

FACEBOOK AS A PUBLIC SPHERE IN EGYPT

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ABSTRACT

The current research discusses the social network “Facebook” as a public sphere and its role in shaping public opinion in Egypt, in particular, the correlation between Facebook and the expression of opinions whether in the virtual public sphere or real life among Egyptians. Results show that Facebook has become one of the most important sources of information for the majority of Egyptians. Facebook use is positively correlated with Egyptians’ feeling of freedom opinion and expression. This paper proves that despite some of Habermas’ ideas about public sphere are not available in Egypt; Facebook could create a public sphere on the case of “Tiran & Sanafir” islands that has helped in creating a public opinion in two sides with and against the government.

KEYWORDS: Facebook, Public Opinion, Public Sphere, Social Networks, Tiran & Sanafir, Egypt

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1. INTRODUCTION

Recent years have seen a great deal of academic interest in social networks and their influence on public opinion. Social networks allow everyone to take part in public discourse and makes it much easier to find ‘followers’ or ‘friends’ for individual opinions. It massively increases the speed of getting messages and opinions across (Dewing, 2012; Leavey, 2013; Lopes, 2014; Quinn-Thomas, 2015).

Many studies show that social networks contribute to the formation of public awareness and urging individuals on adopting specific attitudes (Kalyango and Adu-Kumi, 2012). Moreover, their role in turning these attitudes into a real-life action to the extent of participating in demonstrations and revolts against undemocratic regimes (Eltantawy and Wiest, 2011; Storck, 2011). For Poster (1997) face-to-face interaction of the public sphere was over, democracy must henceforth take into account new forms of electronically mediated discourse (p 220), and different forms of online civic engagement (Macloughlin, 2016: P 12).

Among the many new forms of interaction made possible by the Internet, it would be difficult to find any other services that have experienced such rapid growth as online social network sites. Sites such as Facebook is among the most visited websites globally (Steinfeld, Ellison, Lampe and Vitak, 2012: p 124). Though, it is believed that social networks are to be the most prominent development in this area. Social networks provide their users with all of the conditions required for the idea of the public sphere, like free access, global availability. On the other hand, pioneers of the critical trend, or human change model in public opinion studies, see that public opinion polls only reflect the ability of the ruling and dominant classes on falsifying or directing public opinion (Showman, 2000: p 28). Also, for a real public opinion, they

stipulate the freedom opinion and expression and citizens must be free from all restrictions imposed by traditional social organizations.

Al-Shimi (2016) has noted that periods of democratic transformations could see a decline in confidence level "social capital" between individuals and institutions and a rapid changes in public opinion, these reasons make it difficult to predict the real public opinion.

On Saturday, April 9th, 2016 Egyptian prime ministry council announced that Egyptian two islands "Tiran & Sanafir" located in the Red Sea are affiliated to Saudi Arabia sovereignty. That announcement came after the completion of borders demarcation agreement between the two countries. Egyptian government's approval of this agreement caused opposition reactions among Egyptians. Political activists went out in rejecting demonstrations and some lawyers litigated the government to cancel that agreement.

The purpose of this research is to explore and analyze the role of Facebook informing the public sphere and public opinion in Egypt using the two islands "Tiran and Sanafir" as a case study, particularly with regards to the correlation between Facebook use and the expression of opinions whether in the virtual public sphere or in the real life among Egyptians.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK "PUBLIC SPHERE"

The public sphere is one of the most reliable concepts to understand the relationship between power and society in the modern political systems. The origins of public sphere theory go back to 1961. He believes that the public sphere is in the middle of the public and the government, and the private sphere, which may focus on the family and the personal affairs of individuals.

Through acts of assembly and dialogue, the public sphere generates opinions and attitudes which serve to affirm or challenge, therefore, to guide the affairs of state. In ideal terms, the public sphere is the source of public opinion which is needed to "legitimate authority in any real democracy" (Rutherford, 2000).

This public sphere -as it grew up in the European bourgeois societies- includes discussions about the exercise of government policy, which reflects the public opinion trends (Khadr 2009: p 943).

Habermas has defined the public sphere as a virtual or imaginary community which does not necessarily exist in any identifiable space. In its ideal form, the public sphere is "made up of private people gathered together as a public and articulating the needs of society with the state" (Habermas, 1991). Also, it highlights the views and trends through behaviors, which seek to emphasize the general affairs of the state. Habermas noted that the public sphere success depends on: a) The extent of access "as close to universal as possible"; B) The degree of autonomy "citizens must be unconstrained"; C) The rejection of hierarchy "so that each individual has the same opportunity to participate"; D) The rule of law "particularly the subordination of the state"; E) Moreover, the quality of participation "the common commitment to the ways of logic" (Johnson and Villa, 1994: p 428). Abdul-Maksoud (2009: p 14) has summarized these conditions in three characteristics; first: participation is open, second: all people are equal in positions and roles regardless their social and economic conditions, third: it may discuss or debate any case. But, the question in this area is: to what extent does Facebook function as a public sphere?

Communication revolution has contributed the emergence of a new social public space is subject to the logic of

"Habermas," who see that the public opinion must be in an environment enjoys the freedom of information flooding and ideas exchange between citizens. Macloughlin proves that Habermas' ideas can be manipulated and applied to the online public sphere. His theory is ever present when thinking about its relationship within the context of online public spheres and online political activism. Although problems of universality and the damaging effects of the mass media, which still apparent today with the online public sphere, we can still say that there has been a revival of the public sphere in the way in which the Internet, as a technology has been a key platform to its success and continuation (Macloughlin, 2016: P 34).

Moreover, as a public sphere, Facebook provides a space for people to engage in discussion and deliberation. It gives users the ability to create and manage pages and groups addressing any issue or concern. It allows users to trade ideas, stay informed with local or global developments, and unite people with common interests and/or beliefs through groups and other pages (Ismail, 2016).

Social networking websites are the most prominent evolution in this area, they have doubled the space available online for people to express their views (Faraj, 2012, pp 817-903) through these sites such as blogs, YouTube and Facebook and Twitter to other websites that are more than twenty networks around the world.

Moreover, because of being a source of information, these networks got more importance. Many citizens today follow current events or crises and access to information and different ideas through these websites. Thus, contributes to building public perceptions towards the events (Zhang et al. 2010).

The theoretical approach of Habermas "public sphere" ensures that the electronic media creates a debate among the public, this debate impacts public issues and the government. The public sphere is considered as space for our social life, and public opinion appears as a result of this public sphere. Through his theory, "Habermas" emphasizes the possibility of creating a dialogue outside the control of the government and the economy (Abdel Kawi 2009: p 1558; Azi, 2009: p 8).

According to the theory, the public sphere occurs when individuals are free to express their opinions, they do not know each other, a debate in the sense that there are different opinions and dialogue, everyone can participate independently, and media produce an explicit content. So the author tries to explore the availability of those conditions in "Tiran and Sanafir" islands issue from the viewpoint of participants. This try is to figure out the role of Facebook in-forming the public sphere and public opinion in Egypt about "Tiran and Sanafir" islands, particularly with regards to the correlation between Facebook use and the expression of opinions whether in the virtual public sphere or in the real life among Egyptians.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Many studies have pointed out that Facebook is often used to connect with others and to know them better (Golder et al., 2007; Johnson, 2008; Sheldon, 2008; Wiese and Farrugia, 2009). Although rarely people accept to communicate with others they do not know through Facebook (Stern and Taylor 2007), but it is an easy way of communication between people from far away geographically distances (Dong, 2008; Golder et al., 2007; Sheldon, 2008). Then Facebook has been able to create a large public sphere to discuss issues of mutual interest between those people.

Due to a large number of studies that have been obtained, the author only relied on the most relevant studies. In other words, these studies which addressed the Facebook as a source of information and its cognitive and behavioral effects. Additionally, those studies which have examined the role of Facebook informing the public sphere and its relation

to the formation of public opinion.

3.1 Facebook as a Source of Information

Studies that have tested Facebook as a source of information for the public: these studies have found that Facebook now occupies a leading position among the sources of knowledge for a high percentage of people, sometimes up to more than 95% (Abdul-Rahman, 2014). Social networks are the primary source of information about the US presidential election, compared with other media (Baumgartner and Morris 2010), which makes social networks including a Facebook partner in achieving public awareness not only at the local level but on a global level as well (Abu-Zeid, 2012; Sheedy 2011).

These studies also have demonstrated that the use of Facebook has been related to high levels of knowledge (Pasek, More and Romer 2009); especially political knowledge, so Facebook become a social and political mass medium competes strongly with traditional media and online newspapers. (Shatlah and Meraee 2015; Aldbesa and Tahat 2013) Also, the reliance rate on Facebook as a source of information has related to the emotional and behavioral actions of the public. (Rifaae, 2014)

3.2 Facebook and Political Processes

This group of studies examined the relationship between Facebook and Democratic behavior. These studies have shown that social networking websites use correlates significantly to the increase in civic engagement, which refers to the immersion of citizens in public affairs. This engagement includes many political and non-political activities. Likewise, the personal discussions on Facebook support both civic participation and political activity and behavior, which lead to a deepening of the participation concepts and communicate with others (Abdul-Razzak 2013; Abdul-Wahed 2012; Pasek, More and Romer 2009; Zhang et al. 2010). These studies have found that political activity on Facebook is an indicator of political participation (Vitak et al. 2012).

Other studies have found that social networking websites are working to enhance the values of citizenship (Ismail, 2015) and the sense of social responsibility among citizens (Awad, 2011). Moreover, these sites can be relying on more than traditional mass media for political mobilization and the formation of opinions toward public affairs. Social networks can help to mobilize the masses about a particular issue (Alawnah 2012; Zulfiqar 2011) to become an effective tool for social movements. (Zoudah, 2012) furthermore, the Arabic Spring is a good example of that.

Baumgartner and Morris (2010) have pointed out that social networking websites can find new interactive ways to display themes related to the US presidential election and form new approaches to the practice of democracy on the Internet. The influence of Facebook has increased to be involved with an active role in creating revolutions. Studies (Abdul-Wahid, 2012; Far and Salimi 2012) have proved that Facebook and other social media have had an active role in guiding the Egyptian revolution in 2011 through three roles represented in the call for demonstrations, managing the collecting process and the movements of participants, the publicity of news and information. Also, Facebook has helped to break the barrier of fear among citizens during the revolution and is expected to have a more influential role in the future regarding the political change. (Hossam Ed-Din, 2012)

3.2 Facebook and Public Opinion

The studies that have examined the relationship between Facebook and public opinion have found that a high

percentage of citizens look at the Facebook as a free space to express opinions (Mohammadayn, 2012). They have also found a positive attitude towards Facebook as a public sphere. The video clips and photos were the most important mechanisms which citizens use on Facebook to express their opinions and ideas (Azab 2014).

Hassan (2012) and Lutfi and Saadawi (2013) emphasize that there is a positive correlation between the use of social networks and the formation of public opinion because those networks allow users to talk and exchange views with each other about current issues. Those networks are an ideal opportunity for people demanding political reform, such as the Arab peoples because social networks help them to achieve this reform (Hassan, 2012). Abu-Zeid, (2012) argued that Facebook has a clear influence on the trends of public opinion, and contribute to the mobilization of public opinion towards change. (Abed 2012)

So, many studies agreed that Facebook contributes significantly to providing citizens in any country with more freedom to express their views frankly about current events and issues greater than in the past. Public sphere theory represents that the modern technologies have significantly helped in the creation of the public sphere by making larger spaces available for individuals to talk freely about the different issues and participate in community needs setting.

According to this, we can say that Facebook has become an important source of information for citizens in many societies, including Egypt. Due to its being an easy way to communicate with others across wide geographical distances, Facebook is used as a public space to discuss many issues and ideas; locally, regionally and globally. So Facebook contributes to the formation of public opinion about these issues. In Egypt, Tiran and Sanafir Islands had a huge response from Egyptians on social networking websites, including Facebook. It was the most popular issue online from April 9th, 2016 until the end of the month (rassd.com, 2016). Hundreds of pages, profiles, and thousands of hashtags have appeared on Facebook. These pages, profiles, and hashtags have introduced different opinions about the issue. Herein lies the problem of this research, about the role of Facebook informing the public sphere and public opinion in Egypt, particularly with regards to the correlation between Facebook use and the expression of opinions whether in the virtual public sphere or in the real life among Egyptians.

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

RQ1: What is the role of Facebook in providing Egyptian users with information about “Tiran and Sanafir” islands?

RQ2: Why do Egyptians share their opinions via Facebook about the two islands?

RQ3: How does Facebook shape the public sphere in Egypt about the two islands?

RQ4: How does Facebook affect the public opinion in Egypt about the two islands?

H₁: Facebook use is positively correlated with the expression of opinions.

H₂: Facebook users express their opinions in the public and private sphere alike.

H₃: Facebook trust is positively correlated with the expression of opinions.

H₄: Facebook use is positively correlated with feeling with the freedom to express opinions on Facebook...

H₅: Opinion expression in the virtual public sphere is positively correlated with the opinion expression in real life.

5. METHODOLOGY

This research depends on survey method, to analyze the role of Facebook in creating the public sphere and its relation to the public opinion in Egypt about “Tiran and Sanafir” islands. The current research article is directed only to Egyptian people who do have accounts on Facebook regardless of their participation in the discussion about the issue. Those users are 28 million according to statistics in 2015 (ITIDA, 2015).

To reach only Facebook users, the author has developed an online questionnaire via Google website using the tool (Google Drive), and then the author has posted the form link on Facebook, in particular, the profiles of those people who shared their views or information about the two islands. As well as the profiles of people who had not proclaimed their opinions, but only participated in the discussion and others did not write down their opinions and didn't participate in the debate about the issue. The author asked every participant to nominate at least two people to participate in the survey in a snowball sample method. All of the participants were required to be Egyptian and at least 18 years old. The author collected responses from April 25th to May 24th, 2016, there were 758 participants completed the entire online survey without any incomplete, missing data or inappropriate information. Those participants are considered as a final sample of the research.

A Facebook trust index was developed by the author in order to get a clear idea of the level of trust the in Facebook among the participants. The Facebook trust index is defined as the difference between the percentage of the population who answered (tend to trust, do not know, tend not to trust). The Facebook trust index helps in finding out if it does affect the opinions expression on Facebook.

An attitudinal Likert-type scale was developed as well consists of 10 items to assess attitudes toward Facebook with responses on a five-point Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree). These items included:

- The relation between Facebook and the real life
- The role of Facebook in activating the participation for solving different problems.
- The role of Facebook in the dialogue of cultures.
- The role of Facebook in the public awareness.
- The believing that Facebook is a free space for free expression about opinions.
- The role of Facebook in the social peace.
- The believing that Facebook is an effective communicative medium to form public opinion.
- The credibility of Facebook contents.
- The believing that it is an area for fake news.

6. RESULTS

6.1.1 Participants' Characteristics

Participants in the current study are 758 individuals; 43.7% males and 56.3% females. 81.1% of all of the participants are between 18 and 35 years old, while 18.9% over 35 years old. 51.2% of participants state that they get a

monthly income less than the minimum duty of income, which means that they live below poverty line. While 31.4% have a moderate income, and 17.4% have a high-level income. 7.3% of participants just have a high school certificate, while some of them just read and write without a formal certificate. 82.3% graduated from a university, and only 10.4% are postgraduates, while 30.3% of participants are still students. About jobs, 56.1% work in different careers, and 13.6% did not get any job yet. In addition to the keynote, there is only 7.4% of participants have been members of political parties.

To understand these results we should clarify some facts about the economic and educational conditions in Egypt. As a state, Egypt has focused since the second half of 20th century on education and makes it for free for all Egyptians in governmental schools, universities, and institutes, but it failed to achieve the alignment between education and labor market needs. So now there is a plenty of educated people who can't find enough jobs commensurate with their certificates. So many of the alumni work in private security companies that do not require any scientific certificate, but only reading and writing, or as a delivery guy for restaurants or different shops. While a large proportion of Egyptian alumni still unemployed (12.8%), they don't find any job opportunity at all. Due to these circumstances, there are 27.8% of Egyptians live below the poverty line (Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, 2015).

6.2 Facebook as a Public Sphere in Egypt

6.2.1 Extent of Access

Egypt has a population of 92.45 million people, of whom 48.3 million people use the Internet; this means over 52% of the total population. Social networks users are 28 million, 27 million people of them are using Facebook for once at least a month. Almost 23 million people use Facebook via mobile devices (We Are Social report, 2016).

Due to this, researchers consider that Facebook users in Egypt act as an effective power in the public policy. The current study we have found that 36.7% of participants use Facebook heavily; they used to login to Facebook more than once a day and spend about three hours or more every time they go online. Moreover, 47.6% of participants use Facebook at a moderate level; they use it for less than one hour a day. While only 15.7% of participants use Facebook at a low level; they do not care about daily access, and they do not spend a specific time on Facebook.

As a source of information about "Tiran & Sanafir" islands, Facebook is one of the important information sources for the majority (71.9%) of participants. That information contributed to the debate and controversy over the issue. On the other hand, the study has found that (13.7%) did not use Facebook at all, but used other means of knowledge about the two islands. Moreover, 14.4% never care about pursuing the issue.

Despite these results, the current study has found that most of the participants (78.9%) have a limited level of trust in the information they get from Facebook. Those participants care about checking the authenticity of what is published on Facebook, either through asking some people they know or by searching online to read more about it. While 5.5% of participants believe that information they read on Facebook is false, except that information which is issued by specific people they trust them.

Reasons for the confidence in Facebook information for those who trust it are various. Every one of the participants had the right to clarify one reason or more for why he trusts in the information that shared or published through Facebook. So the most common reasons are as follow: Facebook is an excellent opportunity to express opinions about various issues (31.4%). Facebook includes views reflect the real issues and problems of the community (29.3%). Facebook is easier than other mediums for (25.6%) and it's the only available medium all the time for them. Due to this, they have to believe everything is published or shared on it. For (22%) of participants, they trust in Facebook because it

provides them with a summary of the current events around them. Facebook provides them with different information from what is published by other media; this information is closer to the truth (21.2%). Finally, 11.7% of participants believe in the information is published on Facebook because they trust the people who write or share that information.

Regarding the attitudes toward Facebook in general, the study has shown that most of the participants have neutral attitudes toward it (70.1%). In the second place the percentage of those who have positive attitudes (15.4%). Finally, (14.5%) of participants are adopting negative attitudes toward Facebook.

6.2.2 The Degree of Autonomy

Autonomy in Habermas' ideas about public sphere means that citizens must be free of coercion. So, in case of the current study, does Facebook provide Egyptians with this freedom? Through direct observation, researchers have found that many of people in Egypt to come over the governmental censorship, they sign up for more than one account on Facebook using their real names and many other fake names (E.g: Sad bird, Dream Princess, Darkness of the Night...) and they add themselves as friends on these accounts. In order to make their accounts more popular, they add a lot of other people they don't know in the real life. Unlike many studies findings which have shown that Facebook is employed mostly to keep in touch with people and to know them better (Golder et al., 2007; Joinson, 2008; Sheldon, 2008; Wiese and Farrugia, 2009). And only a small number of users try to meet new people or try to initiate a relationship via Facebook and that most of them use it to maintain already existing relationships (Stern and Taylor, 2007).

In Egypt, even after the revolution in 2011 against Mubarak, free expression is still stifled on a lot of matters. In 2013 "demonstrating regulation law" has been issued. According to this law, Egyptians have to take permission first from the government before they demonstrate and if the government denied they can judge it. Since activating this law Egypt went back to the same conditions before the revolution. So, now a lot of Egyptians use that artifice (using fake names on Facebook) to say their opinions honestly without fear of security prosecution.

Regarding these conditions, the study has shown that 57.7% of participants have less than 500 friends on Facebook, and 21.1% have 500 - 1000 friends. While 14.4% have 1000 - 5000 friends, 6.8% of participants have friends on Facebook reached more than 5000 (through two accounts because of the friend's number limit is 5000). Also, the study has proved that only 9% do not accept adding people they do not know. While the majority of participants (91%) accept adding people they do not know to friends' list (61.6% of them sometimes accept friendship requests from people they do not know, and 29.4% always do the same). As well, they send friend requests to people they do not know. Due to this results, we assume that Egyptians have their own traditions in using Facebook which can be considered as an alternative public sphere for those who are afraid of expressing their opinions against the ruling class.

Also, more than (50%) of participants like to share their opinions with more than just friends on Facebook, they make their posts seen for public and allow everyone to comment on these posts. 13.7% have shared their opinions with friends and groups pages they belong to, and 2.8% communicate with friends and groups and friends of friends as well. While those who share the information and views with everyone were 36.1% of participants. This result means that a lot of Egyptians like to share their opinions through broader ranges not only their Friends on Facebook.

6.2.3 The Rejection of Hierarchy

Rejection of hierarchy in public sphere means that each individual might participate on an equal footing. For Habermas, the public sphere was where people can share their opinions and able to change or influence decisions

separate from the state and economy. Facebook provides its users with a large area to express their opinions, e.g. private accounts, private pages, groups pages (some if the user is a member at and some groups pages allow every user to share what he like to).

So, if we accept that the ideal Habermas' ideas about public sphere have never been fully achieved by most accounts (Sani, 2009: p 23), in addition to facts like: 27 million people use Facebook in Egypt, the majority accept to add and share their opinions with users they don't know, the equity in participating on Facebook, we can assume that Facebook provides its users with an appropriate public sphere to discuss the public affairs and affect the decision making in Egypt.

6.3 Facebook and Public Opinion in Egypt

According to findings, 66.9% of participants see that Facebook is available space for anyone to express his opinion with no restrictions and they can write any opinion whatever or whenever it is. 25.9% agrees with this but they still worry from censorship. Facebook in their view is a free space but with some limits like some political issues, they hesitate to express their opinions in, either as a result to fear of governmental censorship on Facebook or the lack of information about it.

So only 53.9% who expressed their views on "Tiran & Sanafir", compared with 31.7% with said that they did not express their opinions on Facebook, that because they felt that their views will not make a big difference in the real life.

In addition to this, the survey clarified that 14.4% of participants did not care about pursuing the issue. Either as a result of lack of political interest they accustomed to since former regime of President Hosni Mubarak or because of they were absorbed in daily engagements and own business.

So the virtual public sphere through Facebook is characterized by freedom and allows many citizens to express their opinions. Moreover, including individuals aren't known to each other (a large percentage of participants accept adding people they do not know in real life and share debates and comments with them as well). Moreover, the results of this survey show that only 16.6% of participants had had a radical change to their views about the issue, and 48.3% adjusted their views partly as a result of their involvement in the debates on the issue in Facebook (virtual public sphere). Moreover, following-up Facebook causes changes or review to opinions about various issues between 74.2% of participants; totally change the views and attitudes towards issues for 65.9% of them. Also, 96.3% of participants confirm that what they write, or share on this social network reflects their real private opinions about what is happening in society.

According to results, 69.6% of participants assert Facebook leads them to take practical situations in real life. So we can say that protests and demonstrations happened in Egypt rejecting the governmental decision (real public sphere) are associated, in one way or another, to what 's going on in the virtual public sphere of debates and discussions on Facebook.

Moreover, the study has found that despite 43.1% consider it as one of entertaining means; most of the participants don't use Facebook for entertainment, but for serious discussion and expression of opinion and to follow the current events.

6.4 Hypotheses Results

- **H_1 :** Hypothesis one is supported. By normal standards, the association between Facebook use and the expression of opinions would be considered statistically significant [$r_s = 0.118, p < .05$]. It's a weak correlation, r_s value is close to zero but positive, participants have expressed their views and opinions more widely as they use Facebook

for a longer time.

Table 1: Difference between Public Sphere and Private Sphere in the Extent of Opinion Expression

| | Sum of Squares | Df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|----------------|----------------|------------|-------------|-------|------|
| Between Groups | 1.500 | 3 | .500 | 2.151 | .093 |
| Within Groups | 149.473 | 643 | .232 | | |
| Total | 150.974 | 646 | | | |

- **H₂**: The current study has demonstrated that the second hypothesis is supported as well. Table number “1” has shown that “public sphere level” has no effect on the level of opinion expression [$F = 2.151, p = .093$]. The difference between (people who prefer to discuss their opinions about different issues only with their close friends and relatives) and (those who discuss, debate and share ideas and information through Facebook with everyone whether they know or not) isn’t statistically significant. So, the alternative hypothesis is supported which says that Facebook users tend to express their views and opinions in both private and public spheres alike.

Table 2: Correlation between Levels of Trust in the Extent of Opinion Expression

| | | Opinion Expression | | Total |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|------------|
| | | Yes | No | |
| Trust in Facebook | Tend not to trust | 76 | 35 | 111 |
| | Don’t know | 296 | 198 | 494 |
| | Tend to trust | 35 | 7 | 42 |
| Total | | 407 | 240 | 647 |
| Chi-Square Tests | | | | |
| | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) | |
| Pearson Chi-Square | 10.871 ^a | 2 | .004 | |
| N of Valid Cases | 647 | | | |
| a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 15.58. | | | | |
| Symmetric Measures | | | | |
| | Value | Approx. Sig. | | |
| Contingency Coefficient | .129 | .004 | | |
| N of Valid Cases | 647 | | | |

- **H₃**: Table “2” shows the correlation between trust and the expression of opinion among participants. The study has proved that there is a significant correlation between trust in Facebook and expression about opinions [$X^2 = 10.871, p < .05$]. Results have indicated that individuals who don’t tend to trust in Facebook are more expressing their views about “Tiran & Sanafir” than those who tend to trust. But the table shows that those participants who don’t know if they trust Facebook or not were more tending to express their opinions than the two groups.

Those who trust in information published via Facebook believe that it provides them with information worthy of trust; even it was views or comments of ordinary people, in addition to what is posted from the other media like online newspapers or news websites. Those people tend to be less involved in the public sphere either discussion or even giving opinions.

That is why we can say that trust in the information provided by social networking is a condition has a weak effect

on the level of participation of individuals in the virtual public sphere. This is because most of the people have confirmed that they built their views on subjective convictions. Proof of this is that 68.7% of participants have pointed out that their views were not affected by their pursuing to Facebook. This means that most of the participants have formed their opinions in advance, through direct experience, and from other information sources, away from Facebook.

Table 3: Correlation between Facebook Use and Participants' Feeling Free to Express the Opinion

| | | | Facebook Use | Feeling Free to Express the Opinion |
|----------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|-------------------------------------|
| Spearman's rho | Facebook Use | Correlation Coefficient | 1.000 | .221** |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | . | .000 |
| | | N | 758 | 758 |
| | Feeling free to express the opinion | Correlation Coefficient | .221** | 1.000 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | . |
| | | N | 758 | 758 |

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

- **H₄**: According to the table “3” by normal standards, the association between the two variables would be considered statistically significant [$r_s = 0.221, p = .000$]. So, participants’ use of Facebook is positively correlated to their feeling with the freedom to express an opinion on Facebook.

Table 4: Correlation between Opinion Expression in the Virtual Public Sphere and the Opinion Expression in Real Life

| | | | Opinion Expression in Real Life | Opinion Expression in the Virtual PS |
|----------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Spearman's rho | opinion expression in real life | Correlation Coefficient | 1.000 | .097* |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | . | .014 |
| | | N | 758 | 647 |
| | Opinion expression in the virtual PS | Correlation Coefficient | .097* | 1.000 |
| | | Sig. (2-tailed) | .014 | . |
| | | N | 647 | 647 |

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

- **H₅**: The table “4” shows that by normal standards, the association between opinion expression in the virtual public sphere and opinion expression in real life would be considered statistically significant [$r_s = 0.097, p < .05$].

7. DISCUSSIONS

Among the many new forms of interaction made possible by the Internet, it would be difficult to find any other services that have experienced such rapid growth as online social network sites. Sites such as Facebook is among the most visited Web sites globally (Steinfeld, Ellison, Lampe and Vitak, 2012: p 124). This research discusses the role of Facebook informing the public sphere and public opinion in Egypt, in particular with regarding the correlation between Facebook use and the expression of opinions whether in the virtual public sphere or in the real life among Egyptians.

Facebook occupies a leading position among the sources of knowledge for a high percentage of people and the use of Facebook has been related to high levels of knowledge, in addition to the emotional and behavioral actions of the public (Abdul-Rahman, 2014; Baumgartner and Morris 2010; Pasek, More and Romer 2009; Rifaee, 2014)

The high percentage of people believes that Facebook provides them with a free space to express their opinions

(Mohammadayn, 2012). So there is a positive attitude towards Facebook as a public sphere (Azab 2014). The current study proves that Facebook has become one of the most important sources of information for the majority of Egyptians.

Previous studies prove that there is a positive correlation between the use of social networks and the public opinion process through their contribution to the mobilization of public opinion towards change, so they represent an ideal opportunity for people demanding political reform (Lutfi and Saadawi, 2013; Abed 2012; Hassan, 2012; Abu-Zeid, 2012). In Egypt, the use of Facebook is positively correlated with Egyptians' feeling with the freedom to express an opinion on Facebook, and the expression of opinions as well.

From results of the current study, we can say that Facebook could break the control of the ruling class on the public opinion in an incomplete democratic society like Egypt. Although the efforts of the government to use different ways to affect people's opinions via the same social network (Facebook), most of the opinions were against it.

Despite the existence of a law prohibiting demonstrations in Egypt, many people went out against the government's decision regarding the two islands "Tiran and Sanafir". This gives the impression that Facebook has been able to provide the individuals with a virtual public sphere to discuss the issue through it down to shaping a real public opinion reflects the general interests of the majority. Moreover the government couldn't continue in the hands over the process and moved the decision to the parliament. But, Supreme Court made its decision first according to some popular claims and stated that the two islands are Egyptian.

Moreover, social networking websites use correlates significantly to the increase in civic engagement, which refers to the immersion of citizens in public affairs. This engagement includes many political and non-political activities. Likewise the personal discussions on Facebook support both civic participation and political activity and behavior, which lead to a deepening of the participation concepts and communicate with others to the extent to consideration that political activity on Facebook is an indicator of political participation (Abdul-Razzak 2013; Abdul-Wahed 2012; Vitak et al. 2012; Zhang et al. 2010; Pasek, More and Romer 2009). Majority of participants in the current study assert that Facebook leads them to take practical situations in real life.

8. CONCLUSIONS

Pioneers of the critical trend (Habermas and others) assert that the public opinion which appears in the partial democratic environments isn't a real public opinion, but represents the view of the government and ruling class. The current study shows the antithesis; it has found that sometimes the public opinion could be real with the partial democratic environment. Al-Shimi (2016) has noted that the periods of democratic transition could see a decline in confidence level, "social capital", between individuals and institutions, and rapid changes in public opinion. For these reasons, it becomes difficult to predict the real public opinion. Egypt has lived in similar conditions since the revolution in 2011. As a result, it's been difficult to expect that the government controls the public opinion in the same perspectives of Habermas and his colleagues. So, this study agrees with the perception that the ideal Habermas' ideas about public sphere have never been fully achieved by most accounts. Despite some of Habermas' ideas aren't exist in Egypt, Facebook could create a public sphere on the case of "Tiran & Sanafir" islands, that has helped in creating a public opinion goes against the government.

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