7. Egypt's Evolving Media Landscape: Access, Public Interest and Control[1]

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The media in Egypt is currently playing, as it often has in the past, a crucial role in political, social and cultural change. The media has a critically important role to play in Egypt given that authoritarian political rulers have, to a large extent, been controlling the public sphere. Media ownership trends and editorial practices have evolved dynamically within, and in response to, the repressive political ecosystem. A set of intricate factors have been driving this evolution since 2000, and these are now changing rapidly in the wake of the 25 January revolution.

In parallel, technological developments are also shaping changing practices and trends in Egypt's media landscape. Developing information and communication technologies (ICTs) impact on the types of platforms people use to consume media, the way content is produced and the decisions taken by editorial policy makers. For a start, ICTs have transformed mass-mediated communications into a more interactive process that engages citizens more strongly. As well as affecting the way traditional mass media operate, the advent of ICTs has also produced a parallel arena of digital and new media, mostly used by independent citizens. New media spaces, unfolding through interactive content publishers and online social networks, increasingly constitute important players in shaping public opinion about current events.

In this study, we investigate how ICTs are both interlacing with mainstream media practices, as well as creating a novel digital media space. We look into how the two spheres of mainstream and alternative media co-exist, and ultimately intersect and converge. We specifically explore how media, through digital tools, fosters the promotion of human rights. These dynamics are examined within a broader context of online access, and barriers preventing access.

The present study is rooted in the access to knowledge (A2K) paradigm, which advocates the openness, enhancement and development of tools and platforms for building a robust knowledge base, which in turn promotes human development. At the heart of the A2K paradigm is the belief that the media should allow citizens to not only receive, but also contribute to an overall body of knowledge – and so enhance democratic participation. A2K is about democratising knowledge content, tools and platforms, and promoting a participative and active citizenry.
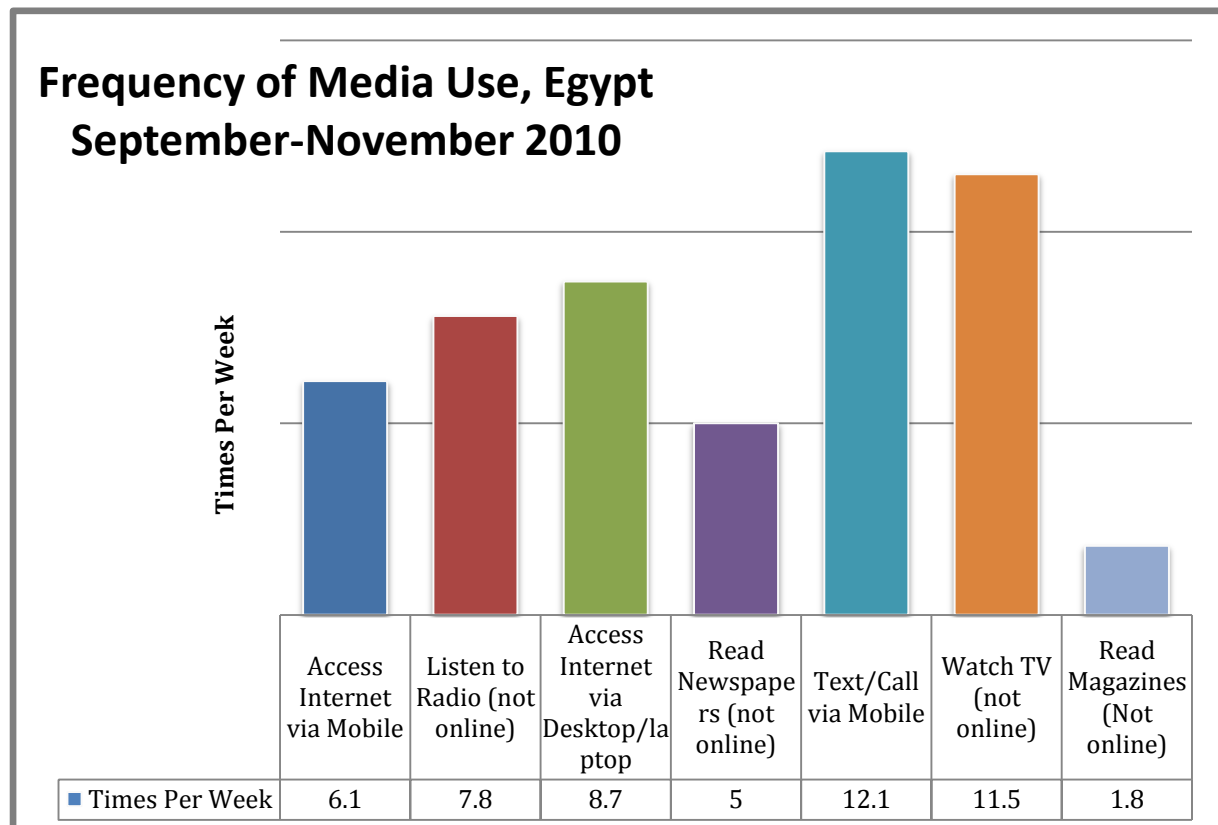
7.1. Access and Accessibility

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Media users in Egypt use a variety of platforms in different amounts. A recent study on media consumption by Google found that, between September and November 2010, mobile phones were the second most popular medium, used for both calling and short messaging services[3]. The internet followed in third place (see Figure 9), this provides an indication of the importance of digital platforms. Access and use of mobile telephony has expanded widely in Egypt, more than any other platform. In January 2011, the penetration rate for mobile phones was just over 91 per cent, the internet penetration rate was 30 per cent.

Figure 9: Frequency of use of different media, Egypt, September-November 2010[4]

**Frequency of Media Use, Egypt
September-November 2010**

	Access Internet via Mobile	Listen to Radio (not online)	Access Internet via Desktop/laptop	Read Newspapers (not online)	Text/Call via Mobile	Watch TV (not online)	Read Magazines (Not online)
■ Times Per Week	6.1	7.8	8.7	5	12.1	11.5	1.8

One factor behind the relatively high levels of technology use for public media consumption is the strong infrastructural foundation rolled out by the Egyptian government since the 1990s. Tarek Kamel, former Minister of Communications and Information Technology traces the advent of the internet in Egypt back to 1993, when a small group of 2000 users were connected via a 9.6K link between the Egyptian Universities Network and France.[5] By 1997 the number of users had jumped to 25,000, as a result of the significant investment in infrastructure by the Egyptian government. The
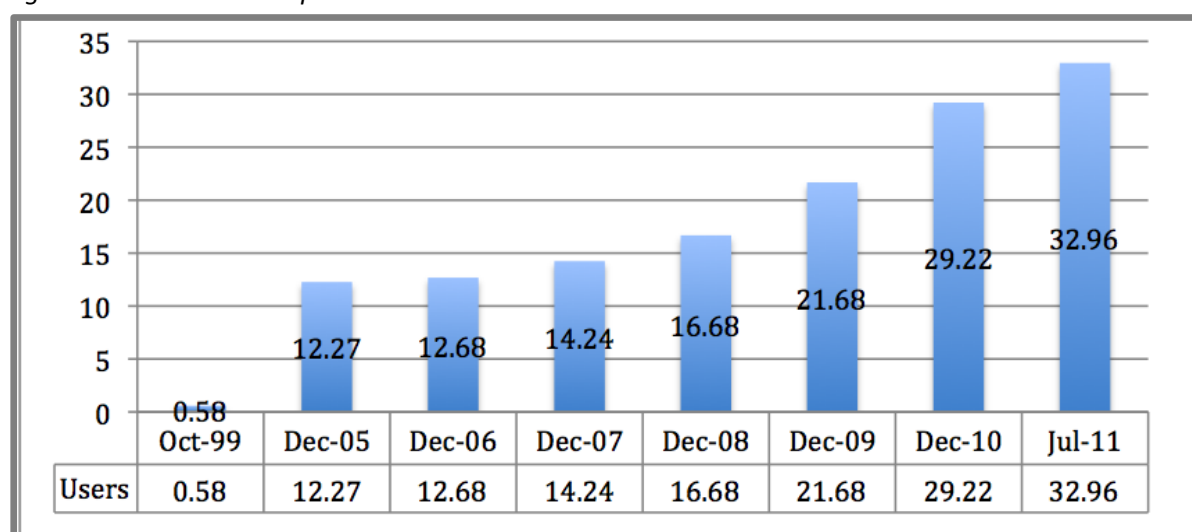
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[3] Insights MENA, 2011. 'Media Usage Frequency', September 2011 [online] http://www.insightsmena.com/en/#!place=category&cat=Media+Usage&qid=Media+Usage+Frequency&filter =Egypt [Accessed 1 October 2011]

[4] Source: InsightsMENA.com

[5] Kamel, Tarek, 1997. 'Internet Commercialization in Egypt: A Country Model', The Seventh Annual Conference of the Internet Society [online] http://www.isoc.org/inet97/proceedings/E6/E6_2.HTM [Accessed 25 September 2011].

government has continued on this path until now, as reflected by the rapid growth in internet use - there were an estimated at 23.5 million internet users in Egypt in 2011.[6]

Figure 10: Internet users per 100 inhabitants[7]

| Users | 0.58 | 12.27 | 12.68 | 14.24 | 16.68 | 21.68 | 29.22 | 32.96 |
| | Oct-99 | Dec-05 | Dec-06 | Dec-07 | Dec-08 | Dec-09 | Dec-10 | Jul-11 |

The Egyptian government's agenda of promoting the adoption of ICTs in general, and the internet in particular, has been pursued via a number of institutional initiatives. In 1999, the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology was created and charged with designing and implementing a national ICT plan.[8] Expanding connectivity was a core objective of the plan.[9]

The "free internet" initiative promoted access by providing free dial-up connectivity with landlines subscription, meaning that the rates for accessing the internet were the same as standard phone call rates.[10] Broadband services later became available, overcoming the dial-up limitations of speed and landline occupancy, but charging users a higher price. Nevertheless, by January 2011, more than 86 per cent of internet users in Egypt were broadband subscribers.[11] Users overcome high broadband costs by sharing broadband connections across households, and by using internet cafes.[12] Almost two thirds of broadband users (63 per cent) share a subscription between neighbours, and more than one fourth of internet users access the internet from a cyber cafe.[13] The liberalisation of the market has led to the creation of some 200 internet service providers, in turn improving the competitiveness of the available packages.[14]

[6] Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, 2011. 'Egypt ICT Indicators Bulletin' , [online] http://www.egyptictindicators.gov.eg/en/Pages/default33.aspx [Accessed 1 October 2011].

[7] Source: Ministry of Communication and Information, Egypt ICT Indicators Portal

[8] Kamel, Sherif. 'Information and Communications Technology for Development: Building the Knowledge Society in Egypt', Access to Knowledge in Egypt. P 179

[9] Ibid, p 180

[10] Ibid, p181-184

[11] 'ICT Indicators in Brief', 2011. Ministry of Communication and Information Technology [online] http://www.mcit.gov.eg/Upcont/Documents/ICTinBriefFeb2011-E.pdf [Accessed 1 October 2011]

[12] Kamel, Sherif. p181-184

[13] 'Egypt Profile.' Open Net Initiative [online] http://opennet.net/research/profiles/egypt [Accessed 27 September 2011]

[14] Ibid

Earlier initiatives to promote ICT use include a plan in 2002 which made subsidised PCs, together with ADSL subscriptions, available to all households in low-income communities.[15] This plan was upgraded in 2010 to include a wider variety of desktops and laptops, as well as a wider distribution across the country's provinces.[16] Information Technology clubs (IT Clubs) were also established across the nation to provide both access and training.[17] By January 2011, the number of IT clubs reached 2162; 1920 of which are connected to the internet. [18]

Mainstream media organisations quickly tapped into the potential presented by the internet, by starting up web-based operations. The emergence of online delivery platforms has come at a time when newspaper circulation has remained modest. In 2009 there a total of 19 paid-for-newspapers titles in Egypt with a circulation of 4 million copies, being read by 5.3 per cent of the adult population (i.e. 76.7 million people)[19]. Furthermore, newspapers were found to be the least used media platform in the study discussed above (Table 1).

The online activities of mainstream media organisations are developing alongside the proliferation of web 2.0 tools. Since the early 2000's, a community of bloggers has thrived in Egypt. As bloggers began to write poignant social and political commentary, they created a media discourse parallel to the one produced by mainstream media. Bloggers use free interactive web publishing platforms such as Blogger, Wordpress, Maktoob, and Tumblr. Youtube and Flickr are other platforms for citizen-generated diversified content, allowing users to upload videos and photos. More recently, online social networks joined the ranks of citizen media tools with Facebook, 2004, and Twitter, 2006, offering highly interactive platforms for user-generated content, around which online communities emerge and flourish.

Since the 25 January revolution, the use of social media in Egypt has expanded at an unprecedented rate. The number of Facebook users in Egypt grew by 1.95 million between January and April 2011, meaning that over 7 per cent of the population now has a presence on the platform. In April 2011, Egypt's users represented 24 per cent of the total Facebook users in the Arab world. Egypt's Facebook community is predominantly young - 75 per cent are between 15 and 29 years of age. Females account for 36 per cent of Egyptian users. Egyptian Facebook members use Arabic and English almost equally[20].

In Egypt, Twitter is less popular. The number of Twitter users by March 2011 was over 130,000, this shows a very modest penetration rate, reaching to just 0.15 per cent of the population. However, this group provides more than 16 per cent of all tweets coming from the Arab region. [21] Given the

[15] Ibid

[16] Kamel, Sherif. P 184

[17] Ibid. p 184

[18] 'ICT Indicators in Brief', 2011. Ministry of Communication and Information Technology. February 2011 [online] http://www.mcit.gov.eg/Upcont/Documents/ICTinBriefFeb2011-E.pdf [Accessed 1 October 2011]

[19] 'A Sampler of International Media and Communication Statistics', 2010. Nordic Media Trends 12 [online] p 229 http://www.nordicom.gu.se/common/publ_pdf/NMT12.pdf [Accessed 20 September 2011]

[20] Dubai School of Government, 2011. 'Arab Social Media Report' vol. 1 no. 2'

[21] Ibid

massive expansion in both Facebook and Twitter, it is likely that penetration rates have increased further since these statistics were published.

Mobile telephony has also witnessed an expansion in use ever since GSM services were introduced in Egypt way back in 1996. The number of subscribers grew from 194 thousand[22] in 1998 to 71.46 million in January 2011, representing a penetration rate of more than 91 per cent of the population. Between January 2010 and January 2011, the number of mobile subscribers increased by almost 30 per cent.[23] Today there are three main operators offering a variety of packages, both pre and post-paid, at competitive rates.

Besides calls and text messaging, (commonly known as SMS for short messaging system), the mobile internet is proliferating fast. By January 2011, 41 per cent of internet users were reported to have accessed the internet through a mobile device and/or using a USB modem.[24] There are currently around 1.5 million GSM internet lines in use.[25]

Overall, the landscape of internet and mobile penetration in Egypt has apparently been positive. There have been some steps towards using ICTs to consume media. Nevertheless, significant barriers to access remain.

Firstly, a rural-urban gap in access remains an important feature of internet penetration in Egypt. The most recently published data (from 2008) shows that internet access in rural areas of Egypt stood at less than 5 per cent of all Egyptian internet users, i.e. 5 per cent of the 15-16 per cent of internet users at the time. Broadband access in rural areas was less than 2 per cent, as compared with 12 per cent in urban areas.[26]

Secondly, language is also an important barrier to access. The creation of more localised and more Arabic content is an important strategic challenge. The 2009 Arab Knowledge Report found that, at the beginning of 2008, there were 60 million internet users in the Arab world. This constituted just 17 per cent of the Arab world's population, a lower percentage than the global average of 22 per cent.[27] Some initiatives have been deployed by the Egyptian government to promote digital Arabic content, these include: creating electronic documentation projects; financing the digitisation of Arabic books; publishing school curricula; encouraging institutions to set-up Arabic websites; supporting localisation research and Arabised tools such as domain names; and incubating software Arabisation businesses.[28] Despite that, the amount of digital content in Arabic remains limited. This

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[22] 'ICT Initiatives in Egypt', 2011. Information and Communication Technology for Development in the Arab World [online] http://www.arabdev.org/node/add/book/parent/90 [Accessed 25 September 2011]

[23] 'ICT Indicators in Brief', 2011. Ministry of Communication and Information Technology [online] February 2011. http://www.mcit.gov.eg/Upcont/Documents/ICTinBriefFeb2011-E.pdf [Accessed 1 October 2011]

[24] Ibid

[25] Fakharany, Wael

[26] ITU World Telecommunications, 2011. 'ICT Indicators Database' [online] http://www.itu.int/ict/statistics [Accessed October 2011].

[27] 'Arab Knowledge Report 2009: Toward Productive Intercommunication for Knowledge.' United Nations Development Programme, p 149

[28] "National Profile for the Information Society in Egypt". United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) [online]

can be broadly attributed to limited numbers of ICT users, the weakness of Arabic IT applications, high illiteracy rates and an over-reliance on English-language publishing.[29]

Finally, general illiteracy remains a challenge to the proliferation of access to technology. Illiteracy rates were 66 per cent between 2005 and 2008.[30]

7.2. Media and Public Interest

Mainstream media ownership
These infrastructural advances come in parallel with a trend of relative diversity in media ownership in Egypt, dating back to the early 2000s. This diversity can be traced back to the business opportunity that arose with the economic openness policies adopted by former President Anwar al-Sadat, and later articulated during the regime of former President Hosni Mubarak. The economic openness policies reversed the Nasserite legacy of the 1960s, whereby concentrated media ownership by the state was an element of former President Gamal Abdel Nasser's rule.

Print media broke away from state control with the introduction of the privately-owned Al-Masry al-Youm in 2004, which today has the highest daily circulation. The paper was launched under the 1981 press law that allows the private sector to own newspapers through joint stock companies.[31] Al-Masry al-Youm's entrance into the print media market kick-started the emergence of other privately owned ventures.

This privately-owned daily interrupted a century-long tradition of state controlled print media, manifested by state ownership of the three main incumbent print media institutions: al-Ahram, al-Akhbar and al-Gomhureya. Each of these institutions produced other publications alongside their daily newspapers.[32] The state has also owned major publishing houses and the main wire service, the Middle East News Agency.[33]

Even before the advent of private newspapers, a quasi-alternative voice had been offered through print media by partisan papers. These were produced by political parties however they were highly controlled by the state. Furthermore, their coverage was largely dictated by the interests of their respective affiliated parties.

Similarly, television only broke away from state monopoly during the last decade. In 1960, Egyptian state television was born. In 1970, the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU) was inaugurated,

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http://isper.escwa.un.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=x1VgLCtd3sY%3D&tabid=219&language=en-US [Accessed 27 September 2011].

[29] Ibid

[30] UN Data, [online] http://data.un.org/Data.aspx?d=SOWC&f=inID%3A74 [Accessed 27 September 2011]

[31] Hamamou, Sabah, 2009. "Local print media going against the grain". Daily News Egypt, [online] 16 April 2009 http://www.thedailynewsegypt.com/local-print-media-going-against-the-grain.html [Accessed 14 September 2011]

[32] Amin, Hussein. 'Report on State of Media in Egypt". The Arab Center for the Development of the Rule of Law and Integrity, [online] http://www.acrli.org/Files/PDF/Media/English/P2/Egypt_MediaReportP2_En.pdf [Accessed 13 September 2011]

[33] Ibid

and has been acting as the control and regulatory body of all terrestrial channels ever since.[34] The state monopoly over television ownership was broken in late 2001 with the rise of home grown satellite broadcasting, and the emergence of private satellite television ventures. The latter included Dream TV and al-Mihwar TV. Satellite broadcasting had started earlier in 1985 with ArabSat, a top satellite provider in the region, which was used by the Egypt government to broadcast its state-owned Egyptian Satellite Channel in 1990. In 1996, Nilesat was established to become an Egyptian joint public-private company that now operates Egyptian satellites. As of 2010, it broadcast 600 television channels and 100 digital radio channels.[35]

This realm of private ownership has been widely celebrated as the emancipation of the media from state control. Nonetheless, the concentration of media discourse among a small number of media outlets that can afford to operate in this expensive business has raised a lot of questions. Media organisations have been sustained thanks to the patronage of strong businessmen who supported them even when there was no financial gain to be had.[36] A prominent example is Salah Diab, the founder of al-Masry al-Youm, who is an established businessman in the oil sector. Similarly, Naguib Sawiris, a telecom and construction tycoon is behind OnTV, a private satellite television channel. Ahmad Bahgat, a real estate development businessman, is behind Dream TV.[37] So despite the fact that the media is not an immensely lucrative business proposition, investors take to the media because they can influence public opinion in line with their political and economic interests.[38]

In the words of one of our interviewees in the broadcast media management field: "The businessmen involved don't see media only as an investment project, but as a socially and politically influential one. No one can play with you today if you own strong media. You can change cabinets. You can change perceptions. It's power and protection that you're buying."[39]

There are many anecdotes about mainstream media that show the extent of its influence on public opinion, and thus on decision-making processes. Former Prime Minister Ahmad Shafik was appointed by Mubarak during the 18-day uprising of 25 January 2011, in what was seen as one of the toppled president's last attempts to hold on to power. Shafik's cabinet was largely perceived to be a remnant of the old regime. In a seminal episode of a nightly talk show aired on OnTV in March 2011, hosts Yousry Fouda and Reem Maged interviewed Shafik. On air he received severe criticism from the shows other guests, including novelist Alaa al-Aswany and journalist Hamdy Kandeel. This was thought to be lethal to his rule and he was sacked the following day by the ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF).[40]

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[34] Howard, P.N, 2008. 'Ownership Diversity in Muslim Media Systems'. World Information Access, [online] 6 October 2008 http://www.wiaproject.org/index.php/68/ownership-diveristy-in-muslim-media-systems [Accessed 14 September 2011]

[35] 'About Us.' Nile Sat, [online] http://www.nilesat.com.eg/AboutUs/CompanyProfile.aspx [Accessed 25 September 2011].

[36] Al-Zalaky, Ehab. Personal interview. 06 September 2011

[37] Many more examples exist. This doesn't constitute an exhausted list

[38] Al-Zalaky, Ehab. Personal interview. 06 September 2011

[39] Sabry, Hossam. Personal interview . 07 September 2011

[40] Peterson, M. 'In Egypt, Television Confronts State; TV Wins.'.Connected in Cairo [online] 7 March 2011 http://connectedincairo.com/2011/03/07/in-egypt-television-confronts-state-tv-wins/ [Accessed 27 September 2011]

Another anecdote showing the dramatic influence of mainstream media on public perceptions is the representation of the January uprising martyrs' narrative, which was influential in reinvigorating public support for the revolution.[41] On 7 February 2011, Dream TV host Mona al-Shazly interviewed Wael Ghonim, the secret administrator of the Kolena Khaled Said (We are All Khaled Said) Facebook group, a major mobilisation platform for the revolution, in her widely watched nightly talk show, al-Ashera Masa'an. Ghonim had just been released after being in secret detention since 28 January 2011. Towards the end of the interview, Shazly displayed photos of the martyrs killed in the early days of the revolution, while a devastated Ghonim watched and wept, thus engaging a whole nation along with her.[42]   The following day, al-Masry al-Youm daily put together a martyrs' page featuring photos and profiles of some of the revolution's martyrs. The headline read, "the martyrs of the 25 January revolution, the flowers that blossomed in the nation's gardens."[43] The page quickly became an icon of the revolution, and was often raised in Tahrir Square, the Cairo site of the sit-in. It became a symbol and a reason for persistence, helping to draw hundreds of thousands of people to the square.

While the mainstream media act as pseudo-empires, fundamentally influencing public opinion, the amount of money involved in operating a media business is also deemed to be a barrier to diversity. In post-uprising Egypt, wealth is still owned by remnants of the old regime, and many of those individuals control an important share of the media market.[44] Hassan Rateb, a cement business tycoon closely tied to the toppled ruling National Democratic Party, still owns al-Mihwar TV.[45] Similarly, the Cairo Broadcasting Channel (CBC), which started airing following the uprising, is owned by businessman Mohammed al-Amin, the partner of the old regime business tycoon Mansour Amer in various real-estate development and tourist projects.[46]

In response to widespread concern about the media being controlled by a small elite of businessmen, some people have been attempting to defy the "anchor investment" phenomenon. An anchor investment is one that represents a majority of shares in a media operation, thus giving the holder control and an ability to influence editorial direction. Hisham Kassem, former publisher of al-Masry al-Youm, is setting up a new media operation that attempts to evade the anchor investor phenomenon by attracting start-up capital from no less than 17 investors, each of whom will own less than 10 per cent of the resulting company's shares.[47] He recounts the difficulty of imposing this new business model: "When I approach investors, I get a lot of 51 per cent offers or nothing at all. I

[41] Sabry, Hossam. Personal interview. 07 September 2011

[42] Ghoneim, W., 2011. Interview on Evening Show. Intervewed by Mona El Shazly [online] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PDci1WFWcRk [Accessed 25 September 2011]

[43] 'The Martyrs of the 25th of January Revolution'. Al-Masry Al-Youm [online] 3 March 2011. http://www.almasryalyoum.com/node/338434 [Accessed 27 September 2011]

[44] Amin, Shahira. Personal interview. 23 August 2011

[45] Essam El-Din, Gamal. "Revolutionary forces want NDP diehards out of government, politics and the media", Al-Ahram Online [online]12 July 2011 http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContentP/1/16155/Egypt/Revolutionary-forces-want-NDP-diehards-out-of-gove.aspx [Accessed 25 September 2011]

[46] Solyman, Hanan. "Egypt's Revolution Media: A Question of Credibility", Emaj Magazine [online] 13 September 2011 http://emajmagazine.com/2011/09/13/egypts-revolution-media-a-question-of-credibility/ [Accessed 30 September 2011]

[47] Kassem, Hisham. Personal interview. 22 August 2011

know that this has not been done before. But I would rather not launch than launch with an anchor investor."[48]

Alternative citizen-driven media

The 2000's was the decade that saw the birth of privately owned mainstream media. It was also the decade that saw citizen journalism begin to thrive, primarily through an active blogosphere. Courtney Radsh relays three phases of evolution in the Egyptian blogosphere. The first phase, starting 2003, was an experimentation phase, where "a few dozen Egyptians discovered and tinkered with a new publishing platform"[49]. These bloggers constituted a core elite that influenced public opinion especially when content was amplified by mainstream media. A second phase, starting in 2005, was marked by the intertwining of blogging and activism; while a third phase, started at the end of 2006, was marked by the widespread proliferation of blogging amounting to thousands of sites and representing a plethora of voices, particularly subaltern voices.[50] Radsh writes: "During this phase one could distinguish virtual enclaves or communities of bloggers that tended to engage primarily, though certainly not exclusively, with each other, such as activists, Leftists, Muslim Brotherhood, cultural and poetic bloggers, Copts, Bahais, homosexuals, Salafis, social commentators and personal bloggers."[51]

Tapping into a multiplicity of web media (text, photos, videos, etc.), and the inter-connectivity between different communities of online activists, both played important role in the proliferation of online citizen content. Additionally, the exclusivity of some online activists' content further drew attention to their autonomous media.

A case in point is online activists reporting on police torture of ordinary citizens. A famous example is the torture video of Emad al-Kabir, a microbus driver who was sodomised by a policeman under orders from an officer who filmed the whole scene with his mobile in 2006. Wael Abbas, a renowned blogger, managed to get hold of the video and disseminated it widely through his blog Misr Digital[52]. The torture scenes received much attention, and this case became one of few that made it to court, most other cases go unreported on.[53] Citizen journalists mapped, collated and disseminated information about the national incidence of police torture through their blogs[54]. Similarly, bloggers were the first to report a shocking case of sexual harassment in October 2006, when a group of women were attacked in front of a movie theatre - the incident had been ignored by mainstream media.[55]

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[48] Ibid

[49] Radsch, Courtney. 'Core to Commonplace: The evolution of Egypt's blogosphere'. Arab Media and Society. 2008 [online] http://www.arabmediasociety.com/?article=692 [Accessed 20 September 2011]

[50] Ibid

[51] Ibid

[52] Abbas, Wael. 'Egyptian Awareness.' Misr Digital [online] http://www.misrdigital.blogspirit.com [Accessed September 2011]

[53] 'Egyptian bloggers: a civilian voice against torture', International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims [online] 2 September 2010 http://www.irct.org/news-and-media/irct-news/show-news.aspx?PID=13767&Action=1&NewsId=2797 [Accessed 28 September 2011]

[54] Atef, Noha. Torture in Egypt [online] http://tortureinegypt.net/english [Accessed September 2011]

[55] Padania, Sameer, 2006. 'Egypt: Cairo's women speak out against violence'. The Hub, [online] 23 November 2006. http://hub.witness.org/en/node/7700 [Accessed 25 September 2011]

While the blogger community was thriving, linking to each other and being quoted in mainstream media, new online social networks were introduced. In her recent article for Jadaliyya, Linda Herrera writes about a certain adaptation process of Egyptians to Facebook as one such successful online social network. She recounts how in her field work, people called it "El-Face". "The community of "El-Face" is developing a cultural, political and ethical universe of its own. It has its own codes and is a regulated space to some degree. There are certain red lines… you should not use the space to insult each other's religion, for pornography or sexual harassment, for advertising or selling things, for spreading false rumours, or for spying. When a Facebook friend crosses these lines others intervene by way of posting a corrective comment on their wall, and starting a conversation on the post in question, or by defriending them."[56] And hence the communities formed around online social networks autonomously organise their publishing activities amongst themselves in what has become a unique model of popular, decentralised media.

Technology convergence and online performance

Where the two streams of media - mainstream and citizen - meet, convergence models can be found. With a plethora of meanings for convergence, from corporate mergers to adopting new economic models, the Egyptian media is mostly concerned with the integration of technology. In their investigation of convergence experiences in Egypt, Naila Hamdy and Phil Auter define two main phases. The first phase was when newspapers and broadcast stations launched online versions of their content. The second phase was when those websites became interactive and were supported by multimedia content.[57] They conclude, however, that convergence in Egypt is still in its initial stages.[58]

Many existing media organisations have tapped into the potentials of technology in many ways; from supporting the communications process in and out of the newsroom, to creating a fully fledged networked content management system which can facilitate the production process on all levels and across departments. Digital presence ranges from making an exact copy of a printed edition available online, to managing web-specific content in parallel with printed editions, marked by faster and shorter content. The state-run al-Ahram media organisation, which produces the al-Ahram daily (for a long time the highest circulated paper in Egypt as well as the second oldest) has created a website edition. Similarly, al-Masry al-Youm started a web edition in 2009, a more interactive updated version running in parallel with a more static web-page that only holds a digital version of the printed edition. Other operations that have taken off exclusively online include al-Youm al-Sabea and Masrawy, both of which enjoy a high level of traffic on a daily basis.[59]

However, applying convergence models and experiences still faces lingering challenges. On the one hand, television operations remain oblivious to the convergence concept, backed as they are by an

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[56] Ibid

[57] Hamdy, N. Auter, P. 'Divergence on Convergence: U.S. and Egyptian Journalism Professionals and Educators Respond'. [online] http://www2.gsu.edu/~wwwaus/Hamdy&Auter.pdf [Accessed 25 September 2011]

[58] Ibid

[59] A rough estimate on top sites in Egypt by Alexa, the web information company, shows that al-Youm al-Sabea, al-Ahram, al-Masry al-Youm and Masrawy are amongst the most highly visited news producers [online] http://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/EG [Accessed 30 Sep. 2011]

already solid viewership. For print organisations that are more challenged by falling readership, most efforts are still geared towards the production of the daily print edition, prioritising this particular platform, and leaving web operations to come a distant second. Editors say that for convergence to happen, the culture of journalists needs to change from one of concentrating on the print edition to one of branching into different outputs. For example, they need to come to terms with the fact that breaking news should go on the web edition.[60] Also, some observe that content produced for print is published online in exactly the same format and without taking into consideration the nuances of the medium.[61] Accordingly, some organisations develop their convergence strategy through journalist training and the concept that a reporter needs to be able to produce different multimedia outputs besides text.

The old guards of journalism perceive convergence as creating competition between different platforms. Meanwhile, proponents of convergence don't see a negative effect on traditional media, but rather an expansion of the community of readers and viewers at large and a positive input to the relevant organisation's reputation.[62] Many media leaders remain largely outside of tech-based networks – this filters down through their entire organisations undermining the full integration of new technologies.

Moreover, a lack of technical expertise in web development, network performance and functional design pose another challenge to technological convergence. News websites often load slowly, display performance issues and lack facets of functional design.[63]

Besides developing integrated technology strategies, many mainstream media organisations - especially in the realm of print - have felt the urge to embrace online social media. Several media outlets have attempted to mainstream online social media content particularly following the outbreak of the 25 January revolution, believing that those networks are the sites of discourse development. It is now common for print media outlets to feature content from Facebook and Twitter, such as can be found in al-Tahrir and al-Shorouk dailies. Prominent bloggers and digital activists are increasingly featured in television talk shows as commentators, and invited to write articles in print media. The level of freedom exhibited in online social networks and blogs has on some occasions motivated mainstream media to experiment with its own freedom of expression. For example, a common practice among mainstream media is to cover a hype created by online social media around a controversial issue such as torture cases of civilians involving the military. For some operations, online social media represents a pool of information and an opportunity for witnesses to newsworthy events to emerge, which can then be called in to share their testimony with both television and print media.[64]

More broadly, media organisations are developing social media and community teams within their operations who are responsible for articulating a strategy for interaction and engagement with their online communities. Such teams define the organisation's online identity, feature its content in

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[60] Ibid
[61] Ragab, Ahmed. Personal interview. 05 September 2011
[62] Al-Zalaky, Ehab. Personal interview. 06 September 2011
[63] Ibid
[64] Ragab, Ahmed. Personal interview. 05 September 2011

online social networks and engage with readers and viewers. However, for most mainstream media their online strategies are limited to just featuring their content on Facebook and Twitter.[65] An example of such superficial use is that of SCAF, which had no online presence at all before the uprising but rushed into creating a Facebook page in the aftermath. SCAF does not interact with its fans on Facebook; it only posts SCAF statements online in an un-searchable JPEG format.[66]

For some media outlets, the quest to build an online social network presence transcends the mere need to attract traffic to their websites. For those media outlets the goal behind embracing online social networks is to create a community around the media operation, and constantly interact with it, in a way that eventually affects editorial decisions. However, the way interactivity is integrated in editorial processes remains weak. Editors say that while there are teams monitoring interactions and comments, there is no instituted process to follow them up editorially.[67]

7.3. Advancing Human Rights and Social Justice

While mainstream media has been negotiating its relationship with web tools since the mid-2000s - many commentators give credit to individual human rights activists for making effective use of digital media.[68] Today, the ways in which digital communications are used to defend human rights in Egypt can be divided into four main categories: self-expression; information and reporting; awareness and advocacy; and organisation and mobilisation.

With regards to self-expression, observers say that digital tools have provided obvious avenues for exercising these two basic rights which were stifled under the toppled regime.[69] Blogging and later on micro-blogging sites became the primary space for bold expression and discussion, which was previously barred by mainstream media channels. While political blogs criticising the Mubarak regime and its police apparatus seemed to be the boldest in terms of freedom of expression, socio-cultural taboos of sexuality and religion are also openly discussed in some blogs.

Meanwhile, there are some success stories of human rights violations, such as police torture and sexual harassment, being reported by activists using digital media. Mainstream journalists, who worked on amplifying the reports, photos and videos captured by activists on online social networks, recognise that it is thanks to the bloggers that torture, for example, became a front page story, when previously it had been barely reported on or was drowned inside newspaper pages.[70] Online networks-savvy journalists say that while self-censorship would prevent them from publishing sensitive information in mainstream media, they would spread it first through online social media, and then feel emboldened to introduce it in mainstream media once it had created enough noise there.[71]

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[65] Al-Zalaky, Ehab. Personal interview. 06 September 2011
[66] Raouf, Ramy. Personal interview. 24 August 2011
[67] Al-Zalaky, Ehab. Personal interview. 06 September 2011
[68] Ragab, Ahmed. Personal interview. 05 September 2011
[69] Raouf, Ramy. Personal interview. 24 August 2011
[70] Ibid
[71] Ragab, Ahmed. Personal interview. 05 September 2011

On the advocacy and awareness front, some organised civil society groups have been increasingly using e-campaigns to address a range of different causes.[72] More autonomous citizens' based e-campaigns have unfolded organically on online social networks such as Twitter, when popular calls have caused certain issues to trend. A case in point is the tragic death of Khaled Said, an Alexandrian middle-class young man, who was beaten by policemen in July 2010. The photo of the young man before and after torture circulated virally through online social networks and deepened the belief that anyone could potentially be a subject of police brutality. One day, activists tweeted intensively about police torture using the #KhaledSaid hashtag until it trended and attracted international media attention. The hype continued on Facebook when the page dubbed, 'We are all Khaled Said', was formed and was followed by hundreds of thousands of people.

In terms of organisation, the internet has crystallised in people's minds as a safe haven following a number of high profile online incidences. Under the previously active State Security apparatus, mobilising through Facebook emerged as a safe option given that the security apparatus monitored the physical moves of activists closely. Threatening cases of arrest, intimidation, torture and forced disappearances emphasised the difficulty of working directly through offline networks. A prominent example of how the internet became a safer option was the call on 6 April 2008, through a Facebook group, for a general strike to protest against rising food prices.[73] The Facebook group drew thousands of followers, and while the outcome of this particular strike was limited, the Facebook call had large-scale reverberations. What was born on Facebook became the 6 April Youth Movement, an important player in the current political landscape and the on-going revolution.

While there is widespread celebration concerning the potential of digital media to promote human rights, there are also many important concerns. The main contention is that the hype of digital media has made activists and civil society groups give too much focus to online campaigning to the detriment of much needed work on the ground.[74] The dominance of a narrative promoting digital media as a silver bullet for human rights, and separated from intricate local context, risks alienating the much larger critical mass. An online campaigner in a human rights organisation sums up the issue as follows: "For me, the most important use of digital media is unveiling facts, which has broken so many informational taboos, such as sexual harassment, police torture, the [toppled] president's health, homosexuality and religious belief. But at the end of the day this process is directed at fellow online users, which are only a few millions. This is very important in order to spread information, but mobilisation and pressure become only secondary impacts of digital media, while unveiling information is the most important function. The millions that joined the revolution from Cairo's slums and Egypt's non-urbanised quarters did not answer a Facebook call, but were mobilised through more traditional offline networks."[75]

7.4. Media Control

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[72] Raouf, Ramy. Personal interview. 24 August 2011
[73] Joyce, Mary. 'Tactic: Egyptians Use Facebook to Organize Strike', DigiActive [online] 6 April 2008 http://www.digiactive.org/2008/04/06/tactic-egyptians-use-facebook-to-organize-strike/ [Accessed on 25 September 2011]
[74] Raouf, Ramy. Personal interview. 24 August 2011
[75] Ibid

Amidst the constant ebb and flow of freedom of expression across the media, self-censorship has remained an on-going practice. It has been widely internalised by mainstream media practitioners, mainly as a by-product, and hangover, of the restrictive censorship regime.

Under that regime, censorship usually happened after the printing or broadcasting process and was manifested through soft strategies, such as threatening phone calls from the security apparatus to the media organisation in question, or harsher tactics, such as journalist interrogations, detentions, prison sentences, fines and even license confiscation in severe cases.[76] Less frequently, and in relation to broadcasting, censorship preceded publication. This usually happened with live political shows, when state officials inquired about intended guests and advised on who was undesirable.[77]

Control was also often imposed through regulations. For example, media organisations used to send news alerts via SMSs directly to users, under an arrangement with mobile operators, in what became a lucrative low-cost business model for web-based operations. However, in October 2010, media organisations were notified by the government that they were required to obtain permission to send such SMSs from the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology and the Supreme Press Council. Many in the news industry perceived this as a form of political control ahead of the parliamentary elections, held later in November, that were characterised by unprecedented levels of fraud.[78]

In the online world, control has been exercised through the intimidation of digital activists, rather than through blocking or filtering websites. The latter would generally contradict the government's ICT investment policy based on openness. The Mubarak era has been famous for three seminal cases of bloggers' intimidation: Karim Amer was sentenced in 2004 to four years in prison for insulting religion and the president[79]; Hani Nazir was arbitrarily detained in 2008 for more than 19 months for an anti-Islamic blog post[80]; and Mosad Abu Fagr was arrested in 2007 and detained for more than two years for blogging about human rights violations in Sinai[81].

While there have been no significant moves to filter the internet in Egypt, there were attempts to impose a ban on pornographic sites through a court order in 2009[82], which was at the time feared to signal the start of more extensive filtering. When online social networks became popular among political activists alongside blogs, the general belief was that the then government would refrain from blocking sites such as Facebook because they could use the sites to identify dissidents, and

[76] Al-Zalaky, Ehab. Personal interview. 06 September 2011

[77] Sabry, Hossam. Personal interview. 07 September 2011

[78] Ashour, Sherif. 'SMS messaging restricted in bid to preempt pre-election activism', *Al-Masry Al-Youm*. [online] 11 October 2010 http://www.almasryalyoum.com/en/node/194067 [Accessed on 30 September 2011]

[79] 'Egypt: Call for Karim Amer's release', Amnesty International [online] http://www.amnesty.org.uk/actions_details.asp?ActionID=410 [Accessed on 25 September 2011]

[80] 'Egypt: Free Blogger Held Under Emergency Law', Human Rights Watch [online] 23 April 2010 http://www.hrw.org/news/2010/04/23/egypt-free-blogger-held-under-emergency-law [Accessed on 25 September 2011]

[81] Atef, Noha. 'Egypt: Blogger Abu Fagr Remains Detained Despite Eight Release Orders', Global Voices Online [online] 13 April 2009 http://advocacy.globalvoicesonline.org/2009/04/13/egypt-blogger-abu-fagr-remains-detained-despite-eight-release-orders/ [Accessed on 25 September 2011]

[82] 'Egypt: Country Profile' *Open Net Initiative* [online] 6 August 2009 http://opennet.net/research/profiles/egypt [Accessed on 25 September 2011]

then intimidate them.[83] Another example of this strategy (whereby the then-government used technologies to monitor citizens rather than blocking access) is when in 2005 the Ministry of Interior passed a regulation ordering internet cafes to register the names and IDs of all their users. Another example is the excessive tapping of fixed and mobile lines in collaboration with operators.[84]

On the eve of the 25 January protests, Egypt entered into an historic and unprecedented internet, and eventually overall communications, blackout. Using an article in the communication law that allows the authorities to disrupt communications in cases of a national security threat, Egypt applied what experts call, "the kill switch… a spectacular technical success and a mystifying strategic blunder."[85] The process of blocking communications started with the blockade of Facebook, Twitter and other online social networking sites on 25 January, followed by the complete blockade of the internet access through five of the six main service providers. This was followed by the blockade of mobile lines and SMSs through the three existing operators on 28 January. While the current case against Mubarak and other ministers implicated in the blackout is ongoing, this experience has prompted policy debates about the need to reform any legislation that allowed for such an act. It has also highlighted the importance of decentralising internet services.

Figure 11: Internet traffic to and from Egypt, 27 and 28 January, 2011[86]
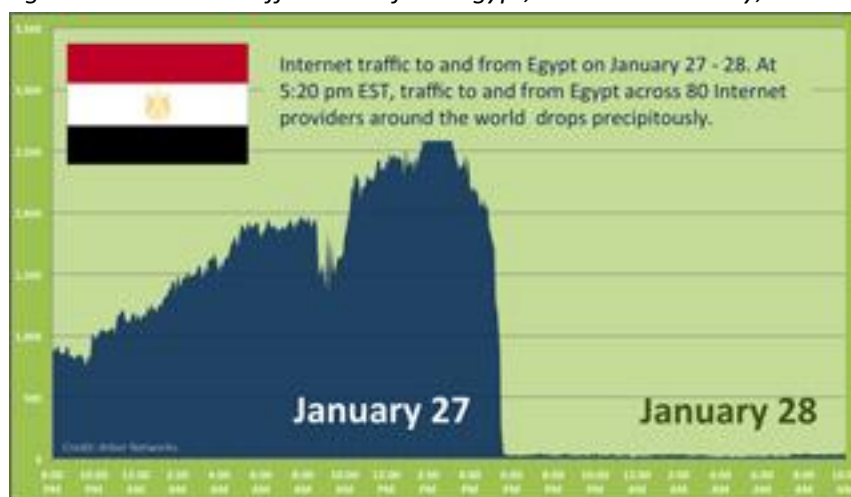
Following the 25 January revolution, openness in media licensing has allowed many new media outlets to emerge. This openness has been received with both enthusiasm and concern from media players. While some think there is no point of return from this new freer ecosystem,[87] others feel there is a level of volatility associated with this sudden and unregulated openness, given that Egypt is currently going through a transitional period.[88] Despite this evidence of relative openness, certain challenges remain.

For a start, self-censorship continues to prevail in post-uprising times. This is mainly because SCAF is not open to public scrutiny and criticism. Self-censorship became particularly apparent after a wave of reporting which covered on-going military trials of civilians and alleged torture and intimidation of those in military detention. In May 2011, the military summoned Reem Magued, a television

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[83] Ibid

[84] Ibid

[85] Cowie, James. 'Can the Internet Tame Governments?', Yale Global [online] 9 February 2011 http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/can-internet-tame-governments-part-i [Accessed on 25 September 2011]

[86] Source: Arbor Networks, 2011.

[87] Kassem, Hisham. Personal interview. 22 August 2011

[88] Al-Zalaky, Ehab. Personal interview. 06 September 2011

journalist, and Hossam al-Hamalawy, a blogger, for publicly criticising military trials on a television show.[89] Also in June, the military summoned journalist Rasha Azab and editor of al-Fajr newspaper Adel Hammouda for publishing the details of a meeting between SCAF and members of the "No to Military Trials" group of activists and lawyers.[90] Local newspaper editors have told foreign journalists and human rights groups that they have received letters from SCAF "warning that all coverage of topics involving Egypt's military establishment must first be vetted by the SCAF's public relations and intelligence directorates."[91]

In early September this year, SCAF expanded the scope of the incumbent emergency law, following massive demonstrations, to include the spreading of false news and information.[92] The decision to amend the law came hand-in-hand with two instances of raiding the offices of al-Jazeera Mubasher Egypt, the live local station affiliated to al-Jazeera pan-Arab network. Their transmitter was confiscated and their chief engineer was arrested.[93] A few days earlier, the Information Minister Ossama Heikal stated that the government will stop licensing new satellite television stations, claiming that many of those channels serve particular electoral campaigns, and thus will not be impartial.[94] Some defend the censorship regime on the grounds of national security, referring to the fact that open media operations like al-Arabiya and al-Jazeera do not cover political issues from their home countries, Saudi Arabia and Qatar respectively.[95] In the meantime, there continues to be a lack of clear legislation, or codes of conduct, covering the operations of media organisations.

Others feel that regulation is needed to limit financial control over the media market, and so limit the ability for the wealthy elite to control public discourse.[96] Heikal mentioned recently that the cabinet is looking into different regulatory options for creating an independent body, similar to those found in some European countries, which would be in charge of issuing licenses and monitoring the performance of television stations in respect to the values of "human dignity, pluralism in thought, public order and the protection of childhood and adolescence."[97] While this authority wouldn't have the power to shut down operations, it would impose fines.[98] However, many practitioners vehemently refuse this instrument: "We do not need regulators. The work of a

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[89] Fisher, William. 'Egypt: Military Honeymoon is Over', Prism Magazine [online] 8 June 2011 http://prism-magazine.com/2011/06/egypt-military-honeymoon-is-over/ [Accessed on 12 September 2011]

[90] 'Journalists Rasha Azab and Adel Hammouda Summoned by Egypt's Military Prosecution', Ahram Online [online] 18 June 2011 http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/14532/Egypt/Politics-/Journalists-Rasha-Azab-and-Adel-Hammouda-summoned-.aspx [Accessed on 13 September 2011]

[91] Fisher, William. 'Egypt: Military Honeymoon is Over', Prism Magazine [online] 8 June 2011 http://prism-magazine.com/2011/06/egypt-military-honeymoon-is-over/ [Accessed on 12 September 2011]

[92] Carr, Sarah. 'Renewed Emergency Law Raises Fears of Coming Crackdown', Al-Masry Al-Youm, [online] 13 September 2011 http://www.almasryalyoum.com/en/node/495212 [Accessed on 13 September 2011]

[93] Ibid.

[94] El-Hennawy, Noha. 'Military Rulers Activate Mubarak's Repressive Media Policies', Al-Masry Al-Youm, [online] 14 September 2011 http://www.almasryalyoum.com/en/node/495805 [Accessed on 14 September 2011]

[95] Al-Habbal, Ayman. Personal interview. 08 September 2011

[96] Sabry, Hossam. Personal interview. 07 September 2011

[97] El-Hennawy, Noha. 'Military Rulers Activate Mubarak's Repressive Media Policies', Al-Masry Al-Youm [online] 14 September 2011. http://www.almasryalyoum.com/en/node/495805 [Accessed on 14 September 2011]

[98] Ibid

regulator can be compensated for with the law, both the criminal and civil, along with legislation to protect against commercial fraud. It's dangerous to have a regulator."[99]

Control over coverage of military-related issues goes back to a law that precedes the revolution. Egyptian media had to abide by the 1956 Law 313, as amended by the 1967 law 14, which bans reporters from publishing anything about the Armed Forces without the written consent of the latter.[100] It was easier to avoid publishing news about the Armed Forces before the revolution since they weren't then visibly entrenched in the day-to-day politics of the country. However this is a serious challenge at present as they are the interim rulers.

The online world is not unaffected by the on-going controls on free expression. The politicisation of online social networks and blogs has made them increasingly a target for censorship. A point in case is Asmaa Mahfouz, a renowned activist who is facing charges by the military prosecutor for criticising SCAF and inciting violence against it in her Facebook feed.[101] Similarly, blogger Maikel Nabil was sentenced to three years imprisonment for criticising SCAF in a military court in April 2011[102]. Concerns are growing as SCAF has recently encouraged the debate around a bill to organise electronic publishing, which freedom of expression advocates fear is an attempt to legalise restrictions on the internet[103], they see this as an ominous development.[104]

7.5. Recommendations

The internet infrastructure in Egypt has been flourishing throughout the past decade with strong commitment from the government - aimed primarily at the economic fruits of such an investment. However, this same government has been actively deploying an array of strategies to block online political expression and freedoms. This contradiction - disconnecting economic development from political development - has put the fragility of the regime on display, particularly with the outbreak of the 25 January revolution. The relatively unregulated space of the internet was wittingly tapped into to unveil information, mobilise and advocate. In the meantime, media practice has been reinvigorated through citizen-driven initiatives, acquiring new meanings on the process of content production. Throughout this study, we have examined both mainstream and alternative citizen-driven media and the ebb and flow that connect those two islands at different times. We accordingly recommend the following:

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[99] Kassem, Hisham. Personal interview. 22 August 2011

[100] "Law Banning Publishing News about the Armed Forces without Consent", United Journalists Center [online] http://ujcenter.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=95:2009-06-04-11-19-02&catid=27:2009-06-01-21-15-08&Itemid=62 [Accessed on 13 September 2011].

[101] Fadel, Leila. 'Asmaa Mahfouz, Egyptian youth activist, is charged by military prosecutor', *Washington Post* [online] 15 August 2011 http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/asmaa-mahfouz-egyptian-youth-activist-is-charged-by-military-prosecutor/2011/08/14/gIQAuqihFJ_story.html [Accessed on 25 September 2011].

[102] 'Egypt blogger Maikel Nabil jailed by military court'", *BBC* [online] 11 April 2011. http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-13038937 [Accessed on 25 September 2011]

[103] Al-Sherif, Ahmad. 'SCAF Recommends Studying Electronic Publishing Law', Masrawy [online] 8 June 2011 http://www.masrawy.com/News/Egypt/Politics/2011/june/8/media_law.aspx [Accessed 25 September 2011]

[104] Raouf, Ramy. Personal interview. 24 August 2011

- *For mainstream media: The integration of mainstream media with online citizen media on a deeper level is a priority. Editorial policies must be emboldened by online voices and new discourses should be examined and negotiated. This integration needs to transcend the superficial levels of engagement witnessed so far between mainstream media and online social platforms. Instead, an understanding of the communities that thrive around new media, the way they use it and the way they interact with each other is the key to successful integration.*

- *For alternative media: Innovation is vital and alternative business models need to be developed to preserve the independence of content and avoid the polarisation of the business-state duality in media ownership. Journalists, citizen journalists and bloggers must find ways to work together to produce collaborative low-budget media platforms that sustain themselves through community support or through cooperative models.*

- *For journalists across the board: Training of basic journalistic skills is commonly and urgently needed, and it requires a developed and localised curricula specific to the Egyptian context. Training must cater to the promises of convergence in media operations and hence should expose journalists to multiple media production processes and uses of technology.*

- *For human rights advocates and researchers: empirical research, both qualitative and quantitative, on the real functions and impact of digital media in Egypt, the way it is used, and the forms of communities that thrive around it, is scarce. This is particularly relevant given current grandiose statements such as the uncontested role of social media as a mobilisation tool; while implicated users remain critical of this narrative, and warn of an increasing gap between online and offline due to inequitable access.*

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