Paper Title:
Journalists in Network Society: Utilization of ICTs inside Three Egyptian Newsrooms

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Abstract
With Egyptian society moving into the electronic age, more people are communicating in cyberspace not only to access more information, but also to create a reality of their own (Parks, 2005). In five years, the number of Internet users increased seven fold reaching 22.1 million users by August 2010 (MCIT, 2010). Egyptians started utilizing the technology to debate current events, criticize the government, public officials, political parties, and to share personal experiences to propose solutions to current socio-political problems, and to construct different visions of the country's future (El Gody, 2004; Parker, 2005). Citizens quickly harnessed ICTs creating online news sites, blogs, vblogs, YouTube, twitters, podcasts, SMS text messages, mobile phone web publishing, and establishing accounts on social networks like facebook (3.2 million users) and youtube (3 million users) mainly to produce and disseminate their journalism and advocacy faster than government can control, regulate or censor (El Gody; 2009; Hamdy, 2008; Salma, 2010). Pitnac (2010) counted 13,500 active Egyptian citizen news journalism websites providing "Politically driven reportage on local events ...break[ing] numerous off-limits to the mainstream Egyptian media" utilizing ICTs to cluster citizens around the idea of embracing democratic change (Pitnac, 2010: 299).

The more audience join the hybrid world, the more networks created, the more active virtual participation occur, the more close Egyptian society in changing their reality witnessed in the increasing number of activities initiated in the online sphere (Radsch, 2008). Development, in that sense, can be attained through the wide participatory process that is intended to bring about social and material advancement for the majority of the people through their gaining control over their environment (Donahue, 2000). Information Communication Technologies hence is perceived as a tool to "empower" the Egyptian public to think and develop programs that respond to their specific needs. As a result of the diversity of the development concept, this alternative/pluralistic networked space envisions the diverse role of communications, too. It emphasizes the multiplicity, smallness of scale, localization, de-institutionalization, and interaction at all levels, and interchange of sender-receiver roles (Bardoel, 2002; Singer 2008). Internet communication technologies (netCTs) hence added a new dimension to the production and consumption of news journalism in Egypt. They have enabled the creation of new communication spaces where diverse voices engage in conversation about matters affecting daily lives. Egyptian mainstream journalism, however, seems to be away from that formula (Ibid; El Gody, 2009). Ang (1991) report on journalists use of technology to communicate with audience describes Egyptian journalists, stating that media pretends to know their audience -through technologies- generating 'institutional knowledge,' realistically journalism media 'is not using the technology' to address citizens.

Introduction of ICTs in Egyptian Print Media

Egyptian print media ecology for the past 40 years has been shaped by loyalty to the system. One can still use William Rugh's 1979 classification of media in Egypt as being authoritarian (Rugh, 1979; 2004). By definition, an authoritarian media system is controlled by the government through direct ownership and/or strict laws and regulations. The purpose of newspapers is to promote the government's main political, social, and economic programs. The government steers the media agenda and direction of news to filter what receivers hear and see. Egyptian journalists do not explore beyond the limits of a traditional system of relationship between the political class and the rest of the population (Rugh, 2004; El Gody, 2006). The failure of the Egyptian print media to have an active presence in people's lives, lead audience to turn to other alternative online independent media forms for news (El Gody, 2004; Salama, 2009).

Internet technology was introduced in Egyptian newsrooms in 1996 as a government 'aid'. Dar Al Tahrir publication *Al Gomhuria* was the first among Egyptian print newspaper to go online as gif/jpg image of clips from the newspaper. During the next four years, 18 Egyptian newspaper organizations joined the cyber world (El Gody, 1999; Mahmoud, 2001). Currently *-till February 2010-* 63 publications, representing 40.4 percent of Egyptian print media industry, have their own website. Although superficially this trend implies development, however whether ICTs has been realized and used in Egyptian newsrooms daily routine has been a question that needs further examination.

In transitional societies –moving towards democracy- like Egypt, politics is a traditional central for journalists to 'mediate with their audience,' informing the citizenry, facilitating their informed choice as 'gate-watchers' not as watchdog 'gatekeeper' in the power struggle between audience, media and politics. Egyptian journalists has been criticized not being 'connected' with their local audiences, losing their ability to help citizens making connections between their everyday life and politics, as well as losing their capacity to encourage local people to participate in political debates, or even provide them with the skills needed in local politics, are rarely used to its maximum (El Gody, 2009; Eliasoph, 1998: 210).

The lack of media freedom gave room for alternative independent online media to develop. News websites soon became the playground for political parties, activists, and groups from various ideologies to creating 'online spaces of flows' to cater readers emerging needs. Political actors started investing creating news portals to attract communities within community to able to interact with their ideas in one hand and with each other on the other hands (Bernard, 2000; Livingstone & Bober, 2005; Castells 2001). Egyptian online discussions were at high, especially after 9/11events, citizens started cluster each with their own agenda fostering several scenarios for democratisation process. Egyptians saw in ICTs a medium that is likely to have profound implication on the socio-political democratization. Activists saw in the Internet an opportunity to curb government pressures creating, a 'space' in which individuals participate in discussions about matters of common concern, in an atmosphere free of coercion or dependencies that would incline individuals toward acquiescence or silence. Internet technology did lead to a more horizontal and less vertical communication model among Egyptian society, enabling people to bypass the

controlled regimes and traditional mass media, allowing the society to create a developmental agenda of their own (Rheinglold, 1993; El Gody, 2009).

On the other hand, a study conducted on 12 Egyptian newspaper websites showed that the Internet plays a role in expanding newspaper circulation, "it is only another form of the printed paper," (El Gody, 2003:47) not a tool to develop news content or interactivity with audience. In a previous study entitled *ICT and Journalism in Egypt,* I (2000) concluded that Egyptian media are not providing any services presenting a free replica of their paper version to their online readers. El Gody's study of Egyptian newspaper sites showed eighty percent of news sites are not updated, some of which had not been updated for more than four months. The study revealed that seventy five percent of Egyptian news sites are not offering any real time news services to readers, eighty percent of the online sites do not provide news archive or database service, finally seventy percent are not presenting a news search tool (El Gody, 2000). This phenomenon occurs because Egyptian print media expand horizontally. They publish their news on the web "just so as not to be behind and to be related to the new Internet society." (ElGosh ,2002:1) Egyptian media and Egyptian journalists don't yet understand the art of net usage. Subsequently online content remains static and newspaper organizations are still losing ground (ElGody, 2003:4), or as Peter Verwey describes the Egyptian experience of using online journalism to be like putting old media in a new jacket (Verwey, 2000). The question that poses itself now is what role ICTs play in promoting news industry and the social democratisation process in Egypt.

Principle Research Questions
The study focuses on the diffusion and implementation of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) especially Internet technologies (netCTs) in Egyptian newsrooms. Further the study examines if/and to what extent and in what ways did Egyptian newsrooms incorporated ICTs in their daily routine, and how did news organizations identify themselves with news convergence and whether the interactive characteristics of new media are playing a role in the Egyptian networked society. Other questions include what are ICTs components diffused and adopted in Egyptian print media? Presence of Convergence strategy(ies) within Egyptian newsrooms? What role, if any, do newsroom culture, and professional backgrounds play in adopting ICTs? form(s) of networking among journalists and their networking strategy –if any- with their sources, editors and audience? Further the role played by 'the networked journalism' if any in shaping society's democratic participation and creation of an active social network sphere.

Research Methodology
The study focuses on the diffusion and implementation of ICTs especially Internet technologies in Egyptian newsrooms. Further the study examines if/and to what extent and in what ways did Egyptian newsrooms incorporated ICTs in their daily routine, and how did news organizations identify themselves with news convergence and whether the interactive characteristics of new media are playing a role in the Egyptian networked society. To reach this goal, the qualitative ethnographic study (field observation, structured and semi- structured interviews, and document analysis) is conducted in order to capture a the use of ICTs in news production and weather ICTs are integrated in the everyday use of the news.