increase political efficacy by helping users interact with politically active social groups. Wang (2007) looked at two components of political use of the Internet: information seeking and opinion-expression and how they influence political attitudes and political participation in Taiwan. He found that expressing opinion on the Internet can predict political interest, political trust, and political efficacy better than seeking information on the Internet. This finding emphasises the proposition that higher levels of activity and interactivity on and through SM are associated with higher levels of political efficacy. Similarly, Nisbet and Scheufele (2004)

found that combining discussion with political information on the Internet increased political efficacy.

Media reliance involves a degree of the perceived importance of given medium/media that positively influences levels of efficacy. Bandura (1997) has noted that media use helps develop political knowledge and instigate additional information seeking, and can thus enhance efficacy. He suggests that satisfaction is key to this process as individuals may turn to other information sources if their needs are not fulfilled. Media can induce political involvement if individuals believe they benefit from the information sources they provide (Pinkleton & Austin, 2001). The perceived importance of communication modalities and related feeling of satisfaction also increase the levels of efficacy. Individuals may rely on a certain medium, but yet not watch (or read) sufficient levels of news to achieve high levels of political activity and efficacy (Miller & Reese, 1982). SM are alternative platforms that offer abundant information and allow more autonomous transmissions through which individuals can circumvent the state's hegemony over mainstream media. This autonomy allows individuals to select media channels and information sources that better satisfy their needs and feed into their sense of efficacy. Accordingly, if individuals refrain from consuming mainstream media content due to feelings of cynicism against the political system and state-run media, then it is expected that their levels of alternative media use and related feelings of efficacy might increase.

SM provide alternative structures to formal organisations. Belonging to these structures (i.e., online activist groups) gives individuals a sense of belonging and generates feelings of efficacy that emerge from participating in group discussions and activities. It has been found that organisational participation produces feelings of personal efficacy (Sayre 1980; Neal & Seaman, 1964, cited in Friedman & McAdam, 1992). However, such association was ascribed either to a raised feeling of political efficacy and the meaningfulness of activism that is based on more engagement in organisational activities, or to the high level of information that increases the chances that members will be more informed about movement activity (Friedman & McAdam, 1992). In both cases, SM increase discussions about certain issues that concern the group (activity) and disseminate information about the movement and its activities.

Forming and joining political groups and interacting with others online also make individuals feel that they are in a majority and that their opinions and actions are worthwhile. Belonging to a network has a special potential for increasing political efficacy, especially in repressive states. These networks may contribute to the distribution of social power. In China, it has been suggested that the “incremental structural change brought to society by the Internet through expanding users’ social network could cultivate an active online opinion expression environment” (Shen, Wang, Guo, & Guo, 2009, p. 467). The researchers found that Internet use was positively and directly associated with online opinion expression, which eventually feeds into political participation. This connection was partially amplified in *sizable* social networks while Internet efficacy was found to be irrelevant to individuals’ political use of the medium. In other words, state hegemony on the Internet might have shaken people’s beliefs in the medium’s capacity to bring about any feasible change. As Shen et al. write, “it seems possible that the insignificant relationship between Internet use and Internet efficacy implies the psychological consequence induced by state censorship [which] has successfully stifled people’s willingness to speak out through eroding their beliefs about the power of the Internet” (p. 467, 468).

Expanding people’s social networks offers another benefit that is relevant to practising collective action. In addition to facilitating opinion expression, as Shen and colleagues (2009) found, expanded social networks have the potential to make individuals feel that their actions (or opinions) are—to use Olson’s (1971) expression—*noticeable*. SM make this visibility possible. For example, an individual can notice how the size of his online group increases on Facebook, how people react to his/her posts (i.e., the number of likes, shares and comments), how many followers s/he has on Twitter, or how many hits a video s/he uploaded on YouTube gets. However, Referring to Opp’s (2009) structuralisation of Olson’s theory of collective action, Olson hypothesises that, at the macro level, the individual contribution in a large group is not noticeable (and thus not efficacious). This might lead to the suggestion that the larger the online group, the less efficacious members of the group will feel which, in turn, reflects negatively, on their contribution to collective action or public good.

The Internet also serves a similar goal in democratic contexts. Both traditional and electronic discussion networks were found to contribute to political participation

around the Iraq War amongst opponents to the War who used the Internet as a tool to develop an understanding of the conflict. When individuals oppose the actions of government and find themselves in the opinion minority, online political discussion was a *complement* to face-to-face political discussion for political activism (Nah, Veenstra, & Shah, 2006, p. 241). Political cynicism might lead efficacious individuals to act collectively outside the convention of political practice. Unlike the politically apathetic, “those who believe they can accomplish social changes by perseverant collective action, but view the governing systems and office holders as untrustworthy, favour more confrontive and coercive tactics outside the traditional political channels” (Bandura, 2000, p. 78)

The practice of deliberation is, in itself, a political skill that bolsters individuals’ sense of personal efficacy, and that is conversely driven by self-efficacious perceptions about one’s self (Lasorsa, 1991). The digital world is a fragmented, hyper-pluralistic space. Heterogeneity and disagreements are expected to arise more often in large groups. In this case, cognitive dissonance is more likely to arise, and “to avoid cognitive dissonance, it is simpler to exit than to work through any messy bargaining and conflictual disagreements within the group.” (Norris, 2004, p. 4). This opt-out inclination shakes commitment, hampers group solidarity, and eventually weakens collective action configuration. It has been also argued that “much online discussion is irrelevant to the ‘real’ world of policy and politics.” As “rational citizens seek outcomes from their participation and meaningful outcomes often depend upon there being a link between the virtual world of complex political relationships and institutions,” (Coleman, 2001, p. 120), new media deliberations might not significantly contribute to their acquisition of skills and related sense of efficacy, especially when these deliberations do not bridge the online environment with the off-line arena. In such a case, individuals may refrain from becoming involved in collective action and so ride free on other people’s efforts or, in Bandura’s (2000) terms, they turn to proxy efficacy.

According to social-cognitive theory, people might perceive their capabilities as agents personally, proximally, or collectively. In some circumstances, people might refrain from utilising their personal efficacy and ascribe the achievement of their goals to other agents in their environment due to perceived difficulties, such as the high cost

of participation. Such a tendency might, however, harm the efficiency of mobilisation and collective action manifestation. As Bandura (2000) writes, in many activities:

... .. people do not have direct control over social conditions and institutional practices that affect their lives. Under these circumstances, they seek their well-being and security through the exercise of proxy agency. In this socially-mediated mode of agency, people try to get their people who have expertise or wield influence and power to act on their behalf to get outcomes they desire. People also turn to proxy control because they do not want to saddle themselves with the arduous work needed to develop requisite competences, and to shoulder the responsibilities and stressors that the exercise of control entails. These dissuading conditions dull the appetite for personal control (p. 75).

It may be a valid suggestion, then, that if SM serve as a platform where opportunities are created, or tools offered through which opportunities are seized, they, by extension, might mediate between the two ends of organising and mobilising collective action. Creating opportunities, however, does not necessarily guarantee that individuals would take advantage of them, or that collective action would be unavoidably executed. Opportunities should be dealt with as a mediating factor between movement and protest (Crossley, 2002, p. 112) rather than as a cause for such an effect. Nevertheless, the virtual space might, at different levels and scales, intersect with and pour into reality to support and/or supplement overt collective action towards acquiring a communal outcome.

3.5. Social media and mobilising collective action

To this point, I have dealt with issues relating to different SM functions and their contribution to social movement organisation. I have also reviewed literature on the role of the Internet and SM in creating opportunities for political practice through building favourable dispositions. In this section, more precisely, I will review literature on the mobilisation theme. In particular, I am going to draw more attention to issues of framing social movements, the varied roles played by different SM users and their reflection on the significance of collective action performance and sustainability.

Organisation, or mobilising structures, combined with favouring opportunities or pro-participation dispositions might offer groups certain structural affordances for action, yet they alone are insufficient to account for collective action. Most important are the “shared meanings and definitions that people bring to their situation [which mediate] between opportunity, organisation and action” (McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996, p. 5).

The social psychologist Bert Klandermans (1987) distinguishes between the formation of 'mobilisation potentials' or recruitment networks, and consensus mobilisation. The mobilisation process starts with the formation of mobilisation potentials. In the heart of the process of forming mobilisation potentials lies the process of 'framing'. This framing process is a crucial initial step that the social movement takes in order to address the wider audiences with meanings they can comprehend and thus can comply with the movement's demands (Tarrow, 1998).

It has been argued that SM may change the space of politics by affording actors new opportunities for being seen and heard. In fact, "political actors who want to accomplish things requiring public visibility will always turn to the media" as they "have become the major sites, the privileged space of politics in late modern society" (Dahlgren, 2001, p. 84).

In the remainder of this chapter, literature on the potential role of the Internet and SM in mobilising collective action is reviewed. This section first starts with reviewing literature on framing collective action. I then discuss how collective action is mobilised and what drives people (or demotivates them) to engage in *off-line* collective action. In doing so, special consideration is paid to the role that SM play with regard to both parameters of collective action.

3.5.1. Social media and mobilising frames

Social movement framing denotes "an active, process-derived phenomenon that implies agency and contention at the level of reality construction" (Snow & Benford, 1992, p. 136). Normally, political activities that fall outside the spectrum of conventional politics or are perceived as a threat to the status quo are neglected, or misrepresented by mainstream media. Activists usually fall prey to unbalanced coverage and biased treatment of their activities in state-run media. Transformations in new communication technology have nevertheless allowed activists new affordances and brought with them new opportunities for media users to play new, more active roles in the shaping of population consciousness. The SM allow activists alternative platforms for representation and action. The term 'alternative media', or 'radical media', as Downing (2001) prefers to label it, refers to "media production that challenges, at least implicitly, actual concentrations of media power, whatever form those concentrations may take in

different locations” (Couldry & Curran, 2003, p. 7). In Downing’s articulation (2001, p. 3), “radical alternative media constitute the most active form of the active audience and express oppositional strands, overt and covert, within popular cultures.” These media are “generally small scale and in many different forms, that express an alternative vision to hegemonic policies, priorities and perspectives” (p. v).

With the rapid spread of new communication technologies, users are no longer passive consumers of media content. Rather, they have the opportunity to spontaneously comment on and share this content attached to their own comments and viewership recommendations. Furthermore, they can also produce their own content and convey their own messages to audiences within their circles of communicative interaction. SM have indeed introduced “changes in the technological and cultural opportunities for protest [causing] the blurring of borders between the senders and receivers, producers and users” (della Porta, 2012, p. 46), to the extent that will make “the distinct[ion] between information producers and consumers increasingly difficult to draw” (Bennett, 2003b, p. 34). Studies on alternative media have especially highlighted these media’s potential for aiding individuals, at a micro level, to practise decentralised forms of news production that free activists from mass media organisations’ hegemony on news production. For example, Bennett (2003b) discusses how the rise of global activist networks has challenged mass media power. He concludes that with the advent of interactive communication and information systems, “people who have long been on the receiving end of one-way mass communication are now increasingly likely to become producers and transmitters” (p. 34). As Dahlgren (2009, p. 190) puts it, “the open and accessible character of the net means that traditional centres of power have less informational and ideational control over their environment than previously.” Social movements are no longer limited to the closed circles of their supporters, they can transcend their own followers to the general constituencies by using SM to permeate the borders between “inward-oriented” and “outward-oriented” communication. They have opportunities to produce and disseminate uncensored messages and outreach to wider audiences. CMC bypasses the intermediation of traditional media and favours “disintermediation”: movements present themselves directly to the general public with low cost, especially facilitating resource-poor actors” (della Porta & Mosca, 2005, p. 166).

SM, as alternative platforms of communication and informational dissemination, have advantaged activists in achieving dual interrelated goals: political environment surveillance and social movement framing. On the one hand, the Internet allows ordinary individuals to scan their environments, spot their governments' misconduct, and act as watchdogs transmitting information about these misconducts to the wider public, as:

The powerful have been spying on their subjects since the beginning of history, but the subjects can now watch the powerful, at least to a greater extent than in the past. We have all become potential citizen journalists who, if equipped with a mobile phone, can record and instantly upload to the global networks any wrongdoing by anyone, anywhere (Castells, 2011, p. 413).

Specific changes in the media field have increased both activists' and non-activists' capacity to produce information. These changes include: "(1) new ways of consuming media, which explicitly contest the social legitimacy of media power; (2) new infrastructures of production, which have an effect on who can produce news and in what circumstances; (3) new infrastructures of distribution, which change the scale and terms in which symbolic production in one place can reach other places" (Couldry, 2003, p. 44). Such changes have not only blurred the borders between media producers and consumers, but they also have significant influence on the "symbolic and normative construction of the relations between media and social movements, journalists and activists" (della Porta, 2012, p. 49). Ordinary citizens can become journalists, so journalism is citizen-controlled. Such journalistic practice is frequently part of protest movement practices. Consumers become producers (prosumers, produsers), the audience becomes active (Fuchs, 2010, p. 178).

As Rheingold notes (2002), advances in personal, mobile informational technology are increasingly providing the structural basis for the existence of novel kinds of highly-informed, autonomous communities that coalesce around local lifestyle choices, global political demands, and everything in-between. The rise of what has been termed "innovative public accountability systems" has been widely ascribed to the emergence of such technologies (Bennett, 2003b, p. 19). That is, the manifold networks of connected citizens and activists have transformed the so-called 'dumb mobs' of totalitarian states into 'smart mobs' of politicised, socially active citizens who are interconnected by communication gadgets, such as notebook computers and cellphones

(Kahn & Kellner, 2004). Smart mobs “consist of people who are able to act in concert even if they don’t know each other.” Thanks to communication and computing technologies, they can “*act together in new ways and in situations where collective action was not possible before*” (emphasis in original) (Rheingold, 2002, p. 191).

Through critical media, activists disseminate “counter-information” and practise “counter-hegemony” that includes the voices of the excluded and the oppressed (Fuchs, 2010). One aim, Fuchs continues, is “to give voices to the voiceless, media power to the powerless as well as to transcend the filtering and censorship of information by corporate information monopolies [and] state monopolies” (p. 179). These media have arguably reversed Foucault’s (1977) metaphoric vision of power dynamics in society. New ICTs allow challengers to observe elites and hence to have the potential to invert Foucault’s oppressive self-regulation model of the panopticon (Garrett, 2006). SM allow activists to circumvent the distortion introduced by mass-media filters, reaching new levels of editorial control (Myers, 2000). A content analysis of 17 global justice movement websites from around the globe indicates that this movement is effectively using the Internet to promote a coherent frame (van Aelst & Walgrave, 2002). Activists have traditionally created their own news media as a means of bypassing gatekeepers, but new technologies have dramatically reduced the resources required (Rucht 2004, p. 44). They give challengers the opportunities to spread new forms of online frames that have the potential for speedy propagation.

Activists have the potential to shape, or alter, people’s consciousness through operations of ‘schemata’ and ‘scripts,’ which have normally been the territories of state-run mainstream media. These operations “assume an active processor who is constructing meaning rather than a passive recipient. They imply agency, providing a natural fit with strategically oriented social movement paradigms” (Gamson, 1992, p. 65). It has been argued that the active agent of schema theory disappears when institutions such as the state and mass media collaborate to produce a quiescent political consciousness. As Gamson puts it, “in the face of such deep rooted institutional and cultural power, the possibilities of changing political consciousness seem remote” (p. 67). So, as they actively construct meanings about their movement in new communication media, activists create a fundamental “ambiguity between the passive

and structured on the one hand, and the active and structuring on the other” (Crook & Taylor, 1980, p. 246).

As producers of news, activists can bypass news organisations’ control and disseminate their own conceptualisation of their movement to their audiences and potential supporters. SM afford them a variety of abilities that can be utilised to construct meanings and build the image of their movement. For example, information may be channeled in different forms and modalities that range from texts and static documents to audio-video and more dynamic content, which adds more cues for a richer communicative transaction. According to media richness theory, rich media are those that have the ability to provide immediate feedback, allow for variety in language, have a personal focus, and provide multiple cues (Daft & Lengel, 1986). Activists can also select certain content and highlight certain viewpoints to other users and audiences in their networks. For example, they can share links to certain content on Facebook accompanied by their own comments and interpretations to exert certain influence. Varied communication modalities of text, images, and audio-video messages also give activists more control and strength in the face of frames fragility and vulnerability to tampering. They can repeat their messages constantly and update them instantly to reach larger numbers of potential supporters, to accommodate new events, and to achieve consensus. Moreover, they can provide evidence for their anecdotes and raise “the evidential basis for a master frame’s diagnostic claims,” (p. 140) or what Snow and Benford (1992) call the “empirical capability,” in the face of meaning constructions propagated by mainstream media.

The non-centralised organisation of digital networks allows for a relatively open public sphere in which newly constructed frames and ideas (or the so called memes) of protest can travel with relative ease, speed and global scope, affording social movements wider spread and sizable expansion. Memes themselves travel autonomously in the time and space created by the Internet. This fluidity resolves the limitations of ideological communication which bound the flow of ideas to particular places, groups, times, and spaces (Bennett, 2003b). Within this space, communication formats, or memes, have the advantage of travelling virally, defying the old two-step model of communication transmission. In such a swarm-like flow of communication, the meme, the communication technology (personal digital media), and the social contact (network)

travel in chaotic yet patterned ways (Bennett, 2003b, p. 33). This model, Bennett continues, is similar to what Castells (1996) signifies when he talks about the flow of spaces and the space of flows.

In addition to their instrumental use for the exposure of a regime's misconduct, and for altering the biased agenda and distorted frames of mainstream media, SM have also been used to construct realities that resonate with social movements' vision of certain issues and causes at the normative level. New avenues for democratic representation have been opened and it has become possible to "grassroot the networks and to network the grassroots" (Castells, 2011, p. 413). Developments in new media have reconfigured and reinforced politics on individuals' everyday life; allowing for the construction of new situations through the use of technology and media to increase the realm of freedom, community, and empowerment, and to promote "a revolution of everyday life" (Kahn & Kellner, 2004, p. 93). New communicative affordances have expanded the cultural opportunities for movement activity by making the creation of the "innovative "master frame" within which subsequent challengers can map their own grievances and demands" (McAdam, 1996, p. 25) possible and more commensurate with their resources.

However, constructing meanings and reaching a level of cultural consensus is a controversial issue in some theoretical lines of social movements. For example, the resource mobilisation perspective imparts more significance to material incentives at the cost of cognitive and ideational dimensions of collective action. As for new media's contribution in this regard, it has been shown hitherto that the Internet redefines traditional information gatekeepers and authoritative elites, and blurs distinctions between producers and consumers of information (Carpini, 2000), and hence, contributes to crystallising sentiments in collective action. Yet, this contribution also invites certain limitations. The absence, or the bypassing, of gatekeepers could also be a source of problems for activists (Castells, 1997). Such problems relate to the quality and quantity of created, distributed and acquired information. SM help to promote 'counter public spheres' for democratic activists as well as for racists and other unsavoury types of radicals (Dahlgren, 2004, p. xiii). While useful information became available, impurities are also invited when filters are removed. Differentiating accurate information from fabrications becomes more difficult and information efficacy becomes

questionable. Conspiracy theories may be confused with well-substantiated claims (Wright, 2004, p. 85). This increases the responsibility on both organisations and individuals. Organisations must work to stand out from others that are less credible, and individuals must develop new strategies for weighing up the claims themselves (Lebert, 2003). Publication unconstrained by gatekeepers also introduces the risk of 'information overload.' In such a fluid environment, "news organisations may be transformed from gatekeepers to brokers that use their expertise and credibility to link information consumers and producers" (Garrett, 2006, p. 215). Additionally, le Grignou and Patou (2004) observe that activist websites can sometimes contribute to 'frame clouding' (Snow et al., 1986, p. 478) distorting the thematic construction of the movement and belying its visibility (cited in le Grignou & Patou, 2004, p. 172).

Concerns have also been raised about the capacity of alternative media to reach beyond those who are already politically interested and active, and to form a bridge between mobilisation, the grassroots and the general constituency. Scholars have discussed the issues of the digital divide and the limited influence of virtual collective action (see e.g., Curran, 2003; Rucht, 2004; della Porta & Mosca, 2005; Gennaro & Dutton, 2006; van Laer & van Aelst, 2010).

Movement framing is not a straightforward process. Activists cannot simply construct and impose their own view of reality on their potential supporters. Rather, they always have to face the challenges of counter framing by movement opponents, bystanders, and the media (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 625). It has been argued that increasing dependence on SM in contentious activity is a source of threat to social movements because it creates new opportunities for demobilisation efforts. In many cases, elites and their allies own and/or control the infrastructure on which new media depend. If a particular use becomes too threatening, challengers may be denied access to resources, or a system's architecture may be modified to prevent undesirable uses. For example, if activists depend on cellphones to coordinate action, disrupting the cellphone service may have a demobilising effect (Garrett, 2006, p. 210). One recent, striking example is the Internet being shut down for five days after the massive uprising of January 2011 broke out in Egypt. The country's four main Internet service providers (ISPs) abruptly stopped shuttling Internet traffic into and out of the country (DailyRecord.co.uk, 2011) to curb the mass turnout of anti-government demonstrators.

Mobile phone data service was also cut off across Egypt for a shorter time, but text messaging services (SMS) remained disrupted during the continuing protests (Arthur, 2011). Such a move of suppression was aimed at limiting the crucial role of mobile phones as they “enhance the autonomy of individuals, enabling them to set up their own connections, bypassing the mass media and the channels of communication” (Castells, Fernández-Ardèvol, Línchuan, & Sey, 2007) usually controlled by the state.

3.5.2. Different media uses, different participators: Alternative media for alternative actions

One way of thinking about the value of new communication technologies for mobilisation and their effect on collective action is to distinguish between various types of actual or potential political actors. From Gamson and Meyer’s (1996) perspective, a social movement is “a field of actors, not a unified entity.” It is thus useful to think of a social movement as “an internal process of contention within movements with different actors taking different positions” (p. 283).

SM outlets are distinguished from the early waves of the Internet in that they allow active users to play different roles. As discussed previously, users of SM transcend being active consumers to become producers of media content. A set of scholarly U&G research has distinguished between creators and non-creators of media content. Creators of user-generated media (UGM) practise different forms of activities to gratify their needs. They produce/consume media content and interact with content and/or with other users to gratify needs that, according to Shao (2009), are fulfilled by the “easy to use” and “let users control” media attributes. An online survey of 489 webloggers and videobloggers showed that content generators were motivated by the satisfaction they feel out from practising the activity itself. On the other hand, non-producers or ‘lurkers’ were the most de-motivated by factors of time consumption and technical restrictions –especially for video blogging (Stoeckl, Rohreier, & Hess, 2007).

Using different media platforms (mainstream versus alternative) is associated with performing different forms and levels of political action (conventional versus unconventional). Mainstream media usually tend to withhold “mobilising information” especially when they deal with controversial or negative contexts (Lemert & Ashman, 1983). Alternative media, on the other hand, afford unconventional political actors the

opportunities to frame their movement, circumvent their misrepresentation in biased mainstream media, and mobilise popular support for their cause at significantly lower-cost. Hwang et al. (2006) found that antiwar opinion holders, who felt that their views differed from those presented in mainstream media, sought out alternative online sources for perspectives about the war. Perceptions of what has been termed “media dissociation” were argued to stimulate dissenters’ information seeking and related political behaviours. Boyle and Schmierbach (2009) distinguished three types of participators in relation to their media use. ‘Traditional participators’ were more inclined to rely on mainstream news media outlets, such as newspapers, television and Internet. ‘Participators in protests,’ on the other hand, were more inclined to use alternative media outlets, such as protest-oriented Internet and protest-oriented print media. ‘Heavy participators’ (those who engage in both traditional and protest activities) were more prone to rely on alternative media. The researchers conclude that mainstream media content may be largely irrelevant to non-traditional means of influencing the political process, as they rarely offer mobilising information or frame protest as a favourable activity. Conversely, the digital networking media afford protest participators new mechanisms for organisation and mobilisation. They help them to connect to organisations (e.g., Web links), coordinate events (e.g., protest calendars), share information (e.g., YouTube and Facebook), and converge two or more of these functions (e.g., links to Twitter and Facebook posts). These technologies also function as archives of memory records or action repertoires that can be passed on to other users (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Such innovative functions may be beneficial in providing mobilising information for non-politicised individuals and reinforcing views and standpoints for those who are newly introduced to political practice. They open a window on practices with which these newcomers are not familiar, and provide them with the know-how and information that they need to become involved in the political process.

The same communication medium can also be utilised for diverse purposes by different users. The Internet, for example, benefits engaged and disengaged citizens differently. For the disengaged, the Internet allows political elites and organisations to reach out for them easily and more efficiently. For example, social movement organisations create their own websites and use e-mail services to spread the word and to reach out to their

potential supporters. For engaged citizens, the Internet provides various and more convenient forms of activities, such as online petitioning. The Internet and related technologies provide ways to sustain, expand and improve the quality of this engagement (Carpini, 2000, p. 347). Gibson et al. (2000) have developed a typology of Internet users in their examination in four nations of the relationship between social capital, Internet connectedness and political participation. They found that Internet connectedness has different consequences for socialisers (who use the Internet for relationship building), utilitarians (who use the Internet to 'do' something, such as find information), and game-players (or recreational users), in terms of building social capital and increasing political participation. While online socialising has the strongest positive effect on social capital, socialisers were also the only type of Internet users whose Internet use has a significant effect on political participation, yet in a negative direction. This led the researchers to conclude that, "while online socialising may lead to higher levels of off-line socialising and civic engagement in one's community, it appears to make one less likely to engage in specifically political organisations and activities" (p. 15).

3.5.3. Social media and the significance of collective performance

Process approaches are mostly oriented on self-organised small-scale community media that enable citizen participation. The danger that lies in this orientation is that such media will remain insignificant and be unable to have a transformative political potential because they are unable to reach a mass public and therefore are unable to be embedded in a large counter-public sphere. *Such media tend to produce fragmented unconnected publics that are only accessed by isolated subgroups and undermine the possibility for a large sphere of political communication that is accessed by all exploited, oppressed, and excluded groups and individuals* (Fuchs, 2010, p. 177) (emphasis added).

A good point from which to start a discussion on the capacity of collective action may be Olson's (1971) insights about *The Logic of Collective Action*. In his view on when individuals can act collectively, Olson identifies a critical null hypothesis:

If the members of some group have a common interest or objective, and if they would all be better off if that objective was achieved, [then] the individuals in that group would, if they were rational and self-interested, act to achieve that objective (p. 1).

He then bonds the hypothesis with certain conditions that might nullify the logic of collective action, concluding that:

Unless the number of individuals in a group is quite small, or unless there is coercion or some other special device to make individuals act in their common interest, *rational, self-interested individuals will not act to achieve their common or group interests* (p. 2) (emphasis in original).

Lupia and Sin (2003) have engaged with the logic of collective action in respect of the role of the communication technologies that were not originally integrated into Olson's argument. They argue that the emergence of new communication technologies has altered the basic assumptions of interpersonal communication upon which Olson built his view of group work. They conclude that:

Technologies that reduce the cost of sending information long distances (or to many people) can reduce organisational costs, increase noticeability, and make ineffective communicative networks effective. If group members' interests are sufficiently common, or if they interact in contexts that induce them to share information, these technologies can also make selective incentives a more viable recruitment strategy In particular, evolving technologies can erase the disadvantages of being large - which should change the rule of thumb that many people use to distinguish latent groups from other kinds (p. 329).

Lupia and Sin's logic can be traced back to and linked with Oliver and Marwell's (1988) argument that the group's size is a paradoxical element in collective action. For them, what matters is the relationship between potential contributors in the critical mass. They argue that the problem of collective action lies in "whether there is *some social mechanism* that connects *enough* people who have the appropriate interests and resources so that they can act" (p. 8) (emphasis added). This might be a valid argument for communication technologies and SM. These technologies have made, and are still making, this connection between sizable, interested and resourced groups possible.

However, this is not to suggest that SM and new communication technologies are, or could be, *the* viable solution to collective action problems. One may agree, as discussed earlier, that SM have enabled members of larger groups to cross physical and time barriers and learn more about each other at a lower cost, which may negate Olson's argument about *small* group size as a precondition for the configuration of collective action. Yet, with new communication technologies added to the picture, careful consideration should be given to the space/place where certain actions and their consequent implications take place. Technology-enabled *large* groups might not cross the borders of the virtual communicative sphere afforded by these technologies (as discussed earlier). Technology (and the large groups they support) might thus not be

sufficient in themselves to enable sizable, significant collective action on the ground. Rather, social movements may run the danger of limiting political action in the communication network (Earl & Kimport, 2011).

The hybridity of online (inter)activism and off-line activism has been recommended by a number of political communication and sociology scholars. As Tilly (2004) contends: “Neither in communications nor in transportation, did the technological timetable dominate alterations in social movement organisation, strategy and practice. Shifts in the political and organisational context impinged far more directly and immediately on how social movements worked than did technological transformations” (p. 104). van Laer (2010) has recently flagged the risk of over reliance on the Internet by social movement organisations, and has stressed the importance of crossing the online border to reach for their own off-line constituency. In the former case, van Laer argues, organisations may face the danger of diluting the movement and so suffer serious consequences for their own maintenance as well as the movement(s) they represent

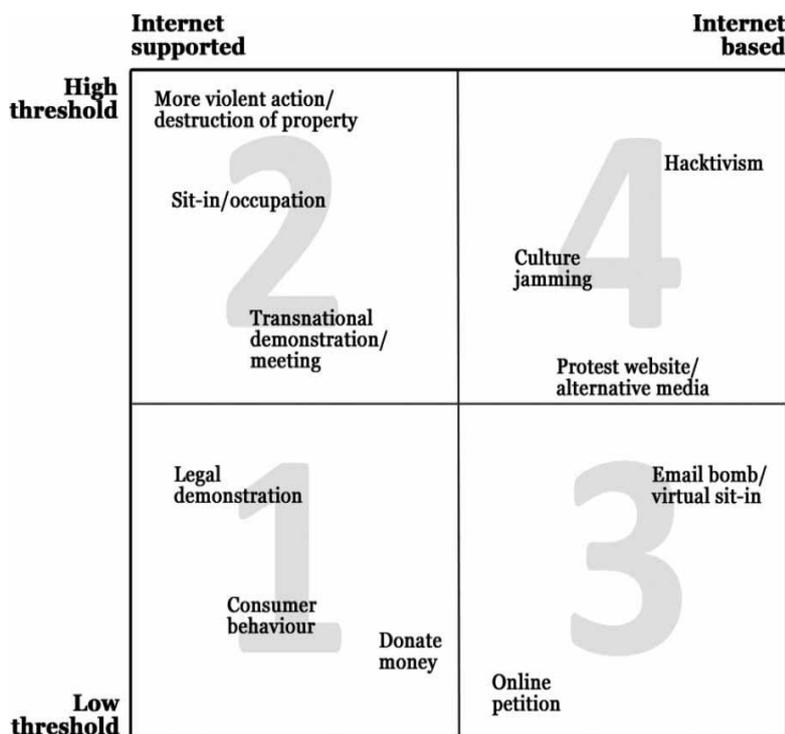


Figure 3.2: A Typology of a new digitalised action repertoire
Source: van Laer & van Aelst (2010, p. 1149)

and support. This *sphere-bridging* is crucial for broader practice and the sustainability of influential collective action, and to create a “favourable breeding ground for future action and mobilisation” (Walgrave & Verhulst, 2009, p. 1378).

In their research for the action repertoires of social movements, van Laer and van Aelst (2009, 2010) have identified circumstances where the Internet creates new problems for collective

action. In some cases, they argue, the Internet has still not made collective action easy enough, while in others it has made it too easy, thus reducing the final political impact

of a certain action. It may be true that the Internet has expanded the toolkit of social movements by hosting modified tactics and “creative functions.” Yet, these tactics are nothing but traditional tools of social movements that have become easier to organise and coordinate by the affordances of the Internet (for example, email petitions can be seen as an extension of an existing protest technique, see Figure 3.2), thus “the shift towards new Internet-based actions and tactics relying on the Internet [still] has not resulted in the replacement of the old action forms, but rather complemented them” (van Laer & van Aelst, 2010, p. 1150). Lupia and Sin (2003) earlier mentioned similar problems in “mak[ing] communication more difficult (by allowing key individuals to better mask their activities), increas[ing] the relative benefits of free riding, or increase[ing] the utility people can achieve without collective goods” (p. 329).

Free-riding can happen online as well (i.e., lurking). Some forms of online communicative interactions do not rise to the level of influential participation that entails individuals benefitting from collective goods. Jesover (2001, p. 8) distinguishes between online ‘serious practices’ and ‘entertaining practices’, as he tries to encourage infrequent users (or passers-by) to take online communication more seriously, rather than perceiving ‘interactivity as gimmick’ (cited in le Grignou & Patou, 2004). This online ‘passer-by’ is seen as a new version of Olson’s free-rider “in so far as his/her activity can consist of paying a subscription, collecting information more or less related to [social movement organisation’s] targets, and ‘chatting’ or holding conversational discussions on the discussion list” (le Grignou & Patou, 2004, p. 174).

A combination between on- and off-line communicative organisation and mobilisation might be more influential in terms of achieving a social movement’s goals. Exerting efforts in the virtual sphere does not seem to be echoed influentially in reality. An experimental study that tests the influence of exposure to mobilising information, either by face-to-face interaction or on websites, indicates that Web-based mobilisation *only* has a significant effect on online participation, whereas face-to-face mobilisation has a significant impact on off-line behaviour, suggesting that mobilisation effects are “medium-specific” (Vissers, Hooghe, Stolle, & Mahéo, 2012). Breindl’s (2010) research illustrates that while activists organise themselves online, they keep an eye on influencing policy-making, which entails a degree of integration between the on- and off-line arenas, or what Breindl termed “Internet-based communities.” These

communities “aim at intervening in “traditional” politics by focusing on power demonstrations in the off-line realm” (p. 69). Similarly, Bennett (2005) defines the political capacity of transnational activist networks through two dimensions: being able to shape public debate about the issues in contention, and developing effective political relations with protest targets to influence political change on those issues (p. 208). As he writes, “social technologies generally combine online and off-line relationship-building aimed at achieving trust, credibility and commitment as defined at the individual rather than the collective level” (p. 205). della Porta and Mosca (2005) describe cyberspace as “a new resource to increase [activists’] chances of success,” confirming that “there is no sign that off-line and online environments [are seen] as alternative to each other [but rather] they are more and more integrated and overlapping” (p. 186). Other scholars strongly assert that a sharp distinction between the on- and off-line spheres should be completely rejected, since both realms are profoundly intertwined (Bimber, 2000).

A possible approach to researching the media and collective action repertoires, then, is to think of collective action and the media as holistic environments of interwoven layers. The conceptualisation of collective action as a toolkit (similar to Bourdieu’s habitus), and media as an environment (similar to Bourdieu’s field) (Bourdieu, 1990) allows us to look at different forms of media and communication modes that are expected to shape different opportunities for activists, defining their roles, and influencing their capacity to reach out to a wider group of potential participants with their informative, mobilising messages. This process of media convergence creates a “media ecology” for activists, which is characterised by being multifaceted and rich in communication channels (Mattoni, Berdnikovs, Ardizzoni, & Cox, 2010, p. 2). In Mattoni et al.’s words:

Always, today’s media ecology revolves around the intertwining of multiple platforms, applications, supports and outlets. Different levels of communication flows overlap: from the mass broadcasting of global television to the information provided by national print press; from local community street televisions to widespread user-generated content spread in social networking sites (p. 2).

Such an environment brings together forms of face-to-face interaction, many-to-many, and mass communication allowing for a continuous flow of communication between what Bennett (2005) has termed micro, meso and macro media. This convergent media

ecology, in turn, allows for a hybrid repertoire of collective action (Laer & Aelst, 2010) where media-based and media-supported actions collide to achieve a desirable collective outcome.

In a society like Egypt, online political practice is not normatively integrated due to structural and/or technological inefficiencies. By the time this research began in late 2009, less than a quarter (21.1 percent) of the Egyptian constituency was online (Egypt: Internet Usage and Telecommunications Report). As the Internet's new communicative affordances have benefitted "those who have crossed the digital divide," (Bennett, 2003b, p. 20) it is expected that the limitations of digital inequalities would reduce the numbers of potential online recipients and possible contributors. This, in turn, excludes the poorer and less-educated, and influences the contributors' capabilities to support a viable form of influential 'Internet-based' activism, so while the Internet and SM have expanded the toolkit for activists and enabled large numbers to assemble in loose networks with minimal resources, a hybrid 'repertoire of collective action' (McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly, 2001) that fuses the virtual with the real is crucial should they aspire to acquire significant change and yield feasible outcomes for the collective. SM, Hands (2011) writes, should be articulated as "a new element into the revolutionary process, in which new dynamics and new capacities need to be absorbed and understood." This was evident in the configuration of the massive uprising of January 2011, which was arguably enabled by the creation of "a complex socio-technical system not only between social media and the more traditional media, but also between mediated and face-to-face networks" (Lim, 2012, p. 244).

3.6. Summarising:

1. Recent reflections on collective action point to opportunities for contemporary social movements in terms of reduced costs and the organising of movements on the basis of more non-centralised, loosely-woven, leaderless horizontal networks within which forms of flexible identities emerge and develop.
2. However, at the same time they also point to the barriers and hurdles that such loose networks and flexible identities might impose while they create an alternative participatory sphere for individuals.

3. These opportunities that SM create include providing a safer environment for practice and the acquisition of experience individuals need for activist identity building. Easing the fear of repression might incentivise non-politicised and less interested individuals operating under authoritarian forms of governance.
4. “Personal agency and social structure operate interdependently. Social structures are created by human activity, and socio-structural practices, in turn, impose constraints and provide resources and opportunities for personal development and functioning” (Bandura, 2000, p. 77). Taking this conceptualisation to new communication technologies, it is suggested that (inter)activity in new media creates social structure (networks), within which individual users may have opportunities for competence building and contribution. This reciprocal connection suggests that personal agency (or efficacy) adds up to the provision of communal agency. Even if deliberations are thus dispersed and groups are fragmented in the virtual sphere, individual interactions and the related know-how processes may still eventually increase networks of activists and bolster their feelings of power and efficacy. In fact, Bandura asserts, “high perceived efficacy is vital for successful functioning regardless of whether it is achieved individually or by group members working together” (2000, p. 77).
5. The costs of political practice and efficacy are not new parameters of political practice, but they acquire considerable meaning in real existing autocracies and societies undergoing (or aspiring for) political and social transformation.
6. Nevertheless, these opportunities may carry barriers within them and cast doubts on the essence and sustainability of social movements. This also raises concerns about the capacity of the political process as practised through new media apparatuses.
7. By participating in the virtual (and more convenient) sphere, non-politicised citizens face the danger of being deluded by a feeling of being politically active and hence entitled to a collective outcome, while they might actually be dwelling on, rather than participating in, political life.

8. These participatory qualities point to the role of new media use (at the individual-level) in mobilising a sizable population to engage in off-line collective action, with particular emphasis on the reasons behind both media uses and collective political practice.

3.7. The need for this study

This thesis explores how different uses of SM function as facilitators (or de-motivators) of collective action as perceived by a sample of young Egyptian activists. This study was conducted prior to the eruption of the 25th January 2011 revolt, portraying a picture of Egypt before the revolt and during what turned out to be the preparatory period that led to the uprising. Generally, introducing new media to the realm of social movements, along with the eruption of wide scale domestic and transnational protests, prompted different prognoses about new media affordances for movements' development and growth. Technological determinists go so far as proposing that revolts are themselves by-products of portals like Facebook and Twitter. On the other hand, sceptics believe that collective action has always been possible with the support of far less innovative forms of communication. Between these two ends of the spectrum lie more moderate views and several areas of tension. Figure 3.1 summarises these areas of conflict and outlines the ways they relate to and affect other themes in the current research.

As shown from the previous review:

- New media have enabled new forms of mobilising structures that are less costly, more flexible and polycentric. However, use of these media has been attached to the development of tolerant identities that enable collective action across borders. Nevertheless, the evolution of such tolerant identities casts doubts on the sustainability of social movements, since they entail weak links to movements and shake feelings of commitment. However, it has been argued that an activist identity might be developed through affiliation to SMOs and practice, which represents another field where new media may contribute to social movements' development through the creation of opportunities that afford practice and skills acquisition.
- SM also contribute to social movements, especially in repressive contexts, by affording activists low risk/cost spaces in which to practise their activities.

However, practising politics online, especially for the less interested and the non-politicised, may encourage an illusory sense of activism and hence, mar individuals' tendency to move to the off-line sphere. Additionally, communicating anonymously raises some concerns about the credibility of the unidentified communicator. As for acquiring the skills necessary for political practice, SM also provide a platform where activists can hone their skills and transfer them to their fellow citizens. Nonetheless, the fluidity of cyberspace allows an easy-in, easy-out fashion of group membership, which also shakes commitment to movement and hampers group solidarity. Heterogeneity of online groups also results in polarisation and hence casts doubts on the influence of online deliberation on enhancing individuals' political skills.

- SM afford activists ways to interpret, attribute and socially construct their movements and the activities that help them circumvent state-run media-biased representations. However, being able to frame movements does not necessarily account for collective action. Concerns have been raised about the irrational use of SM that might lead to obscuring ideas and promoting vague frames. Contrary to assertions about the importance of socially constructed shared ideas in collective action (i.e., political process model), proponents of the resource mobilisation perspective attach little significance to ideas and sentiments to the benefit of material incentives. These contradictions are worth looking at, especially in a context like that of the Egyptian society, where framing shared sentiments of collective action through SM might not outweigh the importance of geographical availability (being able to afford participation in terms of pecuniary and non-pecuniary costs) of the constituency to take part in off-line collective action although, in terms of numbers, Egyptian youth may seem available, as discussed in the last chapter.
- SM have also expanded the activists' toolkit or their repertoire of collective action and afforded them varied ways of political practice. However, heavy reliance on the Internet may push collective action adrift, as it is practised mainly online. Internet-based action has been distinguished from and compared to Internet-supported action. It has been argued that a hybrid of both would be more beneficial for the efficient practice of collective action.

To tackle these areas of tension, the current research seeks to answer the following central question:

How do young Egyptian activists perceive the potential of social media for mobilising collective action?

Subsidiary questions include:

RQ1. *Why do young activists use social media?*

RQ2. How do social media contribute to creating opportunities (favourable *dispositions*) for practising collective action off-line?

RQ2.1. *Does using social media for instrumental purposes relate to young activists' feelings of fear of repression? And if so, in what ways?*

RQ2.2. *Does using social media for instrumental purposes relate to young activists' feelings of being politically efficacious? And if so, in what ways?*

RQ3. How do social media contribute to *mobilising* collective action practice off-line?

RQ3.1. *Does using social media for instrumental purposes relate to young activists' tendency to practise politics online? And if so, in what ways?*

RQ3.2. *Does using social media for instrumental purposes relate to young activists' tendency to practise politics off-line? And if so, in what ways?*

Raising these questions also helps in addressing the following gaps identified in the literature:

- Much of what is known about contemporary technology and social movements is focused basically on the level of social movement organisations and how individuals associate with these organisations and use new media under their umbrella. The studies that investigate individual actors' use of new media on a daily basis to shore up their collective political practices are scarce.
- Additionally, most of these studies were conducted in democratic contexts, where policing protests takes different forms and is on levels other than those in authoritarian regimes; where authorities normatively crack down on demonstrators. These contextual differences are expected to have significant

influences on individuals' tendency to become involved in unconventional political practice—as well as in shaping movement outcomes— whether these individuals are politically active, or non-politicised citizens.

- Most of the studies that have looked at the relationship between new media use and mobilising collective action have done so through a political and socio-psychological lens, with less emphasis from a media perspective. Linking media uses and the reasons that underpin them is less researched in this field. This scholarly work has focused on media use mostly as a dependent variable since researchers have started their research paradigm either from affiliation to social movement organisations, or because they are motivated to contribute to collective action.
- A mounting body of research has been, and still is, investigating the growing role of new media, especially following the eruption of several huge uprisings, both on domestic and international sites. However, these studies are mostly responsive scholarly reactions to certain events that have taken place when debate about the role of new media is usually ignited. As Shirky (2011) argues, “the ability to turn people out on the street is the end of a long process rather than a shortcut” (cited in Morozov, 2012). Hence, empirical study of more stable issue advocacy networks is needed to shed light on important contextual aspects and on opportunity creation that might be eclipsed by these event-centred, post-uprising studies.
- Most of the studies that have looked at the relationship between Internet access and online exposure to information and political efficacy have focused mainly on conventional forms of political participation, such as voting. The mobilising potential of the Internet related to the influencing of individuals' political attitudes has rarely been explained outside the electoral context or in relation to more unconventional activities, such as protesting.
- Most of the research that has been conducted on new media and mobilisation relies on quantitative methods of investigation and studies that mix quantitative findings with activists' views and perceptions about new media potential for mobilising collective action are scarce. Mixed methods help to achieve insightful scrutiny into activists' anecdotes.

The chapter that follows (The Research Methodology) outlines the research design and explains its rationale. It also describes how the research questions are tackled.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Chapter Four outlines elements of the research design and explains how the research process unfolded. This chapter comprises two main parts; the first introduces the research's theoretical framework, and the second discusses the methods used for data collection and analysis to provide answers to the research questions. *In the first part of the chapter*, I outline the concept of political opportunity which leads the discussion on the research context in Chapter Two. I also discuss the uses and gratifications approach (U&G) in order to show how the main research themes –media uses, dispositions, and outcomes – and the related variables, are expected to relate to each other and how they are placed within the suggested paradigm of the current research.

The second part of the chapter introduces the main research questions and discusses the methods used to address them. It also provides an operational definition for each research variable, and demonstrates the ways those variables are measured. The chapter then presents an organisational structure of the qualitative and quantitative techniques used to collect the data needed to answer the research questions, and discusses the structure of the instruments used for data collection as well as the way those instruments correspond to different research variables. Ethical considerations are thoroughly discussed in the second part. Finally, the chapter demonstrates the procedures of analysing the data yielded in order to provide a coherent interpretation of the main research question.

Within these parts, the chapter is organised into six sections:

4.1. Research aims and rationale.

4.2. Theoretical approach to the research design.

4.2.1. The political opportunity structure.

4.2.2. The uses and gratifications approach.

4.3. Research questions and design.

4.3.1. Research questions.

4.3.2. Research population and sampling procedures.

4.3.2.1. Sampling for the quantitative survey study.

4.3.2.2. Respondents' profile.

4.3.2.3. Sub-sampling for the qualitative focus group discussions.

4.3.3. Data collection: Methods and sources.

4.3.3.1. The mixed methods design.

4.3.3.2. The quantitative research.

4.3.3.3. The qualitative research.

4.4. Data analysis strategies.

4.5. Ethical guidelines.

4.6. Conclusion.

4.1. Research aims and rationale

Broadly stated, this study aimed to:

Investigate the perceptions of a sample of young Egyptian activists about the potentials of social media (SM) for mobilising collective action.

More specifically, the study aimed to:

- Identify and explain the range of uses of SM for political activism as reported by a sample of young Egyptian activists.
- Appraise the potential implication of these media affordances as seen through young activists' critique of these media and as related to the degree to which young activists feel satisfied (or not) with SM's contribution to their political activism.

- Reveal and analyse the young Egyptian activists' political dispositions that appear to relate to their purposive use of SM and that are expected to contribute to shaping their tendency to engage in different forms and levels of political activism.
- Illuminate ways in which young Egyptian activists utilise SM tools to shape their movement and mobilise sizable off-line collective action.

4.2. Theoretical approach to the research design

I construct a dialogue between the users (young Egyptian activists), the tool (SM) and the context (Egyptian polity), to explain how activists negotiate the opportunities allowed in their society by utilising the novel tools available to them to achieve certain goals. The main focus of this dialogue is the individual. Activists' perceptions of the democratic potential of SM are unpacked by asking questions about the reasons behind the utilisation of such media apparatuses, how activists' political dispositions may correlate to that utilisation, and how they might bridge their practices to political activism outside the boundaries of the virtual sphere.

The rationale of the U&G approach guides the research to delineate the instrumentality of SM for mobilisation perceived and stated by a sample of young Egyptian activists. In order to provide a balanced picture of the economic rationality of media use suggested by this approach, it was beneficial to conduct this assessment with respect to the context of the Egyptian polity, which may encompass openness and/or repressive aspects. Such opportunities and hurdles may be expected to offer the reasons why, and the ways in which, activists use SM as part of their repertoire for political mobilisation.

In order to address the research's subject matter, I blend concepts and hypotheses from theories of democratic transformation with hypotheses from the communication theories on media use and impact. Drawing on assumptions from U&G helps to understand why young activists use SM to engage in politics in order to acquire social and political change. Since those activists do not work in a vacuum, using the concept of *political opportunity* helps better understand and analyse activists' utilisation of SM platforms with respect to the context within which they operate and the contextual openings they may utilise or create. In the following sections, these conceptual frameworks are discussed consecutively.

4.2.1. The political opportunity structure

The current research builds on the umbrella concept of political opportunity. In Chapter Two, I explained how dynamic opportunities in the Egyptian political environment may have been imposed on the decision-making of political engagement and have allowed activists the openings in which to create their own opportunities, and to what extent the Internet and new communication technologies might permit them to create those opportunities.

The aim of using the concept in the current research strays from empirically applying the theory of political opportunity structure to test how political opportunities in a given polity may trigger, channel and mobilise – or demobilise – activism. Rather, the concept is used, *firstly*, to provide a contextual background for the study by introducing certain aspects of the political opportunities permitted in the Egyptian polity, and to give a sense of the environment within which young political activists have emerged and have been operating. *Secondly*, the concept also helps explain how the given opportunities in this environment – if any – may affect activists' incentives to use SM as platforms for mobilisation to circumvent challenges and create alternative opportunities within that context. *Thirdly*, overarching the analysis and the discussion of the research findings with the concept of political opportunity helps to delineate the mechanisms by which conditions in the polity can translate into the achievement of certain outcomes. It would be also beneficial to compare and contrast those mechanisms with the ways 'media opportunities' – that are perceived by the activists – can work to achieve the same goal.

The political opportunity was firstly used as a framework by Eisinger (1973) to explain why protests emerged in some American cities during the late 1960s. The political opportunity structure has since been applied for various research purposes, yielding numerous versions of the concept. Scholars have used the concept flexibly by adding and removing aspects. However, while "diversity of approaches may provide credible answers to particular problems, it also produces a situation in which the same terms are used to describe completely different factors" (Meyer & Minkoff, 2004, p. 1459). Moreover, some analysts do not use conceptual statements in concert with analytical examinations of the cases they discuss.

Aiming to conceptualise the political opportunity, Meyer and Minkoff (2004) specified three areas to which analysts need to pay more attention when applying political opportunity frameworks. *First*, are the specifications of the analysed issue – or constituency – and polity writ large. Political opportunity theory, Meyer and Minkoff stated, was developed in advanced industrialised nations, which requires prospective assessment of the aspects of political opportunity structure according to its relevance and applicability in the context studied. There is thus no one universal definition that applies to all issues and constituencies. *Second*, the intended outcome of the political opportunity should be assessed and operationally defined; as social mobilisation and changes in public policy do not necessarily move in concert – and it could be acceptable to conflate opportunities for both. In some cases, they argue, undesirable changes in polity may trigger mobilisation. Meyer (1993b) found that activists' outreach and success in mobilising support outside the institutional realm was mostly spurred by hostile and belligerent governmental policies, and was associated with repression of institutional trajectories of political change. *Third*, it is crucial to assess what factors help translate opportunities into collective action, and whether activists are aware of these factors. Moreover, some analysts do not use conceptual statements in concert with analytical examinations of the cases they discuss (Meyer & Minkoff, 2004).

Although using the concept flexibly has resulted in overlapping concerns, it also permits the practicalities to exert more focus on certain aspects of the structures studied, which are expected to be more relevant to the research objectives and the society studied. Embracing a specific definition of the political opportunity structure where key factors are prospectively assessed thus helps to clearly articulate the discussion and makes it easier to follow. I will adopt a flexible, yet clear operational definition of the concept that helps me situate my argument within the researched context, and analyse the findings with regard to the specifications of the Egyptian society. The concept is utilised as an orientation for understanding a certain case – SM and action mobilisation in Egypt - rather than being transferable to other causes or constituencies, albeit that it could be useful in understanding similar issues in comparable societies especially given the eruption of waves of massive demonstrations that swept the Arab region in late 2010 and early 2011.

For the purpose of my research, I use the concept of political opportunity structures within the operational definition suggested by Tarrow (1996) as being “consistent – but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national – signals to social or political actors which either encourage or discourage them to use their internal resources to form social movements” (Tarrow, 1996, p. 54).

Certain components of the political opportunity structure of the Egyptian polity are introduced in Chapter Two in order to give a sense of the research environment and the way it might reflect on activists’ utilisation of SM as platforms for mobilisation. This helps me answer the question ‘how can repression draw the SM opportunity?’ I argue that certain repressive aspects of the political environment in Egypt might have incentivised activists to use SM platforms as an alternative political arena for sizing up and mobilising ‘networks’ of supporters for their cause in order to create pores in that repressive structure and to practise politics more rigorously off-line. In this sense, I argue that SM platforms might represent an environment where activists may practise activism to circumvent certain repressive aspects of political opportunity structures in Egypt. I thus suggest that SM platforms – as used by activists for political communication – could structure a parallel ‘media opportunity’ which affords them with novel organisation and mobilisation mechanisms and enables them to take actions that might challenge repressive aspects in their political environment, and/or might buttress certain opportunities allowed in that environment. Figure 4.1 demonstrates this argument.

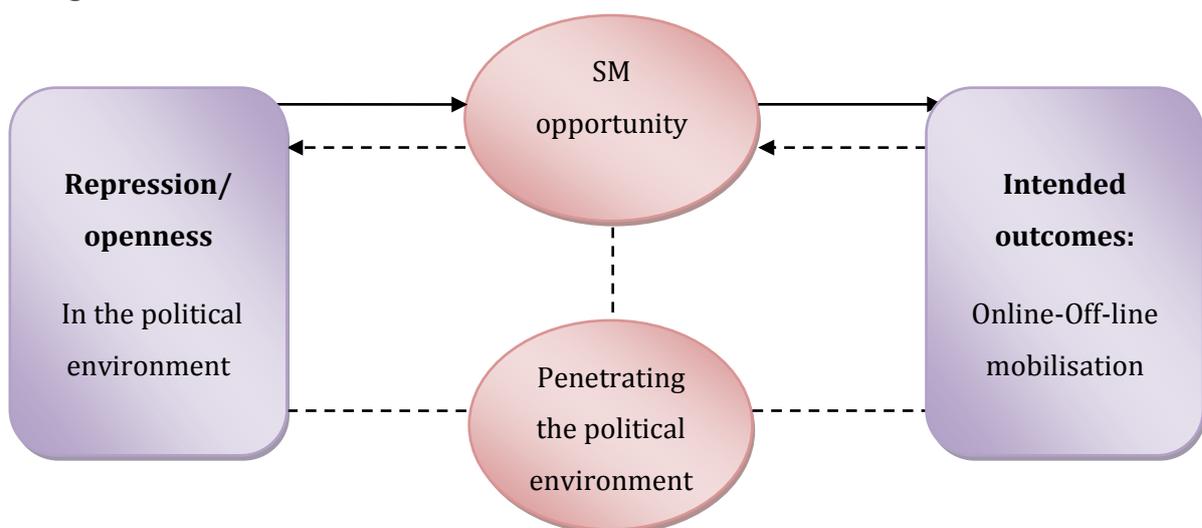


Figure 4.1: Political structure and social media opportunity for mobilisation

Tarrow (1998) has identified a number of factors for the study of the political opportunity in a given polity. They include: 1) state strength, 2) state's prevailing strategies towards challengers, 3) state's modes of repression and social control – as well as 4) the opening of access to participation for new actors, 5) political realignment within the political system, and 6) changes in the state's capacity or will to repress dissent. To avoid abusing the flexibility of the concept, I introduce the structure of the political environment in Egypt with a special focus on the state's modes of repression and social control, and the opening of access to participation for new actors.

Zaki (1994) argued that it is unjustified to presume that political actors would act consistently and rationally based on a logical assessment of the contextual constraints. This argument suggests that following structural elements and rational calculations alone does not help delineate how people act. Exogenous political environments may also secrete political variables that are specifically relevant to a certain issue. Those political variables will serve as the forces that may tend to challenge and destabilise the power of the authoritarian regime and might help in answering Meyer and Minkoff's question: 'how do political opportunities work' (Meyer & Minkoff, 2004). Some of those variables might be outside activists' scope of control, such as population growth, or the rise of an educated middle class cohort in Egyptian society, and the "demonstration effect" of protests (Tarrow, 1998). For example, the "demonstration effect" has been amplifying in Egypt since 2003, gaining momentum after the 2005 parliamentary and presidential elections, with a shift in the dominant incentive from the socio-economic to being more politically based (Ottaway & Hamzawy, 2011). Some political opportunity analysts argue that looking at activists' perceptions of the opportunities they might have is more important than the actual actions. In Chapter Two, political opportunities allowed or oppressed in the Egyptian polity were thoroughly discussed within a scheme of selected variables which are then reflected in the empirical study to show how activists perceive their political environment and the opportunities it may provide, and how this perception might shape their political dispositions and related uses of SM for mobilising purposes.

4.2.2. The uses and gratifications approach

As the media are one of the main components of the opportunity structure which may enhance or deter individuals' active participation in politics, and rather than asking questions about whether media is good or bad, I put more focus on the individual media users to research how they perceive the potential of SM for mobilisation, and how they consequently utilise its apparatus to achieve that purpose. I begin by describing and explaining activists' uses of social networking sites (SNSs) for mobilising purposes. In the process of situating those uses within the broader social and political context, activists responded to a set of questions regarding their political and psychological dispositions. This helped me to investigate how activists perceive certain elements of their political environment that might guide their media utilisation and reflect on their related actions, both on- and off-line.

To bring those concepts and variables together in a theoretical framework and to help to understand the way they might relate to each other in a coherent design, I framed my study in the rationale of the U&G approach. The aim was to lead the research by this umbrella approach and to shed light on why and how individual activists purposively use SM platforms to communicate about politics within a given context.

According to Blumler and Katz (1974), the logic of the U&G approach, based in functional analysis, is derived from:

(1) the social and psychological origins of **(2)** needs, which generate **(3)** expectations of **(4)** the mass media and other sources, which lead to **(5)** differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in **(6)** need gratifications and **(7)** other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones" (cited in Morris & Ogan, 1996, p. 46).

The needs that individuals thus seek to satisfy are determined by their social environment, which includes their age, gender and group affiliation.

Active audience represents the core of U&G research. The approach suggests that individuals are active *consumers* of mass media content in several ways: they use the media most useful to them; they use the media because they are motivated to do so, or they use the media as means of resistance to influence. However, in this theory, it is essential that media use is directed by certain goals and needs that audience members

seek to satisfy by selecting particular media, and by being exposed to particular content (Balnaves, Donald, & Shoemith, 2009).

By being active, individuals build their selection of different types of media on their expectations of the role those media might play in fulfilling their needs or the goals it helps them achieve. Whether those needs are satisfied and expectations are met as the likely outcome that individuals look forward to gaining from their active usage of the selected medium may reflect on their decision to continue using a particular medium to gratify their needs.

Classics of U&G go back to the 1940s, when the research showed a greater interest in entertainment communication than in political communication. The most famous U&G work in political communication is Blumler and McQuail's *Television in Politics* (1969). They compared users and non-users of political material in the mass media during the 1964 British general election. They found that British voters used the mass media to guide them on how to vote and to reinforce voting decisions they had already made, to monitor the political environment, for excitement, or because they might use the information they acquired through interpersonal communication. Those who avoided politics in the mass media did so because it aroused feelings of alienation, or because of participants' party affiliation, or because non-users did not find political content relaxing (Orbell, 1969).

Since its inception in the 1940s, the approach has gathered waves of criticism accompanied by, or followed by, several shifts and developments in research traditions. Early U&G research was criticised for **(1)** over-reliance on self-reports, **(2)** being unsophisticated about the social origins of the needs that drive people to use the media, **(3)** being gullible about the possible relation between both the self and society and certain kinds of audience satisfaction, and **(4)** paying more attention to the diversity of the audiences used, rather than to the constraints of the text (Katz, 1987).

Waves of developments in the approach included identifying and operationally defining different social and psychological variables to serve as the antecedents of different patterns of media consumption (Wimmer & Dominik, 1994, cited in Ruggiero, 2000). This tendency marked a shift in U&G research from being primarily descriptive – aiming at classifying qualitative gratification statements into certain meaningful

categories – towards a more functionalist perspective (Ruggiero, 2000) that attributed a more active role to audience members than had older studies (Klapper, 1963).

However, the approach was also criticised for considering audience members to be highly rational and very selective. In response, both dependency and deprivation theories were developed which suggested that high levels of attachment to media for some individuals could be ascribed to certain conditions, such as confinement to home, low income, and some forms of stress (Ruggiero, 2000). Further, Ruggiero (2000) argues that the notion of the active audience is barely accepted outside the United States and Western countries, which results in different methodological approaches when researching the U&G of media content.

U&G was also criticised for being too individualistic: it does not show how, or predict beyond, the people studied, nor does it account for the societal implication of media use. However, with the emergence of new communication technologies, scholars are urged to challenge those reproaches as, Ruggiero (2000) suggests, U&G provides a typology of uses that could consist a fundamental base of data through which other studies could further examine media use. Moreover, Perse & Dunn (1998) argue that any serious attempt to understand the social and cultural impacts of new media technologies should be preceded by understanding how and why people are making use of that media.

Methodologically, Massey (1995) argues that the approach faced a major difficulty about the way it could empirically assess audience activity and media use without involving the effects of researchers. Consistency in results when asking people what uses they make of the media and what gratifications they sought from that use, made the survey an appropriate tool for researching gratifications as it showed a degree of pattern regularity and predictability (McQuail, 1987). However, Massey builds on Denzin (1970) and Deutcher's (1966) view to argue that consistency is not in itself a guarantee of veracity. Moreover, she argues that the pre-existing lists of uses do not necessarily encompass users' own media uses and gratifications, and that the quantitative data collection method does not allow participants the opportunity to express their own experience with the media (Massey, 1995).

However, other mass media scholars suggest that traditional models of U&G may still provide a useful framework from which to begin to study Internet and new media

communication (December, 1996; Kuehn, 1994; Morris & Ogan, 1996). Perceived as a “cutting edge theoretical approach”, U&G has been deployed in the preliminary stages of each new mass communication medium; newspapers, radio and television, and then the Internet (Ruggiero, 2000). Researchers have applied the approach to investigate why individuals use the ‘new’ medium, how it affects their attitudes, and how this relates to the broader cultural and social context. Concurrently, mass communication research has shifted from the study of the effects the media have on their audience to focus on the functions the media serve. This shift came in alignment with the notion of the ‘active audience’ (Kippax & Murray, 1980), and with the Internet’s nature as, “a medium with the capability to empower the individual in terms of both the information he or she seeks and the information he or she creates” (Singer, 1998, p. 10).

With the emergence of new media, the nature of audience activity has changed from barely being the active selectors, viewers, and interpreters of media content, to possessing greater control on the information superhighway, to being able to negotiate the content and create their own. The ordinary media audience can also have their own audience; they can address other media users, albeit they may be limited to their circle of friends and acquaintances, and their audience may be very fragmented. Lin (1996, p. 2) argued that this functionalist approach provides the “means–ends orientation [for the perspective] and opens up a world of opportunities for studying mediated communication as a functional process that is purposive and leads to specific psychological or social consequences” (cited in Ruggiero, 2000, p. 27). This might suggest that research on interactive media can focus on the ‘functions’ the media offer active users in order to enable them to ‘influence’ another circle of users (i.e., mobilising political activism).

SNSs have drawn the attention of U&G scholars, yielding many studies that have identified different use constructs for SNSs. Nevertheless, most of the research has been done with general Internet users, with a special focus on the media’s ‘social’ aspects, and only a few studies have applied the U&G rationale on politically interested Internet users (Kaye & Johnson, 2002, 2004), or have deployed the approach to explain how Internet users utilise SNSs, in particular to fulfill political needs (Leung, 2009; Cozma & Ancu, 2009; Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009; Hanson, Haridakis, & Sharma, 2008).

In addition to the scarcity of the studies that illuminate the area of the political uses of SM outlets, which were originally generated for social and personal purposes, the vast majority of those studies have examined the incentives associated with SM use within a social and political environment that entirely differs from the structural elements of Egyptian society within which the audience targeted for the current research operate. These social circumstances are expected –according to U&G research- to produce different uses and gratification outcomes that result from, or are associated with, using particular media (Rosengren, 1976). Seeking to provide an answer to the first research question: ‘Why do young Egyptian activists use social media?’ attempts to address this empty area.

Suggested modification of social media use classification

Modelling the uses measures in the U&G approach could illuminate this research inquiry for several reasons. *First*, it suits the nature of both the active users and the interactive medium. *Second*, the idea of active audiences and interactive platforms goes in tandem with applying a basic condition for the practice of active citizenship, i.e., the subjective perception of one’s self as an active citizen. Audience activity is thus a prerequisite for using SM as a resource from which activists can learn how to build the civic capacities that they need to practise politics.

Studies of media gratifications (e.g., Rubin, 1993) have resulted in several classifications of the needs that people aspire to fulfill through their active media use. Two broad categories that direct the active audience’s media consumption were suggested. The first is ‘instrumental’, where audience activity is *goal-oriented* and characterised by selectivity, intentionality, and involvement; they seek to achieve certain goals through their media consumption. Audience use of the media may also be ‘ritualised’ or *habit-oriented* and focused on time-passing objectives rather than planned goal-achievement behaviour.

In the case of examining the uses and gratifications of newer media, researchers tend to build on and adapt measures from traditional use incentives that have been accumulated from previous research, taking into account the nature and context of the new media (Papacarissi & Rubin, 2000). Previous research on media motivations has introduced several adaptations to measures of use in response to changes in the media

landscape. For example, researchers identify 'convenience' as a significant gratification that is sought based on the easiness of use of Internet applications (Kaye & Johnson, 2003; Papacarissi & Rubin, 2000). Similarly, SM use items (see Section 4.3.3.2) were modified from Internet U&G literature (e.g., Papachrissi & Robin, 2000; Korgaonkar & Wolin, 1999; Flanagin & Metzger, 2001; Song et al., 2004 and Stafford et al., 2004; Kaye & Johnson, 2004). As SNSs are basically utilised to meet strangers and maintain relationships with current friends (Newport & Scholl, 2009), and as 'network size' was found to have an impact on political engagement (Shen, Wang, Guo, & Guo, 2009), '*networking*' was added to the SM use scale to allow respondents to indicate whether they use SM to build their own community of potential supporters in order to reach out to a larger audience with their political views and mobilising messages.

Additionally, another dimension was added to the uses of SM battery. This modification builds on the uniqueness of the Internet, which distinguishes the medium's outcomes from those derived from earlier television studies (Greenberg, 1974; Rubin, 1983). It also resonates particularly with the interactive nature of the SM, which entails that communicative interactions run over the SNSs involve other users, who share content with and comment on other users' messages. This adaptation stems from the assumption that individual exposure to the media serves to satisfy needs originating from internal (personal) and social (group) origins (Lenart, 1994, p. 31), and it hence implies users' tendency to work collectively with others and to have an impact on political life. I suggest that the reasons for using SM for political purposes could be 'self-directed' and/or 'other-directed'. Activists may use SNSs for personal purposes, such as to look for certain information that they need to make their mind up about certain issues (*guidance*). They may also use them for collective reasons, such as to help others decide on important issues, or to influence how they could do that (*guiding*). They may also use SM platforms to propagate their own opinions and views within their networks (*information seeking/disseminating*). Intrinsically, by being connected to the nature of the medium, users could use SNSs to aggregate friends and acquaintances and to gain more potential supporters for their views and standpoints (*networking*).

Based on U&G's theoretical framework, which suggests that, from a psychological perspective of communication, people's media use is drawn by certain needs or wants that they seek to gratify, three main themes are addressed in this research; media uses,

dispositions and the *outcomes* of media consumption. These themes, related sets of variables, and suggested connections are delineated in Figure 4.2 and then discussed.

4.3. Research questions and design

4.3.1. Research questions

This study aims to explore the reasons for the active utilisation of SM by young Egyptian activists prior to the 25th January uprising. It attempts to gauge the weight of SM as platforms for political mobilisation as perceived by a sample of activists. In doing so, I also attempt to understand the relationships between the contextual factors represented -for the purpose of this study- in political and psychological dispositions (political efficacy and fear of repression perceptions) and demographics, by seeking answers to the following questions and related sub questions:

RQ1. Why do young activists use social media?

RQ2. How do social media contribute to creating opportunities (favourable *dispositions*) for practising collective action off-line?

***RQ2.1.** Does using social media for instrumental purposes relate to young activists' feelings of fear of repression? And if so, in what ways?*

***RQ2.2.** Does using social media for instrumental purposes relate to young activists' feelings of being politically efficacious? And if so, in what ways?*

RQ3. How do social media contribute to *mobilising* collective action practice *off-line*?

***RQ3.1.** Does using social media for instrumental purposes relate to young activists' tendency to practise politics online? And if so, in what ways?*

***RQ3.2.** Does using social media for instrumental purposes relate to young activists' tendency to practise politics off-line? And if so, in what ways?*

Figure 4.2 delineates the research design. The expected associations between the research variables, presented in the research questions and sub questions, are also demonstrated in this Figure.

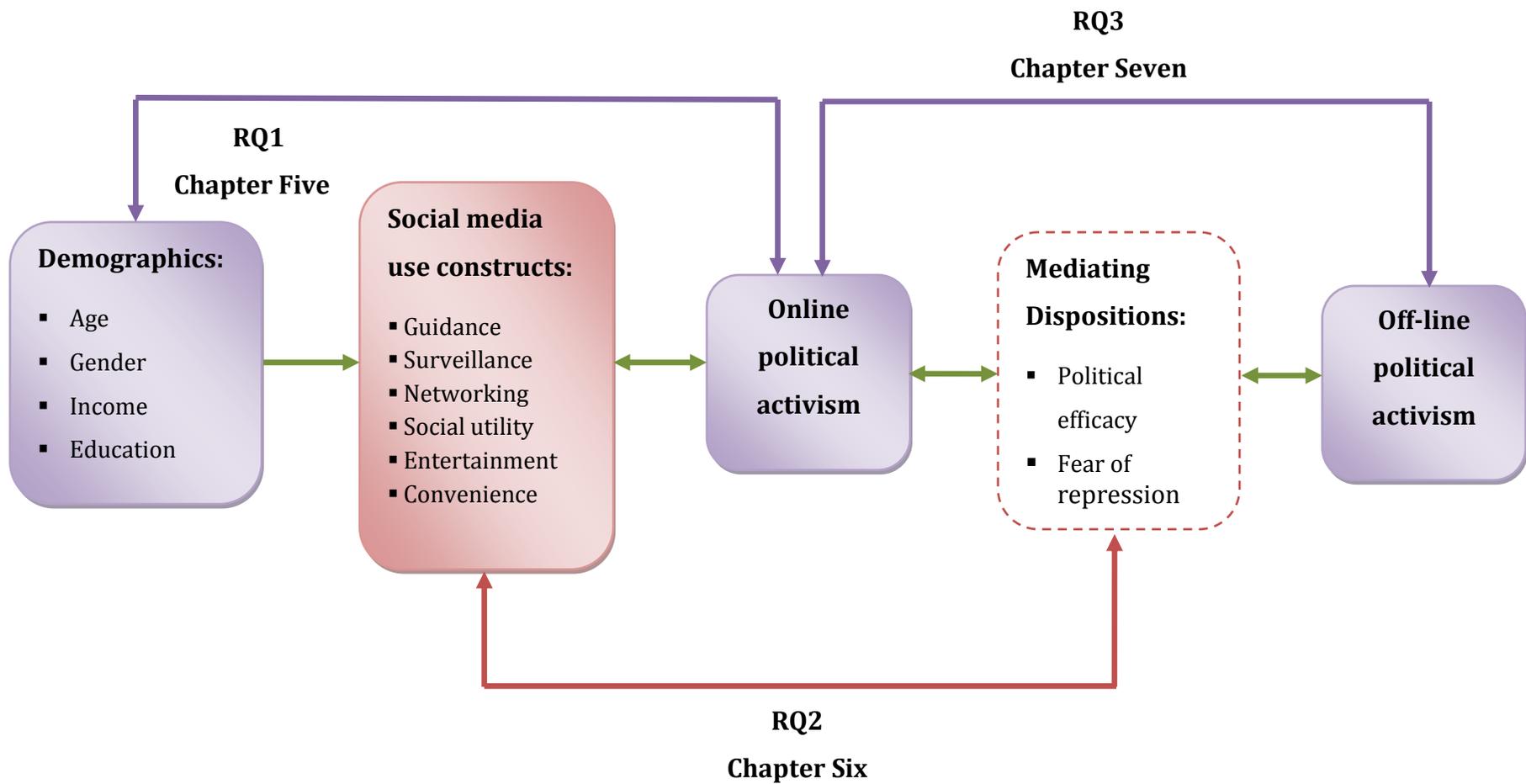


Figure 4.2: Research design

4.3.2. Research population and sampling procedures

Defining the research population provides a basis from which to decide on a sufficient and suitable sample strategy. It also indicates the extent to which extrapolations can be made from a research sample (Deacon, Pickering, Golding & Murdock, 2010). Specific research objectives were used to define the research population. Egyptian citizens, aged 18-35, who describe themselves as being politically interested and active represent the pool of selection for the current research. Using the Internet –and especially SM- for political communication was also one of the main criteria according to which participants in the current research were selected.

4.3.2.1. Sampling for the quantitative survey study

A non-random sampling (non-probability sampling) technique was used to acquire a sample of Egyptian political activists for the purpose of this research. In such a sampling style, the sample units are selected purposively, based on the research objectives. The selection-chance of each research unit is unknown and cannot be calculated. Accordingly, it cannot be guaranteed that every unit of the research population has an equal chance of being selected (Deacon, Pickering, Golding, & Murdock, 2010). Under the non-probability sampling umbrella, a snowball sample was accumulated for the purpose of this study.

Snowball sampling: is a form of convenience sample. Within this approach to sampling, initial contact with a small group of people relevant to the research topic is made. These initial contacts are then used to establish contact with others (Bryman, 2004). Practical reasons have led to compiling the sample for this research by using *snowball-sampling techniques*. As the research objectives and research population are defined, no list of activists exists that might be used as a sampling frame that should contain all (or most) of the units of the population. Given the nature of the current research and the context of the study, snowball-sampling is an appropriate technique for participant selection. Recommendations made by the initial contacts are valuable in dealing with trust issues and in introducing the researcher to groups of activists who might otherwise be difficult to reach and who might refrain from discussing their political activities with strangers.

A problem with snowball sampling is that it is usually unrepresentative of the population. There are therefore concerns about external validity and the ability to generalise which loom, especially within the research's quantitative element. However, it has been suggested that snowball sampling may be a better approach than conventional probability sampling if the aim is to trace connections (Bryman, 2004).

To acquire the survey study sample, I drafted a flexible participation programme which was used as a guide for obtaining the research sample. I began by gaining contacts and building a network of connections before starting the actual field work. The main determinants of the sampling population were: political interest, use of SM and age group. As activists may or may not be affiliated to a political party or social movement, and to avoid acquiring a sample that reflects an inaccurate reading of the target population, when approaching initial contacts it was, as much as possible, taken into account that they represented different schools of political thought in Egyptian society.

Potential nominators were contacted to start a process of referencing possible participants. Although the *snowballing* technique may yield a moderate-sized sample (Denscombe, 2010), it was likely that activists would have been highly active in organising and attending several events in the time period that preceded the parliamentary elections of 28th November 2010, and afterwards. This was expected to enhance the possibility of reaching a sizable number of potential participants during those events. Prior to starting the data collection process, I distinguished a number of activists to contact in the preliminary stages of the field work. Amongst those were:

- W.A., an activist and well-known blogger.
- M.A.E., the creator of the El-Baradei for the Presidency_2011 group on Facebook and a member of the National Association for Change (NAC).
- A.G., an activist and member of the National Association for Change (NAC).
- A.Ma., an activist and co-founder of the April 6th Youth Movement.
- A.F., an activist and member of the al Wasat political party (being founded at the time).
- N.S., an activist and member of the Socialist Renewal Movement.

Nominators helped to introduce the researcher to activists in each research site, thus breaking the ice and building the mutual trust that was much needed for co-operation and to acquire sufficient, reliable information. This helped to move the research readily to the qualitative stage of data collection. Figure 4.3 represents how the research population and the different samples relate to each other. Although participants' consent to use their real names and aliases in this thesis was obtained before the data collection started, I prefer at this particular time to preserve their safety and I made a decision that they should not reveal their real names despite their wishes. On the one hand, I am concerned about providing protection to participants and keen not to cause them any harm for taking part in my research. On the other hand, this is not a historical account that aims at connecting certain events with those who made them. Rather, the main focus of this research is how these young activists perceive SM's contribution to their mobilisation efforts.

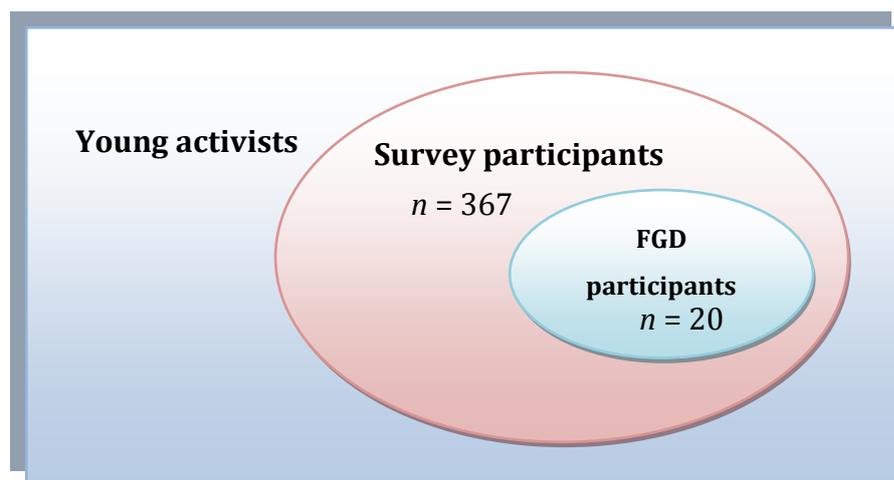


Figure 4.3: Research population and samples

4.3.2.2. Respondents' profile

This study examined 367 responses from a self-administered survey that assessed activists' perceptions of SNSs' use for political communication. Certain attributes were selected to build the profile of respondents in this study. According to the U&G approach, the needs that individuals seek to satisfy are determined by their social environment, which includes their age, gender and group affiliation (Morris & Ogan,

1996). Accordingly, the selected demographic variables correspond to certain issues in the Egyptian polity that are relevant to young Egyptians' geographical availability and related tendency to practise politics as delineated in Chapter Two.

As shown in Table 4.1, the gender ratio is 39.8 percent male and 60.2 percent female ($n = 362$, missing = 5)⁹. 64.9 percent are university students, 24.3 percent are university graduates, and only 8.2 percent hold higher degrees ($n = 357$, missing = 10). Consistently, more than half of the participants fall into the age cohort between 18 and 22, while only 4.4 percent are between 30 and 35 years of age ($n = 362$, missing = 5). 38.1 percent of participants reported a monthly income range between 1000 and less than 3000 EGP. Equal proportions of respondents (21%) reported that they earned between 3000 and less than 5000 EGP, and 5000 – 7000 EGP, and the smallest proportion of respondents fell into the higher income category of more than 7000 EGP ($n = 346$, missing = 21). Respondents were asked to indicate which social networking site(s) they use to communicate with others. Facebook was by far the most visited site (90.9%), followed by YouTube (50.6%). Respondents who reported that they used the interactive comment section in electronic newspapers (15%) were slightly greater in number than those who used Twitter (12.3%), and weblogs were the least popular amongst respondents (7.3%). Table 4.1 describes the research sample's spread by participants' demographic characteristics.

⁹ 367 participants completed the questionnaire for the current research. However, for some questions, some cases were missing and this explains the difference in the total number of research sample (n) for some variables.

Table 4.1: Research sample distribution by demographics

Demographic variables	Sample Distribution	
	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	144	39.8
Female	218	60.2
Education		
University student	238	66.7
University graduate	89	24.9
Higher degree	30	8.4
Age		
18 to 22	234	64.6
22 to 26	43	11.9
26 to 30	38	10.5
30 to 35	16	4.4
more than 35	31	8.6
Income		
1000 to less than 3000	140	40.5
3000 to less than 5000	77	22.3
5000 to 7000	77	22.3
more than 7000	52	15.0

4.3.2.3. Sub-sampling for the qualitative focus group discussions

Participants who expressed their willingness and readiness to take a further step in the research by providing their contact information in the questionnaire represented the sampling frame for the subsequent qualitative part of the research. Questionnaires were collected and revised in order to identify these prospective participants, bearing in mind the link between each group of questionnaires and the initial contact who led to each group's assignment. Subsequently, selection from willing respondents was made within those groups so as to guarantee homogeneity and trust between each discussion group, given the research topic's sensitivity. By following this, the sample for focus groups compiled combines the advantages of both 'pre-constituted' and 'researcher-constituted' groups; as the aforementioned networks act as the former, meanwhile, I had the chance to make selections from among those willing networks of participants and to exert a degree of control over the sample's composition.

Besides homogeneity, selection was also directed by diversity in gender, age, income, political background and degree of activism within the assigned homogenous groups, as revealed by preliminary analysis of the quantitative data. This guarantees distinguishing influential young activists, running vigorous discussions and obtaining various views on the research topic. However, the main factor that directed the stratification of the groups was participants' willingness to take part in supplementary, deeper discussions. Willing respondents were contacted and invited to participate in a group discussion. This yielded three complete focus group discussions (FGDs) with 20 participants and an average group size of seven participants. Table 4.2 shows the qualitative sample of the research.

4.3.3. Data collection: Methods and sources

4.3.3.1. The mixed methods design

Data for this research come from applying mixed methods strategies yielding quantitative and qualitative information. Using this approach provides a deeper explanation of the phenomenon studied by bridging the quantitative findings with the participants' qualitative narratives under the broader umbrella of the research context.

Table 4.2: Research sub-sample distribution

Name	Gender	Age	Profession
1 HA.	Male	22	Student
2 SA.	Female	21	Student
3 RA.	Female	22	Student
4 MD.	Male	23	Student
5 MA.	Male	23	Student
6 MH.	Male	27	Student
7 MD*	Male	22	Student
8 A.A.	Male	35	Lecturer at the Faculty of Engineering
9 W.B.	Male	33	Chief accountant
10 A.M.	Female	26	Journalist
11 I.B.	Male	21	Student
12 M.Da.	Male	23	Blogger
13 A.Ma.	Male	30	Financial control
14 SO.	Male	22	Student
15 I.Z.	Male	23	Student
16 H.B.	Male	18	Student
17 M.E.	Male	19	Student
18 M.S.	Male	26	Communication engineer
19 M.M.	Male	28	Online editor
20 A.Y.	Male	35	Poet and activist

As the research is guided by the theoretical approach of political opportunity, within which activists' perceptions of SM's potential for mobilisation is discussed and explained, this research falls into the '*transformative mixed methods*' category as suggested by Creswell (2009). According to this general strategy, the theoretical framework leads the research design, which contains both quantitative and qualitative data. Under this lens, both sets of data were collected 'concurrently', as both quantitative and qualitative data are merged together to provide an inclusive analysis of the research subject.

In most cases, the general findings begin by demonstrating what participants say in the questionnaires. These findings are subsequently considered in the context of what respondent's say in FGDs. The data retrieved from surveying a sample of young activists is quantitatively analysed to examine how these activists perceive SM's potential for mobilising collective action, as well as building up a profile of SM users that reflects the sample distribution according to the main demographic variables studied (see Table 4.1). While this horizontal view is essential in describing the studied phenomenon through acquiring information about a varied set of selected factors that may relate to SM use by politically active participants, supplementary qualitative group discussions were conducted to provide a deeper vertical scope for understanding, and to extend the analysis by allowing participants the opportunity to elaborate beyond the suggested classification of representative alternatives that are suggested for each research variable, as introduced in the questionnaire. This is expected to enrich the discussion and expand my understanding of the research subject. In addition to capturing their media uses, dispositions, and actions through numerical data and statistics, qualitative methods help by holding more profound accounts of the experiences that participants have regarding their SM and political practices. In other words, researching the questions quantitatively helps to answer the inquiry 'what', while the qualitative trajectory deals more with the questions 'how?' and 'why?' Moreover, "biases inherent in any single method could neutralise or cancel the biases of other methods" (Creswell, 2009, p. 14).

The quantitative step in the empirical data collection was conducted alongside the qualitative data collection, although applying the questionnaire was a step ahead in order to sample participants for the FGDs. This roughly concurrent timing is more

manageable, given the tensions in the political environment researched, the security difficulties that I expected to face, the nature of the research sample, and the limited time allocated for visiting the field.

- ***Advantages and limitations of the mixed methods design***

Using a mixed methods design helps to interpret the findings within the understanding of the political opportunity and the U&G theoretical framework. Additionally to enriching the discussion, integrating qualitative discussions into the analysis addresses one of the shortfalls of U&G research as being over reliant on quantitative methods to address media uses. Additionally, this mixed design helps to reach well-validated and corroborated results through comparison of the two sets of data to determine if there is convergence, differences, or some combination of the two. Collecting the data concurrently is also less time, and hence less money consuming, which makes it more convenient, given the limited time and resources allocated for the conduct of the field work.

On the other side of the coin, this mixed strategy has a number of limitations. Investigating a phenomenon through two distinct methods requires great effort and sufficient experience. It may also be hard to demonstrate and discuss how data of different forms may relate. Moreover, it may be difficult to resolve discrepancies that may emerge while comparing the results, although discrepancies can be addressed by procedures, such as conducting additional data collection, or gaining new insight from the differences in the data (Creswell, 2009, p. 214).

4.3.3.2. The quantitative research

- ***The survey instrument***

The main method for data gathering in this thesis builds on quantitative methodology. The first part of the current research involves asking participants directly about their views, perceptions and activities around the main research question. A printed self-administered questionnaire was designed to deliver questions on a number of selected research variables, corresponding to a set of questions that the research aims to answer. This way of delivering questions to participants is meant to be highly structured and

standardised, which may therefore minimise the influence of the human factor on the data-collection procedure and to increase the sample reliability. Self-implementation guarantees that questions are presented and answers are recorded directly by participants and no intermediary is involved in the data collection process (Deacon, Pickering, Golding, & Murdock, 2010). Although printed self-completion questionnaires may resemble online self-completion ones, the 'interactive element' of the latter implies commonality with face-to-face discussions 'in which respondents interact with the source of questions' (Gunter, Nicholas, Huntington, & Williams, 2002).

Prior to starting the snowballing technique by disseminating questionnaires among initial contacts, who then circulated them amongst their networks, a training session was held to make sure that the nominators are familiar with the instrument. The research topic and research aims were thoroughly explained to and discussed with the first contacts. Careful methodical instructions about the structure of the questionnaire and how respondents should fill them in were conveyed in this session. Activists were then allowed sufficient time to review the questionnaire and ask questions. I received comments about the questionnaire's length, and the possibility of and preference for uploading it online. Initial contacts mentioned that it would have been less time consuming and safer to respond to an online questionnaire, especially for participants in the later stages of the research. I received inquiries about the way participants should respond to some (e.g., multipartite questions). After receiving these comments, a number of questions were omitted from the questionnaire for the sake of clarity given that they would not affect the research design nor hamper the capability of the survey instrument to address its questions. Some of the omitted questions also addressed variables that might have, if included, overloaded the research design and complicated the statistical tests of the suggested correlations. Moreover, a question about interest in politics was also removed from the questionnaire, given that the participants are politically active, which implies a degree of interest in politics. See Appendices 1 & 2 for questionnaires in English and the version translated into Arabic.

Questionnaires were collected and primarily revised for completion and consistency. Participants who mentioned their willingness and readiness for a second foray into the research represented the sampling frame for the subsequent qualitative part of the research, as discussed in Section 4.3.2.3.

▪ ***Operational definitions and corresponding measurements of the main variables***

The main research question revolves around the way activists perceive the potential SM may have for mobilising political action to acquire social and political reform. Under the umbrella of a U&G rationale, several variables were determined to assess activists' perceptions of SNSs as an apparatus for mobilisation. The core question to which the participant activists were introduced addresses activists' uses of SM. They were asked questions about the reasons for which they utilised SM outlets for political purposes. As U&G suggests, media sought gratifications precede and hence may be influenced by motivational antecedents, which may also act as intrinsic incentives for media selection. Rosengren (1974) suggested that communication motives result from the interaction between demographics, communication needs and social and psychological factors (cited in Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000; Sheldon, 2008). Those antecedents may interfere in directing individuals' selections from different media to satisfy certain needs. They may relate to individuals' social, psychological, political, and/or cultural background. For the purpose of the current research, a set of questions about demographic characteristics was included in the questionnaire, as mentioned previously, to serve as a prospective background for the activists' perceptions. They were introduced to the research design in order to demonstrate the way participants perceive SM's potential to mobilise off-line collective action mediated by the specificities of the context within which they are operating.

Based on this rationale, and as shown in Figure 4.2, the main research variables are:

- Uses of SM.
- Political dispositions.
- Online political activism.
- Off-line political activism.
- Demographic variables.

The first data set relating to those variables was collected via a survey of a snowball sample of young Egyptian activists. The survey instrument was thoroughly discussed with academics in Sociology, Education, Communication Studies, Political Science and Statistics before its application. Accordingly, changes in question wording, order and the general design of the questionnaire were applied before the actual fieldwork took place (see Appendix 1).

To help to design the questionnaire, research variables were operationally defined in order to guarantee a collective understanding of research variables and terms and to conserve clear, empirical testing of the research questions. In the next section, the process and series of actions used to measure each variable are demonstrated.

➤ **SM use** is an aggregate of two questions. Respondents were asked to indicate:

(1) Since when have [they] used SM platforms for political communication:

- Less than six months.
- Six months to a year.
- One to two years.
- Two to three years.
- More than three years.

(2) The average time on a typical day [they] spend discussing or practising politics on SM:

- Less than an hour.
- An hour to two hours.
- Two hours to three hours.
- More than three hours.

➤ **SM use constructs:** this question mainly seeks to explore the general dispositions that influence [young activists'] actions taken to fulfill a need or want (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). This perspective reinforces active images of audiences.

As discussed in Section 4.2.2, a significant enhancement was applied to the profile of the political uses of SM. An additional dimension was added to some use constructs on the scale. Rather than focusing solely on the individual needs that an activist seeks to satisfy, a parallel set of uses was included on the suggested scale in order to gauge the activists' tendency (if any) to address, work with and/or influence *others* through their political practices on SM. Although interaction via SM platforms involves the presence of other users, users may perceive themselves to be individuals who are more inclined to engage with the content the medium provides, rather than seeing themselves as members of a larger group and hence aiming their communication to share their experience with other users of the medium. Accordingly, the proposed SM uses scale encompasses *individual* and *collective* uses of the medium. This dichotomous

perspective is expected to have an impact on SM users' dispositions and perceptions of their participatory environment and, hence, on the degree and scale of their tendency to practise politics online and in real life. Six SM use constructs are identified with slight adaptation from previous research (Kaye & Johnson, 2004, p. 207). General definitions of the six use constructs are as follows:

1. **Guidance:** Individuals who are looking for political advice, and who are generally interested in accessing information to guide their political decisions.
 - * Guiding: is defined as actively providing political advice and helping others to make decisions on political issues.
2. **Surveillance:** Information seeking is a more purposeful activity than guidance and is defined as actively searching out specific political information and keeping an eye on the political landscape.
 - * Disseminating information: Is defined as actively providing or drawing attention to specific political information.
3. **Entertainment:** Individuals seeking entertaining political information for relaxation and amusement purposes.
4. **Social utility:** Using the Internet to reinforce decisions and to arm individuals with information to use in discussions with others.
5. **Convenience:** Seeking political information from online sources, and/or practising political activities online, because it is convenient and easier to do than turning to traditional sources.
6. **Networking:** Individuals seeking to build up networks of acquaintances to enhance their capacity to reach larger audiences.

Scale wording and reliability measures

Due to time limitations and constraints in the field, the development of uses of SM profile took a certain route that is slightly different than the standard U&G procedure usually followed in order to develop an initial profile of Internet uses (Stafford, Stafford, & Schkade, 2004). Rather than starting with an open ended question to acquire information about the needs which young activists use SM to gratify, then building a scale based on a thematic analysis of responses to that question in order to assess uses

of SM, the current research builds on previous literature on SM U&G (Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009) to construct a scale of SM uses.

Respondents indicate their reasons for using SM for political purposes on an index of 19 items split into six use categories. Participants were instructed to indicate the level of importance they perceived for each of the 19 descriptive trait terms on a five-point semantic differential scale, where 1 meant 'strongly disagree' and 5 meant 'strongly agree.' Internal consistency was measured among the uses test items; Cronbach's α (alpha) was calculated to determine the reliability of the test scores of each sought gratification category. The value of Cronbach's α reflects the inter-correlations among test items and it generally increases as the inter-correlations among test items increase. Each use category represents a single construct composed of items that measure a different substantive area, hence, Cronbach's α is the most appropriately used internal consistency estimate of reliability of use for test scores (Zinbarg, Revelle, Yovel, & Li, 2005). However, a high alpha (α) does not imply that the measure is unidirectional. Dimensionality may be checked by performing exploratory factor analysis.

Guidance (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.76$): the question reads:

I use social networking sites for political communication...

- (1) To help me decide how to vote in the future.
- (2) To help me decide about important issues.
- (3) For unbiased viewpoints.
- (4) To help me convince others to vote in the next election.
- (5) To help other users decide on important issues.

Information seeking (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.68$): the question reads:

I use social networking sites for political communication...

- (6) To find specific political information for which I am looking
- (7) To keep up with main issues of the day.
- (8) Because it is an easy way to disseminate information.
- (9) To help me draw other users' attention to certain political information.

Networking (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.67$): the question reads:

I use social networking sites for political communication...

(10) To join a group or groups that share the same political interests with me.

(11) Because it is an effective tool to reach a large number of people.

(12) Because it helps me organise political events on a large scale.

Social utility (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.65$): the question reads:

I use social networking sites for political communication...

(13) To give me something to talk about with others.

(14) To use as ammunition in arguments with others.

Entertainment (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.79$): the question reads:

I use social networking sites for political communication...

(15) Because it is entertaining.

(16) Because it helps me relax.

Convenience (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.75$): the question reads:

I use social networking sites for political communication...

(17) Because engaging in an online activity is less time consuming.

(18) Because engaging in an online activity is less money consuming.

(19) Because I can get what I want with less effort.

➤ **Dispositions** were assessed in this study by looking at young Egyptian activists' perceived feelings of political efficacy and fear of repression.

(1) Political efficacy is defined as an individual's belief that performing a particular behaviour will be associated with positive outcomes (Neuwirth & Frederick, 2004).

Scale wording and reliability measures

Political efficacy was measured with a four items index (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.64$) adapted from previous research (Bimber, 2001). Respondents were asked to express to what extent they agreed or disagreed with four items on a five-point scale, where 1 meant 'strongly agree', and 5 meant 'strongly disagree': (a) Politics is too complicated for

someone like me to follow, (b) There is not much point in participating in political campaigns: one person's participation will not make any difference, (c) People like me do not have a say in government, and (d) Politicians do not care about what people like me think. The first two items measure the internal political efficacy, whereas the last two items measure the perceived external political efficacy

(2) *Fear of repression* is operationally defined as the general perceived feeling of being unsafe due to one's public expression of political views and confrontation with authorities, and the related anticipation of being abused, harassed or arrested if (s)he expressed opposing opinions to the regime, either in reality or online.

Scale wording and reliability measures

Fear of repression was measured by a scale composed of three items on a five-point scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.68$). Respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the items: (a) I worry about being emotionally or physically harassed if I go on the street to participate in a political activity, (b) I feel worried about expressing my political opinion in public, and (c) Egyptian citizen could face violations which make him/her worry about his/her safety. On this scale, responses ranged from 1 'strongly agree', to 5 'strongly disagree'.

➤ Outcomes of SM use

While gratifications sought are measured in relation to what incentivises individuals to use SM, the gratifications obtained are determined by what the audience think they gain from using the media (Sheldon, 2008).

- *Behavioural outcomes* of SM use include forms of political activities participants report that they practise on SM platforms, as well as forms of political activities reported to be practised off-line.

(1) *Online political participation* was operationalised as the amount of practice of forms of political activities on SM platforms. This is measured by the frequency of practice of those types of political activities, as stated by the participants. I used seven items to gauge the political use of SM.

Scale wording and reliability measures

The online political participation variable was measured with an aggregate scale composed of seven items (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.87$) where 1 meant 'never', and 5 meant 'very often'. Respondents were asked whether in the past year they had (a) Joined or left a group about politics, (b) Started a social or political topic for discussion, (c) Posted links to news stories relating to a political or social cause, (d) Posted links to videos relating to a political or social cause, (e) Created or invited others to participate in an event related to a political or social cause, (f) Signed an e-mail or web petition, and (g) Forwarded a political e-mail or link to another person.

(2) *Off-line political participation* is another dimension that was added to the behavioural outcome of SM use. It is used for the purpose of bridging the online and the off-line contexts and to give insights into whether online political engagement (online behavioural media outcome) would result in, or relate to, off-line political engagement (off-line behavioural media outcome).

Off-line participation was operationally defined as the number of political activities practised off-line. This is measured by the frequency of practice of different types of political activities. Eight items were used to gauge participants' stated off-line political participation. As suggested in previous research (Tolbert & McNeal, 2003), using an index allows me to look at the impact of using SM on a full range of activities, and helps me to develop a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between online activism and off-line participation. Additionally, the items used correspond to different variables that are also tested in the current research, as well as to the political context of Egypt in the last decade. For example, it is argued that participants will refrain from consuming the 'National' media content due to its biased treatment in favour of the regime and, hence, they feel sceptical about what these media present. Given that their political activities may fall outside the traditional, or 'accepted' realm of participation as defined by the regime and allowed by its' laws, activists are also expected to perceive 'National' media as being hostile and biased against them and their activities and views. Correspondingly, an item about contacting mainstream media on political issues was included in the index.

Similarly, Egypt has witnessed a vibrant political environment in recent years, marked by young citizens practising forms of political activities (for the first time, for most of them) demanding political and social reform. These activities ranged from attending meetings, signing petitions, to demonstrating and protesting. These forms of activities were thus also included in the index to allow participants to report on them. Moreover, a marked openness in Egypt's political structure was changing the system of election of the state president from a referendum to running a multi-candidate presidential election, which implied that, for the first time in twenty five years, change was possible, and citizens' voices might have a value. As the research was applied after the parliamentary elections of 2010, and prior to the presidential elections of 2011, additional items on voting were added to the index.

Scale wording and reliability measures

To measure off-line political participation, a scale was constructed consisting of eight items (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.89$) adapted from previous research (e.g., Bimber, 2001; Feezell, Conroy, & Guerrero, 2009), where respondents were asked to indicate on a five-point scale (where 1 meant 'never', and 5 meant 'very often') whether, in the past year, they had (a) Expressed political opinion through mainstream media (written a letter to the editor of a newspaper or magazine, or called a live radio or TV show to express a political opinion), (b) Volunteered for a campaign or other political cause, (c) Organised or participated in organising a political event, (d) Attended political meetings or speeches, (e) Participated in demonstrations or protests, (f) Displayed a political button, a sign or sticker, (g) Voted in an election, and (h) Tried to influence how others would vote.

- *Attitudinal outcomes* of SM use (SM satisfaction) involve the degree to which participants think that using SM for political communication has helped in meeting their expectations generally.

SM satisfaction: with slight changes to the measures used in previous research (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000), I use a single item to measure the degree of satisfaction with SM as platforms for political engagement. I asked respondents to indicate: "over all, how satisfied [they were] with the job SM do in providing [them] with the things [they] are seeking"

➤ **Demographic variables:** Respondents were also asked questions about their gender, age, education, and the monthly income of their household.

▪ ***Applying the survey instrument***

The actual fieldwork was run between 14th November 2010 and 10th January 2011. Initial contacts were crucial for the data-collection process. They facilitated approaches to activists and the building of trust relationships with otherwise tight social networks, especially considering the tense context in which the field work took place, the sensitivity of the topic, and the related and expected suspicion and confusion. 650 questionnaires were disseminated amongst initial contacts, who started the snowballing technique by suggesting events and meetings where potential participants could be approached and/or by recommending other initial contacts. Participation in the study was voluntary. The response rate was 56.46 percent, with a total of 367 complete questionnaires. These complete questionnaires went through data entry and evaluation processes after excluding 35 questionnaires for inconsistency or non-completion. On one hand, some respondents refused to co-operate, which may be explained by the aforementioned factors, or their lack of interest in taking part in the research. On the other, non-cooperation was sometimes covert; as some respondents avoided revealing their views by choosing not to answer some of the questions, which accordingly led to the omission of the incomplete questionnaires.

4.3.3.3. The qualitative research

▪ ***The focus group discussions (FGDs)***

As the research progressed on the quantitative trajectory, a purposive sample was drawn from among the activists who participated in the survey study to further discuss issues and themes relating to the research topic. A hybrid of methods was used for delivering questions to a secondary sample of participants. Follow-up FGDs were designed to combine the virtues of open-response questions with the closed-response format. Morrison (1998) and Barbour and Kitzinger (1999) stated that focus group research is gaining more popularity as a qualitative research method in communication and cultural studies (cited in Deacon, Pickering, Golding & Murdock, 2010). It also contributes to an understanding of the social context of media use. Additionally, it helps

discuss in more detail the implications of the suggested modification of the SM use measure so as to gauge young activists' perceptions of the potential of SM for addressing others.

▪ ***Discussion guidelines***

A set of questions was used to lead the group discussions and to guarantee that participants do not stray from the discussion line, albeit expressing their opinions freely. These questions were only used to guide the discussions. The groups were led flexibly to give participants the chance to tell their stories and to elaborate more on their perceptions of SM, their personal political experiences, and their experiences with the authorities – if any. These questions were articulated so as to cover the main research themes and variables. They also expanded beyond these variables in order to allow participants to elaborate on their own dispositions and experiences, and to link their views to the context within which they practise politics.

▪ ***Interview questions (flexibly delivered)***

- 1) **What** sorts of SM do you use to communicate with others about politics?
- 2) For each mentioned medium, what are the **reasons** for using that particular platform for political engagement?
- 3) Do you feel that using SM **empowers** you politically?
 - If yes, please tell me how?
 - If no, please tell me why?
- 4) What do you think are the **advantages** (and disadvantages) of using SM for political purposes (elaborate on the unique features of SM)?
- 5) **Why** do you participate in politics despite the **threats** that you might face?
- 6) Could you please tell me about your **personal experience with authorities** concerning your activism (harassment, threats, torture, etc.)?
- 7) Is it significant to your activism that interaction via SM can be **anonymous**? (Do you think that new media features help you cross participation barriers? How?)

- 8) Considering the circumstances that Egyptian society is currently going through, **how** you think using SM might enhance political engagement and feed into participation in politics off-line (using SM as a **channel to off-line activism** and vice versa)?
- 9) What do you think are the **impacts** of practising political mobilisation via SM on political engagement online?
- 10) How would you compare that impact with the impact of off-line activism?
- 11) Are you **satisfied** with the role that SM play in this regard?

▪ ***Conducting the FGDs***

Respondents who provided their contact information and who were selected to participate in the face-to-face group discussions, were contacted to arrange a mutually convenient time and venue for conducting the FGDs. Interviewees were informed at this point about the estimated length of the discussions, which was expected to range from 45 minutes to an hour and a half. As for the venue, arrangements were made in advance to obtain a quiet, private, undisturbed and well-equipped location to avoid the possibility that things would go wrong. In that carefully selected site, seating was arranged in a way that allowed fluent interaction between the researcher and the interviewees and that helped to engage all parties without putting the researcher in a central position.

During the discussions, participants were given the option to use pseudonyms, rather than their real names, to guarantee their anonymity in the recorded material. I used name tags to be able to address the participants by the names they chose in order to enhance the discussion's *flow*. However, participants preferred to use their real names, which were then hidden in the analysis as aforementioned. The average number of seven participants in each discussion group helped minimise nervousness, as well as stimulating discourse and exchange.

4.4 Data analysis strategies

Data collected for this study went through two stages of analysis:

First: analysing the quantitative data that was yielded by applying the questionnaire instrument. This analysis proceeded in several steps:

- (1) I used descriptive statistics to build up a profile of the participants. Frequencies were run on demographics, uses of SM, and contextual factors.
- (2) Mean and standard deviation were calculated to answer the first research question by ranking the SM use incentives participants reported. They describe the central location of the data and its spread, respectively.
- (3) Pearson product-moment correlation (r) was calculated to answer the research subquestions.
- (4) Partial correlation was calculated for each contextual factor to test its mediating impact –if any- on the correlation tested between online and off-line participation.
- (5) Linear regression was conducted to answer the third question. Uses of SM were entered as the dependent block, and dispositions (political efficacy and fear of repression) were entered as the independent block.

Second: analysing the qualitative data that was yielded from conducting the FGDs and using the quotations. All the discussions were recorded on minidisk and transcribed in full. The discussions were then translated from Arabic into English. A sample of discussion quotations was selected to be translated by two other colleagues to guarantee the validity and reliability of translation. Qualitative data were analysed simply by listening repeatedly to discussions and transcribing them. Then I went over them several times to identify and organise quotations that supported the research's themes, and to identify additional ones that might have emerged from activists' repertoires.

4.5. Ethical guidelines

As this study might have presented some concerns, especially in relation to prevention of harm, given the nature of the research subject and the circumstances surrounding the application time, general ethical considerations around informed consent,

confidentiality, anonymity, and participants' safety were addressed in designing and conducting the research. To avoid making participants in this research and the researcher vulnerable to any kind of threat or danger, I followed certain procedures and ethical precautions so as to guarantee both sides' safety, as well as the validity of the data collected.

As for the quantitative study, participants' informed consent was acquired prior to their response to the questionnaire. This involved providing participants with detailed information on the research objectives, the researcher's affiliation, the funding body, and the procedures related to the saving and utilisation of the data (British Sociological Association (BSA), 2002). Participants were given a detailed information sheet which stated the aim of the research, what participation involved, why they were chosen, their right to withdraw at any point in the study, and a guarantee of confidentiality. The form was translated from English to Arabic (see Appendices 1, 2), and all participants were given the Arabic form to guarantee a common understanding of the information, and to avoid inconsistency that might result from misinterpretation. On the questionnaire, an introductory section recapped the basic information about the study, and reassured participants of confidentiality and anonymity. The title of the research and the contact information of the researcher were also clearly stated, and the use of information that the project revealed for 'scientific reasons only', was also assured. As to the structure of the questionnaire, personal questions were postponed to the last section, and a question about religion was omitted in order to avoid sensitivities, given the tension that may have been caused by incidents that took place prior to and during the time period during which the survey instrument was applied¹⁰. Participants responded anonymously to the questionnaire. It was clearly stated at the end of the questionnaire that the research would be pursued on a supplementary qualitative trajectory, and respondents were invited to take part in FGDs. Providing participants' contact information was optional, and it was clearly stated that this was a preliminary step in beginning sampling procedures for the follow up FGDs.

¹⁰ On New Year's Eve 2010, at least 21 people were killed and 70 hurt in the Egyptian city of Alexandria when a bomb blew up outside al-Qiddissin Church (Saints). It was claimed that the targets were Copts, who responded with fury to the overnight attack, marching on a nearby mosque, where they clashed with police. Earlier, on November 25th, violent clashes erupted between Coptic Christians and riot police over the construction of the Church of the Archangel and the Virgin in al-Omraniya, Giza (BBC, 2011).

Participants who showed interest in taking part in a further step in the research were contacted in the way they preferred, as mentioned in the questionnaire. Contact was made at a suitable time to avoid disturbing participants. It was clearly stated that respondents would participate in a group discussion that would last for about an hour and which would cover issues relevant to those in the questionnaire. Prior to the discussions, the aim of conducting FGDs was fully explained to participants as part of the prerequisites for acquisition of their consent, as well as to urge them to elaborate as much as possible when telling and sharing their repertoires and personal experiences of the research's subject. In most cases, I contacted potential participants and gave them information via e-mail, supplemented by calling them on their mobile phones (if numbers were provided) to avoid delay in case some respondents did not check their e-mails often. At this stage, participants were informed verbally about this part of the study. I also brought a printed copy of the information sheet to the discussions and checked that interviewees had read it through. Participants' consent to record the discussions was acquired prior to conducting the FGDs, and their right to withdraw at any point was guaranteed. I also delineated how the recordings would be stored and how the data would be dealt with. During the discussions, personal questions were postponed to the end, and participants were given the right not to answer questions on age and income if they chose not to (these are considered sensitive topics in the Arab region, especially when revealed in the presence of others). Participants were also given the choice to use pseudonyms during recorded discussions if they wished to remain anonymous.

Participating in the FGDs might involve more risk –if there were to be any– as they take longer, participants are known to each other, and their voices are recorded, so their views are attached to their personalities. However, participants voluntarily provided their contact information on the survey as a sign of agreement to taking part in the FGDs. They were also allowed ample time to rethink participating in further discussions, and to change their minds at any point if they had any concerns. Additionally, their informed consent was acquired, both verbally and in written form. It is also worth mentioning that the snowballing technique helped provide a friendly research environment; as groups of participants were built through networking techniques, which implies that participants were already acquainted with each other.

As well as acquiring their informed consent, I was also keen to avoid causing any harm to my subjects due to their taking part in my research. Before starting the actual fieldwork and interviewing participants, approval and security clearances from the relevant Egyptian authority were obtained. I had them on hand at every research scene to show as proof of permission to work with participants and to ask questions on the research subject, if this were to be required. These included my national ID and a proof of affiliation as a Ph.D. student at the University of York.

4.6. Conclusion

This chapter has addressed the theoretical foundation of the empirical study and has discussed issues relevant to data collection and analysis. It began by delineating the aim and rationale of the study. A brief discussion of the concept of 'political opportunity' then followed to inform the presentation of the socio-political context of this thesis (Chapter Two). The chapter then moved on to discuss the U&G approach and how this informs the study's application and helps to answer its questions. A significant alteration was suggested to the U&G instrument to better suit the nature of SM, as interactive platforms of communication, and to help address the research questions. Operational definitions and related measurements of the main variables of the study are thoroughly discussed. The chapter also discusses the pros and cons of using a mixed methods approach for data collection, and moves forward to outline the sampling procedures and data collection instruments used for both the quantitative and qualitative studies. Ethical guidelines have been taken carefully into consideration in order to preserve the rights of participants in my study and to protect the collected data, given the sensitivity of the topic studied and the significant developments that Egyptian polity has recently been undergoing. This theoretical and methodological foundation underpins and informs data analysis and discussion which occupies the thesis' following chapters.

CHAPTER FIVE

MAPPING THE ONLINE SPACE OF PARTICIPATION: YOUNG ACTIVISTS' USES OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Analysis in this chapter aims to illuminate young Egyptian activists' uses of social media (SM) prior to the 25th January revolt. It has been argued that studying patterns, rather than gross hours, of media use helps a better understanding of the potential that certain modalities of media consumption hold for enabling political actions (Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001). This chapter mainly focuses on the reasons behind SM use, activists' self-reported satisfaction about their purposive use of SM and the differences between users as shaped by their demographic characteristics. Data from questionnaires and FGDs are presented in this chapter to answer the research question: Why do young Egyptian activists use social media? Young activists' uses of SM were first quantitatively assigned at the individual level across a range of activities in order to contextualise subsequent qualitative analysis of their prospects to mobilise collective action, to gratify (or not) their active media uses.

In this chapter, I begin by presenting a picture of the young activists' self-reported uses of SM, as revealed by questionnaire and FGD data. In doing so, I pave the way to link these uses to the way young activists perceive the role of SM in promoting participatory dispositions (Chapter Six) within a broader analysis of activists' perceptions of SM as a resource for the mobilisation of collective action (Chapter Seven).

Three main arguments are made in this chapter. *First*, young Egyptian activists were using SM as instruments to achieve certain goals prior to the 25th January revolt. These uses weigh differently and serve to fulfill different needs that mainly focus on addressing non-politicised citizens, rather than on gratifying the personal needs of participant activists. This tendency to address others validates the suggested alteration of the media use scale to add an 'other' dimension to it in order to capture the interactive traits of SM and to allow participants to report on their tendency to address potential supporters with their mobilising messages. *Second*, it is argued that young activists realise several deficiencies in SM that explain the revealed differences in weight between SM use constructs. These deficiencies mainly relate to the nature of the

Internet as a non-centralised space of communication. Participants believe that the efficiency of SM is hampered by a marred culture of utilisation that may result in addressing other SM users with distorting messages. Participants suggested a purposive, integrated strategy of SM utilisation in order to avoid the polarisation of the audience and the stratification of mobilising message. Third, it is contended that SM are becoming more of a mainstream outlet in the Egyptian polity. Quantitative data revealed that demographics (gender, age, income and education) moderately influence young activists' uses of SM (only 11 significant correlations from 24). This finding suggests that, in due course, activists may be able to reach out to a public audience on a more varied scale and of a much larger size than previously.

This chapter is organised into four main sections and subsections:

5.1. Understanding **what** young activists use social media for.

5.1.1. Social media for guidance.

5.1.2. Social media for surveillance.

5.1.3. Social media for convenience.

5.1.4. Social media for networking.

5.1.5. Social media for social utility.

5.1.6. Social media for entertainment.

5.2. Social media satisfaction and its perceived implications for the mobilisation of collective action.

5.2.1. Structural fluidity and defective social media culture.

5.2.2. Social media's perceived credibility and reliability.

5.2.3. Social media and the perceived erosion of the off-line practice of collective action.

5.3. Understanding **which** young activists use social media for what.

5.4. Conclusion.

5.1. Understanding *what* young activists use social media for

Users of SM are active in their utilisation of these interactive communicative platforms. Differences in uses were argued to have a significant influence on individuals' political practices that are not revealed by looking merely at the time measurement of online experience, but through exploring individuals' various uses of new media that correspond to the rich experience they have with such media (Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001; Norris & Jones, 1998). In this section and its related subsections, young activists' uses of SNSs are assessed across a range of communicative activities. Hypothesised relationships between media uses and participants' characteristics (gender, age, education and income) are then tested to explore whether demographic variables can explain differences (if any) in young activists' uses of SM.

Each of the following subsections begins with what respondents said in the questionnaires. These findings are subsequently considered in the context of respondents' typical comments from FGDs to explain more about how young activists' perceive the potential of SM to fulfill each reported need. As we recall from the last chapter, uses of SM were adapted from previous uses and gratifications (U&G) research (e.g., Kaye & Johnson, 2004; Kim & Kim, 2007). 'Networking' was added to the scale to allow respondents to indicate whether they use SM to build their own community of friends and acquaintances in order to reach a larger group of potential supporters with their mobilising messages. Respondents indicated reasons for using SM on an index of 19 items that was split into six media use categories: guidance, surveillance, networking, social utility, entertainment, and convenience, where 1 meant 'strongly disagree' and 5 meant 'strongly agree.' For each set of uses, Cronbach's α (alpha) was measured to determine the internal consistency of reliability of media uses test scores (Zinbarg, Revelle, Yovel, & Li, 2005). After quantitatively delineating young activists' uses of SM, qualitative data from focus group discussions (FGDs) were introduced to the analysis (in Section 5.2) to highlight participants' critique of SM's contribution to mobilising collective action.

As seen in Table 5.1, activists' practice of politics on SM platforms was drawn by six types of needs that weighed differently in leading their active utilisation of the SM apparatus. Politically active Internet users primarily used SM to seek political guidance

($M = 16.7, SD = 3.6, \alpha = 0.76$). Acquiring and disseminating information followed with a slight difference ($M = 16.2, SD = 2.4, \alpha = 0.68$). Convenience and networking followed ($M = 11.8, SD = 2.4, \alpha = 0.75$), ($M = 11.1, SD = 2.3, \alpha = 0.67$) respectively. Social utility ranked fifth on the uses schema ($M = 7.7, SD = 1.5, \alpha = 0.65$). Entertainment was the least significant reason for practising political communication through SM ($M = 6.47, SD = 2.3, \alpha = 0.79$). Figure 5.1 illustrates the proportional weight of each SM use construct as reported by the young activist participants.

Table 5.1: Young activists' uses of social media

SM use constructs	Cronbach's α	Factor Score	
		Mean	SD
I use social networking sites for ...			
Guidance	0.76	16.7	3.6
Surveillance	0.68	16.2	2.4
Convenience	0.75	11.8	2.4
Networking	0.67	11.1	2.3
Social utility	0.65	7.7	1.5
Entertainment	0.79	6.5	2.3

Table 5.2 shows in more detail the young activists' distribution by their SM uses. As appears from the table, participant activists tend to agree more than to disagree that using SM for political communication helps them achieve certain goals relevant to their political activism. Using SM for guidance about voting decisions is the only exception to this finding. The research sample is almost equally distributed between those who are not decided about (35.4%) and those who disagree with (35.1%) SM's potential as platforms where they can get political advice. Young activists seem not to perceive SM as sufficient tools for informing political decisions. This finding is discussed and explained in more details in Section 5.2 about SM satisfaction and its perceived implications for the mobilisation of collective action.

Table 5.2: Young activists' distribution by social media uses

SM use constructs	Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Missing cases	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Guidance								
To help me decide how to vote in the future.	107	29.6	128	35.4	127	35.1	5	1.4
To help me decide about important issues.	231	63.6	98	27	34	9.4	4	1.1
For unbiased viewpoints.	194	54	121	33.7	44	12.3	8	2.2
To help me convince others to vote in the next election.	127	35.9	118	33.3	109	30.8	13	3.5
To help other users decide on important issues.	205	56.8	106	29.4	50	13.8	6	1.6
Surveillance								
To find specific political information for which I am looking	263	72.8	72	19.9	26	7.2	6	1.6
To keep up with main issues of the day.	307	85.3	45	12.5	8	2.2	7	1.9
Because it is an easy way to disseminate information.	315	87.5	38	10.6	45	12.5	7	1.9
To help me draw other users' attention to certain political information.	233	65.3	90	25.2	34	9.6	10	2.7
Networking								
To join a group or groups that share the same political interests with me.	185	52.2	109	30.8	60	17	13	3.5
Because it is an effective tool to reach a large number of people.	207	58	97	27.2	53	14.8	10	2.7
Because it helps me organise political events on a large scale.	275	77.7	52	14.7	27	7.7	13	3.5
Social utility								
To give me something to talk about with others.	276	76.5	68	18.8	17	4.7	6	1.6
To use as ammunition in arguments with others.	227	64.5	100	28.4	25	7.1	15	4.1
Entertainment								
Because it is entertaining.	203	56.8	78	21.8	76	21.3	10	2.7
Because it helps me relax.	131	36.9	88	24.8	136	38.3	12	3.3
Convenience								
Because engaging in an online activity is less time consuming.	240	66.7	69	19.2	51	14.2	7	1.9
Because engaging in an online activity is less money consuming.	272	76	58	16.2	28	7.8	9	2.5
Because I can get what I want with less effort.	278	76.8	62	17.1	22	6.1	5	1.4

5.1.1. Social media for guidance

As Table 5.1 shows, **guidance** was the strongest reason drawing activists' political use of SM ($M = 16.7, SD = 3.6$). Respondents indicated that they used SM for unbiased views and to decide on important issues. Guidance could be pursued by reviewing other users' comments on certain news stories. **HA.** expressed typical participants' views on the viability of electronic newspapers in making sense of the public sphere and informing activists' political decisions:

I always login to the websites of electronic newspapers like *al Masry alyoum* and read the readers' comments to build an impression of what people think and whether they are with or against posted news. When it comes to issues that concern public opinion, I think it is useful to visit those interactive websites to see how the collective thinks.

MH. did the same thing:

I follow certain websites that have a main purpose in their messages and which I feel have a stance towards the current events; such as opinion polls and discussions such as al-Jazeera and the BBC. I get to know people's attitudes and their opinions towards certain issues, so I can assess the direction of the majority. For example, I read the users' comments on the BBC and I also use *al Masry al-Youm*.

RA. agreed with **HA.:**

I also use websites like *Masrawy* and electronic newspapers for the reasons mentioned by HA.; to read people's comments and to know how the collective thinks.

Although SM may not be perceived as a primary source of news, since they were created primarily as platforms where friends could meet and connect, this finding is, on the one hand, consistent with previous research on Internet use for political information. For example, Kaye and Johnson (2004) found in their survey on politically-interested Internet users during the 2000 presidential election that users were primarily drawn to online sites for voting advice, followed by entertainment/social utility reasons, then convenience (Kaye & Johnson, 2004). Zhang et al. (2010) also found that 40 percent of general users of social networking sites (SNSs) who participated in the survey had used MySpace and Facebook for political information. This might be explained by the time during which those studies were conducted; as Internet users are expected to utilise their preferred websites to fulfill needs relating to the presidential campaigns. Along the same lines, the current research was conducted at a time that witnessed significant political incidents, like the parliamentary election of November 2010; the sectarian

clashes between Muslims and Christians, and the upcoming presidential election, which was due in September 2011, and which might have caused Internet users to seek political advice on certain issues. During such times, such incidents and events are expected to invigorate political discussions and heighten the debate about related issues, which might incentivise individuals to seek political guidance in order to make up their minds or to reach an opinion on certain matters.

On the other hand, another dimension of uses was added to the guidance factor (as explained in the Methodology Chapter) to reflect SM's interactive trait. Interactivity entails the presence of *other* users and enables activists to influence potential supporters through their active, purposive use of media. This additional dimension might have pushed the guidance factor to the lead in SM uses schema as young activists aimed to influence *others'* political decisions. **H.B.**, typically, remarked:

Social media play a crucial role in our engagement and mobilising efforts; it gives us the space that traditional media suppress, and it hence enables us to reach those who do not take to the streets and have no other means to know what really happened there.

Participants believe that being able to guide and convince others is crucial for their mobilising efforts. For example, a video posted on YouTube by a young woman named Asmaa Mahfouz, at 10:30 am on 24th January 2011, was – along with an invitation posted on the 'We are all Khaled Said' Page on Facebook – assumed to be the spark of the massive demonstrations that took place in Tahrir Square on the 25th of January. Asmaa urged Egyptian citizens to participate in protests by saying:

Tomorrow is 25th January, the day we have been waiting for. The day we all worked so hard for. The most beautiful thing about it is that those who worked on this were not politicians at all. It was all of us, all Egyptians, we worked hard. Children no older than 14, they printed the posters and started distributing them after prayers. Old people in their 60s and 70s helped as well All of Egypt awaits tomorrow, I know we are all nervous right now and anxious, but we all want to see tomorrow's event happen, and succeed. I would like to tell everyone that tomorrow is not the revolution, and is not the day we will change it all. No. Tomorrow is the beginning of the end. Tomorrow, if we make our stand, despite all the security may do to us, and stand as one in a peaceful protest, it will be the first real step on the road to change, the first real step that will take us forward and teach us a lot of things. Our solidarity in planning is a success in itself. To simply know that we must demand our rights. That is success (Mahfouz, 2011).

However, young activists think that only a small number of those who believe and trust in the content of the Internet would act accordingly. Yet this proportion, in **A.Y.**'s view, is sufficient to realise change and even to topple what he calls the 'aging regime:'

The core of the mobilisation process is the capability to convince people. The Internet users can judge its content and choose whether to believe it or not. This level of trust and reliability is the determinant of whether a further action will be taken or not. In other words, if a million individuals read a certain statement on the Internet and did not believe it, they would not take action, but if they do believe it, we expect that an average of 10.000 will react to it. This is the way things happen, not all people move. But, I believe that the real value does not lie in the number in itself, rather, it lies in our credibility and our capability to mobilise people. If we can really mobilise 1% of the population, we can definitely make the 'ageing' regime fall.

Using SM to convince and mobilise others, rather than to inform young activists' political decisions, was supported by previous research. For example, Feezell, Conroy and Guerrero (2009) argue that "information is more likely to be reinforcing and therefore mobilising, but not enlightening and therefore educational" (p. 16).

5.1.2. Social media for surveillance

The second strongest reason for using SM, as shown in Table 5.1 and figure 5.1, was ***seeking and disseminating information*** ($M = 16.2$, $SD = 2.4$). Acquiring and distributing information followed political guidance with a slight difference; as respondents mentioned that their use of SM was drawn by the need for surveillance. Using SM for monitoring activists' political environment included communicating to find specific political information for which they are looking, to keep up with the main issues of the day, to disseminate information, and to help participants draw other users' attention to certain political information. Previous research found that political surveillance motives were strongly related to certain forms of media-related political activities, such as watching news, political advertisements, and direct-to-camera videos (Hanson, Haridakis, & Sharma, 2008). Additionally, SNSs have special features that enable users to post links to news stories from other websites accompanied by their own comments, which may reflect their own opinion on the story, or to add an attractive title that draws members of their network's attention to what is posted and urges them to consume media content (to read the news story, or watch the video) and to interact with it. Users can also create their own stories, broadcast their videos, and share them with others on websites like YouTube. Castells (2011) describes how public actions are "exposed to the decentralised surveillance of millions of eyes [which makes all of us] potential paparazzi" (Castells, 2011, p. 413).

Informational uses of SM, as revealed by survey data and participants' narratives, appear to follow two practices. The young Egyptian activists used SM to gather, generate, and disseminate what della Porta and Mosca (2005) called 'functional information' to serve *informative*, or what della Porta and Mosca (2005) termed 'cognitive', functions to expose the regime's misconduct and to circumvent national media's biased representations. They also used SM to disseminate *technical* information and relay certain participatory instructions to their supporters. These two dimensions of the informational uses of SM fall under the young activists' perceptions of SNSs as *alternative* platforms to the traditional, state-run media that are usually seen as unreliable, biased sources of information. They use SM to seek out, collect and diffuse 'non-mainstream' information (Dahlgren & Olsson, 2009).

As for *diffusing* information (both informative and technical), several examples can be extracted from the FGDs. **H.B.** noted:

I think that social networking sites play a significant role as alternative media. It can be said that the traditional media outlets are blocked. It is also almost the same case even for the independent or the (opposition) press, which does not operate objectively or reveal facts as they are. Social networking sites could thus serve as ideology-promotion forums for certain movements. It has more credibility in broadcasting events.

Activists have been utilising SM as "primary sources" (Dahlgren & Olsson, 2009, p. 202) for *disseminating*, rather than *gaining*, information. They uploaded first-hand information relevant to their activities and that might differ from state-run (and independent) media representations, or highlight a different angle of events. **H.B.** started by stating that he 'thinks' that SNSs are important *alternative* platforms that enable activists to deliver *quality* information that is more credible, reliable, and far reaching than the traditional media, which serve the terms of elite interests and allow no, or limited, space in which they can let their voices be heard. Moreover, SM not only substitute for state-run media, but also for independent media, which are supposed to present a different point of view but are still perceived as being unbalanced in their coverage.

The young activists' primary concern is to address others and illuminate areas that might be dimmed or smeared by other media resources. Direction is very significant in this regard, while previous studies have found that different uses of the Internet are mainly focused on gathering various kinds of information (i.e., Shah, Kwak, & Holbert,

2001), participants in the current study stated that they used SM as a means to disseminate information. The young activists diffused informative messages to raise *others'* consciousness of certain incidents relevant to their activism. They also circulated technical information to achieve certain goals, like urging others to conduct certain course of actions, or giving instructions on how to participate in certain events. Previous research supports this directional disposition of media activism. Butler et al. (2002) found that individuals volunteer for online groups to achieve goals that have personal and altruistic underpinnings. This emergent directional disposition is expected to reflect on perceived media influence as tools that promote participatory dispositions (discussed in Chapter Six), and to mobilise off-line collective action (explored in Chapter Seven).

Using SM to address and mobilise others has benefitted activists in many ways. Immediacy of information delivery is an additional advantage that SM have afforded activists and, hence, it has enabled them to take timely informed decisions and act promptly. **I.Z.** asserted that:

The immediate delivery of information has advantaged us a lot in the first wave of the demonstrations we staged to support Khaled Said's cause in Lazoghly and in the march in Sherief Street The idea is that: such incidents should be published instantly on the Internet to draw people's attention and assert that the game is not yet over.

I.Z. made the point that activists used SM platforms to send a strong message to authorities and to challenge their manipulative ways of obliterating facts and enforcing certain agendas on the so-called 'national' media and, hence, on public opinion. Forcing certain content onto the mainstream media might result in reaching less technologically advantaged citizens. New media 'fluid' technologies may help citizens to interrupt the manipulated agenda of the national media to "support a greater variety of issue agendas and information access points" (Papacharissi, 2010, p. 120).

When traditional media are censored by the government and their reliability are broadly questioned, people tend to mistrust the 'National' media and to turn to the Internet as an alternative source of information (Tsfati, 2003; Tsfati & Cappella, 2003). Participants think that SM serve as *on the run news portals* that aggregate several sources of news on one portal for their rapid consumption. As **W.B.** remarked, "Facebook, of course, enables us to catch up with the news and interact with people

promptly.” Although activists asserted that news gained from SM should be treated with caution and its reliability should be verified, (these perceptions are discussed in more detail in Section 5.2.2), when it comes to their activism and unconventional practices, it is worth mentioning that young activists realised that SM are essential means for gaining information. **H.B.**, explained how Facebook was their main source of information about the massive demonstrations which broke out in Cairo's Shubra district in January 3rd 2011 to protest against the bombing of the Church of Saints in Alexandria (BBC, 2011):

The news I follow on Facebook completely differ from that I read in newspapers, and this is what happened in the Shubra demonstrations. Youths were beaten and kidnapped, albeit, *al-Masry al-Youm* newspaper only mentioned the damaged vehicles and some financial losses.

M.E. described how joining political groups on SM substitutes for traditional news media sources, especially when it comes to activists' dissident activities:

I joined the Khaled Said group [on Facebook] to know what happens in demonstrations because they post details on their page. The same applies to the April 6th Movement, Justice and Freedom, and Socialist Reform groups. For example, there were demonstrations in Shubra, then we knew that some youths were arrested from a message sent on the group page. I join the largest number of groups to follow the news. *They are like a newspaper* to me (emphasis added).

Similarly, Hwang et al. (2006) found that antiwar opinion holders who felt that their views differed from those presented in mainstream media sought out alternative online sources for perspectives on the war. Perceptions of what has been termed “media dissociation” were argued to stimulate dissenters' information seeking and related political behaviours.

On the other hand, SM benefitted participants' activism as means of distributing, rather than acquiring, information. **A.Y.** explained how using the Internet helped circumvent censorship and opened a window for the free expression of political opinion:

The reason why I insisted on launching my website on the Internet is that when I decided to write on politics, I found that all fronts of free speech were completely blocked, or allowed under certain conditions. And as I am not the kind of person who can bargain with his own beliefs to meet such conditions, or peel off his skin to satisfy people who control those opinion platforms, I decided from the very beginning to create my own platform where I could express my beliefs and relay my opinion the way I want at any time.

SM have enabled activists to address wider audiences, whether directly through reaching out to potential supporters online, or indirectly via forcing their messages onto the traditional media agenda, or what could be termed the '*mediatisation*' of the Internet, and hence, influence off-line audiences. Images and stories posted by bloggers and activists about police harassment and brutality were found efficient in spurring Egypt's mainstream media to cover the authorities' violations against citizens (Shapiro, 2009). For example, police officers were convicted of sodomising a minibus driver after the posting of cellphone video footage of the incident by the well-known Egyptian blogger, Wael Abbas. The case of the brutal murder of the young businessman, Khaled Said, was also taken to court after a photo of his mangled face was leaked from the mortuary and uploaded onto Facebook, which vehemently brought the cause to the focus of mainstream media and the broader public. This direction of information flow (Internet-mainstream) may be beneficial in a society with high rates of illiteracy and low levels of Internet penetration, as well as moderate levels of Internet self-efficiency, which makes mobilisation through SM a harder goal to achieve. For example, independent newspapers like *al-Dustur* have brought the Internet experience to readers without Internet access by re-printing the important weblogs on a special page (Shapiro, 2009).

Conversely, forming a bridge between traditional media content and new media platforms, or what has been labeled the "internetisation" of the media (Dahlgren, 2009, p.40), was found to afford activists a qualitatively wider platform from which to disseminate information, address public opinion and open certain topics up for debate. Equally, activists could conversely highlight selected mainstream media content and bring it to the consciousness of new media users. Cottle's (2011, p. 652) analysis brings him to a parallel conclusion:

New social media and mainstream media often appear to have performed in tandem, with social media variously acting as a watchdog of state controlled national media, alerting international news media to growing opposition and dissent events and providing raw images of these for wider dissemination.

5.1.3. Social media for convenience

Using SM as a convenient tool for mobilising political actions through which participants could lower the cost of organisation, as well as participation or, in the

participants' terms, *lowering the ceiling of sacrifice* followed using these media for surveillance. Participants considered practising politics on SM to be less time, money, and effort consuming in comparison with other forms of political activism ($M = 11.8$, $SD = 2.4$). Convenient tools for mobilisation and a safe environment for participation are benefits that SM afforded young Egyptian activists. Participants explained how creating convenient circumstances for political participation are crucial in urging more individuals to join. **A.Y.** remarked:

Online, people also do not have to pay anything, or exert any significant effort to gain information or to get involved in politics and this is exactly what we are trying to enforce when mobilising the public behind our cause; lowering the cost, especially the risk.

Previous research arrived at similar findings. For example, Shao (2009) found that users of User-Generated Media (UGM) were driven basically by “easy to use” and “let users control” media attributes (Shao, 2009). On the other hand, non-producers, or “lurkers”, were most de-motivated by factors of time consumption and technical restrictions, especially for video blogging (Stoeckl, Rohreier, & Hess, 2007). This may suggest that political participation on media platforms might be preferred to getting involved in political activities outside the virtual sphere and, hence, raises questions about individuals' willingness and capacity to link their online engagement to the off-line arena, which could be expected to cost them more time and effort. It might also impose challenges on activists to mobilise publics to get involved in more ‘costly’ - albeit more effective - forms of participation.

Lowering the physical and financial cost of participation, as revealed by **A.Y.**'s comment above, raises the issue of *online* biographical availability, or what can be termed the ‘*cybographical availability*’ of supporters and potential participants. Studies on social movements show that biographical availability is an important element in explaining differences in the mobilisation of populations (McAdam, 1986; Tindall, 1994; Tindall, 2002). Biographical availability can be defined as “the absence of personal constraints that may increase the costs and risks of movement participation, such as full-time employment, marriage, and family responsibilities” (McAdam, 1986, p. 70). However, online availability is not necessarily associated with, nor does it lead to biographical availability or off-line political practice (as will be discussed in Chapter Seven), especially in repressive regimes, where fear of confronting authorities is expected to

impair some people's tendency to move from the online, safe space of interaction to the off-line, threatening place of action.

Safety adds another dimension to convenience in the underpinnings of the uses of SM. Earl and Kimport (2011) argue that easing the fear of repression lowers the cost of protesting in authoritarian regimes. Participants commented on SM's affordances in terms of providing a more convenient arena for safer political practice. **MH.** Remarked:

I express my political opinion via social networking sites because I cannot talk in the street, or in reality more broadly. For instance, when I am at the university, I feel fear and an incapability to express my opinion.

MA. added:

Basically, there is no other way to express myself and my opinion. Any activity outside the Internet's 'borders' would be tightly restricted and limited. I think the least I can do is to speak my voice out and convey my ideas to others.

However, it is worth noting that while lowering the cost of organisation and participation is one of the main affordances that new media have brought to social movements (i.e., Bennett, 2003a), using SM for its convenience gave way to the benefits of guidance and information dissemination. This could be attributed to activists' expressed worries about limiting activism in the virtual sphere due to the ease of practice and low expenses temptations. Fear plays a dual role in motivating unconventional political actions: it can function as a motivation for 'online' activism – as individuals enjoy high levels of freedom of expression in relatively less-censored cyberspace. Fear could also work as a potential demotivator of 'off-line' activism – as public confrontation with authorities is expected to threaten individuals' safety and well-being. The impact of fear is thus well-situated to explain the expected preference for practising politics online, especially for the less-experienced and non-politicised citizens, and the consequent difference in participation rates between the online and off-line arenas, as expressed by some participant activists (off-line participation is discussed in Chapter Seven). As **A.A.** summarised it:

I do not underestimate the importance and significance of social media platforms. Yet, it should be recognised as a source of information not a space of action.

Realising the impact of fear might also have caused the networking use of SM to drop behind guidance, information seeking and convenience, as activists perceived risk as an

obstacle to their mobilising activities, which may prevent individuals from challenging their fear off-line as they might have done online.

5.1.4. Social media for networking

“One of the real magnetisms of the technology is its ability to enable users to interact with people and views beyond the reach of their normal social networks” (Wheeler, 2006, p. 6). Aiming at mobilising other users to their cause, networking was expected to strongly drive activists’ political activities on SM in order to enlarge their reach capacity and widen the circle of mobilisation. However, networking uses of SM ($M = 11.1$, $SD = 2.3$) receded to the benefit of guidance, information seeking and dissemination, and convenience, which raises questions about SM’s capacity for building communities and organising collective action, as perceived by young Egyptian activists.

Surman and Reilly (2003) stressed the importance of building communities in order to mobilise publics. They view online mobilisation as “online efforts *to move people to action* – to protest, intervene, advocate, support [arguing that] such efforts are much more about relationships and community than information” (emphasis added) (p. 48). As the questionnaire data reveal, SM provided participants with valuable tools for joining online political groups, reaching out to greater numbers of people, and organising political events on a large scale. Joining groups or ‘liking 🍷’ certain pages on Facebook could develop a sense of virtual community around a political idea or leader (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010). Previous research has also found that maintaining communities of certain interests was one of the prevailing reasons for blogging (Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, & Swartz, 2004; Li, 2005).

Participants used SM to build and associate with their personal political networks. Although many of the participants are not affiliated to particular social movement organisations (SMOs) or political groups, they still managed to utilise SM as *fluid mobilising structures*. SM “identify a host of digital networking mechanisms that account for keeping the mobilisation together” (Bennett, Breunig, & Givens, 2008, p. 273). This practical perspective, which I call the *networking preparatory mobilisation*, may (or may not) create a collective ideology among community members that may be embodied on several occasions and at events for which the groups call. This ideology acts as the “connecting tissue” (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 117), or the “in-between bond” (Ardent, 1973)

that cements emerging networks and coalitions. For example, Khaled Said became an iconic figure and a symbol of police brutality in Egypt after the launch of the Facebook Page 'We are all Khaled Said' (Londono, 2011) and his cause was vigorously echoed in the Tahrir Square protests which commenced on 25th January 2011.

It is evident, then, that SM were shaped by individual activists as means for individual-level network bridging outside the boundaries of formal organisations. There is reason to think that this less binding, more supple form of organisation which has developed through SM apparatuses resonates more with the non-politicised individuals who are new to politics; as this non-formal organisation was found to "offer individuals easier opt-in, opt-out mechanisms for affiliation and participation that are often facilitated by social networking and digital communication technologies" (Bennett, Breunig, & Givens, 2008, p. 270). This is not to say, of course, that SM platforms, and digital communication technologies more broadly, are the sole resources of organisation and trust building, yet their significance in bridging to others in an oppressed environment, where an anti-democratic media system is mainly dominated by the state and a handful of businessmen, cannot go unnoticed. SM communication helps maintain reality-developed thick bonds and to establish new evidence-based thinner ties with newcomers to the political sphere. A similar emphasis was noted in **M.S.'s** remarks:

Posting links and uploading videos depicting solidarity campaigns with the arrested activists and posting information of the intensive support that we received from lawyers and human rights organisations until the case was solved and we were set free, gave a push forward and made other citizens believe that they are not solo and that pressure would bear them more rights.

However, activists continued to express their awareness of the limited capacity of the SM apparatus to breach the borders of the virtual sphere and extend the mobilising effect on the ground. These limitations, which I discuss in Section (5.3), clarify the unexpectedly light weighting that networking had in explaining young activists' active use of SM.

5.1.5. Social media for social utility

Young activists who took part in this research were slightly motivated by *social utility* reasons ($M = 7.7$, $SD = 1.5$). Young activists used information they gathered from SM platforms to support their views in political discussions. Activists found SM portals

valuable for providing them with an array of topics to discuss with others, as well as providing them with information that they can use to refute others' arguments. However, social utility moderately underpinned young activists' utilisation of SM. Young activists believe that free expression is an added value to SM and that this attracted them to use its apparatuses to have their say. Typical of this free expression focus was **A.A.'s** FGD comment:

Facebook is a more open society. Youth from different political trends feel that this is the only place where they can enjoy a wide margin of freedom. Ibrahim Essa¹¹ once said: 'true free press is the Facebook press.' I think by that he means freedom allowed on Facebook. There are many restrictions and limitations, but Facebook is wider and more open. Yes, it might not be organised or intellectual, yet it is freer.

This deliberative function of SM also has a social side to it, which is to be expected given the nature and key purpose of communicating via SM. Since their inception, SNSs have been perceived as platforms for meeting new friends and maintaining relations with current ones. This social dimension of Internet use is evident in U&G research (e.g., Stafford, Stafford, & Schkade, 2004). Leung (2009) found that users of User Generated Media (UGM) were the most motivated by the desire to be recognised. Interaction with the recipients of the content they produced was the most stimulating media attribute of their online content generation activity. These interactions and discussions, according to Leung (2009), were found to feed into the building and reinforcing of a cyber community with common interests. Moreover, studies about Internet use for political news have identified social utility as one of the main incentives for media use (Kaye & Johnson, 2004). Social interaction with like-minded candidate supporters was the main need that voters who visited the MySpace profiles of primary candidates during the 2008 presidential campaign in the U.S.A. sought to gratify (Cozma & Ancu, 2009). This implies that users of SM, even when discussing politics and mobilising activism on SM platforms, are doing this in the light of understanding the nature of the medium. They communicate politics 'socially' and perceive sociality as the premium trait of the medium. Additionally, it should be taken into account that some political issues, such as the presidential races utilized in Cozma and Ancu's research, are expected to evoke

¹¹ Ibrahim Essa is a prominent Egyptian Journalist who is known for his opposition to the Mubarak regime. Essa is the editor of *The Constitution* opposition independent newspaper (*Al-Dustour*), founded in 1995 and revived in 2005 after a government crackdown, and he was sentenced to two months in prison on a charge of "Propagating false news and rumours causing general security disturbance and harming public interest" and "Intentionally publishing false news that may hurt public safety" (refworld, UNHCR: The UN Refugee Agency, 2008)

political debate that may draw audience attention and invigorate public discussions between candidates' proponents and opponents, which might explain the emergence of the deliberative uses of SM prior to or during election time, when most of the previous research was conducted. Similarly, the current research took place after the Egyptian parliamentary election in November 2010 and during what became the preparatory phase for the January 25th revolt, which explains participants' tendency to use SM to discuss political issues that surround those incidents.

5.1.6. Social media for entertainment

Young activists who took part in this research also expressed a degree of agreement with entertainment as a motive for practising politics via SM. They were drawn the least to use SNSs for *entertainment* reasons ($M = 6.47, SD = 2.3$). Seeking amusement and the need to relax had very little to do with participants' political communication over SM platforms. Previous research showed mixed results on the relationship between entertainment and political consumption of the Internet. Consistent with this finding, past research found that Facebook group use for recreational gratifications was not associated with encouraging users' participation in political events, in comparison to practising civic activities (Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009; Zhang, Johnson, Seltzer, & Bichard, 2010).

Conversely, habitual entertainment and information seeking were the most dominant reasons for using YouTube during the 2008 U.S.A. presidential primaries (Hanson, Haridakis, & Sharma, 2008). Entertainment/social utility was the second strongest reason that drew politically interested Internet users to access political information during the 2000 U.S.A. presidential elections (Kaye & Johnson, 2004). Those findings, although they contradict previous research on the reasons behind using political media content, as well as the current research, are still consistent with the nature of the SM which were created primarily as a place for social interaction. Consuming (and creating) political content on SM might also be propelled by the entertaining aspect and the excitement that is expected to accompany the following of presidential contests and unconventional politics, since it was found that consuming entertaining political 'infotainment' media content may enhance political engagement, especially the 'intention to vote' and 'interpersonal political discussion' (Moy, Xenos, & Hess, 2005).

Nevertheless, it should be taken into account that participants in this research are politically active, which may readily suggest that their utilisation of SM would be goal-driven to achieve political aims, rather than being done accidentally while being entertained. They are expected to use SM as tools to perform certain function. Their uses will thus be instrumental rather than being of a habitual nature and inclined to passing time and having fun. Such habitual uses of media were argued to limit the media’s potential influence on individual users due to the low levels of activity they entail (Ruggiero, 2000). Perceiving SM interactivity as passing time and entertainment may disguise online actions as a “mere gimmick,” rather than as “serious practices” according to le Grignou and Patou (2004, p. 174). Such perceptions might render activists in danger of diluting their online political practices and their related consequences.

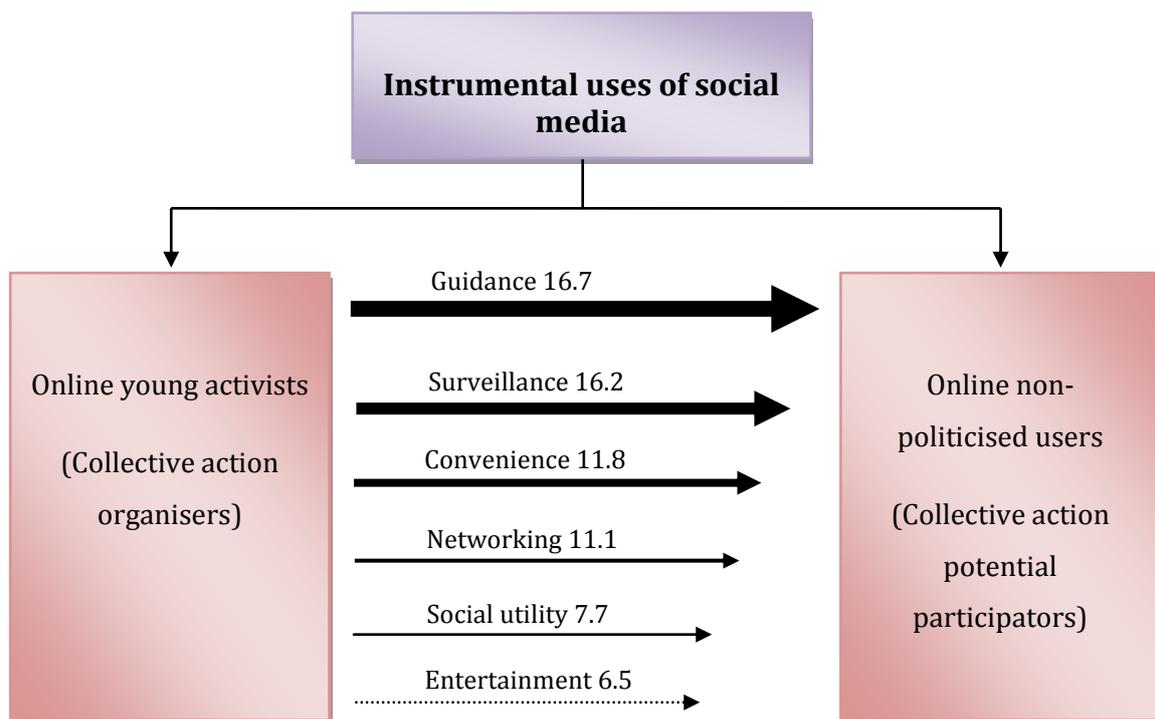


Figure 5.1: Young Egyptian activists’ reported uses of social media

5.2. Social media satisfaction and its perceived implications for the mobilisation of collective action

The degree to which individuals are satisfied with a certain action influences their intentions to continue, stop or change the way they perform this action (Klandermans, 2004, p. 372). From a rational action perspective, individuals decide to practise and/or to continue practising a certain action upon comparing the demands and supply of such an action. As for media use, the U&G approach similarly suggests that users continue to use a certain medium based on the degree to which such a medium serves to gratify their pre-assessed needs (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). It is to be expected, then, that such assessments of SM influence would reflect on young activists' future decisions about using SM to resource their activism and also about the goals which they utilise media tools to achieve.

Young activists' satisfaction with the contribution of SM to their political activism was measured by a single question in the questionnaire. Participants were asked to indicate whether they very weakly, weakly, to some extent, strongly or very strongly believe that SM are providing them with the things they are seeking (see Chapter Four and Appendix 1). Table 5.3 shows young activists' distribution according to their reported feelings of satisfaction about SM contribution.

Table 5.3: Young activists' distribution by social media satisfaction

I'm satisfied with the job SM do in providing me with the things I'm seeking...	very weakly		weakly		to some extent		strongly		Very strongly		total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
	14	3.9	68	18.7	195	53.7	69	19	17	4.7	363	100.0

Missing: F = 4 (1.1%)

As shown in the Table above, the majority of participant activists (53.7%) are 'to some extent' satisfied with the job that SM deliver in terms of resourcing their political activism. Only 4.7 percent of the research population are very strongly satisfied with SM's contribution.

As discussed in Section 5.2, influencing others' political decisions and disseminating information were the strongest reasons for the young activists who participated in this study to use SM. The extent to which SM contributed to gratifying activists' mobilisation-related needs was further discussed in the FGD. While there are several functions that SM contributed to achieving for young activists, data from FGDs also revealed that there are some aspects related to SM's influence on the young activists' movements, which they believe that SM did not necessarily contribute to gratifying.

5.2.1. Structural fluidity and defective social media culture

Several themes about the perceived limitations of SM as tools for mobilising collective action emerged during the FGDs. Young activists believe that there are several pitfalls that may dissolve their media-enabled mobilisation repertoire and, hence, deter SM's contribution to citizens' empowerment. The *first* deficit is related to the *non-centralised organising structure* of SM, which relates to the way users communicate over SM platforms, or what **SO.** termed a *lack of SM culture*. **SO.** suggested a convergent approach to better utilise SM affordances:

Utilising social networking sites for political mobilisation lacks two important aspects: a higher degree of organisation in regard to the way political activists use the medium, and a fundamental level of social media culture. I mean, how to supplement the use of a social media platform by convergence with other social media. For example, I can use Twitter as an add-on to Facebook, and improve practice by uploading related videos on YouTube I cannot expect efficient performance when 20 groups are created to discuss the same issues and to accomplish the same goals. We should create a system of alternative media that we can use when independent media channels and significant talk shows are suppressed. This will enable an *autonomous institutional form of alternative media* that can reach the broader public (emphasis added).

SO. believes that the polycentric organisation of the Internet results in structural fluidity. Thanks to the Internet, creating groups online has never been easier. Users can create groups online for all sorts of reasons which render some of these groups void of essence and meaningful influence. Instead of defective SM culture, **SO.** suggested a convergence culture that would fine-tune the focus of their message to their supporters. Convergence culture allows for "the flow of content across multiple media platforms," (Jenkins, 2005, p. 2) and hence makes possible a holistic media experience and a stronger mobilising message. Providing multiple communicative cues was found to create a rich media experience in which immediate feedback, variety of language, and a personal focus are provided (Daft & Lengel, 1986). Jenkins and Deuze (2008, p. 6)

explain how shifts in media infrastructure have allowed grassroots to practise bottom-up consumer-driven processes of control that might circumvent traditional gatekeepers' and agenda setters' monopoly over the media:

[S]hifts in the communication infrastructure bring about contradictory pulls and tugs within our culture. On the one hand, this 'democratisation' of media use signals a broadening of opportunities for individuals and grassroots communities to tell stories and access stories others are telling, to present arguments and listen to arguments made elsewhere, to share information and learn more about the world from a multitude of other perspectives. On the other hand, the media companies seek to extend their reach by merging, co-opting, converging and synergising their brands and intellectual properties across all of these channels. In some ways, this has concentrated the power of traditional gatekeepers and agenda setters and in other ways, it has disintegrated their tight control over our culture. Convergence, therefore, must be understood as both a top-down corporate-driven process and a bottom-up consumer-driven process.

Taking the lead from **SO.'s** views, **M.S.** added that SM's potential for empowerment could be raised by applying '*efficient economy of the web*':

I believe that social networking sites could be the most important mobilising platform in Egypt if invested efficiently. As for the limited proportional numbers of those who take to the streets when compared to online supporters of a certain cause, *I think this difference is due to the irrational use of the medium*. Creating a group and inviting people to related events only because you are fascinated about a freak idea and want to aggregate people to come and applaud this idea, no matter how silly it is, will eventually mar the credibility of the source and the medium. Moreover, the abundance of groups will result in a disturbing glut of messages and notifications, which might lead users to abandon most of these groups (emphasis added).

An abundance of online groups, in participants' points of view, might on the one hand polarise potential supporters, who would be stratified between multiple online groups that support the same cause. On the other, this structural fluidity of the Web would also put members of online groups off by the gush of messages they receive from these very similar groups. Taking a lead from **SO.'s** argument, **M.S.** suggests that similar groups should co-ordinate their efforts and mobilise for their cause harmoniously.

5.2.2. Social media's perceived credibility and reliability

Information-related uses of SM ranked first across the media uses board. Using SM as a means to influence others' decisions and to address them with certain information, rather than to inform activists' decisions and gain information, is thought to be the reason behind the precedence of informational uses of SM over other use factors. Participants expressed several views during the FGDs that support these inferences. It

seems that relying on SM to support activists' own decisions does not explain much of participants' use of these media. Lack of SM's perceived credibility as a primary source of information was the most reported explanation for this finding during the FGDs. Recent research shows that perceived credibility is an essential parameter that guides the selection of different types of media sources for news consumption in an information-rich environment (Yuan, 2011 & Kioussis, 2001). However, this significant condition does not apply to SM from the participants' points of view. The role that SM might play in stimulating, or enhancing, their political participation by "enabling them to encounter and make sense of events, relationships and cultures of which they have no direct experience" (Coleman & Blumler, 2009, pp. 42, 43) was often criticised by young activists.

Activists think SM are reliable tools for disseminating *functional information* relevant to their activism. However, as primary sources of information, participant activists think that SM are less credible, less organised and, hence, less reliable sources of news compared to more traditional sources. **W.B.** started by telling that Facebook 'of course' is a valuable resource when it comes to keeping updated on current events and timely engagement with the content, as well as other users. He compared electronic newspapers and SNSs as sources of self-political guidance:

Sometimes news presented on Facebook is not always accurate. It is more a kind of 'public journalism', this is why I sometimes find it more appealing to interact with, but when I seek more credible information, I log into electronic newspapers' websites which are more organised.

The young activists criticised SM as platforms for informing political discussions, for lacking professional mediation. SM allow for political deliberation that is hardly "... .. mediated, with professional communicators rather than ordinary citizens talking to each other and to the public through mass media of communications" (Page, 1996, p. 1). This means that for the politically experienced citizens, SM are not perceived in and of itself as an efficient arena for comprehending the political sphere. They realise SM's deficiencies in terms of offering a "central organising idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events [and a coherent frame that] suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue" (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, p. 143). They believe that news frames are better presented on the electronic newspapers, where journalists can identify and classify information and "package it for efficient relay

to their audiences” (Gitlin, 1980, p. 7). More recent research shows that reliability is one of the problems that computer-mediated-communication raises within social movements (e.g., Rucht 2003). Clark and Themudo (2003) arrived at a similar conclusion. They argue that Internet campaigns have “inherently weak mechanisms of information quality control,” and the “Internet is a better medium for disseminating information and opinions than for building trust, developing coherence and resolving controversies” (p. 114).

Accordingly, participants tended to selectively consume news on SM as they stressed the importance of dealing cautiously with SM as primary news sources, and the necessity to consume their content through a critical lens. **A.Ma.** cited several reasons for preferring electronic newspapers over Facebook as a platform for *gaining* constructive political guidance:

Electronic newspapers are more organised than Facebook. Writers have certain ideas that they discuss, and users who post comments on the news stories show a level of awareness.

Participants think that political discussions on SM platforms are polarised, which makes it harder for media users to follow these discussions and extract valuable information from them. Similarly, Johnson and Kaye (2010) found in the study they conducted during the 2004 U.S.A. presidential election that politically interested Web users perceived *all* online media as being only moderately credible. Young activists basically made their point through comparing SM with more traditional online news sources, like electronic newspapers. The perceived quality of information drew participants to rely on electronic newspapers more than on SM to acquire accurate, reliable information. Past research has also found that news gathered from SNSs, like MySpace, Facebook, and YouTube, did not add much to users’ political knowledge or to democratic discourse when compared with the impact of using other news sources, like cable news and traditional media (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010). Along the same lines, Thelwall (2008) concluded from his comparative exploratory study of SNSs and weblogs that news has no place on the former. **A.A.** discussed what the participants meant by organisation:

I think that Twitter, Facebook, and the like are ‘*illusory spaces.*’ They are far from reality, compared to electronic newspapers and, hence, less effective. I feel that electronic newspapers are more serious. People who write in these newspapers are basically writers and journalists, thus they are politicised and the posted comments and feedback

on their work are almost at the same level. But on social networking sites and blogs, the situation is a bit chaotic and not goal-directed, which evokes questions about its genuine political value (emphasis added).

A.A. is doubtful about the political efficacy of SM in terms of acquiring information. He delineates the aspect of organisation and how it affects activists' tendency to use SM as sources of information. For **A.A.**, SM are misleading and 'far from reality' when compared to electronic newspapers. Discussions on SM do not follow a certain theme and they lack professionalism, which affects the quality of discussions on these platforms and may cause polarisation, rather than developing the communicative exchange. This obscuring divergence of online discussions was ascribed to the nature of the digital world: a fragmented, hyper-pluralistic space. Heterogeneity and disagreements are expected to arouse cognitive dissonance which, again, feeds into more withdrawals from discussions. It has been argued that "to avoid cognitive dissonance, it is simpler to exit than to work through any messy bargaining and conflictual disagreements within the group" (Norris, 2004, p. 4).

Young activists expressed their preference for electronic newspapers and, to a lesser extent, blogs, for debating political issues, compared to other online platforms. **H.B.** and **M.E.** emphasised this point while discussing the pros and cons of Blogger and Facebook where **M.E.** highlighted the 'added value' of Blogger:

H.B.: I think that 'Blogger' has lost its popularity for Facebook. No one uses it. I used to have a blog, for example, but I dissolved it because Facebook allows me to integrate my blog as well. It saves me logging into 'Blogger'. Facebook can converge more than one medium.

M.E.: I think that 'Blogger' has an added value. It allows you to 'search' because it is archived on Google and, hence, any topic you search for would appear in the search box. For example, I have a blog which thousands of users visit accidentally while they search on Google. Accordingly, I do not believe that 'Blogger' has lost its appeal. In Egypt, blogs are most popular for political topics.

H.B. and **M.E.** asserted that blogs were more suitable for communicating politics than Facebook. Additionally to thematic discussions, they discussed another side of organisation. Reaching the politically interested is perceivably more achievable through blogs because the topics discussed are archived on Google, so it is easier to reach more potential supporters via thematic blogs if compared to limiting the communication to certain groups of friends and acquaintances that a user has on Facebook, some of whom might not necessarily be interested in politics. This finding corroborates the results that

Thelwall (2008) reached in his exploratory study of SNSs and weblogs. He found that engagement with mass media news was less frequent on general social networking environments, like MySpace and Facebook, than it was on blogs. Through analysing 23 online environments (13 SNSs and 10 blogs), Thelwall found that blogs ranked higher than social networking spaces in both the average proportion of politics pages and politics links to pages. Yet it is worth noting that the gap between blogs and SNSs, according to Thelwall, was not large enough to assert that politics is irrelevant to online social networks if compared to blogs. Thelwall added that the difference was more present when comparing those sites with professional or semi-professional blogs (Thelwall, 2008). Moreover, it should be noted that Thelwall reached this finding by comparing weblogs with general SNSs and so such findings do not necessarily exclude SM from the political communication spectrum, especially when users of these platforms are politically interested. In fact, Iskandar (2013) thinks that using SM is fundamental for keeping records of collective action and archiving protests, which renders "cyberactivism a standardised practice of collective action, [yet] it has also inadvertently led to a highly busied online environment filled with sometimes incoherent and inconsistent messaging" (Iskandar, 2013).

5.2.3. Social media and the perceived erosion of the off-line practice of collective action

SO. argued that utilising aggregate media portals helped activists build a favourable participatory disposition among individuals, or what **SO.** called *public status* and thus enabled them to mobilise action on a larger scale. He remarked:

By [converging several SM platforms] we might be capable of creating a desirable public status that could encompass a larger number of youth and incentivise them to participate. These platforms should thus work in concert with each other.

However, young activists think that SM has a limited capacity to breach the borders of the virtual sphere and extend the mobilising effect to the off-line arena. **A.A.**, typically, explained:

I think the main problem is that practising politics in Egypt is still immature, this is why people tend to practise *virtual political activism*. I mean, if there was real political participation, people would not have spent their time chatting. Rather, they would take to the streets and play the role properly. For example, when the Kefaya (*Enough*) movement first started, we had 1500 registered members online, but how many were actually on the streets? In fact, you barely find 150 or 200 protesters in any protest (emphasis added).

Similarly, Smitten (2008) argues that although the Internet has leverages that may enable online communities to act politically, there are also limitations that can make the "... .. predominant effect of political action of online communities [is] the arousal of public attention as a sign of successful articulation of interests" (p.51). Some political online communities, according to Smitten, lack organisation around well-defined political objectives, and even if they assess those objectives, they may face the difficulty of accessing the political system, especially in dictatorships and non-pluralist societies. This may impose difficulties in bridging online activism to the off-line context to make social and political change feasible. Additionally, the inner structure of online communities does not follow a certain law of organisation. The aforementioned non-centralised form of Internet organisation poses questions on the quality of the "decision-making" and "policy-formation" of these communities and serves as a justification for taking them lightly in the political arena. Moreover, Smitten suggests that online communities could get help to organise off-line events through co-operation and co-ordination with traditional pressure groups, thus taking advantage of their contacts and experiences (Smitten, 2008, p. 51). Nevertheless, boyd (2008) argues that activists are not being realistic in their evaluations of the potential of SNSs for empowering ordinary citizens.

Although SM have provided activists with more convenient organisational and participation tools, as individuals practise politics conveniently they may run the risk of perceiving themselves to be active participators, while they are actually debating about politics rather than taking part in it. Participants believe that practising politics on SM platforms may erode actual participation and limit collective action to the virtual sphere. Relying on Jenkin's notions about media convergent culture, drawing an analogy between Jenkin's notions about the influence of media convergence on media use (new and traditional) and participants' perceptions of the influence of on- and off-line mash-ups on political practice (virtual and real), delineates participant activists' views about

proportional differences between online interactors and off-line actors. Jenkins (2005, p. 6) argues that:

On the one hand, convergence represents an expanded opportunity, since content which succeeds in one sector can spread across other platforms. On the other, convergence represents a risk since once you move filmgoers from theaters to cells one wonders if they will return again.

Similarly, it can be said that once you move protesters from streets to SM one wonders if they will return. Based on the results discussed hitherto, Table 5.4 summarises SM's perceived deficiencies in relation to different categories of media use.

Table 5.4: Uses of social media and their perceived deficiencies

Social media uses	Social media's perceived deficiencies
SM for guidance	Organisation fluidity and disparity of online groups
SM for surveillance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Non-reliable primary source of information ▪ Selective credibility of functional information
SM for convenience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Illusory space of practice ▪ Eroding off-line collective practice
SM for networking	Irrational utilisation resulting in multi-structural basis of social movement and glut of online group formation and content production
SM for social utility	Non-thematic deliberation leading to the obscuring of meanings and the hindering of skills acquisition

5.3. Understanding *which* young activists use social media for what

Addressing this question entails exploring whether:

Demographics (age, education, gender and income) have direct impact on the range of young activists' reported uses of social media.

It has been argued that the rise of an educated middle class cohort is one of several aspects that might have an impact in destabilising the power base of an authoritarian regime in several ways (Pinkney, 1994). In this section, I look at the demographics of the participant activists and discuss how they might have functioned as the antecedents of their SM uses.

Previous research on the social origins of media gratifications has shown that different demographic variables have predicted different media uses. Reasons for using media were found to be different between men and women, as well as among different age groups (Kippax & Murray, 1980; Rubin & Rubin, 1981). As for the Internet gratifications and demographics, studies have suggested different trends since the inception of the medium. Internet users were primarily males of high socio-economic status, according to earlier studies (i.e., Busselle, Reagan, Pinkleton, & Jackson, 1999). More recent studies offered evidence that new media technologies are becoming more popular with the mainstream audience, which may imply less demographic influence on Internet gratifications than on general media ones (Kaye & Johnson, 2004). Nevertheless, it is argued that “although the online population is beginning to diversify, the Internet cannot yet claim a committed, non-elite mass audience” (Bucy, 2000).

The Pearson correlation (r) was calculated to investigate how participants’ age, education, and monthly income might relate to their SM uses, as they are considered, according to the U&G approach, to be the basic antecedents for media uses which can project the needs that individuals seek to satisfy by using the media (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). Gender is a categorical variable¹², hence, a T-test was calculated to capture any of the expected differences between males and females in relation to their SM uses. Results are shown in Table 5.5, and are summarised in Figure 5.2.

¹² A categorical variable (sometimes called a nominal variable) is one that has two or more categories. Such a variable can be classified into categories, but there is no clear intrinsic ordering to those categories. If the variable has a clear ordering, then that variable would be an ordinal variable.

Table 5.5: Correlations of uses of social media and demographics

Demographics	Social media use correlates (<i>r</i>)					
	Guidance	Serveillance	Networking	Social utility	Entertainment	Convenience
Gender (T-test)	- 0.130*	- 0.130*	- 0.068	0.144**	0.178**	0.036
Age	0.119*	0.096	0.043	- 0.080	- 0.120*	- 0.009
Education	0.000	0.067	0.017	- 0.152**	- 0.163**	- 0.065
Monthly income	- 0.107	- 0.168**	- 0.116*	- 0.129*	0.032	- 0.072

Significance * ($p > 0.05$) ** ($p > 0.01$)

According to the correlation analysis, demographics have a moderate influence on SM's sought gratifications. As shown in Table 5.5 and Figure 5.2, only 11 of the 24 tested demographics-SM correlates were found to be statistically significant. This finding suggests that differences in some demographic characteristics of young Egyptian activists accompany changes in their purposive media use, but this does not necessarily mean that gender, age, income and education are causally efficacious in relation to SM use, nor does it suggest that this association should be the case for all young Egyptian activists. It is thus not suggested here that SM would necessarily break traditional barriers to activism. **Gender** was positively correlated to SM uses. There were significant differences in the gratifications sought from SM between males and females, as shown by the T-test results. Males' use of SM was more drawn by guidance and information seeking than females ($p < 0.05$), while females used SM for social utility and entertainment reasons more than males did ($p < 0.01$). No significant differences were detected for networking and convenience needs.

Networking and convenience might be considered the intrinsic gratifications that are mostly related to the nature of SNSs and related needs that can be fulfilled through its platforms, regardless of users' characteristics or their goals. Generally, the Internet is an 'easy to use' medium that costs users little time, money or effort to communicate, as long as they have a level of profeciency and can use the medium efficiently. Additionally, SNSs were originally created as spaces where users could meet their friends and build up networks and communities of common interest, and users, both males and females, seem to utilise SM platforms with this understanding.

Age correlates were the least significant among the demographics. It is significantly and positively related to guidance uses ($r = .119, p < 0.05$), and negatively to entertainment uses ($r = -.120, p < 0.05$). Older respondents are more likely to utilise SM for political guidance, while younger respondents are more drawn by entertainment needs in using SM.

Previous research has consistently detected some differences in Internet use due to demographics. For example, Hollenbaugh (2011) found that age and gender, among other antecedents, positively predicted bloggers' motivations for posting on their blogs except for the 'professionalism' and 'get feedback motives'. Li (2005) also found that women were more inclined to blog about internal topics, such as interests and hobbies, in comparison to men, who perceived the blogosphere as a space for discussing 'public events' or 'remote topics'. Nevertheless, Li (2005) found that the gap between men and women was overcome in the blogosphere, since no gender differences were identified in terms of blogging history. In this sense, the lag in adopting new technology between men and women seemed to be overcome in the blogosphere.

Monthly income was significantly and negatively related to information seeking ($r = -.168, p < 0.01$), and to a lesser extent to networking ($r = -.116, p < 0.05$), and social utility ($r = -.129, p < 0.05$).

Education was strongly and negatively associated with the social utility ($r = -.152, p < 0.01$) and entertainment uses ($r = -.163, p < 0.01$) of SM. That is, higher educated users are less likely to use SM to gratify social utility and entertainment needs.

It is also worth noting that the only use construct that did not significantly correlate with participants' demographic characteristics was 'convenience.' Additionally, using SM for 'networking' only negatively correlated with monthly income. This suggests that, among the research sample, using SM to circumvent limited resources is a fundamental purpose that is embraced by all activists, regardless of their gender, age, educational level and/or income. However, young activists' capability to build communities of supporters and to recruit potential participants through SM, seems to be influenced only by their financial resources. Using SM for convenience and networking are thus expected to link to young activists' online-off-line political practice, which is the focus of the third research question, addressed in Chapter Seven.

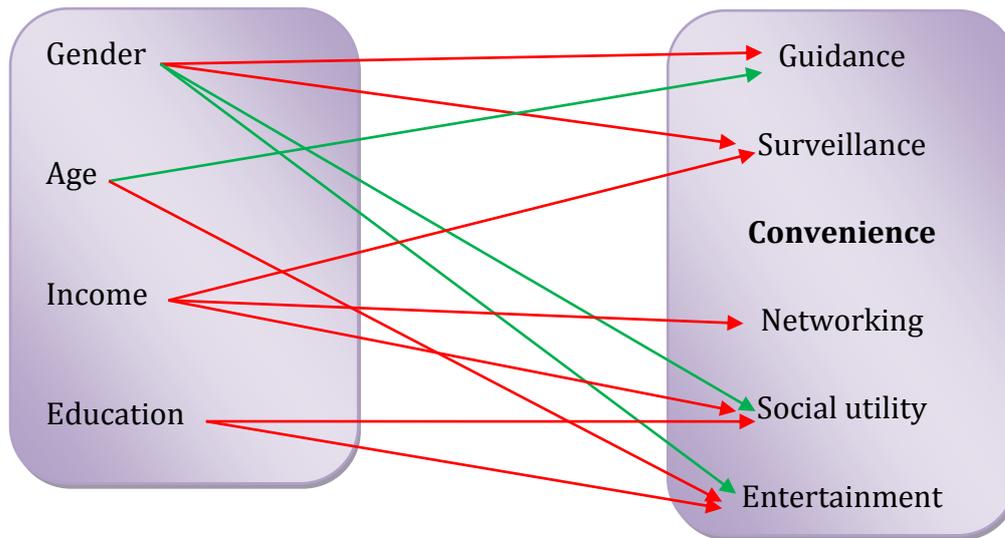


Figure 5.2: Young activists' uses of social media by demographics

—▶ Positive correlation
 - - - ▶ Negative correlation

Findings discussed hitherto suggest that demographics generally have little to do with participants' reasons for using SM to mobilise political actions. Previous research corroborates this moderate impact of demographics on media use (Kaye & Johnson, 2004). This suggests that the Internet is being mainstreamed into Egyptian citizens' lives through different mechanisms. Several factors have helped incorporate the Internet into a wider sector of the mainstream audience's lives. For example, in 2002, the Egyptian government embraced an ambitious project to expand access to information communication technologies (ICT) throughout the country, focusing on socio-economically disadvantaged communities. The initiative included offering discounts on computers and 512 kbps ADSL subscriptions for three years by 2008, due to the agreement signed between the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT), the National Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (NTRA), the Egyptian National Post Organisation (ENPO), and the Computer and Software Department at the Federation of Egyptian Chambers of Commerce (Internet Filtering in Egypt, 2009).

This initiative might have helped in filling the blank area between users and non-users, and hence, to lessen the impact of socio-economic standards on ICT motives. Additionally, a wide sector of the population who are not rich enough to have Internet

access at home, and who are not employed in white collar professions where employees can access the Internet from work, have integrated Internet use into their daily lives by regular visits to Internet cafés, where they managed to use the Internet for an average of 12 hours per week (Wheeler, 2006). Building on narratives of Internet café users in Egypt and Jordan, Wheeler argues that through “Internet use, political debate is promoted. Class, gender and national boundary lines are regularly and openly breached” (p. 6).

Activists were realistic in viewing the limitations of mobilising ‘mass’ support beyond SM platforms. These limitations could be culturally or socially-based. One of the culture-related barriers to bringing people together, which communication through the Internet has helped bridge, is gender boundaries. Previous research showed how using the Internet has enabled political manoeuvre in the Arab World and has created a more relaxed environment for interaction between males and females (Wheeler, 2006). Another limitation may be ascribed to the Internet penetration rates in Egypt, along with illiteracy rates. Internet users compose only 21.2 percent of the population and are located mainly in urban areas. Only 4,077,520 of those users are on Facebook, with a penetration rate that slightly exceeds 5 percent (Internet World Stats, Egypt, 2010). This suggests that over 63 million individuals are excluded from the audience targeted by activists’ online activism – given the fact that they are not expected to reach or target the whole 21.2 percent of the population since they do not represent a homogenous group in terms of age, interest, income and education. Moreover, being an active user of SNSs requires a certain level of technology-literacy that enables users to search for, read and comment on media content. This could be expected to add another obstacle to mobilising activism through SM platforms, given the total adult illiteracy rate, which implies that 34 percent (UNICEF, 2005-2008) of the Egyptian population are totally left out of direct online mobilisation efforts.

5.4. Conclusion

This chapter aimed to answer the research question on the reasons behind Egyptian activists' use of SM to mobilise collective action. Media use is argued to be one of the factors that are expected to shape political practice. A double-track channel of communication is crucial for the resurgence of mobilisation and collective action practice. That is, to engage in politics, individuals need to be informed about important issues and to be able to voice their opinions to large publics.

Through analysing quantitative data and supporting the analysis by qualitative comments taken from group discussions, the findings revealed several needs that activists seek to gratify by using SNSs for political communication. Young Egyptian activists use SM as instruments to achieve certain goals. Results indicate that these goals are more directed at disseminating information to inform and influence other non-politicised users' decisions, rather than being directed at achieving individualistic goals. This is evident from activists' critique of SM affordances and their perceived influence in fulfilling activists' pre-assessed needs. This directional disposition of SM capacity is expected to influence their perceptions about SM's role in promoting participatory dispositions that are much needed to increase the possibilities of participation in collective action.

A number of perceived media deficiencies and limitations have also emerged from the FGDs and were found to have connections with certain types of media gratifications that are sought. Both the gratifications sought and the media deficiencies were discussed with an understanding of the political and social environment in Egypt, where unbiased view points and a free 'double-track' flow of information are all but nonexistent and citizens are denied their right to both acquire sufficient, unhampered information about the government's performance, and to voice their opinion on significant issues in their society, especially when it comes to politics or when it contradicts authorities' and elites' interests. These circumstances have left citizens with a feeling that their voices are not heard, nor are even valuable, but moreover, voicing views may cost them their jobs, freedom, safety, or dignity. Consistent with such an environment, activists were found to be most motivated by information-related reasons for using SM platforms. Acquiring and providing political guidance, as well as obtaining and disseminating

information, were the most prevalent reasons behind activists' political utilisation of SM. Those underpinnings of use were found to be moderated by activists' perceptions of SM as being 'somewhat' reliable sources of information. Censorship also emerged as an incentive to information seeking and dissemination uses.

To shed light on potential predictors of activists' SM uses, correlations between gender, age, education, monthly income and different media use factors were tested. Findings revealed that demographics have a moderate impact on determining activists' uses of SM (see Figure 5.2). This finding might suggest that SNSs and, more broadly, communication via the Internet may gain more popularity among citizens. It also supports the assumptions of previous research, which suggests that demographics, according to McLeod and Becker (1981), predict media gratifications only moderately in comparison to political attitudes (Kaye & Johnson, 2004). These attitudes, along with other participatory dispositions, are the main focus of the next chapter, which mainly discusses how informational uses of SM were utilised to transfer activists' experience to the non-politicised frame of recognition in order to promote participatory dispositions.

CHAPTER SIX

SOCIAL MEDIA USES AND YOUNG ACTIVISTS' CONTEXTUAL PERCEPTIONS AND POLITICAL DISPOSITIONS

This chapter sets out to investigate young Egyptian activists' perceptions about their political environment. It mainly looks at how young activists' different uses of social media (SM) might influence the way they evaluate their context and their agency and, accordingly decide on practising politics off-line, limit their activism to the virtual sphere that is demobilised by the perceived constraints of their environment, or practise a hybrid of both, to different degrees and scales based on those evaluations and predispositions. The research question that articulates these proposed relationships enquires: How do social media contribute to creating opportunities (*favourable dispositions*) for practising collective action off-line?

It has been argued that "we cannot study the power of groups by looking only at their resources; we also need to model the context in which decisions are taken" (Dowding, 1996, p. 85). This chapter, then, moves from focusing on media uses, discussed in the previous chapter, to a focus on young activists' dispositions and the characterisations of their participatory environment. This chapter considers young activists' participatory dispositions in two dimensions:

- Young activists' perceived fear of repression.
- Young activists' perceived political efficacy.

Two arguments are made in this chapter. These arguments mainly relate to participants' reported distinctions between themselves (as political activists) and non-politicised individuals, on the one hand, and their perceptions about their political environment and agency as influenced (or not) by media use (introduced in Chapter Five) on the other. One argument is that young activists exhibit a preference for direct experience with political activism, and confrontation with authorities, as a means to defeat their reported feelings of fear of repression. However, they believe that SM can provide a safer environment, where the non-politicised can be introduced to politics and can gain experience at lower cost/risk levels and, hence, can be ready for more

costly actions. Two, it is argued that using SM helps both, young activists and the non-politicised (from participants' points of view) to acquire political skills and feel more politically efficacious. SM benefit young activists as platforms for political debate, through which they can enhance, learn and share political competences. This SM affordance was found to relate mainly to certain SM uses, but not to others. Instrumental, and mainly informational, uses (i.e., guidance and surveillance) correlated positively to political efficacy, while only entertainment (habitual use) was significantly, but negatively, associated with participants' feelings of political efficacy.

In authoritarian regimes, it is argued that young people need to be mobilised as a citizenry as well as a democracy (Machacek, 2001). Individuals' legal, political and social relationship to the society to which they belong need to be defined to enable an active practice of citizenry (Wallace, 2001). People tend to make their decisions about the actions they are about to take based on their evaluations of the consequences and outcomes of their deeds. Under repressive governance systems, where taking part in politics, especially unconventional forms of activism, might bring about unwanted consequences, and as citizenry might be vulnerable to changing circumstances (Helve & Wallace, 2001), young activists are expected to make certain evaluations of their participatory environment before they decide what forms of action they will take part in, when and how. Previous research has distinguished a welcoming, safe environment and meaningful participation and engagement among several other dimensions of critical youth empowerment (Jennings, Parra-Medina, Hilfinger-Messias, & McLoughlin, 2006). Comparison of their political stances and decisions against the perceived patterns and trends of public opinion was also found to affect individuals' political decisions and actions (Dalton, 2002). Individuals' confidence in their ability to participate significantly in politics was also found to be relevant to relying on the Internet, as well as their perceptions about the utility and the comprehensiveness of the medium (Ognyanova & Ball-Rokeach, 2012; Kenski & Stroud, 2006). In the current research, two variables were selected to represent the young activists' attitudes of, and perceptions about, their participatory environment: the reported fear of repression and their perceived sense of political efficacy.

Accordingly, this chapter is organised into three main sections:

6.1. Social media uses and young activists' perceived feelings of fear of repression.

6.1.1. Breaching fear is a real life experience.

6.1.2. Social media for evidence-based mobilisation.

6.1.3. Social media for fear-proof participation.

6.2. Social media uses and young activists' perceived feelings of political efficacy.

6.2.1. Challenging the regime-induced feelings of inefficacy.

6.2.2. Social media as a hub for collective learning and civic preparation.

6.3. Conclusion.

Each section begins by displaying the participants' profile in relation to the variable under study. To focus the analysis and particularly to address the research question, further relationships are then tested so as to assess how the young activists' use of SM may relate to their political dispositions and the ways in which they perceive their political reality and the significance of their active participation.

6.1. Social media uses and young activists' perceived feelings of fear of repression

Participants in the current study are young activists who are expected to have experience in political activism, expectancy of and readiness to bear its risks and costs. However, they are also aware of the dangers and consequences that may accompany 'going public' and confronting the authorities, especially through contentious forms of activism. Fear of repression was measured by a scale, composed of three items on a five-point scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.68$) (see Chapter Four and Appendix 1). On the scale, responses ranged from 1 'strongly agree', to 5 'strongly disagree.'

As seen from Table 6.1, the majority of the research sample across the Table generally agrees that practising political activism in Egypt brings about bad consequences, ranging from harrassment to assault. Nearly one third of the participants have worries about being harrassed if they practise street politics ($n = 117, 32.2\%$).

Table 6.1: Young activists' distribution by fear of repression

Perceived fear of repression	Strongly agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
I worry about being harrassed if I go on street to participate in political activity*	96	26.4	117	32.2	73	20.1	46	12.7	31	8.5	363	100.0
I feel worried about expressing my political opinion in public**	46	12.7	84	23.3	87	24.1	90	24.9	54	15.0	361	100.0
An Egyptian citizen could face violations which make him/her worry about his/her safety***	152	42.1	134	37.1	50	13.9	16	4.4	9	2.5	361	100.0

Missing: * F = 4 (1.1%) ** F = 6 (1.6%) *** F = 6 (1.6%)

However, participants feel less worried as activism becomes less contentious and confrontational. Almost a quarter of participants (24.9%) believe that they should express their political opinion in public. Making inferences about *other* citizens (i.e., the non-politicised), 42.1 percent of young activists strongly expect that safety issues would deter Egyptian citizens from practising politics.

In order to explore how these reported worries about confronting authorities might relate to young activists' use of SM, the following correlation is explored:

Does using social media for instrumental purposes relate to young activists' feelings of fear of repression? And if so, in what ways?

As discussed in Chapter Five, young activists have been using SM to achieve several purposes, the strongest of which is guidance ($M = 16.7, SD = 3.6$), and the weakest is entertainment ($M = 6.5, SD = 2.3$). For each of the examined political dispositions variables, Pearson product-moment correlations to SM use constructs were calculated to explore whether these uses directly influenced participants' dispositions (see Table 6.2). Results are first reported from the self-administered questionnaires. Data derived from the focus group discussions (FGDs) are then used to further survey and discuss the quantitative findings.

Table 6.2: Correlations between social media uses and perceptions of fear of repression

Dispositions	SM use correlates (r)					
	Guidance	Serveillance	Networking	Social utility	Entertainment	Convenience
Fear of repression	-0.044	-0.046	0.002	0.171**	0.142**	0.135*

Significance * ($p > 0.05$) ** ($p > 0.01$)

It has been anticipated that using SM for guidance, surveillance and networking would link positively to young activists' reported feelings of fear. Contrary to this assumption, instrumental uses of SM, as shown in Table 6.2 and Figure 6.1, were found to be irrelevant to participants' perceptions of a fear of repression. Fear of repression seems not to deter young activists from using SM instruments to communicate politics and to mobilise support for their movement. However, it is worth noting that using SM for

guidance and surveillance purposes associated negatively, yet not significantly, with reported feelings of fear, i.e., participants who feel threatened by the authorities due to their active practice of politics may be less inclined to use SM repertoires to achieve political goals. Conversely, using SM for informational purposes (both informative and technical) does not seem to influence young activists' calculations of threats in their polity. It thus seems that young activists do not rely on SM as a means of "addressing their environment [through] engage[ing] in cognitive mechanisms of identity shift and attribution of threats and opportunities" (della Porta, 2005, p. 178), which stresses the tendency to use SM instrumentally, rather than for ideological and identity-related reasons.

The networking correlate was positive but insignificant, which suggests that young activists who fear confronting the authorities may be inclined to create and join online communities of like-minded others in order to feel that they are in a majority and to interact in a friendly environment. Such groups were found to develop a sense of virtual community around a political idea or leader (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010). The positive direction of the insignificant correlation between SM networking and fear also suggests that young activists tend to invite people to support their cause online when the off-line arena is tightly controlled by authorities, which makes contacting and recruiting supporters off-line more threatening and costly.

More interestingly, fear of repression was associated significantly and positively with habitual uses of SM. High levels of fear of repression strongly and significantly correlate with using SM for social utility ($r = .171, p < 0.01$), entertainment ($r = .142, p < 0.01$), and, to a lesser extent, for convenience reasons ($r = .135, p < 0.05$). As may be recalled from Chapter Five, and supported by recent research on the Internet and social change (i.e., Earl & Kimport, 2011), young activists perceive lessening feelings of anxiety and fear as one of convenience affordances of SM. They believe that SM not only allow them an opportunity for mobilising support for their movement that overcomes the problem of scarce resources, but they also constitute a safer sphere, where the less-experienced and the non-politicised can practise politics at lower-risk levels.

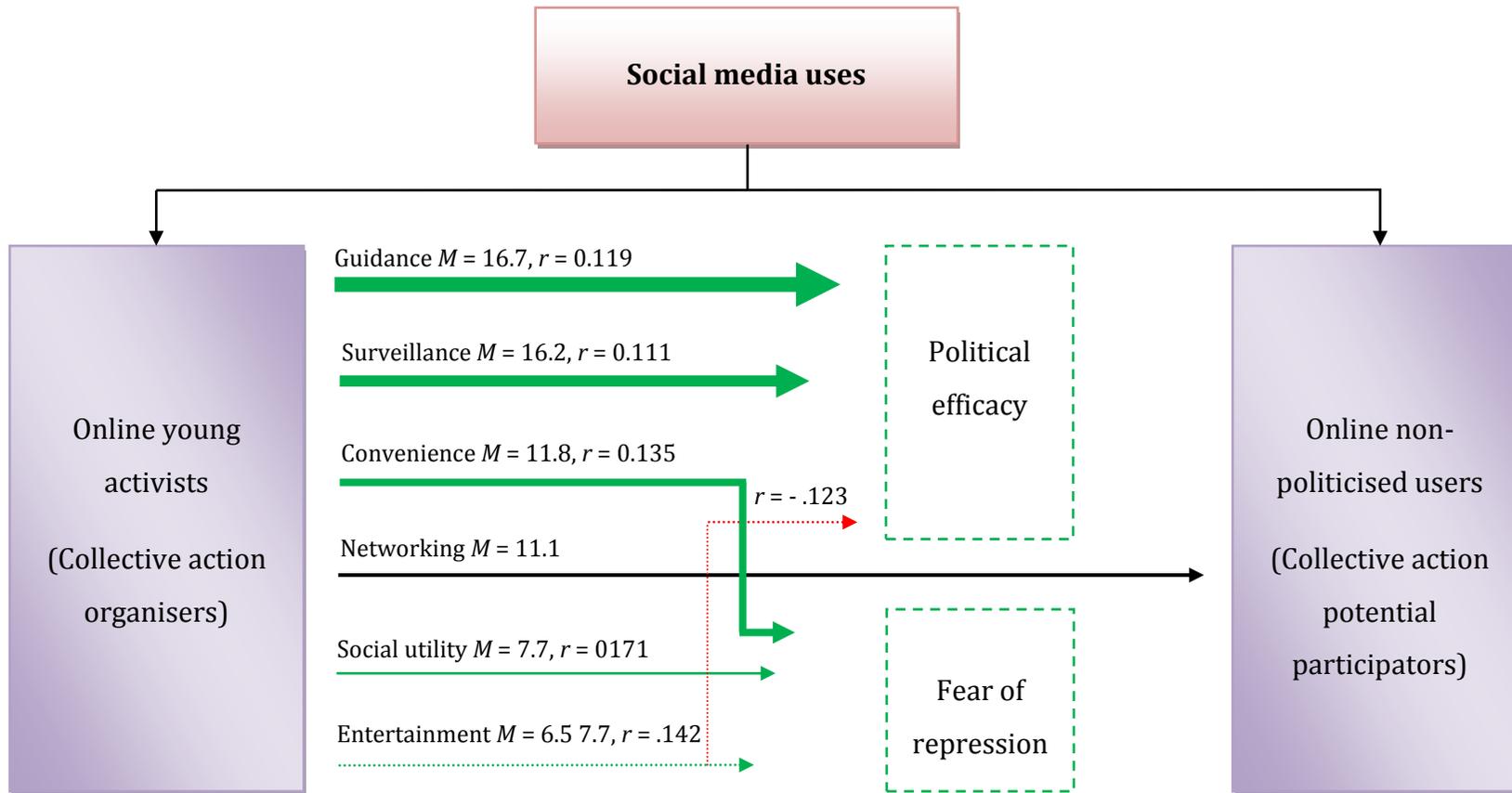


Figure 6.1: Correlations between the young Egyptian activists' reported uses of social media and political dispositions

It is also worth pausing and thinking about the social utility/fear of repression correlation. Debating politics implies an informational form of SM use that might put users in danger if they, for example, hold and publicly express opinions opposed to those of the government. However, individuals may feel safe as they debate politics on SM platforms for several reasons. *First*, they usually interact with friends and acquaintances whom they know off-line, or whom they know online through a common friend. *Additionally*, online discussion groups are usually composed of like-minded members, who hold similar opinions, which makes the participatory environment less hostile. *Last*, but not least, anonymity in the virtual sphere offers a good cover for those who wish to express their political views, yet fear unfavourable consequences. According to social psychologists, communicating anonymously may be most important for excluded and marginalised cohorts who are otherwise alienated from interactions outside their group (McKenna & Bargh, 2006). These reasons explain why debating politics on SM platforms tends to help activists breach their fear more than it imposes threats on their communicative activism, as seen in Table 6.2.

The findings discussed hitherto generally suggest that individuals tend to ease their feelings of fear by 'soft' (or habitual), rather than 'core' (or instrumental) utilisation of SM. As may be expected, less demanding activities on SM give young activists the opportunity to give vent to their feelings of fear. In the U&G approach to media influence, habitual, or ritualistic, use of media involves the concept of utility, but little intentionality or selectivity (Blumler, 1979), which, in turn, associates such uses with limited effects if compared to instrumental uses of media. In other words, 'soft-core' young activists, who use SM habitually and exert relatively less effort in communicating about their cause compared to those who use SM instrumentally, are those who have stronger feelings of fear of repression and so are expected to be less-engaged in more demanding, and indeed less effective, forms of online communication. Distinction between different types of media uses and users was welcomed in media studies as it gauges the richness of mass communication experience as well as highlighting variations between audience members (Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001, p. 465). A distinction between activists and non-activists was typically demarcated by participants during the FGDs, as will be shown below.

To explain these results more fully and to put them into perspective, participants' perceptions about their SM use and fear of authority, which they expressed during the FGDs were analysed. Participants' views took on two main dimensions: first, activists' perceptions of SM's potential as media users or content consumers, which explains the evident lack of a significant correlation between instrumental media use and fear of repression (Section 6.1.1). Second, young activists as mobilisers aim to address *other* fellow citizens through producing, sharing or highlighting certain media messages, where I argue that SM have the potential to stimulate relaxed dispositions amongst the non-politicised others and to reassure them that taking part in changing their society will not necessarily harm them (Sections 6.1.3). These two dimensions intersect in Section 6.1.2.

6.1.1. Breaching fear is a real life experience

The young activists are more inclined to agree that practising politics in Egypt make them vulnerable to certain safety-related consequences (Table 6.1). Yet, it seems that their purposive use of SM does not feed into breaching this fear barrier, nor alter their dispositions in this regard. As shown in Table 6.2, young activists' reported feelings of fear of repression did not relate significantly to their instrumental uses of SM. This might suggest that other factors are in process, bolstering the young activists' propensity to participate in such a threatening environment.

Young activists believe that the street is a suitable arena for practising politics. Accordingly, they also believe that reality is where they should face associated potential dangers and breach the psychological barriers to active political engagement in order to achieve feasible change. **A.Ma.** argues, typically, that breaching fear is a state of mind or a 'status' that we all (Egyptian youth) need to reach:

I was arrested more than once in demonstrations and it meant no problem to me. The problem was in the first time. I mean, the barrier was broken, and then many barriers fell apart. This fear-breach makes the whole difference; it creates a status. I think that we all need to breach the barriers.

When fear feelings were discussed with the young activists during the FGDs, they agreed that, for them, as politicised citizens, real life experience is what really counts in realistically assessing what might accompany their activism. They argue that confronting authorities has actually given them more confidence and has enabled them

to resume what they had been doing. In fact, the young activists feel proud of confronting authorities and being detained, for years in some cases. Several examples of this celebrated confrontation were given during discussions. **A.M.** explains how activists feel a great sense of pride as they face threats, and how such confrontation acts as a catalyst for comradely support and solidarity:

... .. now it is a matter of honour to say that activist X was arrested on that day, at that time, and is now held in the police station, and let's go to visit him and show some support.

I.B. explains how experience matters when it comes to breaching the fear barrier:

I was taken to the State Security many times. What made me fearless and even indifferent is that I was practising politics in college, knowing who the secret agents and the informers are. They were known to all activists at the university.

MH. describes himself as a 'sustained customer at the State Security' since he started engaging in politics. **MH.** was sentenced to 12 years and in return for his release, security forces demanded that he stop practising politics or, as they call it, 'the call' (Daa'wa). He was amongst other political prisoners who benefitted from the U.S.A. administration's pressure on Egypt, among other Middle Eastern countries, to employ democratic reforms and invalidate the emergency law in the shadow of the 9/11 attacks. In the following quotation, **MH.** discusses how his jailers:

... .. felt that [our] release was inevitable, as our solitary confinement was illegitimate in the first place. They started to negotiate our release and tried to make deals with us to benefit from each one. Those who lost their initiative and had already decided to abandon politics, were released, but they kept in prison those who still have the endeavour. I realised, then, that they had reached their threshold and that they would eventually set me free. They tried to gain as much as they could, and my role was to believe in myself and not to give up and also to gain as much as I could. When they got fed up with me, and other activists, they released us.

These results stress the importance of experience in collective action as an essential condition for a movement to grow. Similarly, it has been found that actual experience in collective participation influences individuals' identification with social movements. A high percentage of the non-organised, who had participated in previous demonstrations, were found to identify with movement in general (della Porta & Mosca, 2005). These results thus support the suggestion made in Chapter Three. That is, in the absence of formal organising structure and/or prior participatory experience, developing an activist identity merely through SM use might be a challenging goal to

achieve. For participant activists, reality is where they build such experience. As for non-politicised citizens, young activists believe that SM may help them, *first*, promote a sense of solidarity and build trust relations with them through providing evidence of participants' activism. Participants' views about using pseudonyms while communicating online show a preference for using real names. **I.B.** elaborated on the reasons to avoid anonymity and the ways it could harm activism:

Some things force us to create an account under our real names. I made my account and I was the admin of the 'My Right' (Haqqy) group at Cairo University. This group has several 'admins', amongst which is the main account of the movement, 'My Right Cairo'. However, the amount of communication the anonymous and vague account of the movement receives is far less than it is with the accounts that indicate the name of a certain person ... *..This is because people want to communicate with a real person, not with a nickname* (emphasis added).

Participants agree that communicating with their real names, on the one hand, preserves their credibility and facilitates linking their on- and off-line activism together. Participants believe that communicating anonymously deprives online interaction of a significant cue and may diminish the locus of the communication process. It polarises the debates rather than creating a common ground between the different lines of debated thought and contrasting points of view (Sunstein, 2001). Additionally, they are keen to create chances for networking in the real world, and to communicate from behind a pseudonym may raise trust issues and hinder off-line activism accordingly. On the other side of the coin, participants assert that their real identities are already known to the authorities and that anonymity is no shelter. **M.M.** summarises participants' typical points of view:

Most of the political activists use their real names on Facebook because they are well known to the police and they are not afraid of any pressure from security forces. If authorities want to arrest one of us, they will get him/her from the demonstrations, not from Facebook because of something s/he wrote.

Second, SM could also comprise a "safe foray" into activism (McAdam, 1986, p. 69) and so make up a more appealing repertoire of collective action through which the non-politicised can start experiencing political activism at lower cost/risk. These two dimensions are discussed consecutively hereafter.

6.1.2. *Social media for evidence-based mobilisation*

The young activists use SM to provide evidence of their safety and to reassure the non-politicised that participation *'will not cast [them] far behind the sun'*¹³ (will not harm them). In **M.S.**'s words:

Through social networks, [the non-politicised] gained courage and accumulate a sense that political engagement could be affordable in our society. For example, when we were arrested in the case of solidarity with the victims of the explosion at the Church of Saints in Alexandria, our active friends and colleagues who usually take to the streets, played a significant role in supporting our case and spreading the word through the online networks. This conveyed a message to other *'online-only'* friends that, no matter what happens, the arrested will not stand-alone facing authorities simply, *practising politics would not cast them far behind the sun* (emphasis added).

To introduce the non-politicised citizens to politics and urge them to take part in costly collective actions, the young activists believe that it is crucial to help those citizens, who do not normally take to the street or have direct experience with collective action, to comprehend what the activists actually do and to be able to realistically weigh up the consequences that might accompany confronting the authorities in off-line counter-political activities. They believe that SM are beneficial tools for providing evidence of those consequences. **M.E.** explained, typically:

The images we upload after the protests usually offer several benefits. It is that as soon as we finish protesting and upload the photos on the Internet, many people take to the streets People joined protesters from the Khaled Said Group at Lazoghly Square, despite not having joined the march at the beginning. Again, protesting at Lazoghly Square was more risky, because it was close to the Ministry of the Interior, but because people saw the pictures and saw youth who participated, they had the guts to join and participate.

Archiving activism using rich media tools and various communicative cues (text, images, voice and video) brings the street experience to the non-politicised individuals' frame of recognition and makes identification with a movement easier. This, as **M.E.** believes, has 'made the whole difference.' Non-politicised citizens can easily recognise a tangible experience rather than struggling to identify with an abstract idea. **I.B.** described how he and his colleagues have archived their activities and related incidents and have instantaneously made valuable information available to other users through the 'networks'. Such disclosure, from the standpoint of activists, could cause a state

¹³ 'Casting someone behind the sun' is a saying usually used in Egypt to express peoples' concern about bad consequences that opposing the government will bring.

of identification with remote experiences, the realisation of which is made much easier through the pictures uploaded. Most importantly, it could be inferred from the extract that these practices can create trust in political action itself; as citizens come to realise that participation does not simply make people disappear without a trace. **I.B.** described in detail how the ‘networks’ resourced their activism and sustained their movement:

Fifteen minutes after we were arrested [after demonstrations in solidarity with Khaled Said’s cause in Lazoghly and Sherief Street], a list of our names was available online, including a detailed record of the injuries. This was fundamental to mobilising another cycle of protests and strikes in front of the Syndicate of Journalists and the General Attorney’s office, right after the demonstrations. This is a valuable advantage that was made available by the networks.

By disseminating information about their activism through SM platforms, the young activists seek not only to create dependency relationships with, and have an impact on, individuals (micro-level), but also on groups and organisations (meso-level), and other social systems (macro-level), as they seek to affect the political system (Ognyanova & Ball-Rokeach, 2012). This may be achievable through the establishment of a relationship with the news media. For example, “social media variously [act] as a watchdog of state controlled national media, [alert] international news media to growing opposition and dissent events and [provide] raw images of these for wider dissemination” (Cottle, 2011, p. 652).

It can be said, then, that the young activists utilise SM technology to construct a self-determined sphere of *subpolitics*, which they, then, monitor with as perfect an understanding of the uncertainty surrounding them as the ephemera of the situation will allow (Schudson, 1998, cited in Axford, 2001)). This constructed sphere of subpolitics is valuable in mobilising the non-politicised and less interested citizens to join the activists’ cause, traverse their fear and cross the online borders into the off-line arena. SM is the young activists’ verifying tool, which they utilise to bring their experience to the *online-only* participants’ frame of recognition.

6.1.3. Social media for fear-proof participation

The young activists believe that SM could be beneficial in promoting affordable political action. They use SM repertoires to engage the newcomers and the less interested individuals in low-cost political activities. They agree that SM is a safer place to

communicate politics. For them, lowering the cost of participation, especially when it has to do with people's safety, is crucial for practising unconventional political activities in a repressive environment. **A.A.** remarked:

Many people want to participate, but there are also many limitations and psychological barriers which they try to overcome by participating in the virtual political community.

A.Y. explained:

Online, the government does not have our fingerprints. They cannot chase us easily, so, people feel safer to engage in politics online and this is exactly what we have been trying to enforce when trying to mobilise publics behind our cause; lowering the threshold of risk. In the last strike in Alexandria in solidarity with Khaled Said, all strikers had to do was to dress in black and stand in silence looking at the sea and reading from the Bible or the Q'uran to show dissent and condemn police brutality, it was a great success.

I.B. commented on the same event:

People participated widely regardless of being political activists or not what was required was so minimal, therefore there was larger participation. The more you lessen the sacrifices and responsibilities, the more participation you get.

The young activists believe that SM contribute to raising the perceived rationality of collective action as they lower the costs of participating in political actions to the benefit of achieving certain sought outcomes. Within the SM environment, the non-politicised can gain more courage, since they interact with activists and communicate politics safely. For example, **M.S.** believes that:

Social networking sites have enabled large numbers of citizens to *speak from behind the keyboard*. Now they can break their silence and express their opinion openly with no fear of security oppression (emphasis added).

Perceiving SM as a safer platform from which to practise politics helps better understand how the context of an authoritarian regime might nominate online practices to be an alternative solution so citizens can express their oppressed opinion and engage in politics. As revealed in Table 6.2, activists perceive practising politics on social networking sites (SNSs) as being more convenient than in other arenas – especially when compared to reality. They explained how their perception of SM convenience uses could be ascribed to the *suppressing* political environment in Egypt, where freedom of speech and the right to assembly are restricted. Since 1981 and until people revolted on 25th January 2011, Egypt has been ruled by the National Democratic Party under

a permanent state-of-emergency law. “An estimated 18,000 Egyptians [were] imprisoned under the law, which allows the police to arrest people without charges, allows the government to ban political organisations and makes it illegal for more than five people to gather without a license from the government. Newspapers are monitored by the Ministry of Information and generally refrain from directly criticising Mubarak. And so for young people in Egypt, Facebook, which allows users to speak freely to one another and encourages them to form groups, is irresistible as a platform not only for social interaction but also for dissent” (Shapiro, 2009, p. 2).

SM could thus serve as a mediated arena for political outspokenness on the controversial issues facing Egyptian society. As Vitak et al. (2009) argue, Facebook might have the potential to provide a low-risk arena from which users can interact with one another about politics, which might be highly beneficial for discussing sensitive or inappropriate issues, such as politics and religion (Vitak, Smock, Zube, Carr, Ellison, & Cliff Lampe, 2009). This corroborates the evident positive correlation between the reported feeling of fear and using SM for social utility reasons (see Table 6.2). For example, SM users can communicate with each other ‘anonymously,’ using different identities and pseudonyms, and thus create a safer environment where they can communicate politics more freely. Along the same lines, **MA**. typically stated that:

On Facebook and the Internet more generally, there is no censorship. For example, when I call a friend over the telephone, I do not rule out that the Telecom is eavesdropping. As for the Internet, I believe censorship is unachievable.

M.S. added:

Basically, there is no other way to express myself and my opinion. Any activity outside the Internet ‘borders’ would be tightly restricted and limited. I think the least I can do is speak my voice out and convey my ideas to others.

These typical extracts corroborate arguments from previous research in authoritarian contexts. For example, Rahimi (2003) argues that “Cyberspace gives dissidents a *safer* way to expose the corruption and abuses of authoritarian regimes and enables activists a *retreat* from autocratic institutional spaces, in which speech is kept strictly under supervision” (p. 111) (emphasis added).

However, it seems that providing evidence of safety and enjoying secure practice online does not necessarily encourage people to take to the street or to practise politics off-

line. Fear of repression played both roles: as a stimulator of 'online' activism, as freedom of expression is allowed more on the Internet, as well as a prospective restraint on 'off-line' activism, which involves more serious threats to individuals' safety and well-being. This fear impact may thus explain the expected difference in participation rates between the two arenas, as expressed by participant activists (online-off-line participation is the core focus of Chapter Seven).

Young activists perceived the fear impact as an obstacle to mobilising political activities beyond the virtual sphere. The high cost of practising politics off-line may deter individuals from challenging their fear off-line as they might have done online. **MH.** implies in the following extract how the limited opportunities for participation and retreating to SM as an alternative platform might hollow out the practice of politics and convert it to a mere act of anger release that does not lead to meaningful participation or feasible change:

Security strains are very tight now on the ground. They let people speak out on media platforms and vent their anger online.

6.2. Social media uses and young activists' perceived feelings of political efficacy

Political efficacy was measured with an additive four items index (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.64$) adapted from previous research (Bimber, 2001). Respondents were asked to express to what extent they agreed or disagreed with four items on a five-point scale, where 1 meant 'strongly agree', and 5 meant 'strongly disagree' (see Chapter Four and Appendix 1).

As seen in Table 6.3, participants hold stronger feelings of internal efficacy (items one and two) compared to their feelings of external political efficacy (items three and four). Although about one-third of young activists tend to feel that they are politically competent and that they can easily follow politics, slightly more than one-third of the sample agreed that 'there's not much point in participating in political campaigns and that one person's participation will not make any difference.' Participants' responses to external efficacy items reveal that they realise the restraints of their political environment. 38.7 percent of the surveyed young activists ($n = 141$) strongly agreed that they do not have a say in government, and almost half of the sample (45.5 percent) strongly agreed that politicians do not care about what they think. However,

participants' negative perceptions of political efficacy and their tendency to feel politically powerless in terms of influencing their polity might also stem from the nature of the sample, which combines hard-core and soft-core activists. While hard-core activists are expected to feel more politically efficacious, soft-core and less-experienced activists' perceptions might have tilted the balance.

These results suggest that young activists' functioning may be marred by their perceived feeling of efficacy "because it affects behaviour not only directly, but by its impact on other determinants such as goals and aspirations, outcome expectations, affective proclivities, and perception of impediments and opportunities in the social environment" (Bandura, 2000, p. 75). In order to explore how young activists' use of SM may enhance, diminish or be irrelevant to their reported worries about confronting authorities, the following correlation is examined:

Does using social media for instrumental purposes relate to young activists' feelings of being politically efficacious? And if so, in what ways?

As seen in Table 6.4, informational uses of SM correlate positively and significantly with young activists' feelings of political efficacy. The more young activists use SM for unbiased views and to decide on important issues, the more they feel capable of exerting change in their society ($r = 0.119, p > 0.05$). The more young activists use SM to gain and disseminate information, the more they also develop a feeling that political and social change is possible, and that they can participate in bringing about this change ($r = 0.111, p > 0.05$).

Table 6.3: Young activists' distribution by political efficacy

Perceived political efficacy	Strongly agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Politics is too complicated for someone like me to follow*	28	7.7	71	19.5	76	20.9	113	31.0	76	20.9	364	100.0
There's not much point in participating in political campaigns: one person's participation will not make any difference**	68	18.6	128	35.0	84	23.0	51	13.9	35	9.6	366	100.0
People like me do not have a say in government***	141	38.7	127	34.9	52	14.3	34	9.3	10	2.7	364	100.0
Politicians do not care about what people like me think****	166	45.5	119	32.6	44	12.1	21	5.8	15	4.1	365	100.0

Missing: *F = 3 (0.8%) ** F = 1 (0.3%) *** F = 3 (0.8%) **** F = 2 (0.5%)

As may be recalled from Chapter Five and Table 5.1, young activists have mostly been using SM for guidance ($M = 16.7$, $SD = 3.6$), and surveillance ($M = 16.2$, $SD = 2.4$) purposes. It was argued in Chapter Five that informational uses as such have been mainly directed at serving certain functions (informative and technical) which the young activists seek to achieve through their active and purposive use of SM. It can be said, then, that the more young activists use SM for functional-informational purposes, the more they acquire new political competences and feel politically efficacious. In other words, the more they use SM as instruments for change, the more they tend to face forcible oppression, and defeat the vulnerability to discouragement that could deter them from participating in activating social and political changes. As Hacker (2000) argues, engaging individuals in message construction provides interactive opportunities that should increase learning about political issues and the political process.

This finding links to what Gibson et al. (2000) found in their study of different types of Internet connectedness and political participation in four nations. They found that those who use the Internet to 'do' something, such as to find information, or what researchers called "utilitarians", are more inclined to develop a sense of social capital and to participate in politics. By working together, the young activists can learn transferable skills that are much needed to build their agency. It has been argued that online tools have the ability to aid the maintenance of ideologically homogenous social networks (Ognyanova & Ball-Rokeach, 2012). Conversely, it was found that "perceived collective efficacy fosters group motivational commitment to their missions, resilience to adversity and performance accomplishments" (Bandura, 2000, p. 75), which confirms the reciprocal relationship between the instrumental uses of SM and efficacy. Carpini (2000) argues that the evolution of the Internet, and particularly of SM, have helped to overcome the causes of disengagement that are attached to conditions which stimulate engagement in public life generally. These conditions include motivation, perceived opportunity for involvement and a knowledge-based ability to take part in the civic realm. Carpini asserts that "what is missing is the belief that becoming involved in public life in any way that involves politics, government, or organised collective action is likely to be effective or satisfying" (p. 344).

These findings seem, however, to contradict Lee's (2006) proposal that the Internet could potentially facilitate increased political efficacy by helping users interact with

politically active social groups. This discrepancy might stem from the different roles the Internet plays in terms of enhancing individuals' feelings of internal and external political efficacy. Lee found that using the Internet for information, entertainment and interactive purposes positively influenced internal, but not external, political efficacy.

Table 6.4: Correlations between social media uses and political efficacy perceptions

Dispositions	SM use correlates (<i>r</i>)					
	Guidance	Serveillance	Networking	Social utility	Entertainment	Convenience
Political efficacy	0.119*	0.111*	0.072	- 0.005	- 0.123*	- 0.081
Significance * ($p > 0.05$)		** ($p > 0.01$)				

On the contrary, habitual uses of SM, as seen in Table 6.4, do not seem to feed into young activists' feelings of political power. Social utility and convenience uses were found irrelevant to the participants' sense of political efficacy and their perceived ability to exercise the aspired change in their society. However, social utility correlated negatively, yet insignificantly, with young activists' feelings of political efficacy, which implies that "socialisers" (Gibson, Howard, & Ward, 2000) may develop feelings of incompetence, which may then negatively influence their inclination to become involved in politics. Similarly, Gibson et al. (2000) concluded from their aforementioned study that "while online socialising may lead to higher levels of off-line socialising and civic engagement in one's community, it appears to make one less likely to engage in specifically political organisations and activities" (p. 15). Entertainment is the only type of habitual uses of SM that correlated significantly, but negatively, with young activists' perceived political efficacy ($r = - 0.123, p > 0.05$). The more young activists use SM to feel relaxed and to pass time, the less they feel politically effective and vice versa. It could be suggested, then, that acquiring, sharing and transforming skills over SM platforms may not necessarily promote political action; as it might not trigger the feeling of political empowerment but, rather, could stimulate an illusory perception of being active participants in the virtual space, and increase the numbers of free riders accordingly. Additionally, high levels of disconnectivity, illiteracy and poverty deprive large numbers of people of the prospective leverages of SM use and thus hamper the

escalation of the size of the promoted action (or of achieving collectivity) through SM mobilisation. These propositions are explored in the following chapter.

The young activists' views on their perceived sense of political efficacy and SM's contribution to creating a sense of political powerfulness focused mainly on two points of view: (1) challenging the regime-induced feelings of inefficacy, and (2) SM as a hub for collective learning and preparation.

6.2.1. Challenging the regime-induced feelings of inefficacy

Generally, participants were inclined to report feelings of political inefficacy that leaned towards external more than internal inefficacy. Participants realise the constraints of their political environment, which intertwine with the cultural heritage which does not necessarily favour participation. They ascribe perceptions of lack of political efficacy to such external constraints rather than being an innate trait of a lack of the capability to function. They have doubts about their context and whether their voices will be heard or their aspirations achieved. The following extracts represent how participants recognise their externally-induced political weaknesses.

MH.: The regime *claims* that we are not qualified for fully fledged democracy. This is shocking; it is not possible that a whole population is not qualified for democracy (emphasis added).

MA.: To say that people are not qualified for democracy is a justification made by the regime not to apply democratic transformations. Although the majority of the population are illiterate, but it is still a false claim to say that people are not qualified for democracy. You cannot assert that this majority knows nothing. The average person can choose if a certain choice is explained s/he will participate.

MH.: The problem does not reside merely in understanding different issues, and realising the extent of effectiveness one's opinion could have in the final results. The other problem is that *we do not have the culture of listening to other opinions* (emphases added).

As discussed in Chapter Two, the young activists believe that Egyptian society suffers chronic political and social conditions and relies on supernatural powers to resolve their problems. **W.B.** typically outlined:

W.B.: Authorities have all the tools, so the majority has now reached the limit where they wish authorities to have the guidance. Their only hope for change is divine intervention.

Participants, however, believe that SM have infused new life into Egyptian politics, and offered younger generations a “new beginning.”

6.2.2. Social media as a hub for collective learning and political preparation

I was imprisoned for several years. During that time I did not know how the world had changed. When I was released, I realised that the world has changed dramatically and I found the Internet. This was *my new beginning* (emphasis added) (MH., 2010).

The young activists utilise SM as platform for an Internet-based hub for learning and sharing political experience. Participants mainly highlighted anonymity and interactivity as the main attributes of SM that help them engage in processes of mutual information transmission and deliberation through which they share transferable skills with their fellow citizens. These conventions were found to have a positive impact on citizens’ dispositions and behaviours. **RA.** and **MH.** highlighted anonymity as a reason to think that SM could contribute to developing feelings of political efficacy. They believe that SM provide favourable conditions for discussing politics. SM free the communication process from some constraints that may deter less politicised individuals from taking part in political discussions,

RA.: The main added advantage of discussing political issues through social networks is that they give a sense of comfort with a greater degree of freedom during the discussion.

MH.: People started to join online groups as a means of self-expression. Some people do not reveal their identities, and they can eventually gain the necessary confidence that is much needed for opinion sharing and comprehension.

RA. and **MH.** believe that anonymity benefits political communication, not in terms of providing security cover for activists (as discussed in Section 6.1), but with regard to generating a sense of inclusion for individuals who may feel alienated from interactions outside their group. Social psychologists have similarly stressed the importance of anonymity for excluded and marginalised cohorts who would otherwise feel socially alienated (McKenna & Bargh, 2006). Norris (2004) explained how “textual communication via the Internet strips away the standard visual and aural cues of social identity—including those of gender, race, age and socio-economic status—plausibly promoting heterogeneity” and, hence, loosens the strains of social status and allows for a more mutually inclusive environment of interaction (p. 5).

However, Gastil (2000) suggests that face-to-face deliberation is more appropriate in the political arena if compared to computer-mediated-communication (CMC). He argues that the complexity of political decisions, the diversity of participants and the necessity for group cohesion, and the degree to which CMC can reduce the independent influence of social status, give face-to-face deliberation a powerful advantage over deliberations that are mediated by computers. This might suggest that those who feel more politically efficacious (and use SM instrumentally) will be more inclined to practise politics off-line, where they can work on complex issues, unravel the uncertainties of their ambiguous environment and build trust-based relations with other citizens.

Allowing an interactive platform that brings citizens together to communicate politics in a fashion that resembles face-to-face communication bolsters their sense of political efficacy (Gastil, 2000). Participants believe that changing their society is a multi-stage process. They discussed how SM interaction could contribute to the stage of shaping opinions and empowering individuals. **MH.** started by stating that:

Social networking sites are like an outlet that makes me feel that I still have a say and can do something.

Through interacting with other users online, participants could achieve the sense that their opinions were important and worth listening to. They also have the opportunity to demonstrate to other less politicised users and newcomers to the political arena that their concerns are important and their voices heard. This relationship between medium interactivity and political efficacy was established in previous research. For example, Nisbet and Scheufele (2004) found that Web exposure alone did not produce significant changes in political efficacy for participants. Only when Internet political information was coupled with deliberation did it increase political efficacy. **MH.** explained the psychology of opinion formation through interaction:

Interaction has a psychological aspect. Interacting with any event starts when you accommodate an idea. Then you interact with it internally. Finally, you start to form an opinion. This will lead you to think of how to make changes happen.

W.B. explained:

It is a preparatory phase. We are preparing ourselves for a certain following stage, the time for which is not known to us. Nevertheless, we are building the base and getting ready for that stage so that we can afford what it takes.

Tedesco (2007) reached a similar finding in his experimental study of Web exposure and interactivity effects on political information efficacy and young adults' tendency to vote. He found that user-to-document and user-to-system forms of interactivity on political sites are positive indicators of young adults' feelings of significance in the political process and to their recognition of the importance of voting when compared to Web exposure. Political interest was another interpretation of efficacy in Tedesco's study, and as the young activists are normally expected to have an interest in politics, this might also have fed into their reported feelings of (internal) political efficacy.

Using SM in a communication fashion that entails working with other users, learning and sharing experiences and skills, could feed into the young activists' "shared beliefs in their collective power to produce desired results, [which are] a key ingredient of collective agency. [That is] a group's attainments are the product not only of the shared knowledge and skills of its members, but also of the interactive, co-ordinative and systematic dynamics of their transactions" (Bandura, 2000, p. 75).

M.S. corroborates this finding:

Social media have brought together politicised and non-politicised youth and facilitated interaction and transforming skills. Through interaction with political activists, youth can learn from those who actually practise politics how to get involved.

Wielding power collectively could help the non-politicised follow politics more easily, believe that their participation would make a difference, feel that they do have a say in government, and/or that they can make their voices heard by the politicians. These judgments have been argued to influence the choice of activities and environmental settings, as well as the amount of effort individuals are willing to exert and how long they will persevere in the face of impediments (Bandura, 1982). It can be said, then, that SM serve as one of the young activists' platforms for preparation and practice, where they can raise their sense of efficacy. Whether this sense of efficacy would feed into the young activists' actual performance and practices, and how, is the main focus of the following chapter.

To conclude, the young activists held two opposing views about the possibility of making change materialise. While **MH.** believes that technology-supported social movements are rapidly evolving, **A.Ma.** embraced a rather cautious approach, believing that with such technologies they might end up enjoying '*virtual political efficacy*:'

MH.: Social mobilisation is evolving rapidly and many groups and social movements have been formed, like April 6th, Kefaya, National Association for Change (NAC), and many others. New communication technologies have helped make these efforts possible. Eventually, these efforts will follow a natural course of unification and all these efforts will adopt a common agenda. Otherwise, it would be impossible for these fragmented groups to face the governing powerful National Democratic Party (NDP). We learn from history that social movements come together and embrace the collective aim of change.

A.Ma.: There are many agents and elements of change. Platforms of free expression are available but none of this is feasible on the ground. The freedom they give you is something as if they imprison you then give you a microphone to speak freely, but you shouldn't dream about exceeding that limit.

It could be said, then, that SM afford young activists opportunities for less costly mobilisation while enabling the non-politicised citizens the opportunities for less risky participation. However, creating opportunities might shape movements, but not necessarily lead to explicit acts of protest. Such acts, especially in authoritarian contexts, would lead to imprisonment or even execution. In Crossley's (2002) words:

We should distinguish between movements and their overt acts of protest, and that we should view opportunities as a factor mediating between movement and protest, perhaps determining the latter in some cases, but much less causally efficacious in relation to the former. Movements can form, albeit in a subterranean manner, in a diverse range of opportunity structures, though such structures will shape the ways in which they can be predicted to act and the success they are likely to achieve (pp, 111 & 113).

In fact, scholars disagree about the potential of new communication technologies for empowering poorer people and enabling them to act. While some emphasise a possible equalisation (Myers, 2002), others suggest instead either a neutral impact and normalisation of political activity (Margolis & Resnick, 2000), or even more concentration of power (McChesney, 1996). New communication technologies seem to favour the elite over the masses, and further tend to reproduce the digital divide and hierarchy, and develop vertical relations instead of interactive, horizontal relationships (Rucht, 2003, p. 28). Rucht further suggests that "online activism could become a low-cost but also a low-effect substitute for off-line protest (p. 31). Perceptions of the

potential of SM to mobilise off-line collective action comprises the core focus of the following chapter.

6.3. Conclusion

This chapter aimed to scrutinise the young Egyptian activists' perceptions of their political environment as a prerequisite of their participation in politics and to examine the extent, if any, to which the SM are perceived as shapers or mediators of the construction or direction of their political dispositions. As for SM, use constructs that were discussed in the previous chapter were included in the analysis. Two variables were defined as significant dimensions of the political environment in Egypt prior to the 25th January revolution: activists' sense of fear of repression, and their feelings of political efficacy. It was expected that the more the young activists use SM instrumentally, the less they fear repression, and the more they feel politically empowered, the more they are expected to practise politics off-line (which is the main focus of the next chapter).

Contrary to what was expected, no empirical evidence of a statistically significant relationship was found between the instrumental uses of SM and participants' feelings of fear of repression. SM was found to be irrelevant to guidance, surveillance and networking, and no functional effects of the media were detected. However, it has been found that habitual uses of SM correlate positively and significantly with feelings of fear, which proves the reverse hypothesis. As for political efficacy, using SM instrumentally (except for networking) was significantly relevant to the participants' feeling of political competence and of their capability to exert significant changes in their society.

The qualitative data provided several explanations for the findings and delineated how the young activists did not perceive the SM as sufficient platforms in and of themselves for education purposes and in gaining holistic evaluations of the public sphere. Rather, they could be efficiently used to address the public and to achieve cognitive mobilisation goals, especially for the non-politicised youth. SM was found to be effective in providing relevant information for proving activists' credibility and accountability for those who do not take to the streets and do not witness the events. Moreover, it was also utilised to open a window on political life and to motivate those who might be less interested in politics or who are practising it for the first time. Direction was found very

significant in this regard. For the politicised youth who already practise politics, and who are the main focus of the current research, SM are not seen as spaces for political learning. It is rather a tool through which they can address their fellow young citizens, who are less interested in, and less aware of, current events in order to raise their cognitive awareness and subtly engage them in politics. For the former purpose, the participants perceive SM as a non-organised space within which it is difficult for a constructive discussion to evolve. As for the purpose of engaging the non-politicised in politics, participants believe that SM are their tools with which to verify their narratives and to counterbalance the traditional, state-owned media biases against them and their practices, especially the non-practitioners. Whether the young activists' political dispositions might reflect on their tendency to practise politics online and/or off-line is the focal point of the following chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SOCIAL MEDIA USES AND THEIR PERCEIVED CONTRIBUTION TO LINK TO THE OFF-LINE SPACE

Young Egyptian activists use various repertoires of collective action mobilisation to achieve the transformation of their authoritarian polity. This chapter, building on and linking to the two previous chapters, focuses on young activists' perceptions about social media's (SM's) potential to engage their constituency in collective action. This chapter particularly aims to answer the research question: How do social media contribute to mobilising collective action practice *off-line*? A focus on off-line actions illuminates how SM could (or could not) contribute to achieving political change in Egypt, as perceived by a sample of young activists who use SM apparatuses as part of their repertoire of collective action mobilisation. This focus on off-line practices pulls together the threads of media uses explored in Chapter Five, along with building participatory dispositions, discussed in Chapter Six, to contribute (or not) to achieving a mobilisation outcome of collective action practice beyond the borders of the virtual, more convenient and less costly/less risky space of SM.

Building mainly on data from focus group discussions (FGDs), this chapter explores SM's perceived role in mobilising off-line collective action across three areas of prospective contribution:

- SM's perceived contribution to framing youth movements.
- SM's perceived contribution to recruiting prospective participants in collective action.
- SM's perceived contribution to mobilising collective action off-line.

This chapter, then, seeks to explore and explain perceived differences (if any) between participant activists about SM's contribution to the practice of collective action. Correlations between political practices on- and off-line and the demographic characteristics of participants (measured by gender, age, income and education) are examined thereafter to meet this goal, building mainly on quantitative data from the questionnaires.

Three arguments are made in this chapter. *First*, that young activists in the research sample use SM to frame their movements and construct meanings relevant to the cause they mobilise a constituency to support. Building on their aforementioned perceptions of the defective fashion of utilising SM for social movement organisation and mobilisation, or what participants termed *SM culture*, young activists expressed their preference for using SM as an interactive hub of repertoires where they can enrich recipients' experience and raise possibilities to support their cause by using several communicative cues in their message on one aggregate platform. Participants also highlighted the significant role frames of sentiment can play in balancing the high risk potential participants may meet on the streets and in urging them to take part in practices that might seem costly in terms of cost-benefit calculations. *Second*, consistent with the reported half way down rear ranking of networking within the range of SM uses, discussed in Chapter Five, and, *third*, although SM contribute to giving non-politicised citizens a safer environment for the practice of less-costly political activities and to build their political competences, delineated in Chapter Six, yet, in line with the perceived deficiencies of SM, discussed in Chapter Five, basing activism on SM was perceived to erode actual practices off-line and to delude online *debaters* into believing that they were actively taking part in the political process. Several explanations of participant activists' perceptions about SM's contribution to mobilising collective action were discussed against a backdrop of the massive uprising of 25th January 2011.

This chapter is organised into two sections:

7.1. Social media's perceived contribution to mobilising collective action: Bridging structure and agency problems.

7.1.1. Uses of social media and online political participation.

7.1.1.1. *Social media surveillance and promoting a common threat frame.*

7.1.1.1.1. *Frame marketability: Cost versus threat mobilising frames.*

7.1.1.1.2. *Social media convergence for cohesive framing of the youth movement.*

7.1.1.1.3. *Social media and frame dissemination.*

7.1.1.2. *Social media networking and recruiting potential supporters.*

7.1.1.2.1. Social media and recruiting for low and high risk activism.

7.1.2. Instrumental uses of social media, young activists' political dispositions and mediating a bridge to off-line collective action.

7.1.3. Social media's perceived contribution to mobilising off-line collective action.

7.1.3.1. Social media and the shaping of repertoires of collective action.

7.1.3.2. Social media mobilisation against a backdrop of the 25th January 2011 revolt.

7.2. Conclusion.

7.1. Social media's perceived contribution to mobilising collective action: Bridging structure and agency problems.

This section focuses on young Egyptian activists' perceptions of the role SM played in creating opportunities for mobilising political activism prior to the 25th January 2011 revolt. The analysis of the participants' views builds on Bourdieu's argument that "social practices are generated through the interaction of agents, who are both differently disposed and unequally resourced, within the bounds of specific networks which have a game-like structure and which impose definite restraints upon them" (cited in Crossley, 2002, p. 171). It has been argued in Chapters Five and Six that young activists have been using SM as instruments to achieve their pre-assessed goals. These uses are mainly focused on disseminating functional information that is aimed particularly at lessening feelings of fear of repression and on providing evidence of activists' otherwise mere anecdotes to convince non-politicised others, or online-only participators, to engage in more costly/risky collective actions. Purposive use of SM was also found to increase feelings of political efficacy for young activists, as shown in the questionnaire data, and also for non-politicised citizens, as revealed from FGD data. However, during the FGDs, participant activists evaluated SM and raised some concerns about their potential for mobilising off-line collective action. These aforementioned deficiencies, discussed in Chapter Five, were expected to influence young activists' perceptions of the production of a desired outcome as supported by their SM activism. In the following section, I first start by exploring the relationship (if any) between young activists' reported uses of, and political activism on, SM portals. The aim is to set the context for

discussing activists' perceptions about SM's potential for mobilisation in light of their reported media uses and perceived deficiencies.

7.1.1. Uses of social media and online political participation

In order to explore how young activists' reported uses of SM might relate to their online political activities, the following correlation is explored:

Does using social media for instrumental purposes relate to young activists' tendency to practise politics online? And if so, in what ways?

Linear regression analysis was run to answer that question. Results are shown in Table 7.1. Quantitative results from regression analysis are presented here, before I move to scrutinising young activists' perceptions of SM's contribution to online activism through analysing FGD data. References are also made to findings discussed in Chapters Five and Six.

Table 7.1: Linear regression analysis of predictors of online activism

SM use constructs	Standardised Coefficients Beta (β)	Significance
Guidance	.020	.771
Surveillance	.227	.002**
Convenience	-.046	.452
Networking	.291	.000**
Social utility	-.207	.001**
Entertainment	-.125	.035*

Significance * (0.05) ** (0.01)

- **Guidance:** as seen in Table 7.1 and Figure 7.1, using SM for guidance was not significantly related to practising politics on those platforms. Recent research showed how Facebook users differentiate between practising different forms of political activities on the website, as they slightly accept expressing political opinions on Facebook, but perceive the medium as being inappropriate for attempting to persuade others to change or embrace political beliefs or activities (Vitak, Smock, Zube, Carr, Ellison, & Cliff Lampe, 2009).

The lack of a significant correlation between guidance and online activism goes in tandem with activists' expressed deficiencies of SM as being less credible and thus less reliable as a primary source of news if compared to other sources, such as electronic newspapers. It is true that guidance came first among SM's reported uses, yet this was explained by the young activists' need to influence the *non-politicised*' political decisions and practices, which are not assessed by the questionnaire instrument used for the purpose of this research. This directional emphasis explains the precedence of guidance across the SM's uses schema, as well as the lack of significant association with online political practices as defined by activists' guidance uses of SM.

- **Convenience** (less money, effort, and time) was also found irrelevant to practising politics online, which implies that young activists are willing to devote their time and effort to achieving their goals via the practice of political activities on SM. However, lowering cost, as may be recalled from Chapter Six, was seen as a valuable addition to young activists' efforts to attract non-politicised and less-interested individuals to engage in political activities online.

Contrary to what was expected in Chapter Five, the evident absence of a significant relationship between convenience and online political practices might be ascribed, first, to participants' perceptions of SM as being less costly tools for organisation, rather than for participation. Second, as for participation, young activists, as may be recalled from Chapter Six, seem not to value SM as spaces of significant political practice. They believe that "Twitter, Facebook and the like are illusory spaces" (A.A., 2010) that have "enabled large numbers of citizens to speak from behind the keyboard" (M.S., 2010), but which have not necessarily urged these *large numbers* to take to the street to upgrade their online 'clicktivism' to on-the-ground 'activism.' Individuals may thus be captured in a '*monitorial*' mode of citizenship, which is fed by an ingrained sense of fear of repression if they overtly challenge the regime that suppresses them; as citizens calculate the risks that may be associated with political action prior to getting involved (Schudson, 1998).

- **Social utility:** the more activists were driven by debating about politics, the less they practised political activism online ($\beta = - 0.207$, $p < 0.01$).

- **Entertainment:** the more young activists sought entertainment online, the less they participated in politics via SM ($\beta = -0.125, p < 0.05$).

Social utility and entertainment were the least sought gratifications leading young activists' use of SM (see Figure 5.1). As mentioned previously, the more young activists use SM to debate about politics and to pass the time and relax, the less they practise politics online. As discussed in Chapter Six, such habitual uses of SM correlated negatively and significantly with stronger feelings of fear of repression, and they did not influence (convenience and social utility) or even correlated negatively (entertainment) with young activists' feelings of political efficacy (see Tables 6.2 and 6.4). It has been argued that ritualistic or habitual use is a mild stimulation of audience activity that is considered one of the limiting factors of media effects (Ruggiero, 2000) due to little intentionality or selectivity being involved (Blumler, 1979). More recent research similarly showed that reliance on SNSs, such as YouTube, Facebook, and MySpace, was positively related to civic participation, but not to political participation or confidence in government. Researchers ascribed this finding to the main purpose for which SM were created. They explained that these media are mainly geared toward maintaining relationships with friends and can, hence, have the potential for stimulating community involvement, rather than political participation (Zhang, Johnson, Seltzer, & Bichard, 2010, p. 86). Figure 7.1 builds on Figure 6.1 and further represents the correlations between the uses of SM and young activists' reported online activism.

During the FGDs, the young activists corroborated this finding. They typically believe that debating politics on SM portals does not necessarily encourage political activism. In **A.A.'s** words:

We should not turn information into debate and lock political activism in Facebook pages. What we should do is to aggregate people and take to the streets.

- **Surveillance** significantly related to practising politics online. That is, the more young activists were driven by acquiring and disseminating information, the more they practised political activities on the Internet ($\beta = 0.227, p < 0.01$).
- **Networking:** regression analysis shows that the more young activists sought to gratify their needs to form and join political groups online and to reach out to large numbers of potential supporters, the more they used the Web for political activism ($\beta =$

0.291, $p < 0.01$). This finding is typically consistent with the nature of SM as a platform for maintaining already established relationships and, less broadly, for fostering new ones (boyd & Ellison, 2007), it also reflects young activists' desire to enlarge the size of their network of acquaintances as a prerequisite for mobilising others, as suggested in recent research (Shen, Wang, Guo, & Guo, 2009). As may be recalled from Chapter Five, participants' utilisation of SM for networking purposes was not interrupted by their demographic characteristics. Gender, age, income and education were found to be irrelevant to the networking uses of SM. This finding, along with findings from regression analysis, suggests that, within the boundaries of the sample of the current research, young activists' online political activism for the purpose of networking is not interrupted by their demographic characteristics.

Informational and networking uses were the only positively connected the uses of SM to online political practice, as revealed by the regression analysis. Consistently, during the FGDs, young activists mainly raised issues relevant to these media functions. Young activists' views about mobilising other citizens to participate in political activities that aim to achieve political, social and economic changes in Egyptian society particularly evolved around two main themes: (1) promoting a common *threat* frame, (2) recruiting potential supporters. In the following pages, each of these themes is discussed to capture the young activists' perceptions of SM leverages and their weaknesses for mobilising change in their polity, as related to their purposive media use.

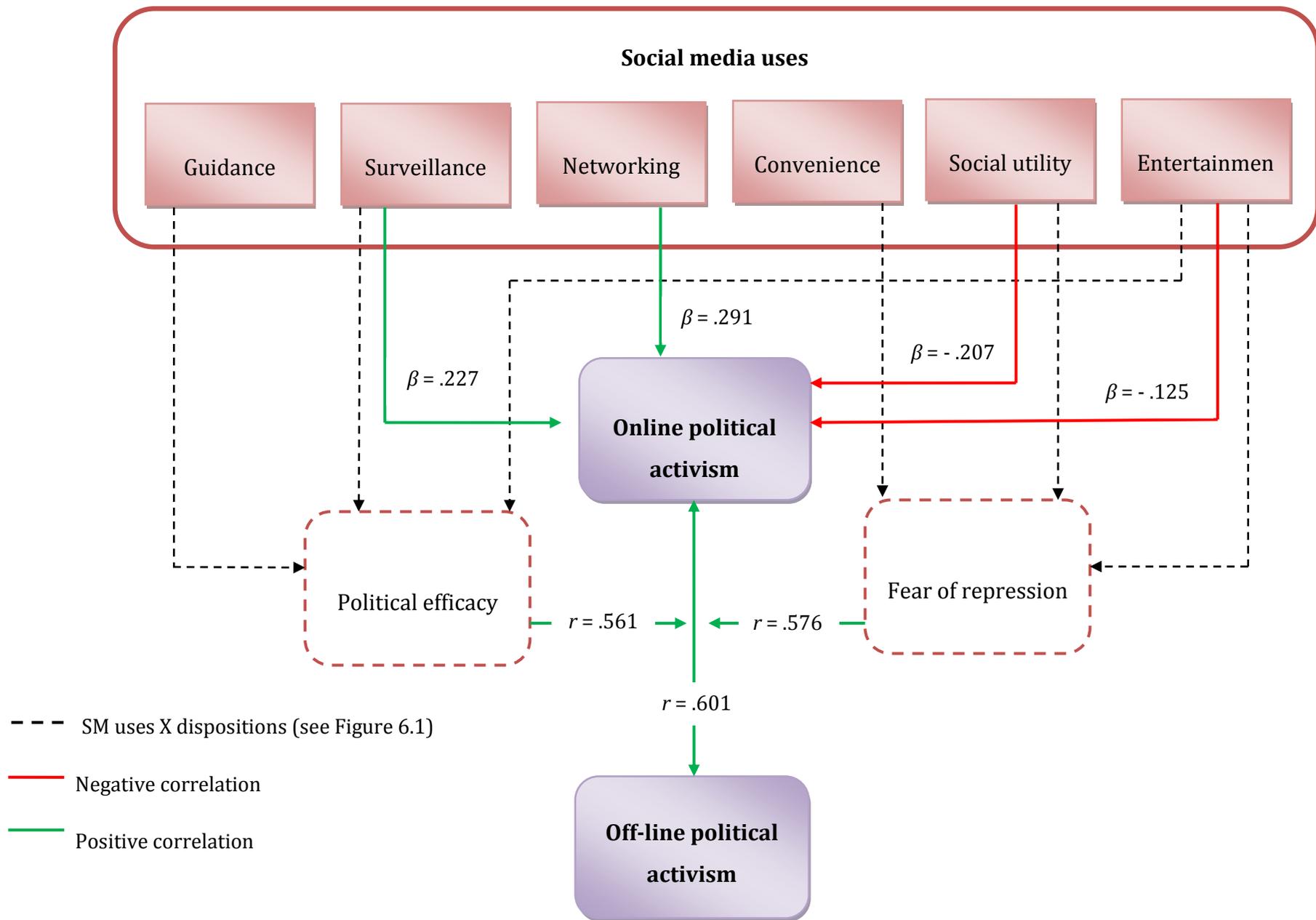


Figure 7.1: Uses of social media and online-off-line political participation mediated by political dispositions

7.1.1.1. Social media surveillance and promoting a common threat frame

As shown in Chapter Six, surveillance correlated positively and significantly with young activists' feelings of political efficacy (see Table 6.4 and Figure 6.1). Additionally, regression analysis in Section (7.1.1) also shows that participants who reported using SM to gather and disseminate information tended to practise political activities online ($\beta = 0.227, p < 0.01$). As may be recalled from Chapter Five, young activists mainly used SM to disseminate informative and technical information relevant to their activism. Participants, however, perceive SM as an inefficient platform for gaining news, due to structural fluidity of the Internet. During the FGDs, participants discussed how the SM could help them frame and disseminate mobilising messages that appeal to the public. In SM terms, participants believe that they can create a *public status* that people can endorse and then act accordingly. **MH.** typically remarked:

I mean that, after all, this is actually a crisis of a community that is not able . . .¹⁴ if we are able to produce *a true and healthy status for people to interact with* then the number [of participants] will increase. So what matters is, in fact, the constructed status itself (emphasis added).

SM have enabled the young activists to scrutinise politicians and elites and to make the few visible to the many. For example, **M.M.** believes that:

Twitter is all about status, which you could deliver to many people, very fast.

Participants mainly discussed their role as media "*producers*" (Fuchs, 2010, p. 178) who, in addition to consuming and circulating media content, compose and convey their own messages. As revealed in the FGDs, participants all agreed that SM are beneficial tools for framing their movement, or for "highlighting symbols that will be familiar enough to mobilise people around [in order to] maintain the movements' integrity against the claims of inherited culture" (Tarrow, 1998, p. 119). Through their informational uses of SM, they sought to frame certain issues by creating what Gamson (1992) dubbed the 'signature matrix', which includes several condensing symbols (catchphrases, taglines, exemplars, metaphors, depictions, visual images) and reasoning devices (causes and

¹⁴ The participant was discussing the case of El-Baradei and how he has not been able to gather millions or hundreds of thousands in demonstrations due to the strategies and tactics he uses to work on the ground and interact with people. He believes that El-Baradei was not able to create the appropriate tactics to increase the numbers of people who gathered around him in Fayoum in thousands to tens of thousands.

consequences, appeals to principles, or moral claims). They utilise SM to transfer the salience of issues, their attributes and the salience of politics to a wider circle of publics. Participants discussed how their SM activism had been successful in enunciating a *public status* or a “master frame” that could mobilise an entire social movement sector (Tarrow, 1998, p.131).

SM have allowed participants to inform the public agenda, especially on the unconventional level of political practices. An explicit example on the “process through which agendas are built or through which an object that has caught public attention by being big news, gives rise to a political issue” (Lang & Lang, 1981, p. 448) is the well-known case of Khaled Said, or ‘the spark of the revolution’, as he came to be known. **SO.** Summarised:

When [Kaled Said’s] photo was leaked on the Internet, it caused a reverse impact. People humanely sympathised with the case and the shocking morgue photo went viral on the Internet. *The public had a rallying point.* (emphasis added).

M.M. emphasised:

The Khaled Said page is one of the largest Arabic political pages on Facebook. This is an indication that the case has become very popular in society, at least for the Facebook community.

The young activists, as *SM users*, are sceptical about the content SM provide. Yet they, as *producers/users*, or *produsers*, tend to rely on SM to address less politically interested citizens. “In spite of the negative coverage of social protest in the mainstream media, protest activists are dependent on the news media to get their voices heard in the corridors of power and be seen in the public space” (Kumar, 2009, p. 137). This dichotomous stance, combining elements of both the limited and strong effects of SM, links to the argument that media effects are limited by an interaction between media and recipients (Scheufele, 1999); as the “media discourse is part of the process by which individuals construct meaning, and public opinion is part of the process by which journalists develop and crystallise meaning in public discourse” (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, p. 2). Activists, as citizen journalists, attempt to frame images of reality using the available, less costly apparatuses of SM, while realising (as discussed in Chapters Five and Six) their limitations with regard to allowing for a constructive discourse to develop among the SM audience. On the one hand, the agenda-setting effect

of SM is not enacted at the ‘users’ level. The participants tend not to rely on SM as their primary source of news and comprehension. As may be recalled from Chapter Five, young activists believe that SM lack a sufficient level of credibility as primary sources of news, which corroborates this observation. On the other hand, the participants expressed the importance of SM as available platforms for opinion expression and information dissemination. They, as *producers*, use the utilities of SNSs to circumvent the barrage of information that circulates through the normally biased state-run mass media by framing political issues that do not receive sufficient, impartial, or any, attention from the so-called ‘national’ media.

It can be said that young activists have been *counter-framing* political issues through providing a different perspective on current events and disseminating unconventional political information to the increasing SM audiences. This process of SM counter-framing could “enhance the autonomy of individuals, enabling them to set up their own connections, bypassing the mass media and the channels of communication” (Castells, Fernández-Ardèvol, Linchuan, & Sey, 2007) controlled by the state. The young activists believe that they can interrupt the state hegemony in shaping the public’s awareness through its national media representations of important issues and events. For example, **SO.** asserts that:

Social networks have benefitted us in so many ways, such as the speed of transferring information. We can instantly show youth what we have seen and experienced that they might not usually read in newspapers. We are members of the April 6th Youth Movement. We were beaten and mistreated and we all suffered from injuries. All newspapers, including opposition newspapers, merely reported that there were fights. This is something we actually lived through.

SO. explained how such informative messages could verify their activities, which are mostly neglected or distorted in the national media spaces. They provide several communicative cues to convey their rich experience to the non-practitioners and hence raise the possibilities of having an influence on their attitudes and future actions.

It could be said, then, that the form of journalism the young activists have been practising was not merely “holding a mirror up to reality it was, at the least, the composition of reality and the composition was entering into our own deliberations- and more, our understandings of who we are and what we were about” (Gitlin, 2003, p. xiv).

One of the most successful frames employed by the youth movement was the *prospective common threat* that was presented through the case of Khaled Said's murder. Although participants have been active in mobilising the public behind the cause of change and the confronting of corruption and police brutality, it was not until the cause was dubbed as an imminent common danger that the public, especially youth, started to join. Diffusing the frame 'We are all Khaled Said' on a Facebook Page has been successful in establishing the link between police brutality and the regime's corruption, as symbolised in Said's murder, and Egyptian youth as the prospective victims who might be in the same position if they remained passive. **M.S.** explained:

The status [We are all Kaled Said] and the mind set it has created played a very important role the idea is not just chanting 'Down with Mubarak', or demanding bread, or condemning the emergency law. The idea is that there must be a common cause that can mobilise all youth to participate.

It is argued that actors in certain issue areas are more prone to use information communication technologies (ICTs) than actors in other issue areas (Donk, Loader, Nixon, & Rucht, 2004). The nature of the issue, the aims activists seek to achieve, and the context within which they operate, drive their selection and use of media to serve their goals. In the case of Said's murder, visibility was significantly important to expose the regime's misconducts, raise the public's awareness and trigger off a wave of protests against the regime's violations. The iconic image of Kaled Said's mangled face was worth a thousand words. It represents a *meme* that travels autonomously and virally in the fluid sphere of the Internet, breaching the ideological limitation of communication (Bennett, 2003b). This image was sufficient to convey the message and refute allegations about Said dying after swallowing a roll of marijuana to cover the incident.

Contrary to the assumptions of *the theory of spectacle*, which states that the 'image' derives its power almost exclusively from the medium of broadcast and that with the Internet, there is no such thing as the 'image', as the Internet does not provide a field of visibility in the same way as broadcasting does, it seems that, in Khaled Said's case, SM have worked against these assertions and caused "a concentration of the attention of the many on a particular monumental event or representation" (Holmes, 2005, p. 31). The image is used as the profile picture of the Facebook Page 'We are all Khaled Said', where repeated and long lasting representation over time has turned the image into an 'icon' (Holmes, 2005, p. 31) that has become, along with its connotations, ingrained

in the public consciousness. It could be said that long-term discreet security practices have been embodied and Kaled Said's case has been personified through the viral spread of his photo on SM platforms. Mona El-Tahawy, a prominent American-Egyptian Journalist and activist, terms this phenomenon the power of the "I", where individuals are shocked by others' experiences and then they feel empowered by these experiences of people whom they perceive as being close or similar to them (El-Tahawy, 2011). SM have been playing a significant role in uncovering domestically committed shocking practices and violations and thus in bringing to the public's consciousness experiences that would have been otherwise kept in the dark.

M.E. typically, explained how Said was portrayed as an ordinary middle class, non-politicised young man who, nevertheless, had fallen prey to police brutality:

People were compassionate with [Kaled Said] because he was a middle class, ordinary, young man. He was not a political activist. He is, to some extent, similar to people on Facebook. All this happened to him although he was not affiliated or connected to any political activity in particular. They firstly felt compassion for him as a humanitarian case, and, secondly, they felt the danger.

Young activists stressed that Said was using Facebook like many other youths. They wanted to make clear that activism through Facebook, although it provides a safe environment for the practice and exchange of experience, especially for the non-politicised, as outlined in Chapter Six, does not necessarily save them the risk of confrontation with authorities, nor does it suffice for achieving the aspired change. Activists sought to make people feel that they were all at risk and that passivity, or *walking next to the wall* as people usually call it in Egypt, does not help avoid unwanted consequences. In **RA.'s** words:

A young man similar to you has been tortured and brutally killed without doing anything. He only uses Facebook, the same as you and I do, yet all this happened to him without even taking part in any demonstration. This means that this could happen to any of us. This is the motive that may contribute to solving the controversy from my point of view. That I don't do anything political, I avoid any suspicious behaviour and *I walk just next to the wall*, but nevertheless, I could get into trouble and the wall may collapse on my head, like what happened to Kaled. So, it does not matter anymore; *we are all at risk* (emphasis added).

7.1.1.1.1. Frame marketability: Cost versus threat mobilising frames

The 'We are all Khaled Said' frame has emerged as "a flexible and adaptable residue of oppositional framing that [has] become a permanent feature of the political culture" (Tarrow, 1998, p.131), especially for youth who built personal attachments to Said's case. Although participants mentioned that they had been working on this frame for three years before individuals started to respond, they perceive it to be a successful social construct in mobilising people to take part in several forms of collective action. This success of the emotional bond was coupled with lowering the risk at the events in which the activists have been inviting individuals to take part in. Low risk activities were found to be efficient in accumulating a sense of commitment and eventually of incentivising individuals to take part in more contentious or high-risk activities.

Participants conducted a comparison between the value of lowering the cost of participation and of appealingly framing their movement with regard to the impact of each technique on mobilising collective action in the Egyptian polity. This comparison brings to mind the differences between rational action theory (RAT) and political process theory (PPT) in regard to influencing people's tendency to engage in collective action. The RAT suggests that prior to deciding on taking action, individuals weigh potential gains against the required costs (money, effort, etc.) of conducting that action. In order to decide to participate, incentives are needed to convince individuals that participation is beneficial and rewarding (Crossley, 2002). On the contrary, political process theory suggests that grievance-based incentives can emerge amongst non-resourceful groups, and sentiments are crucial in motivating people to take action (McAdam, 1982). "At a minimum people need to feel both aggrieved about some aspect of their lives and optimistic that, acting collectively, they can redress the problem" (McAdam, McCarthy & Zald, 1996, p. 5).

During the FGDs, participants drew on examples of the influence of high cost (participation in convoys in solidarity with the people in Gaza), and the influence of threat frames (disseminating pictures of police violations and torture) on individuals' tendency to participate in collective action. Participants believe that the Gaza War that broke out during the winter of 2008–2009 aroused feelings of anger amongst the Egyptian people. The war created a status, or a frame, that favours participation.

Nevertheless, participation in political activities that condemned the war did not exceed the margin between activists and the non-politicised. As may be recalled from Chapter Six, fear of repression did not significantly relate to activists' political participation in reality. Participants outlined that real experience with, and confrontation of, authority is what counts when it comes to breaching the fear barrier. As for the non-politicised and less-experienced individuals, however, **H.B.** believes that the capability to mobilise collective action resides in lowering the cost of participation, or *lowering the ceiling of sacrifice*, in **H.B.**'s words, but not necessarily in creating a public status with which people can interact:

I disagree with **M.S.** about this idea of the public cause or status. I think that among most of the cases that had an impact on the Egyptian people was the war on Gaza. We saw convoys and many invitations were flagged on Facebook. But because the ceiling was still high and participation involved travelling, I believe that participation in the convoy was limited to political activists. An event as such is mainly counted for activists by a hundred percent.

H.B. believes that the high cost/risk of participating in Gaza's convoy outweighed the anger sentiments that the War on Gaza aroused. Furthermore, he thinks that threat frames could harm the level of participation rather than increasing it. For example, **H.B.** thinks that uploading the picture of Said's fractured face on Facebook might be perceived by the public as a negative signal of the consequences that participation could bring. It might be regarded as a form of increasing the cost of taking action and hence might demobilise people and hinder participation. **H.B.** engaged with **M.E.**'s views about uploading pictures of torture online as a mobilising frame:

There are two points of view: M.E., on the one hand, said that the images of torture and people getting arrested can urge other people to participate, even if they are not political activists. On the other hand, we can say that torture is also considered a form of the high ceiling that could make people feel threatened and hence refrain from participation. These two techniques [uploading images of torture and lowering the cost of participation] are just opposite to each other.

Showing images of torture has confronted people with a reality which they did not previously know about or, at least, of which they had no proof. This opportunity to enlighten public opinion might not have been possible without open access to and purposive use of SM. SM have enabled young activists to put individuals face-to-face with a reality beyond their immediate experience. However, some activists have argued that showing such shocking images might create constraints to action within the

external environment of the participants; as it might raise the perceived cost of participation and result in feelings of anxiety and fear developing. Yet most participants agree that such images may serve to formulate and promote the opposite frame. As people come to realise the imminent danger in their polity, they may perceive passivity and non-participation as being more costly than taking chances and becoming involved in contentious political actions in order to condemn violations of their rights. In the same light, it was found that a sense of shock often incentivises individuals to join collective action as they come to realise the regime's hatred and injustice. Such shocking feelings were found to encourage youth to question their cultural framework and not to take things for-granted (McAdam, 1986).

Presenting personalised thematic frames of protests through digital media was also found effective in aggregating larger and more diverse numbers of participants. Placing the average citizen at the centre of the proposed action helped to raise the strength of engagement (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). In the same way, it can be understood why protesters remained in Tahrir Square at the January 2011 events, even after the police has started to react brutally and to crack down on demonstrations, causing hundreds of deaths. They might have been shocked by the police brutality, which instigated more actions. They might also have realised that staying in the Square could maximise their gains, as the regime has already started to respond to some of their demands, whereas returning home would put their lives in danger as they became known to the regime. Although such choices might not seem rational in the ordinary sense of the word, in this case, rationality entails acquiring "the capacity to identify courses of action which would enable [agents] to maximise the realisation of their desires and weigh up the relative costs and benefits of a particular course of action" (Crossley, 2002, p. 58). Activists used the common threat frame as a rallying point and raised the iconic image of Said during the 18 day revolt that started on 25th January, 2011. Other frames then emerged in Tahrir Square; the most prominent of which was: bread, freedom and human dignity, and, in other forms: bread, freedom and social justice. These frames serve what Gamson calls an ideological "package" that can represent a variety of precise claims (Gamson, 1988). A variety of insurgents who engaged in the massive protests in Tahrir Square in 2011 have accommodated this "master" frame of common threat in their struggle for change against elites and opponents.

7.1.1.1.2. Social media convergence for cohesive framing of youth movement

As may be recalled from Chapter Five, young Egyptian activists believe that one of the deficits of using SM for mobilising collective action relates to the way individuals use SM, or what participants called *SM culture*, which stems from the non-centralised organisation of the Internet, and which may create organisational problems for the youth movement at the *online* structural level. The fluidity of the online space allows users to create their own groups and construct their own messages, which may result in crowded and distorted messages and hence obscures the meanings of these messages, deviating from the achievement of the goals for which these messages were constructed in the first place. This fluidity of the new media environment was argued to help activists bypass traditional information gatekeepers and authoritative élites (Carpini, 2000), and so contributes to shaping and highlighting sentiments in collective action. Consistent with the participants' perceptions, meaning construction unconstrained by gatekeepers also introduces the risk of 'information overload' (Garrett, 2006, p. 215), and might contribute to what Snow et al. (1986, p. 478) have called 'frame clouding' (cited in le Grignou & Patou, 2004, p. 172) by distorting the thematic construction of the movement and obscuring its visibility.

However, young activists think that they might be able to overcome the problem of framing their movement through using SM, by utilising media leverage combining several communicative cues on one platform, or what is usually labelled 'media convergence' (Jenkins, 2005). Structural changes in the new media environment have also made "the integration of telecommunications, data communications and mass communications in a single medium," or *the process of convergence* (van Dijk, 1999, p. 9) possible. Participants agree that using SM as a hub for integrated communication media enables them better reaching cognitive consensus as a prerequisite for mobilisation. In **SO.**'s words:

By doing so [converging social media affordances on one platform], we would be able to create a desirable status that could encompass a larger number of youth and incentivise them to participate. These platforms should then work in concert with each other.

According to van Dijk (1999, p. 9), the integration trait of 'multimedia' can occur on several levels (infrastructure, transportation, management, services, and types of data). Participants typically believe that combining information and communication

services on the Internet (services level), and putting together sounds, data, text and images (types of data level) helps activists to better compose and share their socially constructed ideas of collective action. “Media extend the availability of information across time and space, making it visible to new observers in new contexts convergent media make the invisible visible” (Meikle & Young, 2012, p. 129). Several representative examples demonstrate how SM have benefitted the young activists in using so many communicative cues to make their cause more convincing to the less engaged others:

RA.: I think convergence is very good. Users can watch a video from YouTube on Facebook. So we use different media together to convincingly address our targetted audience.

I.B.: A movement can create a group on Facebook as a means of publicity. Twitter, on the other hand, is beneficial in transmitting breaking news from the scene. It is very good for headlines and news alerts. In 2005, we could post on Twitter and then our posts were being sent as SMS messages to our followers.

M.S.: There is also ‘Blogger’. It is a site for blogs hosted by Google. It allows us to upload articles, accompanied by photos and videos as well.

H.B.: Facebook allows me to integrate my blog as well as addressing more people Facebook combines more than one medium.

Similarly, della Porta and Mosca (2005) concluded from their study of the use of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) by the Movement for Global Justice that, at the cognitive level, the movement made wide use of the opportunities offered by the new media to create unmediated flows of communication with their constituency and with public opinion. However, choosing and constructing appealing frames does not necessarily suffice to mobilise collective action since young activists need to reach out to the wider public with their mobilising frames. della Porta and Mosca also noticed that although the Internet enables the production of alternative information and helps to spread information with important agenda-setting effects, the passage from micro- to mass-media is still problematic and social movement initiatives risk being lost in cyberspace (2005, p. 186).

7.1.1.1.3. Social media and frame dissemination

A case such as Khaled Said’s (and many others) was not expected to find its way onto the state-controlled mass media. In this particular case, using SM has helped the young

activists *counter-frame* the issue. They created drama and spectacle, passion and emotion, conflict and threat aspects (Rucht, 2004; Gitlin, 2003; Wolfsfeld, 1984; Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993) which, on the one hand, might link the wider publics to the issue and prompt emotional identification. On the other hand, it might force the issue onto the mass media agenda as a forcefully interesting case to cover. This relationship with traditional media may create a “multiplier effect” (Isherwood, 2008) and SM’s message could reach larger audiences. As Mathes and Pfetsch (1991, p. 33) put it, “the success of counter-issues of gaining coverage in the alternative press leads to a ‘spill-over effect:’ the issue spills like a wave from the alternative into the established media.” This frame amplification and bridging is, according to Snow et al. (1980), required for the adoption of mobilising structural forms, or ways of engaging in collective action (McCarthy, 1996).

Highlighting certain content, and directing individuals to selected messages, enables the young activists to trigger and orient attitudes and behaviours, such as selective exposure (Ball-Rokeach, 1998), newspaper readership (Loges & Ball-Rokeach, 1993), participation in public deliberation (De Boer & Velthuisen, 2001), political perceptions (Halpern, 1994), and voting decisions (Davies, 2009). Figure 7.2 draws on Scheufele’s (2000) overview of framing research to delineate how the young activists use SM to create their own frames in order to balance or refute the elites’ frames. Supported by the power of personal communication and the assistance of mainstream media, the young activists may manage to spread the word and stimulate certain issue characteristics amongst wider circles of audiences beyond the borders of the virtual sphere, thus addressing the problem highlighted by della Porta and Mosca (2005), mentioned in the previous section.

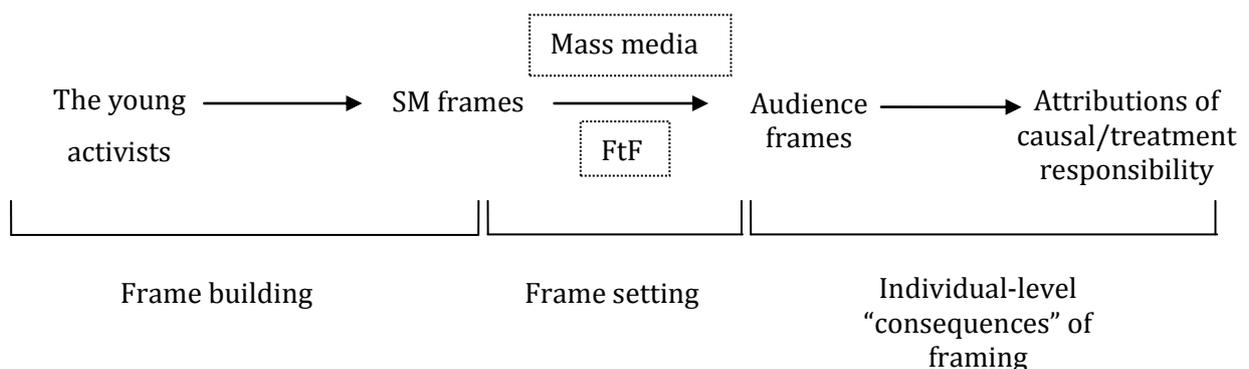


Figure 7.2: Social media’s perceived framing effect

Based on the assumption that “mass-mediated information in general is incomplete, slanted, or in other ways coloured by the intentions of the communicator” (Scheufele, 1999, p. 105), it could be said that young activists have been using SM to provide additional, if not alternative, sources of information for individuals’ active processing, so as not to render them prey to the partial representations of news media. SM also serve as a platform for reflective, yet not constructive, discussions about mass media content, which can lead to better comprehension of current events. Activists see a potential in addressing the non-politicised and less-experienced young citizens through SM in order to spread the word, expose the regime’s misconduct, and to construct and promote “a mentally stored cluster of ideas that guide individuals’ processing of information” (Entman, 1993, p. 53) and so raising the possibilities for their active participation. **MH**, for example, uses electronic media “to help [him] convince someone with [his] opinion and make him change his mind.” By doing so, the participants are not only concerned with drawing the public’s attention to certain issues and forcing them onto the national media agenda to widen the scale of attention, they also aim to select “some aspects of a perceived reality and make[ing] them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (Entman, 1993, p. 52).

As mentioned in Chapters Two and Five, the illiteracy and Internet penetration hurdles may hamper the marketability of the constructed frames. They can pose significant challenges to the young activists’ ability to reach out to mass audiences and acquire change merely through SM apparatuses and the Internet more broadly. To effectively and significantly spread the word, to amplify and bridge their constructed frames, the young activists seek to reach individuals, groups and institutions beyond cyberspace’s borders. They understand that, “if content had remained strictly on Facebook, its audience would have been limited to those who are members of certain groups, and would not likely have been disseminated in ways that proved pivotal to the media coverage” (Ghannam, 2011, p. 16). A concern is expected to shape or influence participants’ perceptions of SM’s potential to recruit supporters for youth movements, which is the main focus of the following section.

7.1.1.2. Social media networking and recruiting potential supporters

As shown through the regression analysis in Section (7.1.1), seeking to gratify young activists' need for networking via SM was positively related to engagement in political activities online ($\beta = 0.291, p < 0.01$). In the FGDs, participants discussed how they perceive SM's potential for reaching out for supporters and enlarging the size of their network as a prerequisite for mobilising collective action, which has been suggested in previous research (Shen, Wang, Guo, & Guo, 2009).

Activists need not only to choose mobilising structures and appealingly frame them as usable and appropriate to the social change tasks to which they will be put, but they also need to target supporters with these frames on both the internal – adherents and activists of the movement itself – as well as the external levels, including bystanders (or lurkers in the case of online users), opponents and authorities (McCarthy, 1996, p. 149).

A.Y. explained the mechanism of recruiting participants via SM for the National Movement for Change to support El-Baradei's nomination for presidency:

M.A.E. created the Facebook group 'El-Baradei for presidency of Egypt_ 2011' and invited me to join. I joined the group as one of the administrators. After El-Baradei announced his intention to join the presidential race in 2011, I started, through my personal website and the database I built, to promote the Facebook group. Consequently, the number of group members rose within two weeks to reach 20.000. Dr. El-Baradei was referring to *the members of the Facebook group as the number of his supporters, stressing the link between the Facebook group and the mobilising campaign* (emphasis added).

MH., explained how SM have benefitted young activists in addressing the less-politicised public and recruiting potential participants into their movement in order to exceed the activists' limit of participation:

In authoritarian regimes, aggregating efforts, by their nature, do not exceed the margin of activists and politicised youth, thus social networking sites could be considered the only pathway we, the activists, can take to reach sizable numbers of non-politicised youth. Discussing political issues through these websites may help incentivise youth to support [certain] issues.

It has been argued that structural factors take on more importance than psychological ones as determinants of individuals' tendencies to engage in collective action, especially when it comes to taking part in low-risk forms of activism (McAdam, 1986). Participation in high risk/high cost activities, however, is argued to be more dependent

on higher levels of ideological commitment (McAdam, 1986). However, this level of commitment may be developed through engagement in low-risk/low cost activities where individuals can build up their competences and acquire the identity of an activist (Crossley, 2002). McAdam notes that an agent's acquired disposition towards politics may be adapted by means of participation in political activities:

First, through his friends, he will almost surely meet activists whom he did not know previously, thus broadening his range of movement contacts and increasing his vulnerability to future recruiting appeals. Second, in talking with others at the rally and listening to the scheduled speakers, our budding activist may well develop a better and more sympathetic understanding of the movement. Finally, the behavioural norms of the rally may encourage the recruit to 'play at' being an activist for the duration of the event (McAdam, 1986, p. 70).

The young activists think that SM could be a well-trodden, structural path to activism. They are valuable platforms for meeting non-politicised individuals, discussing politics, conveying views and raising possibilities for future recruitment. SM has benefitted them in constructing communities of supporters and prospective participants. As the less-politicised become more acquainted with the participatory process, they may acquire the behavioral norms necessary for the process of 'activist identity' development. **M.S.** mentioned how he and his colleagues have been working on the case of Khaled Said and recruiting people for three years, but it was not until individuals identified with the group and formed a shared status (ideological commitment) that significant forms of activities started to materialise on the ground:

The point is not that we spent three years working on Khaled Said and did not achieve the same accumulation of youth who participated actually, from online to off-line. But from my point of view there was no stimulating and real case to make these youths participate. There was no real status to embrace them all.

Although socialisation in Egypt might not be supportive of active involvement in politics, and the suppressive environment might be demobilising (as discussed in Chapter Two), creating networks of potential participants still seems to young activists to be efficient in overcoming or diluting such psychological demeanors of political participation for a margin of the online population of the Egyptian polity. The young activists have managed to mobilise low-cost, less threatening collective activities. SM has been efficient in generating a structural basis for the youth movement. Through SM, the young activists have been able to recruit networks of non-politicised individuals who may, in due course, develop the ideological commitment that is essential for becoming

involved in high-risk activities. **MA.** stressed the importance of the networks for mobilising sizable effective actions:

I believe that large numbers of activists, their strength and the impact they can have on the Egyptian polity relies on their relationships to a large number of youth via social networks. Without these networks, the number would not be as large or have the same strength or impact.

Young activists believe that SM give them an opportunity to circumvent the tight control imposed by the regime, to link to non-politicised citizens and to mobilise support for their cause. Although they believe that streets and confrontation with authorities are where, and what, breaks their reported feelings of fear of repression at the practice level of collective action, as shown in Chapter Six, SM has benefitted them at the organisational level. **M.S.** typically remarked:

Social networks in Egypt are almost the most important tool for mobilising the Egyptian public. In authoritarian societies, normal methods for mobilising people are limited to groups of activists and politically-interested youth, thus social networking sites may be considered the only pathway those activists can take to reach large numbers of non-politicised youth. Discussing political issues through these websites can help to incentivise youth to support certain political causes.

I.B. stressed the importance of realising the role of SM as platforms for discussion. He explained how minimising the levels of sacrifice and risk for the less-politicised citizens may be the pathway to mobilising people from outside the activists' zone:

I think that social networking sites, like Facebook, are tools for disseminating information and means for discussion among group members who actually know each other off-line. In order to use it to mobilise a mass group that exceeds the activists and people who already know each other, then we have to lower the ceiling for our expectations. This is required at some point and may be useful.

It can be said, then, that the young Egyptian activists have composed closely-knit networks whose members have basically met off-line. Through active practice, they developed skills and a better understanding of the movement and eventually developed an 'activist' form of identity. Their relatively greater readiness to become involved in off-line and, indeed, high-cost activities, stems from and depends upon greater levels of ideological commitment than merely upon structural factors. The less- or non-politicised, on the other hand, are unorganised and loose-knit networks. These atomised individuals are targeted by the young activists, who normally aim to mobilise low-cost activities. Such activities are expected to appeal to the non-politicised more than

activities that might draw bad consequences and pose threats. Similarly to **M.S.'s** views, Opp and Gern (1993) have suggested that network formation is possible in authoritarian regimes through communicative exchanges:

Even in societies ruled by authoritarian regimes, politically homogeneous personal networks may develop. In everyday communication, subtle signals indicating a partner's political views may be exchanged. Reactions to such signals provide an impression of the partner's political attitudes. If the initial interactions convey similar political views, step-by-step communication may begin that results in the recognition of the partner's critical views and may result in the establishment of a personal relationship (p. 662).

These findings corroborates the assumption made in Chapter Three that SM have the potential to allow an opportunity for *online* safe activism that *might* lead to street participation. SM offer a low-risk and thus more appealing environment, where non-politicised citizens can gain participatory experience. It was demonstrated in Chapter Three that previous experience, along with affiliation to social movement organisations (SMO), is required for identification with social movement (della Porta & Mosca, 2005) that is crucial for practising collective action. However, experience alone seems not to be sufficient for collective action practice, especially at high-risk levels. Gaining experience at low-risk levels could eventually incentivise individuals to engage in more costly activities *only* if this practice can trigger a “cyclical process of integration and resocialisation” (McAdam, 1986, p. 69).

7.1.1.2.1. Social media and recruiting for low and high risk activism

SO. distinguishes between recruiting participants for low-risk and high-risk events. He highlighted another condition for recruiting participants in high-risk events:

The more you reduce sacrifices and responsibilities, the more participation you get. But if you demand more effort *participation will be triggered by personal influence.* (emphasis added).

SO. agrees with **I.B.** that participation on SNSs entails little responsibility and costs participants less than they might expect to bare if they engaged in off-line, and normally more risky, political activities. This makes **SO.** believe that personal connection and face-to-face communication is required to build mutual trust between participators in collective action. Scholarly views of the Internet as “a better medium for disseminating information and opinions than for building trust, developing coherence and resolving controversies” (Clark & Themudo, 2003, p. 114) support this finding. For

example, Vissers et al. have recently conducted an experimental study where participants were exposed to potentially mobilising information, either by way of face-to-face interaction or by website. The results indicate that web-based mobilisation only had a significant effect on online participation, whereas face-to-face mobilisation had a significant impact on off-line behaviour. The researchers concluded that mobilisation effects are “medium-specific” (Vissers, Hooghe, Stolle, & Mahéo, 2012).

Social movements seek either or both qualitative and/or quantitative impacts when they target their potential audience. Some social movement groups seek profound impact on a limited number of people instead of more superficial impact on large groups or the ‘masses.’ Others are more interested in attracting public attention and support and see this as a key means to impress and influence policy makers. In the former case, Rucht (2004) argues, face-to-face communication is more beneficial in achieving quality mobilisation of more committed supporters, while for the latter goal, mass media, such as newspapers, radio, television and the World Wide Web are crucial for wider diffusion of movements. However, in some cases when personal change is a primary goal, Rucht continues, “the mass media may become a central reference point in so far as a relatively small impact on many people, in its aggregate effect, may dwarf an intensive impact on just a few individuals” (p. 32).

This suggests that SM are beneficial in reaching out for large audiences, but only small numbers of these audiences would be available for costly involvements, due to trust and commitment issues. Figure 7.3 summarises young activists’ perceptions of SM’s potential for reaching out for constituency. It represents how they seek to address the mass public through a combination of direct experience, primary sources of information and new media tools, with respect to their limited ability to reach the masses solely through SM.

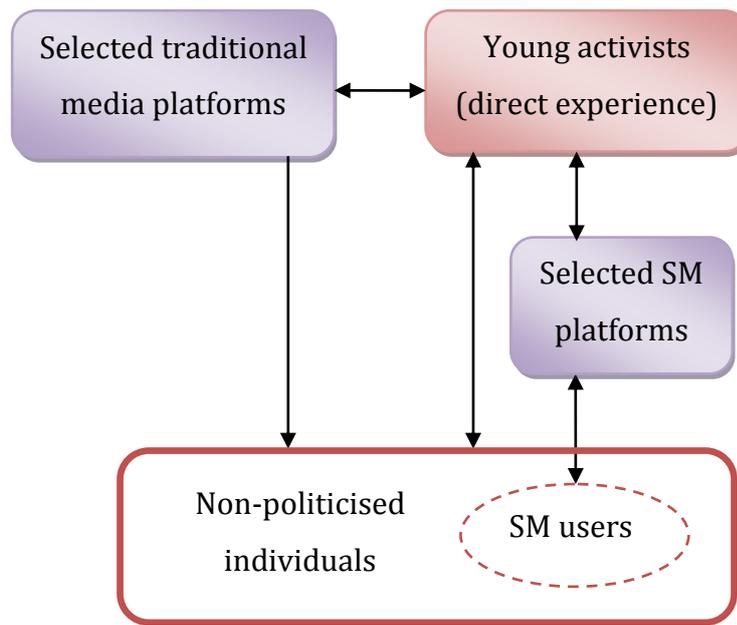


Figure 7.3: Recruiting potential supporters through social media

A.Y. corroborated this suggestion:

The social media experience is a matter of proportion between numbers of people in the virtual reality and those who take to the streets. I noticed that on my personal web site and in the national campaign to support El-Baradei's nomination for presidency as well ... There was a reasonable level of mobilisation behind the 'change' project and this was the real challenge. If the 'change movements' succeeded in promoting this project among Egyptians, it would create a *quantitative and a qualitative critical mass* which could lead to *real change on the ground* without the need for international support or undesirable balances of power (emphasis added).

As individuals gain experience in the low-risk, online environment these fragmented online networks of supporters might eventually become more tightly-knit, giving a path to the movement's growth. Participants, however, think that this development could not happen in the virtual sphere. Participants thus believe that both parameters of participation in low and high risk collective events are needed to recruit supporters online and mobilise participation off-line. As discussed in Chapter Six, and corroborated thus far, participants believe that 'lowering the ceiling of sacrifice' (or lowering the risk) can encourage more people to join and reduce the numbers of free riders. They believe that personal contact and trust building is crucial for upgrading activism from the virtual sphere to reality, even at such low-risk events. This view supports McAdams' on the importance of personal connection with activists, mainly for recruitment to low-risk

and cost-free forms of activism. McAdam (1986) assumes that withdrawal from taking part in collective action, although individuals are attitudinally available for participation (belong to a latitude of acceptance), may be due to the lack of prior contact with a recruiting agent who might have highlighted the significant social costs of non-participation to potential participants. Participants' views about exceeding online recruitment and low-risk participation to off-line and more risky activism (or activating the online latitude of acceptance to produce off-line participation) also confirm McAdam's argument about recruitment for high-risk events. As may be recalled from Chapter Five, participants have implicitly stressed the importance of identification with social movement through actual practice. They, in **A.A.'s** words, believe that practising '*virtual political activism*' stems from the political immaturity of ordinary Egyptians and, for this role to be real, people need to *play the role properly* on the streets, which may gradually develop from taking part in less-costly activities. As McAdam wrote, "each succeeding foray into safe forms of activism increases the recruit's network integration, ideological affinity with the movement, and commitment to an activist identity, as well as his receptivity to more costly forms of participation" (McAdam, 1986, p. 70).

7.1.2. Instrumental uses of social media, young activists' political dispositions and mediating a bridge to off-line collective action

To this point, the qualitative findings have been supported by quantitative data from the questionnaire, which were discussed in Chapter Six:

- ***Fear of repression:*** Reported feelings of fear of repression significantly and positively related to certain forms of SM use. These correlations, however, do not suggest that fear of repression can hinder young activists' political activism. As delineated in Section 7.1.1 by the regression analysis, certain uses of SM (surveillance and networking), but not others (guidance, social utility, entertainment and convenience), are positively associated with online political participation. These uses that feed into young activists' online activism did not correlate with fear of repression. Young activists' reported feelings of fear did not influence the uses of SM that significantly correlated to their online activism. Instead, fear of repression positively correlated with SM uses that were found to be irrelevant to participants' online activism. As may be recalled from Chapter Six, only using SM for social utility, entertainment and

convenience reasons significantly correlated with reported feelings of fear of repression (see Table 6.1 and Figure 6.1). This finding, on one hand, stresses the importance of looking at the influence of certain media uses, rather than of measuring the impact of time spent with media (Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001; Norris & Jones, 1998). On the other hand, it supports participants' views about the importance of off-line activism and confrontation with authorities for combating fear of repression. In other words, young activists who fear confrontation with authorities tend to use SM for habitual, rather than instrumental uses, that do not entail exerting effort and are not necessarily directed at achieving certain goals (Ruggiero, 2000), and thus they do not feed into their online activism.

In his study of the features of collective action in the Middle East, Diani (2008) found that high levels of repression increase the cost of going public and, hence, discourage political activism in general, and specifically pose challenges on forms of action based on associations, coalitions, and movements. Diani argues that such actions require public discourse and public communication, which nominates SM as an efficient alternative means through which individuals can circumvent authority repression and the composing of communities and coalitions for political action becomes more possible.

Additionally, as participants gain experience and feel more capable of becoming involved through low-cost practices, they may be more courageous in going off-line. This is corroborated by the significant correlation (discussed in Chapter Six) between political efficacy and the most frequently reported uses of SM (guidance, $r = 0.119$, $p > 0.05$ and surveillance, $r = 0.111$, $p > 0.05$). It can be said, then, that using SM may be a beneficial tool for mobilising off-line political practices through allowing individuals a platform for practising low-cost activism, gaining experience and developing an activist identity. This preparation process might eventually raise the level of commitment among these loose communities and encourage individuals to become involved in off-line activism. **A.Y.** highlighted the importance of the online preparatory stage of training and practice for mobilising activism that is more demanding and, indeed, more effective than actions practised in the virtual sphere:

Success or failure depends on the capability to create practical programmes that may urge people to move from behind their computer screens to practical reality. In the preliminary stages of the campaign [to support El-Baradei], great success was accomplished in this regard.

▪ **Political efficacy:** Interestingly, feelings of political efficacy related positively to surveillance, but not to networking, as delineated in Chapter Six (see Table 6.4 and Figure 6.1). This does not necessarily suggest that political efficacy may consequently negatively influence online activism. Rather, it may be that, for the surveillance correlate, on the one hand, gathering and disseminating certain information in precise timing, with a specific structure, in order to convey a certain message to potential supporters, entails possessing certain competences. The process of the social construction of a movement and the building of frames with which individuals can identify and interact, requires a degree of political efficacy, as well as Internet efficacy (Rucht, 2004) that is not necessarily needed for networking. Conversely, practising such a duo role, as media users/producers, will also fertilise young activists' feelings of empowerment and agency.

On the other hand, it could be that forming online political groups and contacting people and inviting them to take part in political events, do not necessarily require certain political and/or communicative competences. Networking may also not be perceived as having a direct influence on the political process, but rather as a necessary operational step towards aggregating supporters that may not relate to people's attitudes. This may explain the absence of a significant correlation between SM networking and young activists' perceived political efficacy. In fact, as may be recalled from Chapter Five, young activists believe that SM have made networking so easy, to the extent that could, in **M.S.**'s words, "eventually mar the credibility of the source and the medium." Similarly, van Laer and van Aelst (2010) argue that the Internet has made political action too easy in some cases, which limits the final impact of certain actions. Earlier, Lupia and Sin warned that "optimistic appraisals [of new communication technologies' potential for collective action] overlook the possibility that evolving technologies can make some collective endeavours harder to maintain or easier to destroy" (Lupia & Sin, 2003, p. 316). Moreover, networking is a non-informational form of SM use. Informational uses of the Internet were found to encourage discussions about political issues and hence to strengthen people's tendency to engage in political

activities (Nah, Veenstra, & Shah, 2006; Shah, Cho, Eveland, & Kwak, 2005). Most importantly, communicating anonymously may interrupt the connection between networking and political efficacy. Although anonymity benefits activists, especially in authoritarian contexts, it may pose difficulties for the networking function of SM, as it may hamper trust building amongst online communities and hinder communicative exchanges, which, in turn, may not lead to the development of a sense of political efficacy. **I.B.** typically articulates this view:

[People's preference to communicate with a real person, not with a nickname] compels me to put my real name, because I need to communicate off-line with people who join the group and not to limit the interaction to the Internet. If I meet these people in real life, I will tell them that my name is **I.Z.**; the same name and person on Facebook. This grants me more credibility.

Moreover, it has been argued that the "Internet is a better medium for disseminating information and opinions than for building trust, developing coherence and resolving controversies" (Clark & Themudo, 2003, p. 114). Last, but not least, the absence of a positive correlation between political efficacy and the networking uses of SM may be due to low levels of (inter)activity that such uses involve when compared to informational uses of SM, which entail receiving, creating, sending and/or commenting on messages. Such high levels of activity in media use were argued to have the potential to develop a sense of political efficacy, due to the effort, time, and resources that active use of media necessitates (Bandura, 1986).

To explore these conclusions further, I begin the following section by examining whether on- and off-line activism correlate significantly, and how introducing young activists' political dispositions (reported feelings of fear of repression and political efficacy) might influence this correlation (if they do).

7.1.3. Social media's perceived contribution to mobilising off-line collective action

As revealed in Section 6.1, in the last chapter, and discussed hitherto, feelings of fear were not found to influence goal-directed (or instrumental) media uses, which mainly correlate to activists' online activism. Rather, it correlated to media functions that are mainly habitual. Additionally, feelings of political efficacy were associated positively with informational uses of SM, which suggests that such positive self-perceptions may bolster young activists' tendency to practise politics on- and off-line.

To test these assumptions, correlation between reported political practices on- and off-line was first tested through answering the following question:

Does using social media for instrumental purposes relate to young activists' tendency to practise politics off-line? And if so, in what ways?

Data from the questionnaire show that practising politics on SM was constantly related to engaging in political activities off-line ($r = .601, p < 0.01$). Young activists who practise political activities on social networking sites (SNSs) are more inclined to practise politics off-line. The same correlation was then examined after introducing political dispositions (fear and efficacy) as mediating variables. Results from partial correlation show that the association between on- and off-line activism was persistent, even when mediated by fear of repression ($r = .576, p < 0.01$), which was expected to detach SM users from bridging their online activism to the off-line arena, where they may face several forms of repression and harassment. The correlation also held true when mediated by political efficacy ($r = .561, p < 0.01$). Young activists who practise politics online tend to utilise their competences in off-line activism, even if they have security concerns. Similarly, it has been argued that opinion expression in one scenario is positively related to expression in other scenarios, and expressing opinion online will increase the possibilities of expressing it in reality (Liu & Fahmy, 2009). Figure 7.1 delineates how introducing fear and efficacy dispositions does not break the connection between on- and off-line activism.

7.1.3.1. Social media and the shaping of repertoires of collective action

The young activists also used SM to shape repertoires of contention. Through utilising SM apparatuses, they manage to identify “a limited set of routines that are learned, shared and acted out through a relatively deliberate process of choice” (Tilly, 1995, p. 26). Although Tilly’s definition of repertoires was criticised for constraining behaviour and choice (Crossley, 2002), defining what people should do while taking part in a protest gains special importance in repressive regimes, where authorities are expected to crack down vigorously on any form of contentious political practice. Taking context into careful account when defining repertoires of protest finds support in one of Tilly’s hypotheses for repertoires, as he suggests that “the prior history of contention [in a given geographical/social arena] constrains the choices of action currently

available, in partial independence of the identities and interests that participants bring to the action” (Tilly, 1995, p. 29).

Participants discussed how they had used SM to convey practical repertoires of protest and to share technical information about the know-how to become involved in specific events that they instigate. Mostly, the events that the young activists had been mobilising for were of a less threatening and low-risk nature. This, as mentioned above, is crucial in making such events more appealing to non-politicised individuals, who have not yet developed an activist identity, and who might not have the skills needed to practise more costly repertoires of activism. **A.Y.** explained how political activism transfers from Facebook pages to reality through online tools of mobilisation:

We realised that the Internet presence is virtual and that *we should identify and approach those who are willing to participate on the ground*. So we provided an e-mail address to interact with those who wanted to volunteer for the campaign and participate in organising the welcoming of El-Baradei upon his arrival at the airport on February 19, 2010. We aggregated the first 300 volunteers in the national campaign (emphasis added).

Young activists use the mailing lists’ repertoire to network for the political event mentioned. However, it should be stressed that, first, the aforementioned correlation mainly tests activists’ perceptions of their attitudes and practices, rather than the non-politicised individuals’. Second, the event **A.Y.** mentioned is a low-risk event that might have appealed to non-politicised citizens due to the low levels of sacrifice that participation involved, which explains the high levels of participation.

It has been argued that Web technologies are opening up new spaces of participation where rich, compelling, and sustainable social settings are nourished (Skoric, Ying, & Ng, 2009; Scott & Johnson, 2005). However, there is also an agreement that “the Internet lags far behind” when it comes to reaching publics en masse domestically (Hofheins, 2005). It could be said, then, that in order to make feasible changes and claim rights, as **A.A.** typically remarked, people need to be active in reality. They need to put real pressure on the regime to make their voices heard and to achieve their aspirations. An explanation of what **A.A.** meant by *proper practice*, as compared to SM activism, could be found in the status Hossam El-hamalawy, a prominent Egyptian journalist, blogger, photographer and social activist, posted on his page on Facebook on 10th August 2013,

outlining the affordances of SM and comparing and contrasting online and off-line activism. As El-Hamalawy says:

The Internet opens new, unprecedented horizons for political propaganda for any party or movement. You can express your position in a statement on Facebook and connect to millions of people. The media can also pick that statement up and broadcast it to the broader audience beyond your actual circle. This is very good, and we should benefit from every possible chance to make our voices heard. But the problem is that some have completely abandoned the self-evident: that printed leaflets should also be hand-distributed in the streets. This gives you a real opportunity to test your ideas and attitudes in direct discussions Posting comments on Facebook is not sufficient for reflecting the real mood of the public I mean, how would youth get used to debating politics, building attitudes and working in the streets? Is it through interacting with Facebook comments, or via engaging in political debate with real people on the ground? Relying solely on the Internet as a means of information dissemination and ignoring distribution on the ground leads inevitably to falling into the trap of using the language of the "abstract", rather than the "concrete", in political discourse, and this is the most dangerous thing in my view (El-Hamalawy, 2013).

This suggests that the SM environment could be beneficial in the initial steps of constructing communities of potential participants, where individuals can meet activists through their friends. SM spheres, however, might not be sufficient to develop a psychological bond between members of these communities, which are crucial for incentivising and sustaining higher-risk forms of activism that are basically practised off-line. However, before moving to explore young activists' perceptions of SM's potential for mobilising off-line collective action, it is useful to look at how participants' political dispositions influence (if they do) their tendency to engage in online activism, and, hence, how young activists' dispositions might mediate between their on- and off-line activism.

Participants seem not to be satisfied with the role that SM have been playing in making off-line collective action feasible in terms of the size of mobilisation that these media can instigate (see Table 5.3 for young activists' distribution by SM satisfaction). Although people join political groups on SM platforms and meet like-minded individuals, the numbers that actually take to the street are proportionately lower than the numbers of the members of online political groups. Additionally, the fluid structure of the Internet makes it harder for activists to estimate the numbers of movement supporters and, accordingly, to predict the degree of success (or failure) that their movement may achieve. As Dahlgren writes, "given the fluid character of many net-based movements, and the ease of joining and withdrawing, it is really difficult to estimate

what proportion of the citizenry is actually involved” (Dahlgren, 2004, p. xiii). **SO.**, for example, expressed a typical concern about losing supporters when individuals have to cross the virtual arena to reality, where action becomes more demanding:

A very limited percentage moves from online to off-line. If a thousand individuals indicate that they will attend an event, and if we subtracted political activists, then only 2 or 3 ordinary people would actually attend. I might also be exaggerating if I say 2 or 3. I think there is no connection.

SO. ascribes what could be termed *situational dissonance* between the virtual and the real spheres to what he calls the ‘*negative hostility*’ of the Egyptian people:

The Egyptian people are *negative hostile personalities*; they resent the regime but they are passive ... Facebook makes this passiveness easier. It is easier to say: I am against the regime, but I am still passive in reality. *It is just a means for catharsis not for action* (emphasis added).

Although people have grievances and may aspire to change, they still do not act to claim their rights and change their situation. Walsh and Warland (1983) asked a sample of activists about the reasons for the reported high percentage of free riders amongst those who were essentially in agreement with their local social movement organisation’s goals (98 percent). They ascribed *situational dissonance* mainly to ‘political powerlessness.’ Similarly, negativity, in **SO.’s** perception, is what makes ordinary Egyptian people refrain from taking active action to confront the regime, although they resent it and disagree with its policies. **SO.** thus believes that the realm of confrontation is limited to activists who are ready to express their grievances and vocalise their anger off-line. It was found that Internet users in authoritarian contexts were more inclined to practise politics online compared to non-Internet users, but their activities in the private sphere did not have a significant impact on their off-line participation. This has been ascribed, among other reasons, to limitations related to the repressive context and limited opportunities allowed for real world participation in oppressive and less developed societies (Skoric, Ying, & Ng, 2009). **SO.** stressed the same point in the previous extract. He believes that Facebook allows individuals a platform from which to vent their anger. It may thus result in deluding them and making them think that they are actively involved in politics, while all they are actually doing is merely an act of catharsis. Taking into account the argument that “the virtual space is not a sphere of its own [rather], it is to some extent a social representation of the real world,” (Neumayer & Raffl, 2008) it was not expected that such online

negativity would result positively in effective political participation off-line in terms of the size and scale of activism.

Events that Egypt witnessed in the last decade also support the findings discussed hitherto. During the last few years, manifestations of political engagement have been evident in Egypt. They were crowned by the revolt of January 25th that led to the ousting of former President Mubarak. It may be recalled from Chapter Three that during the period 1998 to 2004, Egypt witnessed 1,000 social protests, with a 200 percent increase in the protest rate from 2003 alone (Ottaway & Hamzawy, 2011). The eagerness to show discontent and claim political and socio-economic reforms was reflected in an unprecedented number of oppositional demonstrations, rallies and the formation of non-violent dissident groups which Egypt witnessed in 2004-2005 (El-Mahdi, 2009, p. 1011). Most of these political activities were pursued in the locus of the private sphere and have been enabled, buttressed, or at least attached, to new media apparatus use. However, those demonstrations have failed to bring about the change for which they aspired, although they have rung some bells and drawn attention to the public's grievances. An explanation might be that these "tendencies are characterised by a variety of atomised action, taking place in a plurality of spaces that are both public and private. These tendencies are the property of a citizen leading a largely reflexive existence in order to actualise an identity that is fluid. The civic base of this identity is exercised via activity emanating from mostly a monitorial, rather than deliberative or proactive, standpoint" (Papacharissi, 2010, p. 131), or, in **SO.**'s words, '*negative hostility.*' However, this ideological fluidity is argued to be solidified with practice, as McAdam (1986, p. 70) suggests (discussed in Section 7.1.1.2.1).

Practising politics and exercising mobilisation efforts on new media platforms comprises "privately contained activities with a public scope" (Papacharissi, 2010, p. 20). These activities, pursued in the private realm, serve as the "private preparation" of the independent individual for the public sphere (Dahlgren, 2009). Papacharissi (2010) explains that "it is from the mobile and connected enclosure of this networked cocoon of the private sphere that the individual directs atomised gestures of civic, social, cultural, economic, and multi-contextual natures to the rest of the world" (p. 21). These atomised gestures, however, might be sufficient for practising politics in Western democracies, but they are indisputably inadequate for practising collective activism and

bringing about democratic transformation in authoritarian regimes. In Egypt, sending online mobilising signals from young activists to popular civil society would be limited in scale due to cultural, social and technical hurdles, which suggests that activism in the online private cocoon cannot be sufficient on its own to enforce political change and bring about the desired political outcomes. Mobilisation should therefore take a convergent pathway to surmount these hurdles. Merging face-to-face communication with online activism is crucial for mobilising political participation in Egypt. In what he calls “augmented revolution,” Jurgenson (2012) has stressed the importance of bringing the advantages of digitality and physical space together. Fast-spread information and enhanced organisational capabilities would not alone make a revolution. Bringing the on- and off-line together is what gathers people en masse to press for change. **M.Da.** explained:

Social media are not sufficient in and of themselves. People should not use Facebook as an alternative to off-line participation. It should rather be used as a means to mobilise as many people as possible to go off-line. I think that collective actions that have succeeded recently, like the April 6th strike, started on Facebook, but the problem is to limit participation to the Internet arena.

As discussed earlier, opening an information gateway does not necessarily entitle the Internet to serve as a source of mobilisation that incentivises the performance of collective action. Active participation in a private sphere ‘shelter’ alone will not bring about political and social change. On the one hand, Gladwell (2010) argues that using SM for political participation will result in a ‘floppy’ form of engagement that has been termed “slacktivism”, whereby social change is pursued through low-cost practices, such as the mere activity of joining Facebook groups and ‘liking’ other people’s status, which, although it might be effective in showing and sharing feelings and dispositions, does not entitle any significant action. This monitorial tendency of media use may tune individuals to what I call the ‘*safe mode*’ of political practice, as they feel threatened in a stagnant political environment that has been ruled for decades by emergency laws, tightly controlled media platforms, and high rates of corruption and inflation, and they are burdened by cultural hurdles that render them alienated in their own societies (Sayed, 2011). Although they might thus have “the potential for activity, they spend most of the time in the suspended inactivity of monitoring, typically practised from a private sphere” (Papacharissi, 2010, p. 103).

On the other hand, Shirky, while he agrees with this critique, states that SM's effectiveness relates to actors' level of commitment and their readiness to take their activism outside the 'safe zone' (Shirky, 2011). **A.A.** explains:

The street is the real arena for taking action and making change feasible. We can utilise technological sources to acquire political news, but we should not turn that information into controversy and limit political activism to Facebook pages. What we should do is to aggregate people and take to the streets.

Additionally, the potential of SM as mobilising tools is defined by their ability to empower, which could be marred by notions related to the digital gap (Papacharissi, 2010). Low access levels, high illiteracy, and male domination may render audience members unequally privileged in benefitting from the opportunities allowed by new media. **H.B.** and **SO.** discussed two different viewpoints on how SM could help reaching out to such unprivileged publics through practising what could be termed a '*multi-step flow of mobilisation:*'

H.B.: I think the role [of SM] is limited when compared to the aspired change. I believe that the critical mass we need resides in labour blocks and trade unions and those are unreachable through Facebook, which is limited to youth. For example, I do not expect a labour leader to have a Facebook account. Hence, the role that Facebook can play is secondary in relation to the 'size' of the aspired change. *To 'change' means to reach ordinary people not only young citizens through their Facebook accounts* (emphasis added).

SO.: I slightly disagree with that point of view. The categories that Hassan mentioned are not all above 40. Labours and peasants also include youth and they use Facebook. They can spread the word to their fellow colleagues, who might not have access to the Internet. Even if Facebook and other networks are limited or more heavily used by youth, this means that we need more users than the number we currently have in order to reach all peasants and labourers in syndicates. *Facebook and the like could be the first ring in the mobilisation chain* (emphasis added).

H.B. commented: but the rate of Internet access is low in Egypt, which adds to the problem and limits the potential of social media for mass mobilisation.

Bennett (2003b) has come to a similar explanation of the suggested 'multi-step flow of mobilisation.' He argues that "the co-ordination of activities over networks with many nodes and numerous connecting points, or hubs, enables network organisation to be maintained even if particular nodes and hubs die, change their mission, or move out of the network" (Bennett, 2003b, p. 20). In their discussion of *the logic of connective action*, Bennett and Segerberg imply that the technology-enabled networks of personalised communication may play an important role in originating large-scale

action. It could be inferred from the following extract that social networking media constitute a first stage in a multi-step process of communication flow that will eventually lead to the off-line sphere if people wish to achieve feasible change on the ground. As Bennett and Segerberg (2012) continue:

In place of the initial collective action problem of getting the individual to contribute, *the starting point of connective action* is the self-motivated (though not necessarily self-centered) sharing of already internalized or personalized ideas, plans, images, and resources with networks of others. This 'sharing' may take place in networking sites such as Facebook, or via more public media such as Twitter and YouTube through, for example, comments and re-tweets. Action networks characterized by this logic may scale up rapidly through the combination of easily spreadable personal action frames and digital technology enabling such communication (p. 753) (emphasis added).

Along the same lines, Jensen (2009) suggests an extended form of Lazarsfeld et al.'s (1944) two-step flow of communication that adds the 'many-to-many' to the traditional one-to-one and one-to-many patterns of information flow. Jensen argues that, through the 'networked media,' news and opinion flow from news organisations to opinion leaders, and then to the public, in a three-step flow model. The public, according to Papacharissi (2010), fit in the second and the third places of this flow equation; as they "possess opinion-leading privileges which allow them to function as consumers and modifiers of news content" (p. 153).

7.1.3.2. Social media mobilisation against a backdrop of the 25th January 2011 revolt

During the events that commenced on 25th January 2011 in Egypt, manifestations of a convergent modular model of communicative mobilisation were evident. For example, Zhuo, Wellman, and Yu (2011) discussed the important role that SM played in enlarging the spiral of activism by 'expanding the traditional word of mouth to inform a range of people broader than kinship and friendship networks' (p. 7). This modality of multi-step/space of communication could have helped the young activists circumvent the hindrances of high illiteracy rates and low levels of access to technology, as well as the technology self-efficacy that could limit SM's ability to afford the people the power needed for change. They discuss how mixing new and traditional communication forms (online to off-line interactions) could further expand their mobilising efforts and invite new cohorts of citizens to real world participation. These convergent mechanisms might suggest that practising mobilising efforts online, has become fruitful in aggregating

a critical mass only when supported by a hybrid of communication modalities and mobilising tactics that correspond to the cultural and social milieu in Egypt, or as **M.M.** put it:

Facebook and these tools can be the first episode in a cyclical process to reach out to [a large] number [of participants].

Firstly, the time: Activists chose to take to streets on 25th January 2011 (The Police Day) to link their protests with the well-known cause of Kaled Said, and the frame they had been constructing for several years. They used police brutality as a rallying point. Mass demonstrations also reached the peak of accumulated grievances that were marked by the critical date of the fraudulent parliamentary elections of November 2010; as young Egyptian activists hoped that the rigged ballot would incentivise a mass movement around Iran's post-election protests (Ishani, 2011). *Secondly*, the significance of the place: Tahrir Square, which activists chose as a public sphere, inspired “a re-interpretation of how people socially relate to space, time, and each other” (Papacharissi, 2010, p. 4). Mohamed Dawoud (2011) explains how space can be significant to practice. He argues that the incidents that the Delta city of Mahalla witnessed on the 6th of April 2008 could have turned into a 25th January had they happened in Cairo,

I believe that if it was meant for the 2008 incidents to spread outside Mahalla all over Egypt, we would have witnessed the revolution in April 2008, rather than in January 2011. Nevertheless, these demonstrations were a precursor to the January revolution. I believe that this ground swelling level of demonstrations did not happen in Mahalla because it stood alone and, hence, it was much easier for security forces in Mahalla and other neighbouring governorates to circumvent the demonstrations and arrest the demonstrators, who were put in jail on several charges, like rioting and destruction of public property. I think what made the difference on 25th January relates to the significance of the place. Cairo is a compelling center. The centralisation of everything in Cairo reflects the authoritarian spirit of successive former regimes in Egypt. The head of the regime controls all the authorities, which was mirrored demographically and economically in Cairo city. Gamal Hemdan has acutely portrayed this relationship by calling Cairo ‘a sweeping head on a crippled body’ (Dawoud, 2011).

Thirdly, bonding the private with the public sphere: In the off-line public realm, and more evident in Tahrir Square, activists expanded their political action outside the electronic private sphere and connected to their fellow citizens. They gained what Arendt (1973) called the ‘in-between’ bond (cited in Dahlgren, 2009). Modes of culture-based social connectivity were enacted in the Square, which, on the one hand,

accumulated a sense of unity, and sent, on the other, a strong message to the authorities by frustrating their malicious attempts to implant ideology-based discrimination among the public (i.e., attempts to instigate sectarian cleavages between Muslim and Christian Egyptians). Interestingly, they cut off the Internet only three days after the mass took to the streets (DailyRecord.co.uk, 2011) and this may have allowed room for trust-based networking mechanisms to flourish through face-to-face communication, which the Internet was blamed for undermining, since it joined the mainstream more than a decade ago (Kraut et al., 1998; Zhang, Johnson, Seltzer, & Bichard, 2010). This bond has also expanded across borders, but thanks to SM and ICTs this time. SM and ICTs were a panacea for connectivity problems caused by the Internet shut down. The regime's attempt to curb the mass turnout of anti-government demonstrators was counteracted by launching the "speak-to-tweet" initiative for protesters, to enable them to send 'tweets' using a voice connection. Anyone could tweet by leaving a voicemail on certain phone numbers and no Internet connection was required. Users could also dial the same numbers to listen to the recorded tweets. This hybrid technological solution enabled what Castells called "flash mobilisation" (Castells, Fernández-Ardèvol, Linchuan, & Sey, 2007, p. 200) to give voice to Egyptians' discontent with the regime.

Protesters have also managed to create what might be termed the 'Friday theme.' They staged a series of massive protests, the largest of which were held on Fridays. Each Friday was flagged by a certain demand to clarify people's reaction to the regime, and/or to announce the next step in the uprisings (i.e., Friday of rage, Friday of departure, and Friday of cleanliness, etc.). Building on Ottaway and Hamzawy's (2011) protest movement assessment in the Arab region, it can be said that this theme helped protesters to conduct a number of connected episodes, which built on each other to provide a form of organisation for a cohesive movement. Moreover, performing the *Jom'aa* prayer together in Tahrir Square on Fridays constructively helped to bridge the stratifying gaps of class and ideology and to convey a solidifying image of toleration and civilisation across the globe. This collective prayer is normally preceded by a public speech (*khotba*), which played a significant role in addressing the people and gave a regular momentum to the demonstrations. In the same light, Sreberny (2001) discussed how cassette tapes comprised a 'suitable' form of communication distribution among Iranians in the context of the Iranian revolution of 1979. She argues that

in a cultural environment that favors oral communication, and with an illiteracy rate of 65 percent of the population, this form of “small media” was an appropriate channel for public agitation. Borrowing Putnam’s (2000) metaphor, it could be said that the young activists are *bowling online and snowballing off-line* (Sayed, 2011) as their movement gains momentum and enlarges in size and scale.

In the light of the above, and given the specifications of the cultural milieu and political context in Egypt, it could be argued that SM have been enabling the young activists to urge citizens to take their first steps on the participatory ladder, but “it is probably unwise to say that the Internet and mobile phones have caused a single democratic revolution. Nevertheless, having an active online civil society [could be] a key ingredient of the causal recipe for democratisation” (Howard, 2010, p. 155).

To summarise, when looking at the potential of SM for supporting collective action one needs to avoid technological determinism by integrating media into their context and dealing with them as a ‘capacity’ rather than as an ‘overhead tool’ (Hands, 2011). Commenting on the massive protests that erupted in Tunisia in late 2010, Hands stresses the importance of evaluating SM’s attributes and contributions with respect to the wider spectrum of the social specificities of a given society. These views also intersect with and corroborate suggestions made by U&G scholars about the significance of embedding the study of media characteristics into the broader communication contexts of their selection and use (Flanagin & Metzger, 2001). As Hands (2011) writes:

A tool implies an object or technique used to directly leverage an outcome, and thought of in this way Twitter’s impact can be judged on some kind of scale to be argued over—and from here scepticism can easily spring. Yet the ‘virtual’ and the ‘real’ are no more separable than ‘mind’ and ‘body’. Twitter, social media or the Internet as a whole, can’t be isolated as the cause, or not, of anything, because they are part of the fabric of social life and the terrain of struggle.

7.2. Conclusion

This chapter aimed to answer the third research question, which centres on the perceived role of SM in creating opportunities for mobilising collective political activism off-line. As revealed through the analysis, young Egyptian activists have been utilising SM to circumvent hurdles in their polity. They aimed to create opportunities that might help them to gain the public support needed to agitate collective action and to achieve the political outcomes for which they aspire. In this regard, SM have benefitted the

young activists in several ways. Firstly, they managed to use SM to build and disseminate a unique frame of their movement that would not have otherwise found its way to the national media. Through SM platforms they have managed to make certain issues visible to the public and put them face-to-face with their grievances. They believe that shocking the public with such grievances is crucial for mobilising them to face the imminent dangers in their polity. Secondly, the young Egyptian activists have been using SM to structure and propagate their movement. They have managed to build loose-knit networks of non-politicised supporters and potential activists. Through discussion of political issues on SM platforms and by mobilising low-cost and less risky activities, these supporters may eventually develop their competences and acquire an activist identity and hence become more inclined to take part in high-risk activities. Thirdly, is the potential of these networks to link to the off-line arena and aggregate a critical mass to achieve change on the ground. For this particular outcome to be achieved, as well as for the others, participants believe that SM are not sufficient in themselves to make feasible changes in the Egyptian polity. They demonstrated several forms of evidence about the deficits of SM in playing solo in mobilising sizable and diverse masses on the ground. On the one hand, the online space is not compatible with its off-line counterpart. SM are not media for the masses in Egypt. Access problems, illiteracy rates and technology efficiency are all hurdles to be jumped before reaching mass audiences solely through SM. On the other hand, being active on SM platforms could create an illusory feeling of being active. Such a feeling could limit actual participation on the ground, as online practitioners reckon themselves to be politically active in the online cocoon. The perceived political capacity of the medium could also contribute to holding such dispositions. For example, Shen et al. (2009) ascribed the limited political effects of the Internet in China to the perceived limited efficacy of the medium. They believe that state hegemony on the Internet might have shaken people's beliefs in the medium's capacity to bring about any feasible change (Shen, Wang, Guo, & Guo, 2009, p. 467). Additionally, the young Egyptian activists believe that this limited, yet effective, role of SM can be ascribed to the way these media are used. For example, as mentioned in Chapter Five, **M.S.** ascribed the difference in size between '*online interactors*' and '*off-line actors*' to "the irrational and mis-use of the medium, [which could lead to] a disturbing glut of messages and notifications that might lead to abandoning most of these groups."

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION: SOCIAL MEDIA USES AND COLLECTIVE ACTION GRATIFICATIONS

This thesis has focused upon perceptions of the mobilisation that preceded the eruption of the massive demonstrations which took place in Egypt in early 2011, one of a number in the region that became known as the Arab Spring. Many commentators (i.e., Aouragh & Alexander, 2011; Tufekci & Wilson, 2012; Wilson & Dunn, 2011; Wall & Zahed, 2011) have remarked upon the role played by social media (SM) in the Egyptian uprising and this has been the central concern of my research. More precisely, my research was designed to address the question: “How do young Egyptian activists *perceive* the potential of social media for mobilising collective action?” The research findings outlined in the preceding chapters make a unique contribution to contemporary debates about SM and the Egyptian mobilisations, since the data was gathered prior to the uprising of 25th January 2011. Consequently, it provides us with a clear understanding of what Egyptian activists actually thought and said about the potential value of SM, both for the organisation and the mobilisation of protests, rather than as retrospective judgments which may be subject to selective interpretations. The current research attempts to answer enquiries about SM and political dispositions during what turned out to be the preparatory phase of protests. Additionally, this research reports on the perceptions of a sample of young Egyptian activists to whom the credit for igniting the two waves of uprisings (25th January 2011 and 30th June 2013) has been widely attributed.

This chapter is organised into three sections:

8.1. A moderate case for the potential of social media for mobilising collective action.

8.2. Social media *cycles of mobilisation*.

8.2.1. *Cycle (1) young Egyptian activists and the instrumentality of social media (corresponds to RQ1).*

8.2.2. *Cycle (2) same media, different opportunities for different actors (corresponds to RQ2).*

8.2.3. *Cycle (3) social media uses and gratifying off-line collective outcomes (Corresponds to RQ3).*

8.3. Recommendations for future research and implications for practice.

8.3.1. *Recommendations for future research.*

8.3.2. *Implications for practice.*

8.1. A moderate case for the potential of social media for mobilising collective action

This thesis has tackled three main areas of inquiry. *First*: the uses of SM as reported by the participant activists. *Second*: the contribution of these uses to creating favourable dispositions for political participation in the Egyptian polity, given its specificities as an authoritarian form of governance, and *third*: the expected outcomes of SM uses with regard to mobilising the Egyptian constituency to engage in off-line political practices aimed at achieving political reforms in Egypt.

Throughout the analysis of my data, I built a moderate case in favour of the potential of SM to give young Egyptian activists novel and honed affordances to practise 'preparatory mobilisation' at the grassroots level, bridging their efforts in a bottom-up direction in order to put pressure on elites and to achieve political change. Several limitations were highlighted; some of which relate to the constituency, while others are mainly related to the media. The analysis led to a general recommendation to study SM as capacity and the unpacking of its utility through a contextual lens takes onboard the specificities of Egyptian society that might have, along with media, led to the unfolding of recent events. My findings situate this research almost on a middle point in the spectrum of the heated debate between technological determinists (e.g., Clay Shirky), who raise questions such as "would there have been a revolution in Egypt without Facebook?" and media scepticists (i.e., Malcolm Gladwell and Evgeny Morozov), who ascribe a frail role to technological innovations. In general, this research thus corroborates the view that "social media or the Internet as a whole, can't be isolated as the cause, or not, of anything, because they are part of the fabric of social life and the terrain of struggle" (Hands, 2011).

In general, I argue that young Egyptian activists were using SM during the period that led to the 25th January 2011 uprising as instruments of dissemination, rather than to gain information motivated mainly by lowering the cost/risk of organisation and participation. SM also helped young activists to create opportunities for practising collective action by promoting favourable participatory dispositions among less-interested and non-politicised citizens. However, these media portals were not perceived as being significant contributors to the mobilisation of *sizable* numbers of people to become involved in off-line activism, due to their instrumental utilisation, which does not necessarily feed into developing activists’ identities which is responsible for building trust, strengthening commitment, and hence, for sustaining social movement. della Porta (2012) has similarly attached some normative, rather than instrumental, constraints to different social movements’ uses of new media. This finding is also supported by previous research that stresses the importance of developing ‘non-virtual identities’ (della Porta & Mosca, 2005) through affiliation to social movement organisations (SMOs) and by practising collective action as parameters of activist identity development and social movement dedication (i.e., van Laer & van Aelst, 2010; Bennett, 2005). Figure 8.1 builds on the suggested design of the study (Figure 4.2) and shows how the main themes of the research relate to, and interact with, each other.

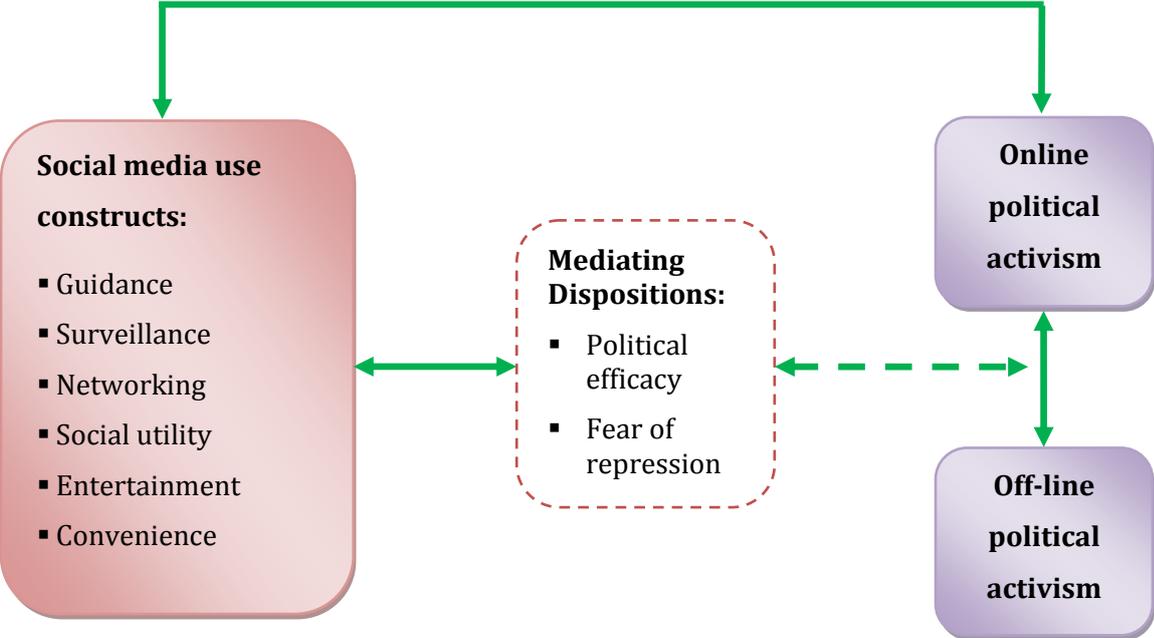


Figure 8.1: Research themes’ interrelations and interaction

More specifically, the young Egyptian activists have been engaged in what could be termed 'networking preparatory mobilisation.' In this bottom-up form of mobilisation, young activists mix their off-line experiences with their purposive online media uses in a three-step flow of mobilisation at the base level of the population. The mobilisation starts from activists on the ground and moves to their online (and off-line) circles, and then it feeds into reality again, where the active and the activated act together collectively. Taking a clue from Tilly's (1978) classification of collective action into competitive, reactive and proactive actions, it is suggested that certain changes in the circumstances of the Egyptian polity and population,¹⁵ coupled with the power of SM resources have enabled young activists to mobilise the proactive collective action or "collective proaction" (p. 147), that have not previously been exercised. As far as the media impact is concerned, the size and scale of such off-line collective action relies — among other things— on the degree to which online users can act as what has been termed 'nodes' (Castells, 1996). These key influencers, as seen by the young activists, are essential to lowering the costs of the social transaction of collective action to the broader disconnected population.

This argument is represented, with regard to the aforementioned areas of enquiry, in three interrelated themes, or 'cycles of mobilisation,' that have emerged from the analysis: (1) the young Egyptian activists' instrumental use of SM, (2) SM and the creation of different opportunities and dispositions for different actors, and (3) the uses of SM and the promotion of off-line outcomes. Each episode of this media-supported mobilisation continuum was discussed in Chapters Five, Six and Seven, respectively. Figure 8.2 summarises the main findings of the research and shows how the emergent themes interconnect with each other. Thereafter, the diagramme is unpacked and a summary of results for each cycle is presented.

8.2. Social media *cycles of mobilisation*

A moderate case was built through a horizontal analysis of young Egyptian activists' perceptions of SM to mobilisation. The analysis expanded over Chapters Five, Six and Seven. Each chapter addressed and answered one of the research questions and built up

¹⁵ For example, the constitutional amendments of 2005 that led to the consequent success of the Muslim Brotherhood in the parliamentary elections of that year. This was followed by a crackdown on the MBs in the parliamentary election 2010-2011.

a cycle in the suggested chain of mobilisation (see Figures 5.1, 6.1 & 7.1). Participant activists have been using SM to mobilise collective political practice that is mediated by certain dispositions. Figure 8.2 represents a holistic vision of the themes that emerged and shows how these processes interrelate and overlap. In the *first cycle (media uses)*, the young Egyptian activists used SM as instruments to disseminate information in order to draw users' attention to certain issues. SM were found to be efficient in achieving certain goals related to youth activism, such as the organisation of events and mobilising action at low cost, but it was not symbolically used for identity building purposes. In the *second cycle (dispositions)*, the young activists aimed to create opportunities for the non-politicised to take part in the collective actions for which they mobilised. At this stage, the young Egyptian activists believed that SM could introduce the non-politicised to the political arena and lower the cost of participation by serving as a safer environment for competence acquirement and political practice, yet they believe that it is not until the non-politicised engage in political activities off-line that they add value to the political process. This entails their involvement in the *third cycle (off-line action)*, and acquiring the identity of an activist that is crucial for sustained participation, especially with their perceived low levels of both political awareness and an inclination to participate in politics, as seen from Chapter Two. At this stage, SM have benefitted the young Egyptian activists in achieving three outcomes related to mobilising off-line collective action, i.e., they helped them frame their movement, recruit *potential* participants, and organise off-line collective actions.

Activists believe that using SM as instruments of mobilisation places several hurdles in front of each of the aforementioned off-line-related outcomes. These hurdles affect the width of the third cycle (the digitally-enabled networks of participants) unless supplementary modes of communication are enacted (e.g., face-to-face networking). These perceived difficulties are discussed in Section 8.2.3.

At the time when this research was conducted, November-December 2010, the participant activists believed that mobilising massive collective action was a very challenging goal to achieve. The massive uprising of 25th January 2011 falls outside the realm of the current analysis, yet taking insight from the current research and the consequent happenings in Tahrir Square, it might be concluded that it was not until these digitally-enabled networks met ordinary people in the off-line domain to shape

wider networks of supporters with the power of face-to-face interactions and word of mouth, that a critical mass was formed, a social movement materialised and a revolutionary threshold was reached. This was an outcome that had not been anticipated earlier by the young activists when they discussed SM as means of mobilisation.

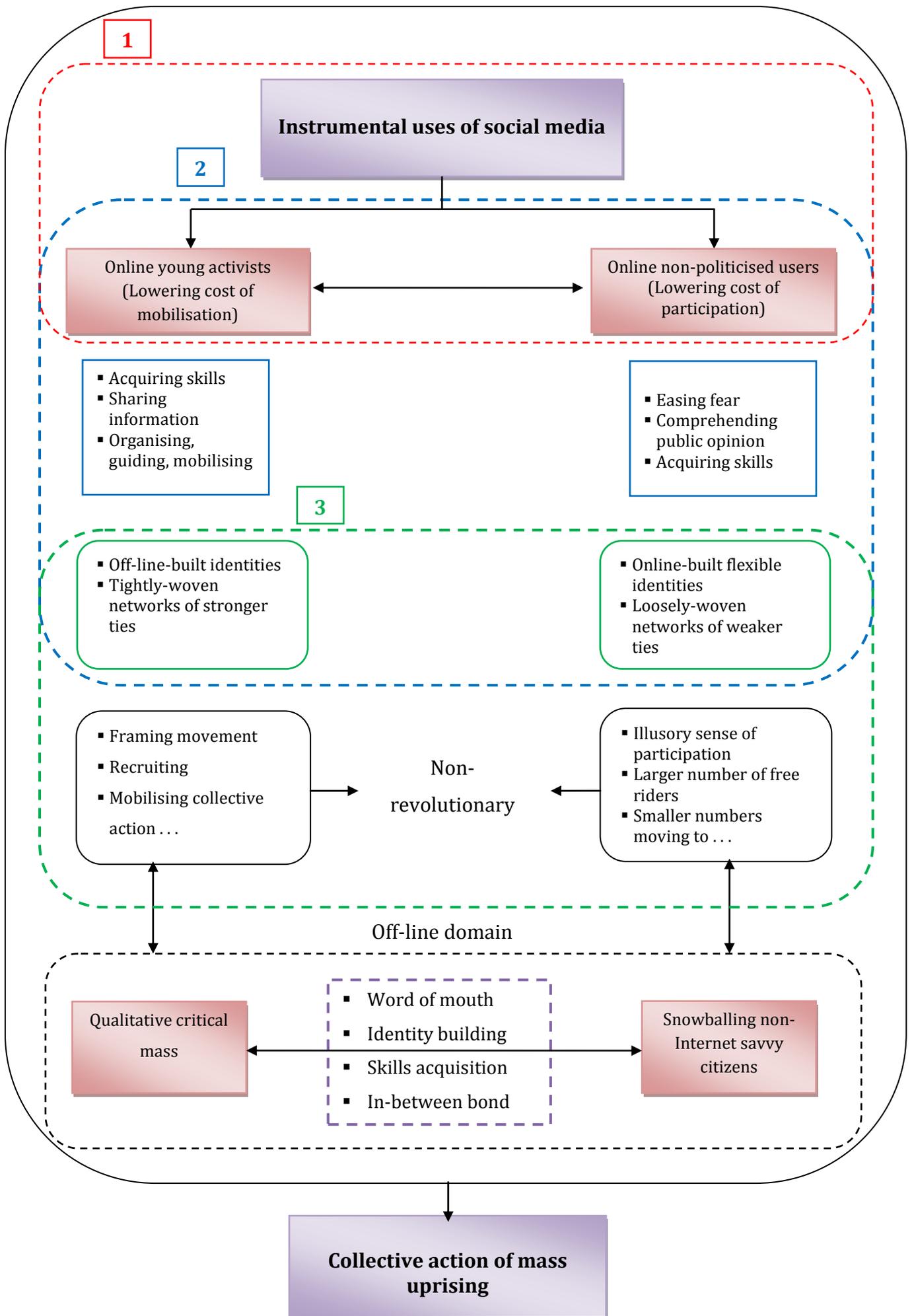


Figure 8.2: The perceived potential of social media for mobilising collective action prior to the ²⁸⁵2011 Egyptian Uprising

In the following pages, these cycles are unpacked and the main findings are summarised against a backdrop of pertinent literature.

8.2.1. Cycle (1) young Egyptian activists and the instrumentality of SM

The answer to the research question: *'Why do young Egyptian activists use SM?'* was discussed in Chapter Five. It was found that participant activists were using SM prior to the January 2011 uprising, mainly for the purposes of guiding and mobilising others. They were engaged in their online tier of activism, in activities that aimed to aggregate popular support for their cause. They predominantly sought to reach wider circles of the public, to affect their political decisions and to urge them to participate in events that support their cause. The main path to such an outcome, as seen by the participants, was to disseminate information and to spread the word to as many supporters as possible. One of the main reasons for this information-oriented use of SM was to lower the threshold of the social transaction costs of collective action.

For young Egyptian activists, as they operate under an authoritarian regime with scarce resources, it is crucial to externalise the costs of mobilisation. Networking was the instrument with which they fulfilled this need. Using SM for instrumental functions corroborates the findings of previous research on computer mediated communication (CMC) and protest mobilisation (see, e.g., della Porta & Mosca, 2005; Diani, 2000). This perceived necessity for information dissemination function may also enhance the prospects of participation for the non-politicised users of SM. This finding is supported by previous research on media functions. It was found that "individuals who use the Internet for information exchange probably encounter more mobilising information and experience more opportunities for recruitment in civic life with the panoply of mobilising content available on-line, citizens who are armed with such information may be able to exert greater control over their environments, encouraging participation and enhancing trust" (Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001, p. 154).

Using the Internet instrumentally was expected to hamper the significance and sustainability of SM-supported collective action, although instrumental uses of the Internet do not necessarily rule out its symbolic capacity, as previous research has underlined the Internet's aptitude for generating new, flexible identities (della Porta & Mosca, 2005), yet, it was also found that the instrumental contribution of (CMC)

to social movements outweighed its symbolic one, and that it is more likely that CMC reinforces ties that have originally developed through direct networks, rather than creating new ones (Diani, 2000). Notions of engaging those who are traditionally active, and of engaging the already engaged, have also been corroborated by other scholars (e.g., Chen & Lee., 2008). Viewed together, these results led to the question on whether instrumental use of SM might contribute to achieving the desired outcomes of mobilisation, or even to the creation of participatory dispositions, especially among the non-politicised individuals. To put it differently, social movement identification is crucial for collective participation, especially when it comes to involvement in unconventional and more demanding forms of practice (Crossley, 2002). Yet, reinforcing identity implies the prior existence of a collective identity in which SM play the secondary role of a supporter rather than the key role as a constructor.

Furthermore, studies that have highlighted the Internet's contribution to building new identities have mainly been focused on protest events and movement activists' use of media. This implies that participants in these studies are already committed to a certain ideology and are more likely to share common identities with *on-the-ground* others. However, SM's contribution to developing a sense of collective identity in the non-politicised is not necessarily ruled out. McAdam (1986) argues that "high-risk/cost activism is often expected to grow out of a history of prior involvement in less intense forms of movement participation" (p. 81). It was thus suggested that if SM could serve as a low-risk environment for participation, they might help to recruit potential participants for collective action. This thread was picked up in the discussion on SM's perceived potential for creating participatory dispositions, in Chapter Six.

8.2.2. Cycle (2) same media, different opportunities for different actors

Media functionality cannot be assessed in a vacuum. Certain circumstances and attributes of polity also affect both the constituency and active actors. Such conditions were taken into consideration in order to shed light on the role that SM might have played in creating opportunities for mobilisation and participation in the pre-uprising context. The main focus of Chapter Six was to answer the research question: '*How do young Egyptian activists use SM to create participatory dispositions?*' This discussion mainly centred on the perceived role that SM might have played in creating

opportunities *by* the young activists and *for* ordinary Egyptian people to make them feel more politically enabled by looking mainly at the fear of oppression and at political efficacy. In an authoritarian regime, it was expected that both factors might be significant parameters of capacity building that may encourage, or impede, individuals' decisions to go off-line.

The young Egyptian activists perceive remarkable differences between themselves, as core activists, and non-politicised citizens in regard to the contribution of SM to creating opportunities for both organisers of, and participators in, collective action. Figure 8.2 provides an exemplary summary of the perceived dichotomous potential of SM for mobilisation of both the active and non-politicised citizens. As might be expected, activists differ from those who are newly introduced to the political arena, yet this difference, as perceived by the participant activists, is basically driven by differences in their active media use at the individual level and the consequent opportunities this purposive use helps to seize or create. Normally, yet most importantly, this difference stems from prior experience with political practice, which the activists mainly acquire and develop in the real world.

This conceptual pairing (organisers versus participators) consists of analytical categories used by social movement scholars (Walsh & Warland, 1983; Earl & Kimport, 2011). It also supports research findings from the same participatory context. It has been argued that access to information and communication technologies (ICTs), along with the rise of a new generation of well-educated Egyptian youth, has helped Egyptian youth dissidents to instigate circles of non-violent protests and to shape what has been called a "Youth Movement" (El-Mahdi, 2009). Such non-violent protests were clearly linked to creating opportunities in authoritarian systems (Beissinger, 1993). This distinction between activists and non-activists also finds support in Dahlgren's work on civic culture. He argues that elements of civic culture have an impact on bottom-up mobilisation. This means that the individual uses and appropriations of available media may vary according to variations in cultural contexts (Dahlgren, 2009). Accordingly, the role that SM can play is expected to vary between the well-educated, more privileged social classes and the more politically-involved citizens, and their non-politicised and less socially privileged counterparts.

As revealed by the quantitative data, SM did not actually contribute much to the creation of political opportunities for young activists in Egypt with regard to overcoming their reported fear of authority, nor were they relevant to realising incentives for undertaking collective action in the Egyptian polity. This clear distinction between the opportunities, and outcomes that SM deliver for the young activists and the non-politicised *others*, resonates with Tarrow's argument that "movements create opportunities not only for themselves, but also for others [and that] they do this by diffusing collective action through social networks and by forming coalitions of social actors" (Tarrow, 1998, p. 82).

The young Egyptian activists have been actively using SM apparatuses to help the non-politicised users in their online circles to break their fear of authorities, to feel that they are in a majority by creating a supportive participatory atmosphere, and to provide an interactive environment for sharing information and transforming participatory skills. SM have allowed the non-politicised an access to participation, which is argued to be the major important stimulus for collective action (Tarrow, 1998).

It has been suggested that a rise in repression and an overall perception of closing opportunities for action usually discourage a civic activity in the Middle East and would thus limit the establishment of networks to the boundaries of environments that are safe. Such networks could represent a type of informal autonomous networks which have been argued to trouble repressive regimes less than networks linked to tradition, such as religion or the local-community (Diani, 2008). SM have made the formation of such networks easier and less costly for young activists, as may be recalled from Chapter Five. This suggests that networks formed on SNSs could provide an alternative milieu of inclusion for young citizens and hence encourage a sense of agency and political efficiency that will connect long endured grievances to action. Additionally, this also suggests that authorities will not bother to tightly circumvent such networks, rather, the Egyptian government might have, in fact, underestimated the potential of SM potential and have relied on a 'tolerant model of governance' (Tilly, 1978), hardly reacting to online political groups. For example, "let them have fun" was a customary reaction by the former presidency when issues of youth dissent arose. This toleration has allowed young activists a greater chance to mobilise and create/seize opportunities for collective action.

However, while using SM for political interactions was perceived by the participant activists as a means of lowering the cost (of participation) for the non-politicised, by framing a safer environment of practice and promoting a sense of collective support and solidarity, there was the risk of the increasing force of Olson's (1971) statement of the free-riding problem, especially in relation to off-line participation. Participants raised concerns that online participation might delude newcomers into thinking that they were contributing their share to the group's efforts and so were eligible for the outcome, or the collective good, due to their online activism, while they were actually free-riding on the efforts of those who transcended the online borders with reality. Previous research has supported the illusory participation argument. Putnam (2000), for example, argues that Internet users develop a sense of "depersonalisation" and "feel less solidarity with one another due to interacting anonymously in the virtual sphere (p. 176). Similarly, Lerner (2010) argues that "the anonymity and isolation of Internet membership in various groups may replace real world interactions to the detriment of the solidarity and singular purpose associated with social movements" (p. 557).

It has been argued that people opt to free ride especially when their actions stem from, or are mobilised by, material incentives, rather than a collective identity, even if they are interested in an issue (Polletta & Jasper, 2001). In the worst cases, this is expected to nullify the provision of the public good (Brubaker, 1975), while a less dramatic scenario suggests that the provision of the public good will be sub-optimal because of the many free riders (Samuelson, 1954; Marwell and Ames, 1979, cited in Walsh & Warland, 1983). Different findings have been reported on the formation of an activist identity in regard to media use. While some recent empirical studies have found that the Internet allows an environment where individuals can develop a sense of the collective and obtain a civic identity (Dahlgren & Olsson, 2009), some scholars argue that a collective identity entails active participation and face-to-face interactions with activists (McAdam, 1986). Bennett and Segerberg (2012) corroborate this view by arguing that transcending the barriers of political organisations, ideologies, interests, class, gender, race, or ethnicity, lies outside the capacity of SM. Loose networks with weak ties within online group members might jeopardise solidarity and lessen the level of commitment to the group, thus making 'free riding' an easier option, which might diminish the size and scale of collective action.

It was expected that people would be more inclined to ride-free on the efforts of the few in the case of increasing fear and cost of participation, or even due to waning interest. The difference between those who indicate their support to a certain issue or event on social networking sites (SNSs) and those who actually take on the burden and participate in reality was the focus of Chapter Six and represents the locus of cycle (3).

8.2.3. Cycle (3) social media uses and gratifying off-line collective outcomes

Media uses, discussed in Chapter Five, and youth's related aspired for political outcomes, were linked to the actual outcomes (or obtained gratifications) that youth managed to achieve (or gratify) in relation to their reported media use. As discussed in Chapter Seven, the young Egyptian activists have perceived SM, in the context of the pre 25th January 2011 uprising, to be a valuable tool for achieving feasible outcomes and for mobilising collective action in the off-line space. Nevertheless, they were aware of the hurdles they were facing. In answering the research question: *How do social media contribute to practising collective action off-line?*, it was found that the participant activists were utilising SM to mobilise political participation through: the promotion of common beliefs about their movement (framing), the recruitment of large numbers of supporters and potential participants, and their incentivisation to act collectively off-line (outcomes).

The young Egyptian activists reported that they were using SM to inform the public about the regime's misconduct, which does not normally find its way onto the tightly controlled national media. This finding corroborates Lim's assertion that "social media are not simply neutral tools to be used or adopted by social movements, but rather influence how activists form and shape the social movements" (Lim, 2012, p. 234). However, it is worth noting that such instrumentality did not exclude the emotional element from the mobilisation equation. In fact, the young activists were uploading photos, sharing videos and disseminating information through which they made the invisible visible and widened the circles of diffusion by providing a spectacle that interested traditional media. Although some participant activists argued that brutal images might demobilise the public, since they raise the ceiling of the cost of participation, many others agreed that it was necessary to shock the public and create a sentimental link with the issue. It could be said that such images have helped the

young Egyptian activists shape the emotionality of the collective action for which they have been mobilising by stimulating certain sentiments and beliefs. They introduced the public to sentiments that resonated with their frame of reference and urged them to take active actions to face the imminent dangers in their polity. The case of Khaled Said well-exemplifies this notion. Although it is emotional, it does not lack rationality or contradict instrumentality. It provided a reason for taking action. Such images resonated with the rationality of the collective action as it is “perfectly understandable that a person who is mistreated will become angry” (Crossley, 2002, p. 49). Additionally, it created an emotional link with the public who felt that every one of them might be another Khaled Said, should the regime resume trampling over their rights. The young Egyptian activists’ utilisation of SM has assisted both the instrumental element and the emotional component of framing the collective actions for which they have been calling.

While digital personal protest networks, or “dissentworks”, have managed to spread horizontally (Coopman, 2003) in established democracies, due to several hurdles and some contextual specificities, such networks have remained vertically distributed among a certain cohort of politically active, well-educated youth in Egypt. Organisations operating under authoritarian regimes tend to rely on decentralised structures that are more difficult to monitor and repress, prompted mainly by the open information-sharing system supported by the growing Internet services (Whine, 1999, p. 125). The Internet also allows dissidents an affordable opportunity to reach their targeted populations. In his attempt to model the Internet-based dissidence in the Middle East, McLaughlin (2003) found that lowering the cost through Internet use outweighed the desire of non-state dissident groups, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan and Egypt, and the Movement for Islamic Reform in Arabia (MIRA) in Saudi Arabia, for gaining support from groups or countries within the international community (internationalisation), as well as in seeking to erode support for their rivals (support erosion).

The young Egyptian activists perceive ordinary Egyptians as ‘passive angry people’ (SO., 2010); although they suffered many grievances, they yet lacked the motive (or the opportunity) to take action to change or improve their *status quo*. As might be remembered from Chapter Two, the Egyptian regime has been investing for decades in ignorance and a dependent state-citizen relationship, grooming generations

of illiterate people, or poorly qualified 'educated' people (Zaky, 2013), and playing the role of breadwinner. Such practices prompt ordinary Egyptians to prefer stability and order over change and democracy.

Other hurdles have to do with the communication medium itself. Participants believe that political discussions over SM platforms are polarised. They do not follow a certain theme that one can easily track and comprehend, which mars their educative effectiveness and makes shaping identity through SM more difficult. Furthermore, practising politics on SM, especially for the non-politicised, might capture users into a 'safe mode' of action and delude them into the feeling of being politically active, while they are actually limited to the online bubble. An additional hurdle related to the economy of the medium and the way some users utilise it for political purposes. Lacking what participants called the 'efficient culture of utilising SM' (SO., 2010), coupled with the non-centralised organisation of the medium, as well as access problems in Egypt, causes audience stratification and makes massive aggregation of supporters solely through SM activism even more difficult.

Contrary to what Shah et al. suggest (2005, 2006), the young activists did not see digital media as capable of transforming the scope and scale of interpersonal political relationships, at least off-line if not online (Shah, Cho, Eveland, & Kwak, 2005; Nah, Veenstra, & Shah, 2006; Hwang, Schmierbach, Paek, Zuniga, & Shah, 2006). Indeed, the participant activists raised issues about the need for a 'better culture of using social media' and for a 'central organisation of the medium', in order to be able to deploy meaningful connectivity capable of inducing social and political change with the help of SM. Conventional organisation, in terms of hierarchy and centralisation in such a fluid collective action space could thus enable more entrepreneurial and less centralised communication networks to form among members (Bimber, Flanagin, & Stohl, 2005), giving way to stronger ties, much needed in a threatening environment of participation, to form. Taking a clue from a resource mobilisation perspective (RM), which suggests that proponents are maintained in their involvement by a variety of selective individual incentives (Tilly, 1978; Oberschall, 1973), such organisations may also resource political activities by providing such incentives. It could be said, then, that the off-line created, digitally enabled networks of young activists have fuelled, but not necessarily amplified

the power of the uprising on a grassroots basis, due to hurdles relevant to constituency, communication medium and the participatory context within which both operate.

However, given the illusory feeling of safety that the online environment instigates, SM were not perceived by participant activists as efficient tools *in themselves* for aggregating people en masse to participate in off-line collective action. Although they have proven successful in creating loose networks of online supporters, yet these networks shrank as they moved to the off-line arena. The young activists raised the problem of the “point at which [forms of contention] enter the part of the range conventionally understood as social movement” (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p. 745). Returning to the online ‘cocoon’ (Papacharissi, 2010), this was found to lend less power to technology-based networks of dissent and leave the young activists sceptical about the efficiency of what has been termed the ‘connective action’ (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012), that is, the form of collective action which is basically supported by online technology and conducted by networks of individuals who are primarily motivated by personal needs for political connotations. This represents a case of limitation of the political action in the communication network (Earl & Kimport, 2011).

Building on what has been said hitherto, it is suggested that SM have created an inward spiral of mobilisation, or an inverted pyramid (Figure 8.3), where the number of online supporters of a certain issue outweigh the number of off-line actors in support of the same issue. SM have significantly allowed the young activists an opportunity to mobilise political action at lower levels of cost. They have also allowed the non-politicised citizens the opportunities for lower-cost political practices-in the online sphere. Nevertheless, as the cost (of participation) increases, as media participants move to the off-line arena, opportunities for political practice become more limited. Accordingly, the numbers of online actors and (inter)actors are perceived to be sizably greater than the numbers of those who actually take to the streets and participate in collective actions (see Figure 8.3).

However, the base of the pyramid (Figure 8.3) started to widen on the 28th January, as a wide base of ordinary people massed with the critical group of young activists. A critical mass was shaped in the off-line domain of Tahrir-Square when the two poles

met, giving momentum to the eighteen days of protest that toppled the former regime while the Internet was completely shut down for consecutive five days (see Figure 8.2).

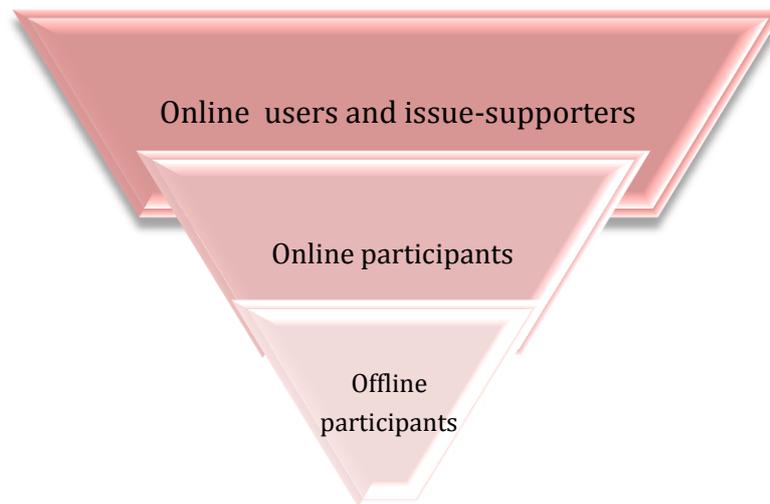


Figure 8.3: The perceived inward spiral of mobilisation via social media

Mobilising a critical mass that might significantly influence the Egyptian polity could not be achieved *solely* through SM. In fact, the young Egyptian activists could not actually anticipate a mass uprising that would topple the regime after almost thirty years of a dual problem of authoritarian rule and public silence. Rather, they believed that a drastic and sudden political change would drag the country into a dilemma for which it was not ready, or as **MH.**, one of the participant activists, put it:

People have rightful demands. These demands should be fulfilled, but gradually. There must be some objectivity and a balanced discourse. Otherwise, we would find our country divided into a 100 pieces overnight.

To conclude, SM are apparatuses for mobilisation that are instrumentally used with respect to given factors (or opportunities) at each stage of the life span of the youth social movement and the context within which it emerged. A similar conclusion was reached by Rinke and Roder (2011) in their analysis of the components of communication during the Egyptian (first) uprising. They suggested that what is needed for anti-authoritarian movements in the Arab world is a comprehensive consideration of the communication role. Available media apparatuses, different actors, diverse cultural contexts, and different stages in the lifetimes of such movements, need all to be taken into account. However, this is not to propose that the suggested cycles of

mobilisation through SM occur consequentially. Rather, the young activists have been using SM interchangeably as they mobilise the non-politicised to engage in politics online and themselves take part in collective actions off-line.

It could be said that SM have allowed the young activists an opportunity to practise a form of 'preparatory mobilisation' that is presented as the most top-down form of mobilisation, which is only likely in the smallest groups without active leadership and deliberate organisational effort (Tilly, 1978). As the number of free-riders is argued to be the highest in this form of mobilisation, 'selective incentives' are needed to motivate people to take part in collective action and so to enjoy the collective outcome. This supports the argument that a form of organisation-centred solution might be needed to assure the commitment of resources to collective ends. As discussed in the last chapter, SM have been enabling the young activists to mobilise citizens to take the first step in this preparatory mobilisation process. However, this is not to suggest that groups of activists could organise and mobilise for collective action using solely SM apparatuses. SM could not compensate for formal organisation, especially in a society where citizens are perceived to be "passive angry" (SO., 2010). In such a recipient culture, people need incentives to move and to participate and hence, formal organisation may still be crucial for social movements to grow. Although this might be hard to assess, yet recent incidents that took place in Egypt may illuminate this argument. For example, the 25 January 2011 protests have significantly escalated on 28 January after members of the Muslim Brothers, the biggest organised opposition group in Egypt, started pouring into Tahrir Square adding momentum to the protests.

Although collective action frames might be beneficial in lowering resource costs (and the costs of participation) by retaining the mobilised population's emotional commitment to action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012), the logic of rational choice is still in action in relation to contentious issues at hand, as people need selective incentives to overcome their long endured passivity.

We should avoid becoming obsessed with just the communication technology itself. Instead we need to include in our analytic horizons the complex ways in which ICTs interplay with the dynamics of the social movements, as well as with mainstream political structures and contemporary cultural trends that frame these movements (Dahlgren, 2004, p. xv).

8.3. Recommendations for future research and implications for practice

While using digital media is an activity that is widely embedded in the everyday life of the younger generations in developed, post-industrial democracies, this is still far from the case in authoritarian and less developed societies. Personalised ideas of a political nature that are digitally transformed were argued to engage youth in politics “as an expression of personal hopes, lifestyles and grievances” (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p. 743). Such an individualised approach seems to resonate with a cohort of young Egyptians, who have deployed the Western model of knowledge-resourced, digitally-enabled activism. A new generation of well-educated Egyptian youth have shaped their pathway to political inclusion and have been successful in instigating circles of non-violent youth protesters and in shaping what has become known as the “Youth Movement” (El-Mahdi, 2009). Such non-violent protests were clearly linked to creating opportunities in authoritarian systems (Beissinger, 1993). It is widely reported that these youth were the spark of the 2011 uprising. However, these youth, according to the participants in the current research, did not see the uprising coming, due to the aforementioned hurdles that they met while working to widen their reach in the Egyptian polity. It is suggested, then, that such an individualistic model of mobilisation through digital media might not resonate with the specificities of the less developed societies that live under authoritarian forms of governance. This model could not be applied at a grass root level to include ordinary people in the political process and encourage a collective action powered by digital media. Accordingly, this research study cannot lead to generalisable suggestions for action. As discussed in the methodology chapter (Chapter Four), the research sample was not chosen to be representative of the whole population of Egyptian young activists, and the researched issues and related ongoing developments on the ground are too complex for a straightforward statement to be made. However, on the basis of the research undertaken, I will make some suggestions for both future research and practice.

8.3.1. Recommendations for future research

- In authoritarian contexts, regimes are more expected to promote a “legitimizing frame that provides the citizenry with reasons to be quiescent” (Gamson, 1992). While the relationship between new media and political participation and

mobilisation have been the focus of a plethora of scholarly work, and have produced dichotomous views between technological determinists and more sceptical scholars, such issues are often still less articulated in discussions about youth under authoritarian regimes. Under such forms of governance, youth are more likely to be excluded from political life and may have different opportunities for political practice than those allowed in established democracies, where most of the debates take place. Issues of imposed political deprivation and opportunities for empowerment and democratisation in authoritarian regimes need to be further scrutinised with a mediascopic scholarly lens.

- Most recent scholarly works have researched event-centred contentions, such as protests and sequences of protests, while the current research was applied to more stable issue-advocacy networks. Compared to the former group, where the role that SM might play in organising and orchestrating collective action is more evident since they spontaneously create a different set of mechanisms that do not necessarily rely on recourse mobilisation and identity building (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012), the connection was moderate in the present case. In fact, the young activists did not foresee the January 2011 uprising. This suggests that more non event-centred investigations need to be undertaken to unravel the prospective role of SM, separately from the enthusiasm and spontaneity of event-centered contentions.
- Moreover, due to the perceived hurdles in utilising SM for mobilising collective action, it is expected that incentivising greater populations of the Egyptian constituency to overcome free-riding might still rely on shaping identities in common and, to some extent, on resource mobilisation. Such assumptions need to be investigated in further research.
- As should be obvious, differences that have been sketched in this work between the young activists and the non-politicised citizens in terms of SM's potential for mobilisation, are based on the perceptions of a sample of young activists and how they see SM's potential for mobilising collective actions that involve the participation of a broader base of non-politicised and less-interested citizens. This suggests that a study of the non-politicised is needed to shed light on the perceptions of this quantitatively and qualitatively significant cohort of the Egyptian constituency, how

they might use new media to create, realise and seize opportunities for political practice, and what outcomes could be attached to such opportunities and practices.

- The current study also pointed out a socio-psychological aspect of collective participation in authoritarian regimes with regard to SM use. While SM are perceived by young activists as a less costly tool of mobilisation and as a safer environment for skills sharing and participation for the non-politicised, participation at a low cost, or in a shelter, might appeal to the less-experienced citizens more than taking to the street and participating in collective action. Eventually, a free riding problem could arise. The participant activists have raised concerns about a significant margin of SM users who might resort to the online arena and refrain from taking part in collective actions that are normally practised off-line. Such an angle falls outside the immediate scope of interest of the current research. Contrary to utilitarian models, such as Olson's (1971), which assume the absence of collective identity, and suggest that people make strategic judgements based on their expectations about costs and benefits, it was argued that "solidarity and collective identity operate to blur the distinction between individual and group interest, undermining the premises on which such utilitarian models operate" (Gamson, 1992, p. 57). Concepts of online commitment and solidarity in authoritarian contexts need to be unpacked and further inspected.
- Embracing the 'civic culture' paradigm to study political practice might be better situated in established democratic contexts. However, recent accelerating developments in the Egyptian polity, and the massive aggregation of almost 33 million people in Tahrir-Square and various other public spaces in Egypt (the lowest number reported was 17 million protesters) suggests that a new form of civic culture might be evolving in Egyptian society, especially among youth. In fact, many of the problems Egyptian society has been enduring in recent decades have been ascribed-along with other factors, to the demolition of the Egyptian middle class, while the recent societal awakenings have been widely ascribed to the emergence of a new, well-educated cohort of Egyptian youth. This suggests that embracing a 'civic culture' model in studying youth utilisation of SM might shed new light on the novel modalities of political and civic traditions in post-revolt(s) Egypt.

- The qualitative data from the FGDs corroborate the validity of the suggested alteration to the scale used to measure the uses of SM. Participant activists discussed how they used SM to address other users, who are mainly non-politicised and may be potential supporters to their movement. However, it is recommended that future research statistically tests the validity of such qualitative evidence for the suggested 'towards others' dimension of purposive use of SM. Building such a SM use scale, starting with an open ended question about media uses. Categorising participants' responses then follows to define SM use constructs. Running exploratory factor analysis is finally needed to test the dimensionality of the yielded use constructs and to test the validity of the suggested alteration

8.3.2. Implications for practice

- More inclusive collective action frames need to be promoted and diffused among the less-interested and the non-politicised people to raise the possibility of mobilising political actions on a collective scale.
- As such collective frames were found to hit the barriers of political organisations, ideologies, interests, class, gender, race, or ethnicity, the overcoming of which seems to be beyond the capacity of SM (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012), it is suggested that more emphasis should be placed on the role of conventional institutional organisations alongside the role of digital networking technology, to promote and widely diffuse collective memes of political action.
- Both loose and strong organisations (and by extension loose and strong ties) might benefit political practice in Egypt. Loose organisations can allow for more centrally organised use of SM while allowing room for "considerable discretion to activate personal networks that may extend well outside a particular organisation's reach" (Bennett, Breunig, & Givens, 2008, p. 284) and hence extend the scale of digitally-enabled political action. Strong organisations, on the other hand, could be beneficial in promoting collective action frames that are more linked to common identities, to raising political awareness and to making political involvement more appealing to powerless citizens. Such organisations could also create personal incentives for participation that SM may not offer to prospective participants. For example, a well-organised group, like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt (and elsewhere), played

a significant role in mobilising its members and supporters to take to the streets en masse during the events of 25th January 2011 uprising, and it was not until they joined on the 28th January that the demonstrations significantly escalated and reached a more pressing level. Such organisations may use SM as a means of mobilising participation, but they do not, however, seem to welcome personalised interpretations of problems and self-organisation of actions (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012).

- Creating more opportunities for physical exchanges and personal interactions between activists and non-politicised citizens would benefit the latter so that they can acquire the participatory skills and activist identity needed for involvement in collective action.

At the time of writing, Egyptian people are pouring into the streets in tens of millions breaching the epic ‘million protest’ of January 25th 2011. In less than three years, specifically on 30th January 2013, ordinary Egyptians have become capable of voicing their grievances more vigorously, despite the enduring corruption, poverty and illiteracy. They took to the streets to restore their ‘revolution’ and to claim their unfulfilled demands for *eish, horreya, adala egtema’eya, karama insaneya* (bread, freedom, social justice and human dignity) in what some regarded as a second wave of the 25th January revolt, while others viewed it as a military coup. However, the fact remains that the spiral of silence into which Egyptians have been dragged for decades seems to be broken. They have come to realise that ballot boxes do not necessarily enact democracy. However, while some world leaders, political scientists, media scholars and commentators have praised young Egyptians for making *the whole world watch* on January 25th 2011, others have regarded the Rebellion Movement, ‘*Tamarod*’, that broke out on 30th June 2013 as a breach of legitimacy and a setback for democracy. The main party to blame was SM.

APPENDIX (1)

**Young Egyptian Activists' Perceptions of the Potential of Social Media for
Mobilisation**
Nermeen Sayed Kassem
November 2010

I am a research student at The University of York, UK. My research explores how and why young activists use social media to engage in politics. Your cooperation in response to this questionnaire will contribute to the understanding of how and why young activists choose social media platforms (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and weblogs) and how this may reflect on their political engagement offline.

- **Confidentiality of information you provide is completely guaranteed.**
- **Information you provide will be exclusively used for research purposes.**
- **If you have any queries regarding this research project and how data will be dealt with, please contact the researcher on nsh503@york.ac.uk.**

Please answer all the questions below.

Social media (SM) use:

Q1: There are different social media platforms that provide users with several opportunities to interact with others, please indicate the types of media you use from the following list (choose all that apply).

1. Facebook.
2. YouTube.
3. Twitter.
4. MySpace.
5. Blogs.
6. Other (please specify) -----

Q2: On average, approximately how much time on a typical day do you **generally** spend on SM?

Less than an hour	One-two hours	Two-three hours	More than three hours
1	2	3	4

Q3: On average, approximately how much time on a typical day do you spend **discussing or practising politics** on SM?

Less than an hour	One-two hours	Two-three hours	More than three hours
1	2	3	4

Q4: Since when do you use those social media?

less than 6 months	6-less than 12 months	12-less than 24 months	2-3 years	more than 3 years
1	2	3	4	5

Q5: Do you disclose your real identity on SM (your name and contact information)?

all the time	most of the time	some of the time	only now and then	never
5	4	3	2	1

Online political activism:

Q6: Websites like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, etc. have variety of features that provide users with various opportunities to engage in political activities, please indicate the degree to which you have been engaged in any of the following activities on SM in the last 12 months.

	all the time	most of the time	some of the time	only now and then	never
Joined or left a political group	5	4	3	2	1
Started a social or political topic for discussion	5	4	3	2	1
Posted links to news stories relating to a political cause	5	4	3	2	1
Posted links to videos relating to a political cause	5	4	3	2	1
Created or invited others to participate in an event related to a political cause	5	4	3	2	1
Posted a photo that something to do with politics	5	4	3	2	1
Signed an e-mail or web petition.	5	4	3	2	1
Forwarded a political e-mail or link to another person	5	4	3	2	1

Reasons for using SM:

Q7: Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following factors as reasons for using SM for political activism:

I use social media platforms . . .	strongly agree	agree	neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	strongly disagree
To help me decide how to vote in the future	5	4	3	2	1
To help me decide about important issues	5	4	3	2	1
For unbiased viewpoints	5	4	3	2	1
To help me convince others to vote in the next election	5	4	3	2	1
To help other users decide on important issues	5	4	3	2	1
To find specific political information I am looking for	5	4	3	2	1
To keep up with main issues of the day	5	4	3	2	1
Because it is an easy way to disseminate information	5	4	3	2	1
To help me draw other users' attention to certain political information	5	4	3	2	1
To form/join political groups	5	4	3	2	1
Because it helps me express my opinion among a large group of people	5	4	3	2	1
Because it helps me organize political events on a large scale	5	4	3	2	1
To give me something to talk about with others	5	4	3	2	1
To use as ammunition in arguments with others	5	4	3	2	1
Because it is entertaining	5	4	3	2	1
Because it helps me relax	5	4	3	2	1
Because engaging in an online activity is less time consuming	5	4	3	2	1
Because engaging in an online activity is less money consuming	5	4	3	2	1
Because I can get what I want for less effort	5	4	3	2	1

Political efficacy:

Q8: Some people believe that their participation in politics would make difference, while others do not. On the following scale, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	strongly agree	agree	neither agree nor disagree	disagree	strongly disagree
Politics is too complicated for someone like me to follow	1	2	3	4	5
There's not much point in participating in political campaigns: one person's participation will not make any difference	1	2	3	4	5
People like me do not have a say in government	1	2	3	4	5
Politicians do not care about what people like me think	1	2	3	4	5

Fear of repression:

Q9: On the following scale, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	strongly agree	agree	neither agree nor disagree	disagree	strongly disagree
I worry about being emotionally or physically harrassed if I go on thestreet to participate in a political activity	1	2	3	4	5
I feel worried about expressing my political opinion in public	1	2	3	4	5
Egyptian citizens could face violations which make him/her worry about his/her safety.	1	2	3	4	5

Off-line political activism:

Q10: Please indicate the degree to which you have been engaged in any of the following political activities in the last 12 months.

	all the time	most of the time	some of the time	only now and then	never
Expressed political opinion through main stream media (Written a letter to the editor of a newspaper or magazine or called a live radio or TV show to express a political opinion)	5	4	3	2	1
Volunteered for a campaign or other political cause	5	4	3	2	1
Organized or participated in organizing a political event	5	4	3	2	1
Attended political meetings or speeches	5	4	3	2	1
Participated in demonstrations or protests	5	4	3	2	1
Displayed a political button, a sign or sticker	5	4	3	2	1
Voted in election	5	4	3	2	1
Tried to influence how others would vote	5	4	3	2	1

SM satisfaction:

Q11: Over all, how satisfied are you with the job SM do in providing you with the things you are seeking?

very much satisfied	satisfied	neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	dissatisfied	very much dissatisfied
5	4	3	2	1

Demographics:

Q12: Gender:

1. Male
2. Female

Q13: Education:

1. University student (undergraduate).
2. University BA or its equivalent.
3. Higher degree as well as MA.

Q14: Age:

1. 18 – 21 years.
2. More than 21 – 24 years.
3. More than 24 – 27 years.
4. More than 27 – 29 years.
5. More than 29 years.

Q15: The average monthly income of your household:

1. Less than 1000 EGP.
2. 1000 – less than 3000 EGP.
3. 3000 – less than 5000 EGP.
4. 5000 – 7000 EGP.
5. More than 7000 EGP.

Optional:

Would it be possible for me to contact you for a follow-up interview? If so, please provide information about your preferred method of contact

Your name	Your e-mail address	Your mobile number

Thank you for your cooperation

Appendix (2)

استمارة استقصاء

رؤية الشباب المصري الناشط سياسياً لدور ساحات التفاعل الاجتماعي عبر الإنترنت في تفعيل الحراك الاجتماعي

إعداد: نرمين سيد قاسم

بيانات هذه الاستمارة سرية ولا تستخدم إلا لأغراض البحث العلمي

نوفمبر 2010

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته... أنا باحثة دكتوراه في جامعة يورك بالمملكة المتحدة، وأجري دراسة حول دوافع استخدام الشباب المصري لساحات التفاعل الاجتماعي عبر الإنترنت (مثل: Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Blogs)، وأود في البداية أن أشكر على تعاونك في ملء بيانات هذه الاستمارة، وإذا كان لديك أي استفسار فيما يتعلق بهذا البحث بإمكانك التواصل معي عبر بريدي الإلكتروني nsh503@york.ac.uk

أرجو الإجابة على جميع الأسئلة بوضع دائرة حول الإجابة التي تعبر عن رأيك.

استخدام ساحات التفاعل الاجتماعي:

س 1: توجد العديد من ساحات التفاعل الاجتماعي عبر الإنترنت، حدد أي من الوسائل التالية تستخدمها في التواصل مع الآخرين عبر شبكة الإنترنت (يمكنك تحديد أكثر من وسيلة).

1. YouTube

2. Blogs

3. خدمة إضافة التعليقات التي تتيحها مواقع الصحف الإلكترونية عبر الإنترنت.

4. Twitter

5. Facebook

6. مواقع أخرى-----

س 2: ما متوسط المدة التي تقضيها تقريباً في استخدام هذه الوسائل للتواصل الاجتماعي مع الأصدقاء والزملاء والأقارب بشكل عام في اليوم العادي؟

أقل من ساعة	من ساعة إلى ساعتين	من ساعتين إلى 3 ساعات	أكثر من 3 ساعات
1	2	3	4

س 3: ما متوسط المدة التي تقضيها تقريباً في استخدام هذه الوسائل لمناقشة القضايا والموضوعات السياسية المثارة (تحديداً) في المجتمع المصري في اليوم العادي؟

أقل من ساعة	من ساعة إلى ساعتين	من ساعتين إلى 3 ساعات	أكثر من 3 ساعات
1	2	3	4

س 4: منذ متى تستخدم هذه الوسائل لمناقشة القضايا والموضوعات السياسية المثارة (تحديداً) في المجتمع المصري؟

أقل من 6 أشهر	من 6 أشهر إلى سنة	من سنة إلى سنتين	من سنتين إلى 3 سنوات	أكثر من 3 سنوات
1	2	3	4	5

س 5: هل تستخدم اسمك ومعلوماتك الحقيقية أثناء مناقشة القضايا السياسية تحديداً عبر هذه الوسائل؟

أبداً	نادراً	أحياناً	غالباً	دائماً
1	2	3	4	5

النشاط السياسي عبر ساحات التفاعل الاجتماعي:

س 6: حدد معدل ممارستك لكل من الأنشطة السياسية التالية من خلال ساحات التفاعل الاجتماعي عبر الإنترنت خلال السنة الماضية.

أبداً	نادراً	أحياناً	غالباً	دائماً	العبئارات
1	2	3	4	5	انضمت إلى، أو غادرت مجموعة ذات اهتمامات سياسية
1	2	3	4	5	شاركت في مناقشات أو كتبت تعليقات حول موضوع يتعلق بقضية سياسية
1	2	3	4	5	أضفت روابط لقصص إخبارية لها علاقة بقضية سياسية مثارة
1	2	3	4	5	رفعت أو شاركت لقطات فيديو أو صور لها علاقة بقضية سياسية
1	2	3	4	5	دعوت آخرين للمشاركة في حدث له علاقة بقضية سياسية
1	2	3	4	5	وقعت على بيان سياسي أو مررت عريضة سياسية عبر الإنترنت
1	2	3	4	5	مررت رسالة إلكترونية e-mail أو رابطاً ذا طابع سياسي لشخص آخر

أسباب استخدام ساحات التفاعل الاجتماعي:

س 7: أرجو إبداء رأيك في العبارات التالية حول أسباب استخدامك لوسائل التفاعل الاجتماعي عبر الإنترنت كساحات للتفاعل السياسي:

معارض بشدة	معارض	محايد	موافق	موافق بشدة	أشارك في ساحات التفاعل الاجتماعي عبر الإنترنت ...
1	2	3	4	5	لتساعدني في اتخاذ قرار التصويت في الانتخابات
1	2	3	4	5	لتساعدني في تشكيل آرائني نحو القضايا الهامة
1	2	3	4	5	لتساعدني في الحصول على آراء غير متحيزة
1	2	3	4	5	لأنها تمكنني من دعوة آخرين للإدلاء بأصواتهم في الانتخابات
1	2	3	4	5	لأنها وسيلة أستطيع من خلالها إقناع آخرين بتبني وجهات نظر معينة نحو القضايا الهامة
1	2	3	4	5	لتساعدني في الحصول على معلومات سياسية محددة أبحث عنها
1	2	3	4	5	لأبقى على اطلاع ودراية بأهم الأحداث والقضايا التي تحدث على الساحة
1	2	3	4	5	لأنها وسيلة سهلة لنشر المعلومات
1	2	3	4	5	لتساعدني في جذب انتباه آخرين نحو موضوعات ومعلومات سياسية محددة
1	2	3	4	5	لأنها تتيح لي الانضمام إلى مجموعة أو مجموعات لها نفس اهتماماتي السياسية
1	2	3	4	5	لأنها تعد أداة فعالة لتنظيم المشاركة الجماعية في القضايا السياسية
1	2	3	4	5	لأن لها القدرة على الوصول إلى عدد كبير ومؤثر من الناس
1	2	3	4	5	لأنها تمدني بقضايا وموضوعات يمكنني التحدث فيها مع الآخرين
1	2	3	4	5	لأجد ما يدعم وجهة نظري عند الدخول في نقاش مع الآخرين
1	2	3	4	5	لأنها مسلية
1	2	3	4	5	لأنها تساعدني على الاسترخاء
1	2	3	4	5	لأن التواصل من خلالها لا يتطلب الكثير من الوقت
1	2	3	4	5	لأن التواصل من خلالها غير مكلف
1	2	3	4	5	لأنني أحصل من خلالها على ما أريده بأقل مجهود

الكفاءة السياسية:

س 8: حدد على المقياس التالي درجة اتفاقك أو اختلافك مع كل من العبارات التالية:

معارض بشدة	معارض	محايد	موافق	موافق بشدة	العبارات
5	4	3	2	1	يصعب عليّ متابعة القضايا السياسية لأنني أجدّها معقّدة جداً
5	4	3	2	1	أشعر أن مشاركتي في الأحداث والفاعليات السياسية لا تُحدث فرقاً كبيراً
5	4	3	2	1	أشعر كمواطن عادي بأنّ كلمتي ليس لها قيمة لدى الحكومة
5	4	3	2	1	أرى أن المسؤولين في الحكومة لا يهتمون بمعرفة رأي المواطن العادي في القضايا والأحداث المثارة

الخوف من القمع:

س 9: إلى أي درجة تتفق أو تختلف مع العبارات التالية؟

معارض بشدة	معارض	محايد	موافق	موافق بشدة	العبارات
1	2	3	4	5	أخشى أن أتعرض للإيذاء النفسي أو البدني إذا نزلت إلى الشارع للمشاركة في نشاط سياسي
1	2	3	4	5	أشعر بالقلق إذا أبديت رأيي السياسي بشكل معلن
1	2	3	4	5	قد يتعرض المواطن المصري لمضايقات أمنية تجعله أحياناً غير آمن على نفسه أو أفراد أسرته أو ممتلكاته
1	2	3	4	5	يمكنني الثقة في معظم المسؤولين في الحكومة الحالية
1	2	3	4	5	أنا على قناعة بأن المسؤولين في الحكومة يتخذون القرار الصائب دائماً
1	2	3	4	5	عادة ما يلتزم المسؤولون في الحكومة بتنفيذ الوعود التي يعدون الجماهير بها

المشاركة السياسية في الواقع:

س 10: تتعدّد الأنشطة السياسية التي يمكن للفرد أن يعبر من خلالها عن رأيه أو موقفه السياسي في أرض الواقع، في هذا الإطار حدد معدل ممارستك لكل من الأنشطة التالية خلال السنة الماضية.

أبداً	نادراً	أحياناً	غالباً	دائماً	العبارات
1	2	3	4	5	عبرت عن رأيي السياسي من خلال وسائل الإعلام التقليدية (راسلت محرراً في صحيفة أو مجلة، أو تواصلت مع أحد برامج الراديو أو التليفزيون)
1	2	3	4	5	تطوّعت في حملات سياسية تتعلق بقضية أو مرشح سياسي
1	2	3	4	5	شاركت في الإعداد لتنظيم حدث سياسي
1	2	3	4	5	شاركت في ندوات أو محاضرات خاصة بقضية أو شخصية سياسية
1	2	3	4	5	شاركت في تظاهرات / إضرابات / اعتصامات
1	2	3	4	5	ارتديت أو لصقت أو وزعت ملصقات أو شعارات سياسية
1	2	3	4	5	أدليت بصوتي في انتخابات
1	2	3	4	5	أقنعت أو حاولت إقناع شخص أو أكثر بالمشاركة في انتخابات أو أحداث سياسية

معدل الرضا عن إشباع الاحتياجات السياسية من خلال ساحات التفاعل الاجتماعي:

س 11: هل تعتقد أن توقعاتك المسبقة من استخدامك لتلك الوسائل بهدف التفاعل السياسي (تحديداً) قد تحققت؟

إلى حد كبير جداً	إلى حد كبير	إلى حد ما	بشكل ضعيف	بشكل ضعيف جداً
5	4	3	2	1

المتغيرات الديموجرافية:

س 12: الجنس:

1. ذكر
2. أنثى

س 13: التعليم:

1. طالب جامعي
2. حاصل على مؤهل جامعي
3. حاصل على مؤهل أعلى من الجامعي

س 14 العمر:

1. من 18 – 22 سنة
2. من 22 – 26 سنة
3. من 26 – 30 سنة
4. من 30 – 35 سنة
5. أكثر من 35 سنة

س 15: متوسط الدخل الشهري للأسرة:

1. 1000 – أقل من 3000 جنيها
2. 3000 – أقل من 5000 جنيها
3. 5000 – 7000 جنيها
4. أكثر من 7000 جنيها

اختياري

قد يتطلب البحث التواصل معك في المستقبل للحصول على المزيد من المعلومات أو لاستيضاح بعض النقاط، لك مطلق الحرية في ترك بياناتك الشخصية.

اسمك	رقم الهاتف المحمول	بريدك الإلكتروني

شكرا لحسن تعاونك

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