

**RURAL EGYPT AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE:  
THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE  
NEW MEDIA ENVIRONMENT ON POLITICAL  
INTERACTION, 2011-2015**

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**A DISSERTATION IN**

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**JANUARY 26, 2020**

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## Abstract

*A large body of academic research has developed regarding the prevalence of social media in society, and its impact. Previous research has delved into this topic from the perspective of psychology, business administration, sociology, politics, law, and media communication studies. One common thread among many that can be found in a large number of these academic endeavours is the attempt to evaluate the manner in which social media impacts norms, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours.*

*This thesis investigates this same topic through an analysis of rural citizens in Egypt in the period between 2011 and 2015. The main topic addressed in this thesis is the impact of the new media environment, specifically the synergy between social media and satellite television, on the public sphere and political interactions of rural Egypt, with the aim of assessing the role social media played in the neglected areas of Egypt during the 2011 uprisings. To do this, this thesis addresses (i) the effect of social capital on the political interaction of citizens in the public sphere with a consideration of social media access, (ii) how social media changed individual norms of political interaction within the public sphere of rural Egypt during and after 2011 due to convergence with television media, and (iii) how media coverage of the uprisings impacted micro public spheres and sentiments of empowerment and social capital in rural Egypt.*

*It is found that rural Egypt contributed significantly to the 2011 uprisings, and their 2013 counterparts. Social capital among the rural population is shown to have had a marked effect on the development of the 2011 uprisings, as well as their success. Through primary research and supporting data, it is shown that there were four distinct stages of media use during the period of the 2011 uprisings that, when analysed, highlight that social media could not have been the primary determinant of the uprisings and their aftermath. While social media did play a role, it was not the driving factor behind the uprisings. Issues such as economic, linguistic, and infrastructural barriers prevented social media penetration from being significant enough to be the driving force it has been considered by some academics. Moreover, the state's decision to cut Internet access early on in the timeline of the uprisings highlight that other factors were at play. Finally, the four stages of media contribution bring to light the expansion of rural Egypt's social capital during this time, and show that this played a stronger role than had been previously thought when evaluating the 2011 uprisings. As such, other factors - social capital, interaction norms, and the public sphere - are evaluated given the findings on social media's role.*

## List of Contents

	Page
<b>Preface</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Author's Declaration</b>	<b>12</b>
-	
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>2. Chapter 1 - Contextual Background</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>2.1. A General Overview of the Rural Area of Egypt</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>2.2. Formal Political Participation</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>2.3. Informal Political Participation</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>2.4. Barriers to Social Media Use in Rural Egypt</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>2.5. The Media &amp; The State: Pre-2011 and Post-2011</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>2.6. Concluding Remarks</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>3. Chapter 2- Egyptian Media &amp; Political Interaction: A Scholarly Overview</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>3.1. Background</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>3.2. The Political Context of the Egyptian Media System</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>3.2.1. Agenda Setting Theory in Relation to Public Sphere</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>3.2.2. <i>Al Jazeera</i>: Disrupting Mubarak's Control over the Egyptian Public Sphere</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>3.2.3. Bourdieu: Television &amp; Habitus</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>3.3. Social Media</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>3.3.1. From Spectating to Political Interaction: How Social Media Fermented Mobilisation Both Online and Offline</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>3.3.2. <i>Al Jazeera</i> and Social Media: The Impact of the</b>	<b>84</b>

<b>Emergence of a Convergent and Symbiotic Media Landscape in Egypt</b>	
<b>3.3.3. Convergence in Relation to Technological Characteristics</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>3.3.4. Changed Norms of Communication and Technology</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>3.4. Changing Landscapes of Place, Politics and Cognition: Social Media And Agenda Setting</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>3.4.1. Agenda Setting, Agenda Melding: Leading up to, During, and After the Revolution in Egypt</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>3.5. Exploring the Impact of the Convergent Media Environment on the Uprising using the Concept of Social Capital</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>3.5.1. Background: The Concept of Social Capital</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>3.5.2. Key Factors Affecting Social Capital in Society</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>3.5.3. Social Capital and Social Media</b>	<b>108</b>
<b>3.6. Conclusion: The contribution of this thesis to the academic literature</b>	<b>110</b>
<b>4. Chapter 3 - Qualitative Research Method, Going Beyond Urban Egypt</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>4.1. Introduction</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>4.2. Research Philosophy</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>4.2.1. Research Approach</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>4.2.2. Research Design: A Qualitative Research Approach</b>	<b>114</b>
<b>4.2.2.1. Semi-Structured Interviews</b>	<b>117</b>
<b>4.2.3. Limitations</b>	<b>122</b>
<b>4.2.4. Secondary Data Collection</b>	<b>122</b>
<b>4.2.5. Data Analysis</b>	<b>124</b>
<b>4.2.6. Themes of Primary Research</b>	<b>126</b>

<b>4.2.7. Ethics for Primary Research</b>	<b>128</b>
<b>4.3. Conclusion</b>	<b>129</b>
<b>5. Chapter 4 - Convergence: Social Media, Television, and the Changes in Political Interaction Norms During and After 2011</b>	<b>131</b>
<b>5.1. Introduction</b>	<b>131</b>
<b>5.2. Four Stages of Media Contribution During the 2011 Egyptian Uprisings</b>	<b>133</b>
<b>5.3. Protest Patterns in the Rural Areas Prior to (and During) the First Stage</b>	<b>148</b>
<b>5.4. Television &amp; Social Media: Mobilisation &amp; Demobilisation Frames during the 2011 Uprisings</b>	<b>157</b>
<b>5.4.1. Mobilisation and Demobilisation Frames</b>	<b>163</b>
<b>5.5. The online and offline activism during the 2011 Egypt uprisings</b>	<b>174</b>
<b>5.6. Conclusions</b>	<b>175</b>
<b>6. Chapter 5 - Political Interaction &amp; The Public Sphere: The Impact of Social Capital on the 2011 Uprisings and its Aftermath</b>	<b>178</b>
<b>6.1. Introduction</b>	<b>178</b>
<b>6.2. The Definition of Social Capital in Rural Egypt</b>	<b>180</b>
<b>6.3. Social Capital &amp; The Motivations For Political Interaction in Rural Egypt</b>	<b>185</b>
<b>6.4. Social Capital and the Context of Political Participation in Rural Egypt</b>	<b>191</b>
<b>6.5. Social Ties, Forms of Political Participation, &amp; The Effect of the 2011 Uprisings</b>	<b>201</b>
<b>6.6. Social Capital &amp; Formal Participation in the Aftermath of the 2011 Uprisings</b>	<b>206</b>
<b>6.7. Conclusions</b>	<b>212</b>

<b>7. Chapter 6 - The Transformation of Media and Its Impact on Social Capital of Rural Citizens After the Egyptian 2011 Political Uprisings</b>	<b>216</b>
<b>7.1. Introduction</b>	<b>216</b>
<b>7.2. The Media Background after the 2011 Uprisings, and During the Build Up to 2013</b>	<b>217</b>
<b>7.3. Social Media after the 2011 Uprisings</b>	<b>230</b>
<b>7.4. Power Shifts and Changing Norms in the Social Capital and Public Spheres</b>	<b>236</b>
<b>7.5. The Effect of the 2011 Egyptian Uprisings on the Electoral Framework</b>	<b>246</b>
<b>7.6. Conclusion</b>	<b>254</b>
<b>8. Conclusion - Rural Egypt (2011-2015) &amp; What Comes Next</b>	<b>258</b>
<b>9. References</b>	<b>274</b>
<b>10. Bibliography</b>	<b>297</b>
<b>11. Appendix</b>	<b>330</b>
<b>11.1. Themes Framework</b>	<b>330</b>
<b>11.1.1. Themes Considered Beforehand</b>	<b>331</b>
<b>11.1.1.1. Political Engagement Before &amp; After the Uprisings</b>	<b>331</b>
<b>11.1.1.2. Trust in Media Before &amp; After the Uprisings</b>	<b>332</b>
<b>11.1.1.3. Strength in Social Ties Before &amp; After the Uprisings</b>	<b>333</b>
<b>11.1.1.4. Convergence in the Media After the 2011 Uprisings</b>	<b>333</b>
<b>11.1.2. Themes that Arose Naturally</b>	<b>334</b>
<b>11.1.2.1. The Normalization of Social Media</b>	<b>334</b>
<b>11.1.2.2. The Expansion of Social Capital</b>	<b>334</b>

## **List of Tables & Illustrations**

	<b>Page</b>
a. Political Participation in Presidential Elections By Governorate	<b>22</b>
b. The Urban Population in Four Key Governorates in Egypt (Total & Percentage)	<b>117</b>
c. The Geographical Distribution of the Participants in the Protests	<b>184</b>
d. Political Participation in Presidential Election, 2014	<b>251</b>



## **Preface**

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my father-in-law who opened up for me a dimension in Egypt that I never understood as an urban citizen that never moved in different parts of Egypt. Your strong tie to your land surrounding rural areas of

Egypt opened my eye to Egyptians that I never knew much about except generalizations that are inaccurate. Among you I would like to thank all the rural citizens of Egypt that are as important as all urban citizens of Egypt. Your culture and lifestyle is very special.

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## **Author's Declaration**

I, Sara Mamdouh Ismail Mohamed Aly, hereby state that my PhD thesis, titled *Rural Egypt and the Public Sphere: The Effect of Social Media and the New Media Environment on Political Interaction, 2011-2015*, is my own work and has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, by me or another person, for taking any degree from this University Bournemouth or anywhere else in the country/world.

I, Sara Mamdouh Ismail Mohamed Aly, further submit that all sources used in researching my PhD thesis are fully acknowledged and all quotations properly identified. I understand the ethical implications of my research, and this work meets the requirements of the Faculty of Media and Communications at the University of Bournemouth.

At any time if my statement is found to be incorrect, even after my graduation, the university has the right to withdraw my PhD degree.

Sara Mamdouh Ismail Mohamed Aly

January 26, 2020

## **1. Introduction**

The prevalence of social media in society has brought with it a body of academic research in fields as diverse as psychology, business, sociology, politics, law, and - in the case of this thesis - media communication studies. As social media and digital platforms become more firmly entrenched into societal norms, the question of their effect on these societies will become more significant. This question is, of course, already being addressed and researched. Scholars such as Henry Jenkins, Manuel Castells, and Tarik Elseewi, among others, have investigated the impact of the Internet, digital media, and social media on society, and their interactions with other forms of media. For some scholars, such as in Jenkins' works (2006) or in this particular thesis, this research may be to highlight the interactions between traditional forms of media and the new media forms that have arisen. Other scholars may be more interested in an analysis of new forms of media in a specific situation, for a specific purpose, or at a specific time (Elseewi, 2011). In any case, the research of these scholars - and the continued commitment in academia to uncover social media's impact - highlights the significance of the topic. One common thread among many that can be found in a number of these academic endeavours is the attempt to evaluate the manner in which social media impacts norms, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours. Interaction norms, social norms, individual norms, and political norms have all been assessed in light of the ubiquity of social media, as well as the relationship between social media and more traditional forms of media. As such, this is a central concern, especially given the potential for political, economic, and social outcomes to be influenced.

The aim of this thesis is not to provide an answer to the question of social media's impact in the abstract, or to deal with all circumstances of social media use, for all purposes. Rather, the aim is to investigate a narrow slice of this field - the effect of social media on interaction norms - within a narrower circumstance: rural citizens in Egypt in the period preceding the 2011 uprisings, during the period of the 2011 uprisings, and during its aftermath up to 2015. It is important to note that, unlike the scholars previously mentioned, this thesis deals with the

interaction that exists between traditional forms of media and social media during the period between 2011 and 2015, rather than social media only.

In any case, the period being discussed (2011-2015) is a period of particular significance, for the purpose of this study, for a number of reasons. First, digital and social media were considered primary features of the 2011 uprisings in Egypt and other uprisings throughout the Middle East and North Africa in the period dubbed the ‘Arab Spring’. As a result, news reporting in the aftermath of the uprisings considered that social media was pivotal to the execution of the 2011 Egyptian uprising and that the opportunities it provided regarding communication and collaboration were largely responsible for the uprisings’ success (Gustin, 2011). In fact, the uprisings have commonly been referred to as examples of a ‘Social Media Revolution’, or a “Revolution [that] began on Facebook” (Vargas, 2012). These claims, however, provide an incomplete picture of the 2011 uprisings and the ten-year period which preceded it. First, it must be noted that revolutions and civil uprisings have occurred - in both world history and the history of Egypt - prior to the advent and ubiquity of social media. Second, this claim may not take into consideration a vast number of indicators and socio-political considerations regarding Egypt in the years preceding the 2011 uprisings, including the rates of offline political engagement, the history of protesting in rural regions, the importance of social capital and societal ties, and infrastructural and economic barriers to social media use, among others. The most significant of these considerations is the role of rural citizens. This is a topic which, perhaps, has not received as much consideration as it is due. This is not uncommon and, in this case, may be due to a number of concerns. One of these concerns is general; studies have highlighted that intellectuals, especially within the social sciences, have a tendency to focus their attention on the elite or middle class, on the centre of the demonstrations and on political authorities (Kabbanji, 2011). Given that the majority of Egypt’s population is rural, however, this focus may provide an incomplete image of events. The second concern may be the difficulty in accessing these areas; safety concerns, as well as the openness of individuals in these areas, may prevent access or the level of engagement and interaction needed for a study to be accomplished. Lila Abu-Lughod, an anthropologist at Columbia University in New York, discusses this aspect of

researching outside urban areas in her book, entitled *Veiled Sentiments*; the book, an investigation of gender relations and oral lyric poetry in a Bedouin community in Egypt's Western Desert, necessitated a lengthy stay in a bedouin household (Abu-Lughod, 1986). However, regardless of the reasons why, the claim that the 2011 uprisings were dependent on social media - and that the communicative and collaborative opportunities it provided were pivotal to its success - is a claim that deserves academic research. As such, the role of social media in Egypt during 2011 is a subject of academic significance.

In order to successfully approach this subject, three areas will need to be considered: (i) the role of social media in relation to its effect on political interaction and interaction norms in rural Egypt; (ii) the role of social capital in terms of its effect on political interaction among rural Egyptians in the public sphere, taking into consideration the state of rural interaction with social media; and (iii) the effect of media coverage on the uprisings in rural Egypt, in terms of the media's role in invigorating micro-public spheres and contributing to the strengthening of social capital in rural Egypt. Through an analysis of these three areas, this thesis will examine the impact of the new media environment, specifically the synergy between social media and satellite television, on the public sphere and political interactions of rural Egypt in order to assess the role social media played in neglected areas of Egypt during the 2011 uprisings. The 'new media environment' in this sense can be defined as the media environment wherein there is convergence between social and traditional forms of media such as television, radio, and newspapers. New media, on the other hand, refers primarily to media that was brought about recently due to the increased level of connectivity that has arisen due to the Internet and a more globalized landscape; examples of this include social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as other online applications such Youtube and Whatsapp. To a lesser degree, satellite television can also be classified as new media since it is a new method of providing a traditional form of media.

This thesis is divided into six chapters, each of which deals with a particular aspect of this study. The first chapter provides contextual information that acts as a necessary background. This includes a brief overview of rural Egypt, and a breakdown of the rural regions that are studied in-depth through interviews -

Qalyoubia, Menoufia, Minya, and South Sinai. Moreover, this chapter delves into formal and informal political participation, highlighting the distinction between them as well as the manner in which they exist in Egypt during the period discussed. This is followed by a brief topline view of the barriers that exist to social media use in rural Egypt, and a historical summary of the relationship between traditional media (primarily television, and news journalism) and the state.

This chapter will be followed by a review of the relevant literature regarding the Egyptian media, political interaction, and other academic research of significance to this study. This chapter will address the political context of the Egyptian media system, public sphere theory, agenda setting theory, relevant studies and practical examples relating to social media, convergence theory and the manner in which private, state, and international broadcasting proved significant in 2011, and the concept of social capital. In essence, this chapter will provide an overview of relevant scholarly research of significance for the purpose of this study and its objectives regarding the investigation of social media, political interaction, and rural Egypt; as such, this chapter investigates previous academic research in order to provide a scholarly overview in a similar manner to which the first chapter provided a contextual overview.

Following this, Chapter 3 will focus on methodology. In this chapter, a review will be conducted of the research methodology adopted in the collection and analysis of data relating to Egypt's media environment, before and after the uprisings. The methodology of a study defines the specific stages in which the researcher will obtain data relevant to the research objectives (Thomas, 2011). The stages of conducting the study involve selection of a suitable sample size, data collection, and data analysis which culminates in the presentation of findings. This is central to the study, since it determines the accuracy of the conclusions of all subsequent chapters. This chapter will address the reasoning behind the chosen methodology, its impact on the results, the way it may aid or limit the research, and any ethical considerations that arise as a result of the methodology chosen.



Having discussed all relevant contextual, theoretical, and methodological considerations, the subsequent three chapters will each be focused solely on the aim of this thesis: the investigation and analysis of the new media environment's effect on the public sphere and political interactions of rural Egypt, taking into consideration the synergy between social media and satellite television, in order to assess the role social media played in rural Egypt during the 2011 uprisings. As such, these chapters will discuss the results of this thesis. To do so, each of these three chapters will discuss one specific aspect of this overall aim. Chapter 4 will address whether social media changed political interaction norms in the public sphere in rural Egypt during and after 2011 due to its convergence with television media. This will include a consideration of the media's contribution during different stages of the 2011 uprisings, protest patterns in rural Egypt before and during the 2011 uprisings, mobilisation and demobilisation frames during the same period, and offline and online activism or political interaction during the 2011 uprisings. Chapter 5 will focus on how social capital in rural Egypt affected the political interaction of citizens in the public sphere, taking into consideration social media access and the circumstances surrounding it. In this chapter, analysis of this question will be conducted through a consideration of the unique example of social capital that exists in rural Egypt and the reasons surrounding its existence, the impact of rural Egypt's social capital on formal and informal political interaction norms, the forms of political participation that existed in the period preceding the 2011 uprisings as well as during and after the uprisings, as well as the manner in which social capital and social media interact. Finally, Chapter 6 will address the extent to which the media coverage of the uprisings in rural Egypt invigorated micro-public spheres and contributed to empowerment and building social capital in rural areas. This chapter will include a discussion of the media background after the 2011 uprisings and in the build-up to the 2013 uprisings to oust the Muslim Brotherhood regime, social media usage after the 2011 uprisings and its significance in 2013, changing norms in relation to social capital and the public sphere in rural Egypt, and the impact of the 2011 uprisings on the electoral framework.

These chapters will together highlight the extent to which social media affected rural citizens of Egypt in the 2011 uprisings, the extent to which social

media was a driving factor for these uprisings, as well as the manner in which social interacted with the new media environment, traditional media, the state, the citizens and their political interactions and interaction norms. Given the fact that rural Egyptians constitute over half of Egypt's population, and the fact that they are an understudied group in this context, this thesis will address the above factors through the lens of the rural citizens, their relationship to traditional news, the state, social media, political participation, and the new media environment. This does not mean that urban citizens will not be discussed. However, the focus will be on rural citizens; reference to urban citizens will be used throughout for comparative purposes, or in order to highlight a distinction between them and their rural counterparts.

Of course, this thesis and its findings do not exist in isolation. The findings here exist in conversation with a variety of scholars and researchers with specializations in convergence, agenda setting, political interaction, media and communication, and sociology. Without the body of scholarship that exists from previous researchers and academics, this thesis would not have the theoretical, methodological, and contextual underpinnings that act as its foundation. As such, the opinions, findings, and considerations of these researchers will be used throughout this study - in conjunction with the primary research conducted - in order to evaluate the assertions made throughout. In this manner, a conclusion will be reached regarding the impact of the new media environment, specifically the synergy between social media and satellite television, on the public sphere and political interactions of rural Egypt in order to assess the role social media played in neglected areas of Egypt during the 2011 uprisings.

## **2. Chapter 1 - Contextual Background**

The 2011 Egyptian uprisings began a period of political, cultural, and social change within Egypt. These changes have affected interaction norms, technology usage, and media reliance and organization. As such, an evaluation of an event as politically significant as the 2011 Egyptian uprisings necessarily requires an understanding of the context in which the event occurred, and the background from which it sprang. This thesis addresses three primary areas in relation to political interaction in rural Egypt during the period between 2011 and 2015: (i) the role of social media in relation to its effect on political interaction and interaction norms in rural Egypt; (ii) the role of social capital in terms of its effect on political interaction among rural Egyptians in the public sphere, taking into consideration the state of rural interaction with social media; and (iii) the effect of media coverage on the uprisings in rural Egypt, in terms of the media's role in invigorating micro-public spheres and contributing to the strengthening of social capital in rural Egypt. Through these areas, the aim of this thesis is to investigate the effect of social media on interaction norms within rural Egypt. For this subject to be analysed with any degree of accuracy or success, there are several topics that must be discussed beforehand to provide the necessary context for the discussion. As such, this chapter deals with the period between 2011 and 2015, as well as the ten-year period that preceded it .

The aim of this chapter is to provide context relating to Egypt generally, and rural Egypt in particular, in terms of significant cultural details, political participation, political and media organization, and technology usage. This will serve as an underpinning for the remainder of the thesis. This background is divided into five sections. The first section provides a general overview of rural Egypt, and an introductory overview for each of the four governorates specifically researched for this thesis: Qalyoubia, Menoufia, Minya, and South Sinai. Each of these governorates is described in terms of social structure, location, proximity to the urban centers where the uprisings occurred, and other distinguishing features. This will showcase both their commonalities and their differences, and the manner in which the four governorates provide a full view of rural Egypt. This section also highlights the limited focus that has been given to

rural involvement in political change, as well as the reasoning behind scholarly focus on elites, middle class, urban centers, and political authorities.

The second and third sections of this chapter address formal and informal political participation, respectively. In each case, a theoretical background of the term is provided, and a definition that serves to distinguish them. Following this, formal and informal political participation are considered in terms of Egypt generally, and rural Egypt specifically. This serves as a topline overview of political participation in Egypt, providing the underpinning for all subsequent discussion. These sections include examples of each form of participation, the prevalence of this form of participation in Egypt, and other contextual information related to this form of political participation in the country. Given the focus of this thesis, an overview of political participation prior to the 2011 uprisings allows for a deeper understanding of the 2011 uprisings, the circumstances that led to the uprisings and played a role in their progression, and their aftermath.

The fourth section of this chapter deals with the barriers that exist in rural Egypt regarding the use of social media. This includes socio-cultural barriers, economic barriers, infrastructural barriers, and barriers that arise from linguistic or educational limitations. This overview furthers one's contextual foundation of rural Egypt while specifically addressing the role of social media. Given the focus of this thesis on the effect of social media on interaction norms within rural Egypt, a foundational understanding is necessary. It is important to note that, while the barriers to social media will be discussed, this does not imply that social media played a small role in rural Egypt's involvement in the uprisings. Rather, in order to successfully assess the extent to which social media affected political interactions and interaction norms within rural Egypt, it is necessary to understand the role of social media in the area beforehand, as well as its limitations.

The final section provides an overview of the relationship between the media (primarily in terms of traditional media) and the state, prior to and following the 2011 uprisings. To uncover the details about the evolution in Egyptian society in the aftermath of the uprisings, it is clear that the media must be considered as an

important source and a useful indicator of what happens in a society. As such, this section provides a recounting of the media in terms of its significance in Egyptian society, its role, its limitations, and its interaction with the state. This background information will allow for clarity when analysis is conducted on whether media coverage on the uprisings in rural Egypt played a role in invigorating the micro-public sphere and if it contributed to the strengthening of rural Egypt's social capital.

Essentially, the sections of this chapter all exist to provide information that is essential for any meaningful analysis of Egypt, rural Egypt, political interaction in Egypt, and the role of the media in the uprisings between 2011 and 2015.

### **2.1. A General Overview of the Rural Area of Egypt**

The regions chosen for analysis were four large Egyptian governorates characterised by a big territorial area, considerable importance in Egypt's political scene, and the fact that they make up a dominant percentage of the rural population. Due to these factors, the four governorates chosen are best-suited for discussion on social media's influence and analysis of the changes in political norms as relating to political interaction triggered during, and after, the 2011 uprisings. This is due to several factors, including variety in social structures, different proximities to the urban centers in which protesting occurred, different locations within Egypt, varying economic and political realities, and differing population sizes. The four chosen areas where research was conducted are Qalyoubia, South Sinai, Minya, and Menoufia.

In order to analyse the role of rural Egypt in the uprisings with any measure of success, some contextual information is necessary regarding Egypt in general and the governorates chosen for this thesis specifically. Being composed of 27 governorates, Egypt has only four governorates that are predominantly urban, namely Alexandria, Port Said, Suez and Cairo. The other remaining 23 are mixed, both rural and urban. Nine governorates are located in Upper Egypt, four in the Eastern and Western frontiers and nine in Lower Egypt (El Zanaty and Way, 2008; CAPMAS, 2015). While the urban areas are composed of the capital of the governorate and its smaller districts, the rural areas are composed mainly of

“villages, pilgrimages in the land areas, and the Bedouins in some of the frontier governorates, such as North and South Sinai” (Zohry, 2002). More than 50% of Egypt’s population – around 47 million – live in rural areas, of which 15 million are living under the poverty line (Rural Poverty Portal, 2014). In terms of the four governorates discussed in this thesis, the table below highlights the rural-urban split, and the levels of political participation as seen in the 2014 presidential elections.

<b>Governorate</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Urban Population</b>	<b>Rural Population</b>	<b>Political Participation in Presidential Elections, 2014</b>
Qalyoubia	5,105,972	2,280,927	2,825,045	55.2%
Menoufia	3,941,293	812,833	3,128,460	62.6%
South Sinai	167,426	85,502	81,924	45.4%
Minya	5,156,702	973,418	4,183,284	35.4%

Political Participation in Presidential Elections By Governorate (Pres2014.elections.eg, 2014)

Qalyoubia is one of the most populated regions of Lower Egypt, with a population slightly over five million; 50% live in rural areas. This region also represents the second most important region in terms of political participation, because the voting percentage is 55.2%. This is the second highest voting percentage in Egypt and clearly highlights the strong political deliberations in this area. A voting participation level of 55.2% also makes the region one of the most politically active in Egypt, a fact that is very important considering that 52% of this statistic are women. In fact, this area has the highest female voting participation in Egypt (Pres2014.elections.eg, 2014). This high level of political engagement is also determined by the governorate’s geographical positioning; Qalyoubia is situated only 50 km from Cairo, the capital, and 30 km from Menoufia, which is another of the governorates chosen for study in this thesis.

Nevertheless, the strong political sense of this population has never alienated them from their bond to the land, which keeps the people focused on agriculture and on their rural way of life. There is, of course, variation within every governorate in regards to employment, with some commuting to work rather than engaging in agricultural activity. The citizens living in Qalyoubia are similar to those living in Menoufia; one significant difference that arose among interviewees from these governorates is that Qalyoubia's citizens appear more interested in engaging with media than Menoufia's citizens, since minimal travel time for work (for commuters) allows them more free time. The urban area in Qalyoubia is also very developed, with many citizens based in rural areas commuting to the urban area of the governorate daily.

Menoufia is in Lower Egypt as well, being characterised by a strong political involvement and a great lobbying tradition. The region has a population of approximately four million citizens, 80% of whom reside in rural areas. However, their voting participation reached 63%, the highest in Egypt (Pres2014.elections.eg, 2014). Menoufia was chosen as a focus area because it is majority-rural, yet remains the governorate with the highest level of political participation. It also has the highest percentage of individuals commuting daily to Cairo, 80 km away, for work, which is 22.1% of its population (Zohry, 2002). The majority of Egyptian presidents have come from Menoufia. Its financial stability is superior to that of other rural areas such as Minya and its citizens are less conservative and more open to communicating freely. However, even if Menoufia has a strong political tradition, its citizens in lower economic categories are not particularly concerned about using social media more than citizens with similar circumstances in Qalyoubia, as will be shown in interview data throughout this thesis; they have less agriculture due to changes in their area that will be discussed in later chapters, and tend to commute to Cairo on a daily basis for work. This makes their daily routine exhausting due to the difficulty of transportation facilities to and from Cairo.

South Sinai, unlike Qalyoubia and Menoufia, is a frontier governorate with a strong tribal tradition. This governorate has been chosen because its population represents an interesting sample for the analysis of social media influence and of

levels of political participation. South Sinai is one of the few governorates in Egypt with a tribal tradition. This is due to geographic position, which is very close to Libya, with many Libyan tribes exerting a specific influence on the region. The area is also quite isolated because of the mountains surrounding it; the tribal form of organisation is more effective in such a geographical context. Six major tribes that discuss with the government the particular needs of the entire population represent South Sinai (A, 2018 in South Sinai). Even though educational institutions have been introduced in the last 50 years, even the most educated citizens still have strong bonds to the tribal culture and social behaviour, especially when it comes to obeying the head of the tribe. The heads of the tribes determine political participation even when some members have different opinions. South Sinai is close to Palestine and government authorities prefer to have a very high level of security in that area. Therefore the government makes agreements with the head of each tribe, on the presumption that they know better about the needs of their own people and because they know the mountains and geography of the areas more. This situation has led to a reliance on tribal leaders for political decision-making.

While the importance of South Sinai and its tribal traditions will be discussed in more detail throughout this thesis, it will also be discussed here in terms of how that tribal tradition affected their social media use during the time period this thesis is analysing. It is sufficient here to note only that the governorate has a 45% rate of voting participation, and a population of 167,000, 50% of whom are based in rural areas (Pres2014.elections.eg, 2014). The majority of the other frontier governorates are urban and do not have a tribal tradition. In fact, North Sinai is the only other governorate with such a tradition. However, this region was not an option for analysis in this thesis due to safety concerns. One of the most significant aspects of this tradition is the fact that the head of the tribes determines everyone else's political participation even when some of the members have different opinions. This provides a focus on the local level that, as will be shown, may not be consistent with the use of social media for political participation.



The final region that will be discussed in this thesis is Minya. This governorate is the most populated in Upper Egypt, with 80% of its citizens living in rural areas. This makes Minya one of the most important areas for analysis in Upper Egypt because it has the second highest voting participation in the region: approximately 35% with a majority rural population (Pres2014.elections.eg, 2014). Upper Egypt's governorates are characterised by strong ties to tradition, especially relating to women and vengeance if a family takes land from another or disrespects one of its members. It is important to note however that, despite this, residents of Minya are also open to settling disputes calmly depending on the situation and the families involved. As part of Upper Egypt, traditions in Minya are more conservative compared to Lower Egypt. Generally, women do not deal with strangers as easily as in Lower Egypt. For example, during interviews conducted in Minya, the time of female interviewees was notably shorter than their male counterparts because they did not talk as much as women in Lower Egypt. Moreover, Minya's residents are also more rigid about their traditions due to seclusion from the rest of Egypt, caused by distance and lack of infrastructure. This region is farther from the urban areas when compared to Lower Egypt. It is around 300 km away from Cairo and almost 500 km away from Alexandria, the second largest urban center in Egypt, making its infrastructure not as developed and its living conditions more difficult. This leads people to focus more on day-to-day life than politics, an attitude which plays a role in why voting percentages in this region are the lowest out of the four areas chosen in this thesis.

Given Egypt's high rural population, and the size of its rural governorates, it is not a stretch to assume that this sector of the population has affected its political landscape. However, focus on the effect of rural populations has generally been minimal. Lama Kabbanji (2011) underlines the fact that intellectuals, especially those in social sciences such as politics, have the tendency to focus their attention on the elite or middle class, on demonstration centres and on political authorities. Consequently, the opportunity to understand the events (and to analyse the dynamics of the Egyptian social movements from a broader perspective) is undermined by their vision. The instant analysis of the events outside the historical framework poses a barrier to analysing the contribution of all social categories in Egypt. While Galal Amin (2013) refers to the 2011 Egyptian

uprising as a revolutionary moment that emerged due to a desire to dispense with the Mubarak regime, Gilbert Achcar (2013) presents it as the climax of a long-term process, opening the way to broader and more accurate analysis. It is for this reason that this thesis places a large emphasis on explaining the context of the rural population in terms of history, interaction norms, economic limitations, as well as linguistic and infrastructural barriers. It is necessary background, without which any analysis of social media's impact on political interaction norms would lack context. Moreover, when comparing differences in political interaction norms, it is necessary to consider how these changed before, during, and especially after 2011. Finally, this thesis takes into consideration Kabbanji's assertions regarding the limitations to understanding imposed by a focus solely on elites, middle class, centres of demonstrations, and political authorities.

However, it is important to note that this perspective and focus does also cause difficulty. Research into rural activity comes with many complications that may not exist when focusing on the elite and middle class. One difficulty in understanding the rural activity concerning the resistance against the regime in Egypt, for example, comes from the geographical complication that it is simply difficult to access many rural areas. There is also the matter of security, and openness, in some of those areas when one enters it as a stranger, as well as the fact that the tribal organisation in some rural governorates sometimes makes interaction more difficult. South Sinai, as highlighted in this section, serves as an example of this. On the other hand, many difficulties in understanding the rural areas' role in the uprising comes from stereotypes such as the idea of the 'passive or indolent peasant', which obscure the numerous forms, and their resistance to the Mubarak system. Some researchers consider that the rural citizens already had an everyday form of resistance prior to the events of 2011 (Scott, 1985) while others have questioned this idea (Fegan, 1986, Adas, 1986). This topic will also be considered later in the thesis.

For now, it is sufficient to know only that the four governorates discussed in this section - Qalyoubia, Menoufia, Minya, and South Sinai - provide variety in terms of population size, social structures, safety and stability, financial wellbeing, historical and modern significance in politics, political participation

rates, location, and proximity to urban centers such as Cairo and Alexandria. However, despite these differences, the chosen areas also serve as rural centers. Given the focus of this thesis on the impact of rural Egypt on the political landscape between 2011 and 2015, a clear and nuanced analysis requires the study of different rural sectors of Egypt - with different histories, relationships to the regime, and political viewpoints. As such, these governorates allow for an analysis of rural Egypt that can both illuminate the commonalities and highlight the differences between rural areas in general, as well as between rural participation as compared to Egypt's urban counterparts.

## **2.2. Formal Political Participation**

Having discussed the four governorates that will serve as the focus of this thesis and given a general overview of their features, it is important to highlight Egypt's political interaction norms. While this section (and the following section on informal participation) will not delve into specific norms of each individual region, it will serve as an outline for political participation in the country, and distinguishing characteristics of this participation.

Political participation is broadly defined by researchers in the field as the involvement of citizens in governmental decision-making, in order to influence or change it (Nelson and Huntington, 1976). In theoretical terms, political engagement refers to active participation of citizens in the political sphere. It represents a process through which people can determine changes in the political life of their communities through the role they play in the political sphere. Political scholars divide political participation into formal and informal depending on the purpose and the direction of a specific context: "formal political participation is defined as not anti-systemic and does not directly challenge the underlying legitimacy of the central government" (Maki, 2006). Informal political participation, on the other hand, would challenge the legitimacy of the central government. Thus, formal political participation refers to people who make use of their legitimate right and get involved in the political sphere by means of political parties, associations, and other similar methods. Formal activities are not considered illegal and include running for a particular position, voting,

campaigning, joining different political parties, and getting involved in civil society organisations.

According to detailed statistics presented by Mostafa Refaei (2012), Egypt's citizens identify themselves more with formal than informal political participation. This is particularly clear when considering the importance individuals from rural Egypt place on parliamentary elections. Parliamentary elections in Egypt, particularly in rural regions, typically include higher voter turnout and consistency in voter choice than presidential elections (B, 2018 in Qalyoubia; D, 2018 in Qalyoubia; [pres2012.elections.eg](http://pres2012.elections.eg)). While this will be discussed in greater detail in later chapters, it must be noted now that this focus on parliamentary elections and their importance has had ramifications on national politics. While in power, the Mubarak regime regularly attempted to locate and co-opt key political figures in rural areas to ensure that the ruling regime would maintain a parliamentary majority. This in turn made it appear, to citizens of rural Egypt, as though voting in parliamentary elections made a difference to the governance of the state and created a kind of connection between the regime and the citizens of rural Egypt.

It is important to note that this commitment to formal political participation for parliamentary elections did not exist in the case of Egypt's presidential elections. When, in 2005, presidential elections were held that involved multiple candidates, citizens of Egypt regarded this new situation with suspicion and voting participation was consequently very low (Lynch, 2006). However, Refaei's statistics have highlighted that, in the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings, the majority of Egyptian citizens presumed voting at the national level would be more likely than previously to change the political sphere (Refaei, 2012). This is borne out in participation percentages. For example, the participation percentage in the March 2011 referendum was 41% and dramatically increased in the November 2011 elections of that year to an unprecedented 76%. This is in contrast to previous participation percentages of 23% in 2005's presidential elections (Meital, 2006).

The 2011 uprising marked the beginning of a series of transformations in Egypt's political system. After President Mubarak's resignation, studies showed

that almost all citizens had strong feelings of nationalism, as they were all proud of being Egyptians, but their political values and trust were affected by the division of the country in terms of religious and national identity (Karoui, 2015). The oppressive governance from the previous 40 years caused them to be highly unsupportive of the majority of political actors and institutions. This was based on their feeling that Egypt's political leadership would continue to be corrupt in the future. Statistics conducted between August and October 2011 highlight that approximately 76% of Egypt's citizens had "little confidence" or "no confidence at all" in the country's political parties. The police, unions, press, and civil society organizations received similar percentages: 61%, 70%, 59%, and 63% respectively (Erle et al., 2012).

After President Mubarak resigned, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) took power of the state until the first presidential elections were organised. During this transitional period, a constitutional review committee was founded and a referendum for a constitutional declaration organised. After the restrictive measures against forming political parties had been removed, Mr. Adel El Shourbagy, Head of the Party Establishment Committee stated more than 90 parties were formed (El Daragly, 2017). Parliamentary elections were organised between November 2011 and January 2012. These elections were proclaimed as "the first honest national elections of any sort held in Egypt since the overthrow of the monarchy in 1952" (Ifes.org, 2013). The Islamists, run by Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom Justice Party, had an overwhelming victory, taking 47% of seats. As demonstrated, citizens from rural areas proved to have a strong political consciousness, participating massively in both parliamentary and presidential elections. Turnouts showed that around 72% of the rural population took part in parliamentary elections. In May and June of 2012 Egypt faced the first free presidential elections; 13 candidates participated in the first round. In the second round only two candidates remained: Mohamed Morsi, representing the Muslim Brotherhood and a former Prime Minister under Mubarak, Ahmed Shafik, with Morsi winning the election. 51.8% of the population of Egypt participated in the presidential elections (El-Mallakh, 2017).

### 2.3. Informal Political Participation

Informal political participation refers to getting involved in a variety of political organisms not under the government's control, and that usually represent the voices of dissent. Informal political participation takes many forms, including involvement in demonstrations and protests, organisation of violent activities against state institutions, and the practice of online activism through the use of social media networks, blogs or other channels (Nasser, 2010). Unlike formal political participation, informal participation is "primarily characterized by voicing or acting on anti-systemic opinions" (Maki, 2006). According to Lina Khatib (2013), informal political participation "through social networks, underground political movements, and social movements, was often the only way for citizens to challenge their regimes." In fact, the uprisings discussed in this thesis would fall primarily under the term of informal political involvement.

In Egypt, the legislative and political context was very limited for common people, and did not allow them much access (or options) in the political scene during Mubarak's regime. As such, Egyptian citizens started to make use of informal political practices, rather than formal ones, because it was their only opportunity to gain the liberty of having formal rights in the formal political sphere. Many turned to social media as a form of informal participation, and began using Facebook and Twitter as uncoerced and local spaces for citizens to discuss issues of social, economic, and political concern. Informal forms of political involvement are often represented by their opposition to the existing authoritarian political system. The aim of this informal participation is to force the government to respond to particular issues the state's citizens consider a priority.

The Facebook group, "*We are all Khaled Said*" or "*Kolona Khaled Said*" in Arabic, is a particularly significant example of informal political participation with roots in social media. This Facebook group, which was started in July 2010 by Google marketing manager and Internet activist Wael Ghoneim (Sakr, 2013b) reached 3.58 million Egyptian Facebook users. The group's name is derived from Khaled Said, an Egyptian male who posted an online video of two police officers exchanging money after a drug deal. On his final day, Said visited an Internet

café where two officers approached him and began physically and violently abusing him. The beating began inside the café and continued on the street, ultimately resulting in his death. Immediately following this, a police car arrived to take possession of his body. Later that day, it was reported to his family that the cause of Said's death was a drug overdose. His family and friends believed he was beaten because of the video he had posted online and many people, including human right activists and El Baradei, headed to the streets in an expression of outrage at his death. Said became a symbol, and the Facebook group solidified the opposition of Egyptian citizens to the routine police brutality that had become commonplace, and acted as an attempt to seek governmental response to issues of physical safety and the prevalence of police brutality; social media pages were soon flooded with images of Said's disfigured face following his brutal attack and murder by the police. Other citizens who held grievances against police maltreatment joined this group and posted their own experiences. As a consequence, Said became the icon of the 2011 revolution (Eltantawy and Wiest, 2011) and his image could be seen as a cultural 'meme' which spread rapidly through social media and came to symbolise government repression and police brutality. The sense of anger which was encapsulated in the Facebook group and its content was considered by Egyptians to have played an essential role in sparking the uprisings. Some consider this incident to be one of the primary catalysts for encouraging and motivating Egypt's population to head to Tahrir Square.

The 2011 Egyptian uprisings themselves consisted of an unprecedented mass mobilisation that brought millions of Egyptians onto the streets. Keeping in mind that political street demonstrations had been forbidden in Egypt since 1967, the uprisings themselves are considered a form of informal political participation (Joya, 2011). The goal of the uprisings was to combat corruption and social injustice, both of which had existed in Egypt for a long time. This is confirmed by the Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, which in 2010 rated the country at 98 points out of 100. There are several researchers who have investigated the participation rates in the 2011 uprisings and the reasons that people gathered together. During the 2011 uprisings, those involved noted their reasons for participating as being related to wanting to combat social injustice,

“end [the] dictatorship and stifling [of] liberties,” and finally to end corruption within the state (Erle et al., 2012).

According to Refaei (2012), there was also a socio-demographic component to the informal political participation in Egypt. 52% of those involved in informal political acts were aged between 18-30 years old and, as such, their participation in social media networks and protests was done with a level of enthusiasm that is typical of the youth (Refaei, 2012). Moreover, they had not been exposed to the authoritarian regime to the same extent as their parents and grandparents. As such, their level of fear was lower. 17% of the uprisings’ participants were from the upper-middle class, meaning that they were educated and had certain access to news, as well as a measure of economic stability. Moreover, approximately 55% of those involved in informal political acts lived in urban areas, even though only 43% of the total population of Egypt live in cities (Erle et al., 2012). On the one hand, the previous statistics are normal, considering that the uprisings’ demonstrations took place in urban regions, primarily Alexandria and Cairo. On the other hand, the percentage of the rural population who participated in the events was quite impressive, considering that the rural population’s access to social media for getting news was reduced by their geographical position and conditions, as will be reviewed throughout this thesis. Moreover, given that the uprisings’ demonstrations occurred in urban regions, the ratio of urban to rural citizens, while favouring the former, only does so minimally. This highlights the high level of involvement, and the motivation, among rural citizens.

Even though protestors made up only 8% of Egypt’s total population, specialists in the field claim this is a very high rate of participation, taking into account the high risks (Erle et al., 2012). For Egypt, these include jail, torture or even death. As such, it is clear that political participation in Egypt existed despite high risks and barriers. Even though many social media, news commentators and news transmissions referred to the 2011 uprisings as a “democratic movement”, democracy was non-existent in Egypt and it was only a goal that emerged after the uprisings that began on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2011. The movements’ goal was not to remove the regime, at the beginning, but to cut out corruption and reform the political system. The president’s refusal to cooperate gave activists no option but



to fight for the removal of the political regime. The dynamic of the events clearly indicate that the purpose of the 2011 uprisings was not just political, but also economic, because people were sick and tired of living at the edge of a normal existence. The end of unemployment was, in fact, another reason protesters gave for their participation in the uprisings (Erle et al., 2012). The different movements created online, via social media networks or offline, through face to face meetings, had different agendas, but they were united by the ardent desire to end corruption and social injustice (Joya, 2011).

It is important to note here that the existence of these movements was partially possible because of the Mubarak regime's desire to appear as pro-democratic. In order to maintain his image of a democratic leader, Mubarak allowed a number of political liberties: he increased his tolerance of criticism somewhat and allowed small protests, such as those conducted by factory workers prior to 2011 (Gamil, 2017). Examples of this include the Mahalla Strike in 2008 and the El-Ghazl workers strike in 2006. Mubarak felt confident he could keep these small demonstrations under control and no one could threaten his position or power. Moreover, this allowed him to act as a democratic leader in front of his Western counterparts. He was playing a dual role between transparent leadership and dictatorship. Through his dictatorial regime, Mubarak wanted to destroy as much as possible the relationships between people – the social capital – to make the citizens and residents of Egypt helpless and disparate, rendering them easier to control. This was obvious in how the Mubarak regime refused to legalize protesting. Moreover, evidence of the state's attempts to minimize the strength of the country's social ties and connections is evident in the fear people held about the security police. These forces inspired a fear in Egypt's citizens that centred on the concern that any citizen's knowledge regarding protesters or protest plans could lead to arrest, interrogation, or imprisonment. In terms of restrictions on formal participation, the regime placed limitations and severe restrictions on the starting of any major political parties.

However, this double-faced character - of democratic politics internationally and dictatorial measures internally - brought his regime to an end. By allowing small-scale liberties such as those mentioned, Mubarak inadvertently created

space for numerous youth movements and activities on behalf of civil society. He never managed to undermine the social relationships that were so prevalent within Egypt, especially in rural areas where strong bonds between people and their families was an ancestral heritage. The Kefaya Movement formed in 2004 and became one of the most important movements of the period, because it united people of very different political interests and orientations. Its consistent calls for political change were not necessarily successful, but they inspired people to create other groups, causing a shift in the collective consciousness. “The April 6 Movement” formed in 2008 and had its roots in the Kefaya movement. Together with “We are all Khaled Said”, these movements were able to fly under Mubarak’s radar and undermine totalitarian policies and control. This enabled a bridge to be created over the political regime and to gain support from many people, who could organise private meetings to exchange ideas, plan, and mobilise the public will. For example, the Kefaya movement reached 10,000 by 2005; “We are all Khaled Said” reached approximately 30,000 members prior to the 2011 uprising, with an increase to 190,000 once Wael Ghoneim appeared on Dream TV. There have also been many other smaller groups such as “March 9 Movement”, “Youth Movement for Justice” or “Workers for Change”. All these groups started to meet each other and discovered they had very similar interests and grievances; they also realised that they had an enormous potential to succeed when acting in unison, as a bigger movement, rather than as independent small groups. Their meetings revealed to them they could make a real impact only by acting together (Refaei, 2012), which helped in creating the micro public sphere. It became evident through these groups that discussions on social, economic and political issues could actually lead to changes in these areas if organized and directed in a deliberate fashion. The studies in the field show that political values and norms of the 2011 protests have to be regarded as a whole. First of all, in terms of the demands that gathered thousands of people together, under the same goal. Second of all, it is in terms of the common values shared by the activists and by the youth movements. Thirdly, in terms of how all these have reflected on the Egyptian society after the uprisings (Joya, 2011).

## **2.4. Barriers to Social Media Use in Rural Egypt**

Social media was one of the methods used for communication and coordination by independent groups such as those mentioned previously. Social media, in this sense, could theoretically allow for increased communication within Egypt, and increased flexibility in communication over long distances. This feature of social media plays a role in why many scholars have considered its use pivotal to the success of the uprisings (Chebib and Sohail, 2011). As such, the prevalence of social media, and its limitations, must be considered in order to evaluate this claim as related to rural Egypt.

As already explained, over 50% of Egypt's population reside in rural areas, which means that half of its population is represented by rural citizens. This is one reason why this study places such a strong emphasis on the rural areas' contribution to the 2011 uprisings, aiming to discover the extent to which social media has had an impact on changing individual norms of political interaction. One of the important facts is that, on the one hand, the rural areas do not have as much access to social media as urban areas and, on the other hand, do not rely on it much when taking political action because it is not in their day-to-day culture, particularly when focusing on the time frame of this thesis. This perspective concerning the media is due to some specific barriers to its access in the rural areas.

### *Economic barriers*

The economic barriers to accessing social media represent one of the most significant barriers. The economic level of some rural areas, which is very frequently more like a survival path for some of the rural areas, affects the possibility of having Internet access for some rural families from Egypt (Beilock and Dimitrova, 2003), because they do not have enough resources to buy mobile phones or computers or to pay for monthly subscriptions from an Internet company (Curran et al., 2012). Moreover, in the majority of rural areas, the economic barriers are far more challenging than the ones people encounter in the urban areas.

### *Poor infrastructure*

Another major barrier directly connected to the economic one is the poor infrastructure in Egypt's rural areas when compared to the urban. Interviewee D in Minya, explained, "*the area I was living in did not have Internet connection but I heard about it from other friends and relatives that were in areas with Internet connection*" (D, 2018 in Minya).

The low percentage of Internet users is also linked to poor infrastructure, which represents an obstruction to the introduction of Internet networks to these areas. Developing countries such as Egypt present a major need to run an inclusive growth system that would develop rural areas and which would also be reflected in the welfare of the population (Ghanem, 2014). The infrastructure barrier is directly connected with low economic levels in the rural areas and actually triggers many other barriers to social media access such as the next barrier: language and education.

### *Language and education barriers*

Many rural citizens are illiterate and, as a result, cannot use the Internet (El Nawawy and Khamis, 2013). Internet users in Egypt, especially during the 2011 uprisings, were represented by the educated youth, using mostly English (Prashad, 2012). According to the International Telecommunication Union, only 3% of Internet users utilise the Arabic language; the rest rely primarily on English (Curran et al., 2012), meaning that the English language itself represents a huge barrier for a large majority of Egyptians, including even many of those living in urban areas. Even though in 2009 *Facebook* introduced its Arabic version, the translations were quite poor and did not provide easy access (Castells, 2013). Nevertheless, despite education and language representing a huge barrier to media access, Arab countries characterise themselves by a political unity which is specific to the Middle East, especially in the rural areas (Danielson, 2007). This unity is called Pan-Arabism and refers to the fact that Arab citizens feel connected through history, religion and mother-tongue, which is enough to motivate them to take action when it comes to their country (Carbaugh, 2016). This is the reason why rural areas have not been hindered in their political interaction, because their tendency of sticking to tradition keeps them more united

and more implicated in politics in terms of both engagement and involvement, which takes us to the social and cultural barriers.

### *Social and cultural barriers*

The rural communities have always been characterised by a more traditional way of living and by a general tendency of preserving their norms and cultural boundaries (Brusco, 1996; Paloscia, 1991; Granovetter, 1985). A prime example of this is South Sinai, which relies on a tribal framework. Some other academics show that the agrarian communities function in such a way that prevents the poor social class from participating in political life because they remain loyal to their farmers, landowners or tribal leaders, in the case of Bedouins (Moore and Putzel, 1999). Basically, the power remains with rural elites, which have an interest in maintaining poverty levels to maintain the gap between their social class and lower ones. This phenomenon is also found in Egypt (Blair, 2000). Rural citizens do not rely on media only because their life is based on “connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (Putnam, 2000). As already discussed, the rural communities have much higher levels of connection among the citizens than the urban areas. This is mainly because small groups develop social relationships from one generation to another (Murdoch, 2000). Even though the higher status people affect decisions of the communities they run, this is a result of trust that has been built over time, rather than a mind-set, which is based on fear. This happens outside of any state institutions, because the relationships are built and transmitted from one generation to another and the tribal (or large family) leaders have a long history in their communities. The rural population needs much more time to integrate the Internet into their life and to trust it in the way they trust their local leaders and long established family and intra-families relations. They accept changes harder not because they are less civilised, but because they are more connected and attached to their culture, which they cherish and respect. Nevertheless, their culture and traditions have never been an impediment to taking action when needed and to protest against the state, as the following section will highlight. They trusted instead their old, traditional sources, which are ‘word of mouth’ recommendations together with following their leaders’ recommendations and advice.

As such, it is clear that rural Egypt suffered from economic, infrastructural, educational, linguistic and cultural barriers that prevented - or, at least, strongly limited - social media usage. These barriers, combined with a lack of experience in the use of social media for political purposes, must be considered when discussing the relationship between the uprisings, the media, and the rural population that forms the majority of Egypt. Despite these barriers, however, it must be noted that rural Egypt has a strong history of protesting injustices and governmental abuses when its citizens feel it is necessary, as will be highlighted

It is important to note here that these barriers do not necessarily mean that social media was insignificant. On the contrary, Facebook groups such as “Khaled Said” and similar spaces certainly played a role and held significance. However, these barriers serve as a context for the prevalence of social media, which serves as a necessary first step for analysing the extent of that significance. By understanding the extent to which social media existed in rural Egypt, it will be easier to compare its effects to other factors - such as traditional media, private media, and social capital - between 2011 and 2015.

## **2.5. The Media & The State: Pre-2011 and Post-2011**

The media gained heavy attention during the Arab spring. This is especially true for Egypt, where many researchers considered that the media, particularly social media, triggered the uprisings and mobilised people to go out onto the streets to fight for their rights (Campbell 2011; Castells, 2012; Howard and Hussain, 2013). The historical and political context created during the events of 2011 acted as a signal for the popular appeal of social media for political interaction. Nevertheless, specialists in the field consider that it is important to remember, as a general rule, that “winning the media contest is not enough for the transformation of political systems – new Arab media have to be followed by new political movements” (Khamis and Vaughn, 2011). Scholars have even underlined that new media had been preceded by active political and social actions, and that new media continued this process by having a long lasting impact on liberalisation processes and real transformations in the society to which

they belong (Brisson and Lee, 2011). However, this claim is also refuted by Evgeny Morozov, and thus is not an unquestioned fact (Morozov, 2011).

As such, in order to uncover the details about the evolution in Egyptian society in the aftermath of the uprisings, the media must be considered as an important source and useful indicator of what happens in society. Regardless of the question of cause-and-effect, after the uprising the media was expected to become a critical factor in the transformation of the political system. After the uprisings, the citizens of Egypt expected the media to play a role in the creation of a landscape of free speech and political discussion, and to act to facilitate the exchange between citizens and the government. In an increasingly globally mediated context, the media - be it social media, national television, or satellite television - is an important catalyst and tool in generating changes and simultaneously in controlling the masses. As such, the media and state must be considered in terms of their relationship - both before and after the 2011 uprisings - in order to have the necessary foundational context for the analysis of this thesis.

This identification of the relationship between media and state requires an evaluation of the media forms most prevalent in Egypt, and rural Egypt in particular. While social media has been discussed previously, traditional media forms have not yet been considered. Despite the fact that there are several traditional media forms that can be analysed in comparison to social media, television remains the most readily available and prevalent medium across all of Egypt's rural areas. Even radio has less penetration. According to the Broadcasting Board of Governors (2014), nearly all (98.8%) Egyptians have a working television in their home, while only 37.9% of Egyptians own or use a radio. The percentage of Egyptians with a radio in their household is down significantly from 2012, when nearly half of the population (49.7%) reported radio ownership. Internet access at home is up slightly from the 2012 figure of 22.3%, but remains fairly limited: only one in four Egyptians (25.5%) have Internet access in their household. Television is by far the most common source of news for Egyptians. Nearly all Egyptians (94.1%) use the TV for news at least once a week, and 84.2% use it daily, or most days. In contrast, fewer than one in five (17.3%) Egyptians use radio as a news source at least weekly, even though

more than twice that number have access to a radio at home. While only 20.5% of Egyptians use the Internet for news weekly, 75.5% of those with home Internet access use it for news at least weekly. With the exception of television, males are significantly more likely than females to use all other sources of media for news and tend to do so more regularly (Broadcasting Board of Governors, 2014). These facts make it evident that television is the clearest medium for the analysis of this thesis, being the most widely spread and commonly used. As such, an analysis on the basis of television and social media will yield the strongest results for understanding the relationship of the new media environment and Egypt. Thus, television will be used as the counter to social media throughout this thesis when focusing on the effect of both in rural Egypt. An interesting aspect relating to television usage can be seen in the Eutelsat and Nilesat statistics, which revealed that the proportion of homes in Egypt with satellite and/or cable access rose from 7.4% in 2002, to 24% in 2003, 32% in 2004, and 50% in 2006. The figure continued to rise, to 65% in 2010 (Elsewi, 2011). By 2011, it had reached 94% (Fanack.com, 2016).

Having noted these numbers however, and their implications regarding the importance of television for connection within rural Egypt, it is important to consider the actual content of the television media being consumed. This is particularly significant given that one of the central features that critics have identified as undermining the flourishing of the public sphere is the concentration of media ownership in the hands of the state or a small group of powerful elites (McChesney, 1999; McQuail, 2005). Not only does concentration of ownership limit media plurality, but strong financial or political pressures from the state (or private actors within it) leads to news content that conforms to their interests (Altschull, 1984). This was, in fact, the case in Egypt. Although a variety of media outlets existed before 2011 and generally during Mubarak's Egypt, the regime maintained tight control over media ownership. Admittedly, Mubarak did permit the establishment of private newspapers. However, in order to apply for a license from the Supreme Council of Journalism (Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 2006), the owning company was compelled to have a minimum of one million Egyptian pounds of prepaid capital for daily publications, and one owner could not own more than a 10% share in the



publication (Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 2006). In addition, prospective media owners were obliged to be a joint stock company or a co-operative institution (Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 2006) and to follow exceptionally complicated legal procedures. Consequently, only wealthy elites - often with strong ties to the Mubarak regime - could afford the time and money to start a newspaper. In terms of broadcasting, the ownership of private channels, such as the *El Mehwar* channel, depended on approval from the government and the regime. One notable example of the close links between the regime and the media is the *Sada El Balad* Channel, owned by tycoon businessman Mohamed Abou El Enin. Abou El Enin was also a parliamentary member of Mubarak's ruling party (and is now a firm supporter of President Abdel Fatah El Sisi). He used his channel with the primary purpose of voicing the government's perspective. The Mubarak regime also controlled satellite broadcast channels such as NileSat and adopted a charter alongside other Arab governments which asserted the principle of state control over satellite broadcasting (Seib, 2008; Pintak, 2010).

Once in operation, media outlets felt obliged to self-censor in order to adhere to the regime's pre-set agenda. The Supreme Council of Journalism was empowered to shut down newspapers by terminating licenses if they published content believed to be a threat to national order, law, and security (Rugh, 2004). In addition to the government council having sole power to renew or revoke licenses, publication was controlled through the monopolistic national printing house (Rugh, 2004). Consequently, so-called opposition and independent newspapers were required to abide by certain limitations. Criticism of Mubarak's regime by journalists at media organisations was not tolerated and often came at the risk of considerable personal and institutional penalties. In one incident, Egyptian journalist Ibrahim Eissa was taken to court for reporting news about Mubarak's health and corruption. He was accused of reporting information that threatened the country's stock market and, as a result, was sentenced to six months imprisonment (Heslop, 2012). Similarly, in 2002, *Al Naba* and *El Destour* newspapers were shut down after publishing stories which were regarded by the regime as inciting religious hatred (Eissa, 2015). The Supreme Council of Journalism justified the closure of the newspapers by claiming the news stories

threatened national security by inflaming Christian sentiment (Asharq Al Awsat, 2001). Other common justifications for newspaper shutdowns included claims that their content had a malign influence on 'moral', 'social' or 'cultural values', or that it acted as a tool for 'spreading propaganda' (Pintak, 2010).

The government's low tolerance for press and media freedom bred a culture of self-censorship. Naguib Sawiris, a prominent and well-connected businessman, admitted that fear of persecution plays a large role in the public's reluctance - as well as his own personal reluctance - to oppose the regime. He said that incriminating information could be easily faked against journalists courageous enough to speak out (Sakr, 2013a). In fact, even pan-Arab broadcasters based in Egypt - such as *Orbit*, *Dream* and *El Mehwar* - largely avoided criticism of Egypt's government despite the fact that they were given more relative freedom than domestic media. Lawrence Pintak (2010) points out that editors of current-affairs shows at these channels privately advised that they had been given a warning by the Mubarak regime to control their coverage and ensure their talk-shows included heavy representation of the government's stance on all matters. As a result, the overall quality of journals, newspapers and journalists was compromised; even professionals often classified themselves as amateurs in the field because of the regime's control over their work (Sakr, 2013a). Journalists were often forced to publish content that pleased their employers and managers (and ultimately the regime) due to fear, lack of education, lack of professionalism, as well as economic need rooted in the possibility that doing otherwise would lead to them losing their jobs. An alternative to this was migration; several journalists left for Gulf states in the knowledge that, despite equally restrictive media policies, they would find higher salaries (Rugh, 2004).

One notable exception to this state of affairs can be seen in *Al Jazeera*, a news channel launched in Qatar in 1996, which played a strong role in the period directly preceding the 2011 uprisings. Unlike state channels and private channels headquartered in Egypt, *Al Jazeera* produced content that opposed the Mubarak regime's stance on many occasions. *Al Jazeera's* journalists encouraged public participation in news journalism and were critical of all aspects of social, economic and political life in the region, thereby exposing "the cruel failings of the Arab order" for all Arab citizens to see (Seib, 2008). In the 2005

parliamentary elections, for example, the state-run Egyptian channels did not report the violence that occurred during the voting process, whereas *Al Jazeera* ran footage of voters with bloody faces and thugs waving machetes while police officers stood by (Seib, 2008). The channel also reported that judges admitted to the fact the elections were fraudulent and that the police intimidated potential voters (Seib, 2008). Mustafa El Menshawy believed that *Al Jazeera* coverage shifted official attempts by state-run stations to deny or disregard the electoral violations (Seib, 2008). In addition, *Al Jazeera* played an essential role in highlighting even the most taboo of social issues such as gender discrimination, religious discrimination and unemployment (Rugh, 2004).

Although, *Al Jazeera*'s news and current affairs programming did not directly cause the political upheavals in Egypt and in other Arab countries, its bold approach to journalism offered an alternative narrative to state-controlled and state-sponsored media, which may have begun to alter political perceptions. Salama Ahmed Salama, a renowned columnist and former managing editor of *Al Ahram* newspaper, explained that *Al Jazeera* threw a stone in the stagnant waters of the official and traditional media (El Nawawy and Iskander, 2008). Yosri Fouda, an Egyptian journalist and television anchor, noted that the reaction of the government to *Al Jazeera* proceeded in three phases. The first phase was utter shock resulting in the withdrawal of ambassadors from Qatar. The second phase was a series of smear campaigns, which involved arrests and harassment of journalists and the closing down of bureaux. The regime repeatedly threatened to forbid *Al Jazeera* from having studios and correspondents in Egypt and even threatened to ban the channel from broadcasting by satellite from Egypt (Lynch, 2013). The Egyptian government also accused *Al Jazeera* of threatening national order and security, inciting civil disorder, poisoning Arab society and ripping that society apart. When this failed, the third phase was an attempt to dilute *Al Jazeera*'s influence by flooding the television market with alternatives. The government launched new channels, copying the style of *Al Jazeera*. Egyptians soon found 'daring' programs on their local television called 'In Depth', 'Breakthrough', and 'Without Censorship' (Miles, 2005). This approach was necessary because the attempts of the Mubarak regime to portray themselves as supporters (and promoters) of freedom would be threatened if *Al Jazeera* was

banned. Unable to ban the channel, their only recourse was to dilute its influence. As such, *Al Jazeera* continued to elude state control, providing Egyptian audiences a new avenue of gaining information and significantly challenging the political narrowness which had previously characterised the Egyptian public sphere.

Thus, the state of the media pre-2011 was one based on fear and control as opposed to the tenets of a free media environment. While there were some exceptions to this, such as *Al Jazeera*, these were few. After the 2011 uprisings, government manipulation of the media became less visible to the public. The only real change that happened in the media environment was that state control went from a direct strategy to an indirect strategy, in the sense that it became less visible. Under Nasser's regime, the state manipulated the press' production. Later on, under Mubarak, control shifted to printing houses and every publication was censored to avoid controversial content. The so-called censorial controllers were employed in each publishing house, in order to do the media's censoring job. This form of media control proved very efficient, because employees were professional journalists who knew how to present the news in an attractive and credible way, despite being censored (Yasin, 2011).

Immediately after the 2011 uprising and Mubarak's resignation, the state media publishing houses faced two battles: removing the existing chief editors who were symbols of the old regime, and eliminating the huge income scales of the journalists, in order to decrease disparity. The new editors were named by the staff, but were not chosen based on professional criteria. They were, rather, chosen based on who had the most experience in the news area. Many of them were selected as a form of revenge against those who had served Mubarak for a long time. Consequently, during this transition, the media lacked professional managers. Instead, managers simply wanted to please the staff and increased salaries based on sympathies, in order to keep their positions, a move which created a new opportunity for the state to have a good reason to once again appoint their chosen individuals in chief editor positions:

Under the interim governments which followed Mubarak's resignation, a Deputy Prime Minister was assigned to implement the

prerogatives of the then-dissolved Shura Council, and appoint the editors-in-chief of state press. In the short period in which the Ministry of Information was abolished, the functions of this Ministry were exercised by the government-appointed heads of [the Egyptian Radio and Television Union] ERTU. After the formation of the Muslim Brotherhood government, the new Shura Council appointed new editors-in-chief of state publications, sparking the indignation of journalists. They considered these nominations as an attempt to circumvent long-standing requests to free this process from the authority of the Shura Council.

(Issawi, 2012)

This new wave of nominations generated some protests inside the journalists' community who were demanding an end to any form of subordination to the Shura-controlled Supreme Press Council, but no real changes have taken place, as *Ahram* reported:

(...)the new editors replicated the old managerial style. They did not take any measures for liberalising the internal structures such as enforcing editorial independence and setting clear editorial policy and standards. There were no real changes inside newsrooms.

(Egypt Independent, 2012)

The journalist Issam Zakariya from the *Roz el-Youssif* publication described in a very clear manner what truly happened in the media after the uprisings, stating that after the January 25<sup>th</sup> uprisings, the media only suffered an internal shock instead of a real revolution that should have brought real changes in terms of editorial practices. This led to major losses in audience, as people were less trusting of the media than they had been during the Mubarak regime (Walker and Orttung, 2012).

It is important to note, however, the state media did not behave in a uniform manner. In some sense, this was due to a lack of directives. The end of the

Mubarak regime had an effect in this regard: it left the state media in a situation wherein official guidance had disappeared and yet attitudes had not shifted. Obedience and the bureaucracy had not totally disappeared, despite the end of the regime:

The idea of prohibited information no longer exists but journalists are used to it. They continue to define new red lines even if no one asked them to do so. They had to be reassured by the publication of the information by private media to consider the news as non-prohibited

(Interview with Gamal Fahmy, the first secretary of the journalists Syndicate, in Issawi, 2012).

It is clear that the systems of the regime, and the punishments associated with disobedience, continued to play a role. In the absence of official direction, state journalists looked toward private media for confirmation; if private media channels reported on an incident or story without consequence, state media would be reassured. Many state media journalists who were trying to do their job (and broadcast facts as they were truly happening) faced bureaucratic and censorship measures, or at least attempts to censor them:

Our correspondent was not relying on the news provided by the official news agency as we used to do. He was in the street, when the police issued a communiqué saying that they did not use gunfire, our correspondent was reporting live showing us the empty cartridge in streets. We were telling what we were seeing and not what we were told to say. (...) Our major problem is our editors who still follow the old practices, such as waiting for the government to issue a communiqué before reporting on the events. The quality of reporting is very much linked to the personality of the editor of the day. There is no clear editorial policy.

(Interview with a Nile TV reporter, in Issawi, 2012)

As such, the existence of bureaucracy and culture of obedience after the end of the Mubarak regime led to both the continuation of the previous system, and attempts to reform it on the side of some journalists. However, while the lack of an editorial policy may have encouraged more active journalistic pursuits in some areas, there were exceptions. Some institutions, such as the military, remained untouched by media coverage, and only the state media reported news about them, and even this was done sparingly and according to strict guidelines. These military institutions were the most feared by people all over the country and no one reported anything beyond the official communiqués. Nevertheless, although with great caution, there has been some criticism concerning SCAF, while the military institution remained protected by Law 313 that prohibited any coverage about it without the consent of the Director of Military Intelligence. Breaking these prohibitions was a real taboo among journalists, who faced the possibility of arrest or, at least, a trial before military courts. Even though these rules generated massive protests, the journalists who dared to cross this red line and report criticisms against SCAF or military institutions faced hundreds of days of arrest, torture, etc. (Walker and Orttung, 2012).

In fact, during the time of the Muslim Brotherhood's government there was an unprecedented wave of legal trials against journalists. This sharpened the gap between the liberal media and the state media journalists, but it also led to a greater diversification of perspectives among the state media's representatives. The Muslim Brotherhood chose to control the media almost as much as Mubarak had done and the intimidation of journalists through repressive methods generated a major debate on state-controlled media. Around 30 cases, against different journalists, were initiated by the Muslim Brotherhood government who claimed that they had insulted President Morsi or the Muslim religion (Issawi, 2012). Asked about this situation, the Minister of Information tried to cover the government's tracks with legal statements:

The law allows any citizen to resort to legal cases against expressions of defamation targeting the president given that he is representing them and they elected him. This is our law. The

president did not intervene personally against any journalist. Most importantly, no journalist has been imprisoned under these cases.

(The former Minister of Information under the Brotherhood government declaration, in Issawi, 2012)

However, an important progressive measure was the fact that arrests-before-trial had been stopped, even though the Muslim Brotherhood continued to dominate state media. Furthermore, according to different TV and radio broadcasts, “(...) any change in leadership is irrelevant. All the second and third rank managers are known to be members of the Mubarak regime’s party” (Somaya al-Shinnawy of Egyptian TV and radio interview in Issawi, 2012). Basically, as stated previously, the media had not suffered a real uprising and the changes were only superficial or repressed by the state.

Media staff’s reactions to state manipulation can be categorised into three groups. Some individuals simply obeyed instructions, fearing the loss of their jobs and freedom. The second group pleaded for an improvement to working conditions, not mentioning anything about the political agenda. The third group (the smallest) vehemently protested against state control and pleaded for media independence. Nevertheless, their protests have never been broadcast and most of the time they were dismissed as people making chaotic expressions of their personal frustrations (Walker and Orttung, 2012). Although the government denied it, the trend was to lower any voices of radical or critical opinions concerning the government. There were even rumours about a black-list with persona non-grata who had criticised the regime, rumours which were not denied by the head of the news department:

“if a guest is employing obscene expressions and using our platform to settle personal accounts, he cannot be a regular guest with us. I asked the staff to invite the wise people and the moderate voices; those who have constructive opinions that unite and not divide”

(according to Issawi, 2012).



The Arabic Network of Human Rights Information reported almost 30 cases of abuses against media staff during the Muslim Brotherhood government, ranging from public prosecution to arbitrary income cuts, work suspensions or administrative investigations. The Minister of Information claimed that:

“In any media system, journalists and staff can be subject to investigation when they commit professional mistakes. A presenter, for example, praised a guest while he was expressing insults. This is not professional. Will [sic] this be accepted in western media?”  
(Interview with the Minister of Information, in Issawi, 2012).

Thus, it is clear that the media faced different challenges in the aftermath of the uprisings than before, but that these challenges shared a commonality in that they limited a truly free media environment. During Mubarak’s regime, this could be seen through censorship by the state, bureaucracy to limit the creation of new channels, centralized printing, a culture of fear based on the threat of imprisonment, self-censorship on the basis of that fear, among others. After Mubarak’s regime, the media continued to face challenges. These challenges included a continuation of self-censorship as a result of uncertainty and habit, the continued threat of imprisonment by the Muslim Brotherhood, fear of SCAF, and a culture of obedience ingrained into the sector from years under Mubarak. While the post-2011 situation was less restricted, and several journalists did in fact attempt to report accurately and objectively, the threat of the state remained a genuine fear that limited true change for the majority in this regard.

## **2.6. Concluding Remarks**

The analysis of Egypt between 2011 and 2015 requires an understanding of a complex system of relationships between various bodies within the state. As such, the 2011 uprisings, and their aftermath, cannot be discussed without first providing a foundational knowledge of these relationships and the manner in which they existed before 2011. This is particularly true given the focus of this thesis on three aspects of this time period: (i) the role of social media in relation to its effect on political interaction and interaction norms in rural Egypt; (ii) the role of social capital in terms of its effect on political interaction among rural

Egyptians in the public sphere, taking into consideration the state of rural interaction with social media; and (iii) the effect of media coverage on the uprisings in rural Egypt, in terms of the media's role in invigorating micro-public spheres and contributing to the strengthening of social capital in rural Egypt. In order to provide this foundation, this chapter has given an overview of rural Egypt, a background of formal and informal political participation in Egypt, a brief outline of barriers to social media use in rural Egypt, and a review of the relationship between the media and state. To do this fully, this chapter has moved beyond the confines of the 4-year period between 2011 and 2015, highlighting information from that period as well as the 10 years that preceded it. This information, while contextual, is necessary for the analysis provided in the following chapters.

In terms of Egypt's rural areas, it has been shown that the four governorates in which in-depth study was conducted - Qalyoubia, Menoufia, Minya, and South Sinai - provide a diverse sample of Egypt's rural citizens. Each of the governorates has a unique history and location, as well as differences in economic and socio-political reality. This allows for commonalities to be found in terms of participation, and for these commonalities to be analysed in light of the differences between each governorate. Moreover, this overview ensures a focus on each rural area as an independent entity, providing a fuller view of rural Egypt as a result. Finally, this overview acts as a basis for understanding the interview data used throughout the thesis.

On the other hand, the background provided into formal and informal participation in Egypt acts as a top-line perspective on political participation in the country. It is shown that Egypt's citizens, rural and urban, prefer formal participation to its informal counterpart. However, the importance of informal political participation is also highlighted in terms of physical resistance (such as the uprisings themselves) as well as participation through social media. Groups on social media, such as "We are All Khaled Said," have been introduced to shed light on socio-political concerns that Egypt's citizens find most concerning, namely corruption, police brutality, and social injustice.

Given the importance that scholars have placed on social media's role in Egypt's uprisings, this chapter has also attempted to convey the level of social media access that existed within rural Egypt, as well as the barriers that prevent that access. These barriers - linguistic, educational, economic, infrastructural, and socio-cultural - are prevalent and, given the fact that over 50% of Egypt's population is rural, highly significant for an understanding of the role of rural citizens in the uprisings. Furthermore, this allows for a discussion of the commonalities that exist between rural areas despite historical and cultural differences between them.

Finally, in this chapter, a brief review has been given of the relationship between the media and the state prior to and following 2011. Pre-2011, it has been shown that the media faced challenges that arose due to a direct connection between media and state. These challenges included centralized printing, censorship by the state, bureaucracy to limit the creation of new channels, a culture of fear based on the threat of imprisonment, and self-censorship on the basis of that fear. These challenges meant that the media could not, in fact, operate as an uncoerced public sphere for the discussion of citizens' concerns. In the aftermath of the uprisings, the media landscape changed. However, this change came with its own challenges. While, admittedly, several journalists attempted to enact change that would lead to a truer and more accurate media, this proved difficult. For the most part, the landscape in the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings was characterized by a continuation of the self-censorship culture, the continued threat of imprisonment by the Muslim Brotherhood, fear of SCAF, and a culture of obedience ingrained into the sector from years under Mubarak.

Thus, the contextual information in this chapter should act as an overview of the historical, political, and cultural considerations that must be taken into account for a full understanding of this thesis and its analysis. This information is the context from which the analysis of this thesis stems and, as such, acts as an introductory and foundational background. The following chapters will deal with literature - both theoretical and historical - addressed in this thesis, methods of research, and the primary research topics: (i) the role of social media in relation to its effect on political interaction and interaction norms in rural Egypt; (ii) the role

of social capital in terms of its effect on political interaction among rural Egyptians in the public sphere, taking into consideration the state of rural interaction with social media; and (iii) the effect of media coverage on the uprisings in rural Egypt, in terms of the media's role in invigorating micro-public spheres and contributing to the strengthening of social capital in rural Egypt.

## **3. Chapter 2 - Egyptian Media & Political Interaction: A Scholarly Overview**

### **3.1. Background**

In 2010 and 2011, a series of popular uprisings changed the political arena of the Middle East and North Africa. In Egypt, weeks of growing protests and intense street clashes - compounded by fierce international pressure - resulted in the unexpected downfall of President Hosni Mubarak's regime. Ostensibly, the Mubarak regime had maintained control of the Egyptian people through a powerful and repressive state apparatus that included the Central Security Forces and the State Security Investigations Service. Egyptian politics had long been suffocated by the regime's repressive and manipulative grip (Sakr, 2013a); freedom of expression was stifled, corruption was prevalent and detention without trial was a regular response to acts of political opposition or activism. In this context, state-controlled media also played an important role. In keeping with a number of other dictatorial Arab regimes, Mubarak's government maintained a tight and ruthless control on the flow of public information and opinion. State-controlled television stations glorified the regime while maintaining a monotonous and toxic brew of official pronouncements. Editorials were highly regulated and rigorously censored to uphold government standpoints. Often, these editorials were written directly by the intelligence agencies themselves (Lynch, 2013). Mubarak's regime appeared impregnable.

The late-2000s, however, proved to be a time of change. Resentment and dissatisfaction surfaced as Egyptian society grew more disillusioned with a ruling class that proved itself corrupt, arrogant, and increasingly out-of-touch (Lynch, 2013). Economically, the regime failed to produce jobs for the growing population, resulting in a widening gap between rich and poor (Sakr, 2013a). Furthermore, Egypt's youth were frustrated by the lack of change in the country and its high cost of living. Critically, Marc Lynch notes that these young Egyptians had long since given up hope that their leaders might themselves change (Lynch, 2013). According to Elsewi (Elsewi, 2011), these issues in combination with a dilapidated educational system, an ineffectual pretence of a democratic structure, and the continued valorisation of a patriarchal culture paved

the way for popular unrest. Therefore, as evident from these findings, the uprisings and civil unrest in Egypt had a number of political, economic and social causes.

In terms of execution, however, one of the main features attributed to the 2011 uprisings across the Middle East and North Africa was the emergence of digital media technologies and social media tools. In fact, many news reports from the period suggest that the execution of the Egyptian uprising was primarily dependent on social media and the communicative and collaborative opportunities it provided (Gustin, 2011). It must be noted that world history has provided several examples of political uprisings and revolutions that were successfully conducted prior to the existence and prevalence of social media technologies. As such, there is a possibility that the effect of Facebook or Twitter may have been overestimated by news journalists, both at the time and in subsequent reporting. This makes the role of social media in the Egyptian uprising a subject of importance in academic research.

Lynch (2013) observes that although the Arab regimes in general (and Egypt's regime in particular) had always been considered incompetent and corrupt in the West, changes in the information and news media environment managed to give voice and solid expression to the oppressed. As Lynch notes, perhaps the Arab regimes had always been bickering. Nevertheless, satellite television stations such as *Al Jazeera*, when combined with the increased penetration of social media in the region, meant that Arab leaders could no longer go about their business in private while suppressing all signs of discontent from the public eye (Lynch, 2013). Naomi Sakr (2013a) posits that the growth in social media penetration, in particular, led to a situation wherein Egypt's populace could receive and impart information intranationally and internationally at a level far beyond anything the region had ever experienced previously. New communication technologies in the form of satellite television, social media and cheap mobile phones all worked to change the nature of political communication, creating new public spheres and forms of communication. These new communication technologies created a less restricted environment for discussions related to governance and politics. As a result, a new public sphere was created that had more political interactions within society and political deliberations between citizens. According to Lynch (2013),

enhanced political interactions promote awareness of fundamental changes in society as well as their role in that society, elevate understanding of political ideologies and social challenges, and engender active participation in national conversations. Due to the new media landscape, Sakr (2013a) observes that journalists and reporters in Egypt's mainstream media had a novel means of challenging misinformation from Mubarak's dictatorial regime and his ruling National Democratic Party, providing new insights into its ills. The free flow of information and the explosion of public discourse and open debate facilitated by the new media are deemed to have shattered one of the core pillars of the authoritarian system (Lynch, 2013).

The aim of this thesis is to examine the impact of the new media environment, specifically the synergy between social media and satellite television, on the public sphere and political interactions of rural Egypt in order to assess the role social media played in neglected areas of Egypt during the 2011 uprisings. As relating to political interaction, this thesis will focus on deliberation on participation of voting in elections, the difference between participation with (and joining of) new political parties before and after the uprisings, and the extent to which citizens in rural areas were participants in political deliberations in the public sphere. In order to provide a theoretical basis for this research, the chapter will review three strands of existing literature. First, it will draw on Jurgen Habermas's ideal of the public sphere to assess the nature of the media environment in Egypt prior, during and after the uprisings; this will be used as a means of understanding the impact of traditional and social media in Egyptian public discourse. This will depict the environment for political deliberation, which can impact political interaction. Second, literature on the emergence of the relationship between traditional and social media will be analysed within the context of a convergent media environment as a whole, which will clarify the role of new media (rather than solely social media) in the uprisings. Throughout the chapter, agenda setting theory will be included due to its ability to explain how Egyptian media functions and relates to the public sphere and convergent media concepts. Third and finally, the literature will include a consideration of social capital in order to assess the difference of the convergent media environment between governorates in relation to social capital of the people in each area. To

achieve this, the review will investigate the context of the Egyptian media from ten years prior to the uprising and after the 2011 uprisings.

There are a range of extant studies examining the Egyptian media, produced to determine the differences in the political interaction of the citizenry before and after the uprising. This study will commence by using the idea of the public sphere as the first concept in creating the theoretical framework of this thesis. This was done to demonstrate the forms of political deliberation taking place in Egypt whilst considering the changes that emerged in the public sphere during the timeframe being reviewed. Such a timeframe will provide groundwork for an explanation of the changes in political deliberation and its norms. By reviewing the context of the media both ten years before the uprisings and after the 2011 uprisings until the end of 2015, one will be able to assess its impact on the public sphere and its relation to political deliberation, which impacts political interactions. Firstly, the section will examine the relevant literature on the public sphere and the Egyptian media environment. Secondly, the symbiotic relationship between traditional and social media will be analysed with a particular focus on the convergence that emerged after 2011 and the new norms of political deliberation, all of which form a part of the public sphere and impact political participation. The basis for this analysis will be Admire Mare's (2013) assertion that one of the reasons for the opening up of access to the media environment is the symbiotic relationship between traditional and social media. It is important to note here that the agenda setting function must be taken into consideration since it plays a major role in the Egyptian media environment and, as such, impacts the public sphere. This will present a starting point for the framework that will conceptualise the media environment, which will be examined as one of the core factors of the research in this thesis.

### **3.2. The Political Context of the Egyptian Media System**

Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini (2004) note it is not possible to understand the role and nature of the media without understanding the political context in which the media functions. This includes the nature of the state, the system of the political parties, the pattern of relations between economic and political interests, and the development of civil society, which is in turn affected by the politics of



the state. It is worth briefly outlining, therefore, the central features of Egypt's political system. Egypt was considered a Republic under the five-term rule of Hosni Mubarak. Theoretically, the state was organised under a multi-party semi-presidential system, with power divided between the president and prime minister. In practice, this was not the case; power rested solely with the president. Moreover, Egypt held regular multi-party parliamentary elections. The last presidential election before the 2011 uprisings, in which Mubarak won a fifth consecutive term, was held in September, 2005. In late February, 2005, Mubarak indicated in an unannounced television broadcast that he had ordered the reform of the country's presidential election law, paving the way for multi-candidate polls in the upcoming presidential election. This meant that, for the first time since the 1952 movement, the Egyptian people were apparently being given the power to elect a leader from a list of various candidates (Rugh, 2004). As the president explained, his initiative came "out of [his] full conviction of the need to consolidate efforts for more freedom and democracy". However, as became evident, exorbitant restrictions were placed on the filing for presidential candidacies. These restrictions, designed to prevent any candidates from opposing Mubarak, cemented the road for his easy victory and re-election (Lynch, 2006). Following the 2005 parliamentary elections, the public began to consistently express their views regarding the election process, with specific focus being placed on public concerns regarding fraud, vote rigging, violence and police brutality by pro-Mubarak supporters to opposition demonstrators (Sakr, 2013a).

Alfred Stepan and Juan Linz, (2013) classify the nation's political system before the 2011 uprisings as being characterised by 'Patrimonialism' and, in extreme terms, 'Sultanism'. The latter is defined by Max Weber as "domination that develops an administration and a military force which are purely personal instruments of the master". Considering Egypt, Mubarak was head of most government departments and official head of the army. In such systems, there is no effective role for state officials because they are seen as the household staff of the sultan. One pertinent example of this is Gamal Mubarak, Mubarak's son, who was known to interfere in economic policies and enact economic changes without holding any related official post in the government. This highlights that the Mubarak regime was, in fact, characterized by sultanistic measures, and that these

measures took precedence over official state roles (Stepan and Linz, 2013). Mubarak's political approach was reflected in his handling of the media; his regime offered the impression of liberalisation while simultaneously pursuing a policy of ever-tightening media control through media ownership, censorship, agenda setting, and legal controls (Cottle, 2011). Before considering these elements of Mubarak's approach to the media system in more detail, it is worth briefly outlining Habermas' theory of the public sphere to provide a theoretical background to the discussion.

In his influential work, *The Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas sets out a model of an ideal public sphere. According to Habermas, the ideal form of public sphere is the informal environment where people discuss political issues and debates. Their discussions are free of domination and participants in this public debate do so on an equal basis. Within this public sphere, people rationally discuss and decide how they want their government to develop, which in turn shapes government policy (Habermas, 1989). According to Habermas, a public sphere that is adequate to a democratic polity largely relies on both the quality of the discourse and the quantity of participation (Calhoun, 1992). Habermas developed his concept of the public sphere based on the European context of the early modern period as a result of the evolution of what he termed a critical discourse in informal settings such as coffee houses and salons. In his view, this was reliant on the rise of national and territorial power regimes based on capitalist economic structures. These developments meant people were able to discuss and evaluate their views, eventually formulating a public opinion regarding issues of common concern. Political decisions were made on the basis of rational analysis of competing positions and empirical evidence. Consequently, political leaders no longer had absolute rights to impose their legitimacy; rather, they were expected to fulfil the people's will which took shape and acquired expression in the emerging political public sphere. For Habermas, the public sphere was not necessarily permanent once it had emerged, and he chronicled a decline of the public sphere in Europe as powerful commercial, government, and media interests sought to influence and control the nature of political debate (Habermas, 1989). There are problems transferring Habermas's conceptualisation of the public sphere to the Egyptian context. In particular it is questionable whether the

same sort of public sphere Habermas described as emerging in early modern Europe ever emerged in Egypt. After all, the socio-legal and religious context of early modern Egypt under the Ottoman Empire was markedly different to that of Europe. Nevertheless, in the context of the 2011 uprising – an uprising that can be broadly understood as a call for ‘democratic’ reforms that include a Habermasian conception of freedom to debate political issues - Habermas’s ideal can be used as a backdrop against which to analyse the state of Egypt’s public sphere prior to the uprising.

One of the central features that critics have identified as undermining the flourishing of the public sphere is the concentration of media ownership in the hands of the state or a small group of powerful elites (McChesney, 1999; McQuail, 2005). This concentration limits media plurality, and leads to a situation wherein financial and political pressures from the state and private actors within it leads to news content that conforms to their interests (Altschull, 1984). Egypt is an example of this kind of situation where, despite a wide variety of media outlets, there was tight control over ownership by the regime. Private newspapers exist, but the restrictions and limitations placed on their establishment is high, as discussed in the previous chapter. As a consequence, only wealthy elites - often with strong ties and relationships to the Mubarak regime - have the time and money to start a newspaper. The situation was similar with broadcasting, where the ownership of private channels, such as the *El Mehwar* channel, was dependent on approval from the government and the regime. The Mubarak regime also controlled satellite broadcast channels such as NileSat and adopted a charter alongside other Arab governments which asserted the principle of state control over satellite broadcasting (Seib, 2008; Pintak, 2010).

Due to these restrictions and limitations, self-censorship was prevalent. The Supreme Council of Journalism was empowered to shut down newspapers by terminating their licenses if they published content that was believed to be a threat to national order, law, and security (Rugh, 2004). In addition to the government council having sole power to renew or revoke licenses, publication was controlled through the monopolistic national printing house (Rugh, 2004). Criticism of the regime by media organisations, or journalists within those organisations, often came at the risk of personal and institutional penalties. One

example of this is the case of Ibrahim Eissa - the journalist who was accused of threatening the country's stock market and sentenced to six months imprisonment on the basis of a story on Mubarak's health and corruption - which has previously been discussed (Heslop, 2012). As a result of the potential for severe punishment, and the fear this engendered, the overall quality of journals, newspapers and journalists was compromised, with professionals often classifying themselves as amateurs in the field of because of the regime's control over their work (Sakr, 2013a). Journalists were often forced to publish content that pleased their employers and managers (and ultimately the regime) due to fear, lack of education, lack of professionalism, as well as economic need rooted in the possibility that doing otherwise would lead to them losing their jobs.

In addition to the phenomena of self-censorship, fear, oligopoly in media ownership, and patrimonialism, such media systems are also controlled through the agenda setting function. This will be explained in detail in the following section.

### **3.2.1 Agenda Setting Theory in Relation to Public Sphere**

Agenda setting theory concerns the causal interrelations underlying the way in which the dominant agenda of the mass media comes to exert such sizeable influence on the public, particularly insofar as the media shapes popular perceptions. In essence, then, agenda setting theory holds that there is a direct correlation between the agenda of the media (in the form of issues given the most coverage, time and attention) and the agenda of the public (in terms of the issues they deem most important). Thus, as the media's agenda changes, the public's agenda shifts in direct correlation to reflect this. The news media therefore acts to "set the public agenda, [and] since the news media's ability to cover events is limited by time and space, only a few issues muscle their way onto the media agenda, shoving aside other issues" (Kaid and Holtz-Bacha, 2008). It should be noted that, in this context, the term "agenda" is "meant purely in a descriptive, not a pejorative sense", and refers merely to matters to be addressed or undertaken (Ongaro and Van Thiel, 2017). This theory brings the discussions of the previous section into a new light. Since the media's focus on particular issues tends to direct the popular gaze in the same direction, it can be seen that the

Mubarak regime's tight grip on the media led the public agenda toward issues that would limit (if not stifle) criticism of the regime.

Agenda setting theory finds its origins in a study by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1968) the "Chapel Hill study". This study examined the correlation coefficients between public opinion and the news agenda, using the 1968 United States presidential election as its context (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). The findings showed "evidence of strong agenda-setting effects" of news media "among the public"; in particular, a "substantial correlation" was identified "between the patterns of coverage in news magazines and the trends in public opinion reflected by responses [from Chapel Hill residents] to the Gallup Poll's question about the most important problem facing the country" (McCombs, 2004). The study concluded that voters "apparently learn" in "direct proportion to the emphasis placed on the campaign issues by the mass media" (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). While the Chapel Hill study was not the first to examine the influence of the communications industries on public perception (see for example Lippmann, 1922; Cohen, 1963), it was groundbreaking in its methodological tenets: bringing together a combination of survey data and content analysis in order to examine cognitive effects.

Since McCombs and Shaw's foundational study, a significant body of follow-up research has arisen (McCombs and Shaw, 1972;; Iyengar and Kinder, 1987; Kosicki, 1993; Roberts and McCombs, 1994; Huckins, 1999; McCombs, 2000; McCombs, 2004; McCombs, 2005; Yu and Aikat, 2006; Wallsten, 2007; Sayre et al., 2010; McCombs and Stroud, 2014; Vargo et al., 2017). These developments have seen the progression of agenda setting theory from "simple techniques of ranking issue salience to advanced statistical analyses, as well as being researched with qualitative methods" (Bruns et al., 2015). Excepting only a few instances, all subsequent (and substantial) scholarly research has corroborated the initial findings attesting to marked agenda-setting effects (and the existence of positive correlation coefficients). Indeed, nearly every study on agenda setting theory has found that the media exerts some order of popular influence via the promulgated news agenda (Ansolabehere, 1990). As a consequence, the critical tradition, which extends over five decades and touches upon multidisciplinary focus, offers strong support for the salience and validity of agenda-setting research – *in*

*general*. Speaking more specifically, one can conceptualise agenda setting theory as containing the principal divisions as follows. Firstly, the apparent methodological flexibility - the theory's widespread utilisation - means that it is analytically versatile, insofar as it is open to cross-subject integration. Secondly, agenda setting theory can be viewed as a new research paradigm in that it fundamentally changed and re-directed critical opinion on mass media influence (which, hitherto, had not been afforded anything like as much significance). Indeed, scholars agree that agenda setting constitutes one of the most important, influential and "scientifically prolific" research models to have arisen in previous decades (Walgrave and Van Aelst, 2006). Thirdly, the theory is adaptive, having (especially in recent years) extended its scope to contexts outside of public affairs and expanded its purview on key findings, thus enabling greater analytical depth (McCombs et al., 2014).

So, one can summarise that agenda setting theory encompasses a methodologically versatile, scientifically prolific and influential critical approach, as well as one that is analytically adaptive. These particular traits – characterised by adaptability – are of primary importance in the context of the current study, which specifically foregrounds the shifting relationships between media technologies, news agendas, and public perception. In other words, agenda setting theory, being concerned with determinant connections between communications processes and cognitive effects, is not confined to any platform-specific media context. As a result, even though the theory of agenda setting "was conceptualised before the fragmentation now evidenced in the twenty-first century new media climate", its "continued prolific usage, not only within the field of political communications", indicates its methodological "strength" (Johnson, 2013). Indeed, according to McCombs (2013) "communications is a process which can include any set of objects – or a single object – competing for attention among journalists and various audiences". The expansion of the theory to accommodate heterogeneous contexts for agenda-setting has ensured its relevance in the rapidly shifting contemporary media marketplace (Anderson, 2010). A prime example of this is the emergence of "Intermedia Agenda Setting", which places focus on "the interaction between different media outlets in setting each other's news agenda" (Vargo et al., 2017), with online/alternative media

now commanding more agenda-setting power than traditional broadcast and print media in some analyses (Meraz, 2011). The theory has likewise evolved more nuanced perspectives on shifts in generational media consumption habits (Coleman and McCombs, 2007). In agenda setting theory, then, one finds a methodological approach and analytical framework that is systematic and precise, yet adequately expansive and adaptable. This is relevant for the demands of the current thesis because this evolution is related to the convergent media environment, which is focused on while analysing social media impact in rural Egypt. Therefore, discussion will return to the agenda setting function and its relationship to the convergent media later on in the chapter. This will be done following a thorough accounting and explanation of the convergent environment in Egypt, since an understanding of both the agenda setting function and the convergent media will be necessary before highlighting the manner in which they relate.

The past sections have demonstrated that the extent of freedom for traditional media journalism in society – one of the key considerations in any assessment of the state of the public sphere – was severely compromised under the Mubarak regime. Media freedom was affected by restrictive laws that were empowered, in some cases, to jail journalists and shut down newspapers at will. Egypt's traditional media system under Mubarak fell short of the principle democratic roles of the media according to traditional liberal theory. Egyptian media was not acting independently, nor as a state watchdog. Furthermore, it was incapable of furthering the public interest in cases of government malpractice (Curran, 2003). Mubarak's regime encouraged the media to self-censor, used fear and repression to stifle criticism of his government, and ultimately suppressed opposition movements. The regime also regularly interfered with the media's agenda setting, stifling democratic discourse and controlling the terms of deliberation in the public sphere. Drawing on theories which suggest that the marginalisation of individuals from the public sphere leads to resignation, apathy, despair and a lack of willingness to participate in the national conversation, (Dahl, 1971; Pateman 1971), many political observers such as Ahmed Ragab and Salama Ahmed Salama - both prominent political journalists - felt that Mubarak's regime could not be challenged.

### **3.2.2. *Al Jazeera*: Disrupting Mubarak's control over the Egyptian Public Sphere**

If Mubarak's control over Egyptian media was so complete, the public sphere so compromised and political activity so stifled, the question remains as to how the political uprising in 2011 occurred. In his book, *The Al Jazeera Effect*, Philip Seib (2008) notes that traditional ways of shaping global politics have been superseded by the influence of new media – satellite television and social media in particular. The old dominance of state-structured and territorially-bounded public life - mediated by radio, television, newspapers and books - is coming to an end. National communication hegemonies are rapidly being eroded by the development of a multiplicity of network spaces of communication, which are not tied to a close proximity with the territory (Webster and Blom, 2004). The satellite channel *Al Jazeera*, which was launched in Qatar in 1996, was one aspect of a new media landscape, which crossed and transcended national boundaries in the Middle East and North Africa. *Al Jazeera* came to be an important player in Egypt's media landscape because the country's almost 90 million population has far easier access to television than to other news sources, with approximately 94.1% of Egyptians using TV to get their news at least once a week, and 84.2% using it daily or most days (Broadcasting Board of Governors, 2014).

*Al Jazeera's* journalists encouraged public participation in news journalism and were critical of all aspects of social, economic and political life in the region, thereby exposing "the cruel failings of the Arab order" for all Arab citizens to see (Seib, 2008). In the 2005 parliamentary elections, for example, the state-run Egyptian channels did not report the violence that occurred during the voting process, whereas *Al Jazeera* ran footage of voters with bloody faces and thugs waving machetes while police officers stood by (Seib, 2008). Furthermore, the channel had reports on political and social issues such as fraudulent elections, voter intimidation, electoral violations, gender discrimination, religious discrimination, and unemployment (Seib, 2008; Rugh, 2004). This bold approach to journalism - predicated on a lack of self-censorship and a direct, uncensored reporting of events - acted as an alternative narrative to that found in state-controlled and state-sponsored media. This, in turn, may have served to alter



political perceptions in the region and - as noted by renowned columnist and former managing editor of *Al Ahrām* newspaper Salama Ahmed Salama - throw a stone in the stagnant waters of the official and traditional media (El Nawawy and Iskander, 2008). Of course, this approach to journalism did lead to governmental reaction. The first reaction was the withdrawal of Egyptian ambassadors from Qatar as a response. The second reaction was a series of smear campaigns, harassment and arrest of journalists, as well as the closing down of bureaux. These campaigns included threats to ban *Al Jazeera* studios and correspondents from the country, threats to ban the channel from broadcasting by satellite from Egypt, and accusations against *Al Jazeera* on the basis that it was threatening national order and security, inciting civil disorder, and poisoning Arab society (Lynch, 2013). The final reaction was to flood the Egyptian market with alternative channels - examples include 'In Depth', 'Breakthrough', and 'Without Censorship' - in order to dilute *Al Jazeera's* influence (Miles, 2005). However, given Mubarak's attempts at appearing as a democratic leader and defender of civil liberties to the international community, banning *Al Jazeera* was not an option. As such, *Al Jazeera* continued to elude state control, providing Egyptian audiences a new avenue of gaining information and significantly challenging the political narrowness which had previously characterised the Egyptian public sphere.

According to Nahed Eltantawy and Julie Wiest (2011), *Al Jazeera's* coverage of Egyptian politics and their continuous broadcasting of Tahrir Square contributed significantly to the 2011 uprising. Everyone could watch *Al Jazeera* to find out where and when protests were occurring. In contrast, Egyptian television channels during the same period showed little more than the peaceful Nile River and the calm Tahrir Square from a safe distance. As noted by Lynch, *Al Jazeera* became the unquestioned home of the revolution across the airwaves. Therefore, *Al Jazeera* is indeed one of the earliest channels developed along western lines that dared to challenge and transform conventional forms of news media, and soon became one of the factors of Egypt's evolving public sphere. Prior to the rise of *Al Jazeera* in Egypt, citizens experienced apathy and lacked credibility in the media. However, *Al Jazeera* and similar types of media had

better credibility and refused to self-censor, which led to decreased apathy in the public and the promotion of political deliberation.

It is clear that the foundation of *Al Jazeera* constituted a major development in the Egyptian media landscape. From the evidence presented thus far, it is also apparent that the satellite channel was an important player in the dissemination of news and information which challenged the Mubarak regime (Miles, 2005). It is in this context that social media platforms worked to further disrupt the regime's tight control of the media system and the public sphere. Similar to *Al Jazeera*, the content on social media platforms did not self-censor and worked outside the regime's tight control.

### **3.2.3. Bourdieu: Television & Habitus**

Prior to discussing social media, however, it is significant to discuss sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's theories on the concepts of 'habitus' and capital, as well as his concerns regarding television. *Habitus*, in Bourdieu's work, can be defined as "a set of acquired dispositions, the internalized interpretive framework, rooted in family upbringing and conditioned by one's position in the social structure, through which one perceives the social world and one's prospects within it." (Bourdieu, 2002). These dispositions determine many aspects of one's life, generating practices, perceptions, and aspirations. As a result, according to David Swartz (1997), these dispositions act as master patterns for styles of behaviour, and can "find expression in human language, nonverbal communication, tastes, values, perceptions, and modes of reasoning." In this way, the circumstances of one's family upbringing and life experiences act in such a fashion as to determine future circumstances and experiences. Essentially, one's primary experience of the world is based on "an adherence to relations of order which, because they structure inseparably both the real world and the thought world, are accepted as self-evident" (Bourdieu, 1984; Garnham, 1993).

In any case, Bourdieu posits that one's class determines 'habitus', and that 'habitus' is expressed in lifestyle choices; taste, the sign of these lifestyle choices, is thus determined by social class. Taste, to Bourdieu, is not arbitrary but is rather

determined by social status and power; the dominant classes “affirm their high social status through consumption of cultural forms consecrated by institutions with cultural authority. Through family socialization and formal education, class-bound tastes for legitimate culture develop alongside aversions for unrefined, illegitimate, or popular culture” (Johnston and Baumann, 2007). As such, tastes - rather than being personal or autonomous - can be associated with class, and with symbolic associations; one may associate certain products with good or poor taste, high and low class, or legitimate and illegitimate culture based on habitus.

It is through this paradigm that Bourdieu analyses television - and television journalism, or mass media - in his work, *On Television*. He posits that television journalism could be a danger to culture production; this is because of the introduction of “heteronomous agents into autonomous worlds,” these agents being heteronomous because the field in which their capital is most recognized becomes “subordinated to market pressures” (Whelan and Muthuri, 2002; Bourdieu, 1998). In order to discuss this concern, it is first important to consider the meaning of capital within Bourdieu’s work. Bourdieu’s definition of capital is “approximately equivalent to social power” (Fowles, 1999). This can be social capital (discussed later in this chapter, but which can be simplified as ‘whom one knows’), symbolic capital (in the form of recognition or prestige), or culture capital as seen through “expressive preferences gained primarily through education” (Fowles, 1999). An understanding of this definition of capital is significant when considering television, journalism, culture production, and power from Bourdieu’s perspective.

Bourdieu posits that an autonomous field is one in which “producers’ sole consumers are their competitors, that is, individuals who could have made the discovery in question” (Bourdieu, 1998). Mathematics is such a field. Journalism however - including television journalism - is itself a field, but not one that is autonomous. This is due to the existence of market pressures within it. These occur in two ways. Market pressure is inherent in the field in the form of audience ratings, as well as competition without a rational consideration of consequences. The field is dependent on ratings for commercial success. These ratings are at least partially connected to the novelty and sensationalism of the content.

However, this causes a situation wherein “news which might prove dangerous to those involved can be broadcast simply to beat out a competitor, with no thought given to the danger” (Bourdieu, 1998). This existence of market pressure is a structural aspect of the field, but is one that means the field itself is not autonomous.

This lack of autonomy has consequences on the content produced. Bourdieu (1998) asserts that the competition within the field leads to a situation of uniformity that arises through “permanent surveillance (which can turn into mutual espionage)” between journalists and their competitors, in order to “profit from competitors' failures by avoiding their mistakes, and to counter their successes by trying to borrow the supposed instruments of that success.” This uniformity can take the form of specific issues to be addressed, topics to be covered, individuals to be invited, and more. However, the consequence of this is not just uniformity in content, but a subsequent uniformity in values through the habitus. Content, rather than being informative, objective, novel or diverse, is structurally “oriented toward preserving established values” (Bourdieu, 1998). Dominant power structures are thus preserved through the habitus. Given the relationship between the media and the state in Egypt, as previously discussed, Bourdieu’s findings are interesting for the purpose of this thesis. State channels in Egypt, as shown previously and as will be shown throughout this thesis, have an influence on the nature of political debate, influencing the media’s agenda setting and minimizing negative statements related to the regime. This, in turn, meant that the state media continued to preserve the dominant power structures of the country. Moreover, the state’s power to revoke license - and several examples of this power being used - meant that this uniformity had at its basis a positive outlook of the regime, and minimal criticism. Bourdieu (1998) notes that it is clear that authorities, the government being a particular example, influence the media “not only through the economic pressure that they bring to bear but also through their monopoly on legitimate information.” This monopoly also allows manipulation of the media agenda, a power that is enhanced through the symbolic power of the state when used through actions, decisions, and entry into journalism through interviews and conferences, all of which allow them to manipulate “the journalistic agenda and the hierarchy of importance assigned to events.” This can

be seen through laws in Egypt - a prime example being Law 313 that prohibited any coverage about SCAF without the consent of the Director of Military Intelligence - as well as through the concentration of media ownership, the restrictive requirements for opening media outlets, and the government's power to revoke licenses at any time for any reason (Rugh, 2004; McChesney, 1999; McQuail, 2005).

A second issue of television media, to Bourdieu, is the fact that this field - itself subject to market pressures and thus heteronomous - also subjects pressure on other, autonomous fields. This introduction of "heteronomous agents into autonomous worlds" leads to two distinct issues (Bourdieu, 1998). The first of these issues is the fact that, through exposure and the symbolic capital received by presence on television, agents are given authority that they would not have received from their own fields. In essence, these individuals are given "television value, a journalistic weight that is not commensurate with their particular weight in their particular world." In some fields, this weight is even taken into account for funding, grants, and subsidies. This means, essentially, that these individuals are bypassing the requirements of their own fields, such as peer review, which in turn affects power relations between fields. Bourdieu uses the examples of judges being influenced by popular appeal, and other judges using television to short-circuit internal hierarchies, in order to illustrate this point. The second issue that arises, however, is closely related to the first. It is the fact that information - and autonomous fields - become subject to this critiquing by individuals, groups, and social entities without the same cultural capital. These demands, and pressures, can be resisted within autonomous fields, but not when subjected to television and the engagement of heteronomous agents. Essentially, the more producers "aim for the mass market...the more likely they are to collaborate with the powers that be - State, Church, or Party, and, today, journalism and television - and to yield to their demands or their orders."

As such, when assessing the role of television journalism as media within Egypt's state channels during the period of the 2011 uprisings, it is important to take into consideration the manner in which television can be used for the reproduction of dominant social structures, as well as the manner in which this is

done through market pressure and the monopoly on legitimate power. To Bourdieu (1998), politics is an autonomous field which can be unduly influenced by the introduction of “heteronomous agents into autonomous worlds.” Therefore, it must be assumed that the involvement of television-journalism in politics - and the involvement of politics and the government in television-journalism - had some form of effect. This should be considered compared to social media, which may operate more autonomously.

### **3.3. Social Media**

In his book *Communication Power*, Castells (2009) states that social media helps to build an "autonomous communication process" that ultimately produces effects on political systems and the public consciousness, which in turn leads to movements against unjust and corrupt social and political orders. Castells views social media as one feature in the emergence of ‘mass self-communication’ during the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. The term ‘mass self-communication’ is derived from the idea that the information is created by the user (that is, the individual self) and reaches a general audience (the masses) (Castells, 2009). This is the alternative term for "user generated content" (Van Dijck, 2013). Due to the mass self-communication nature of social media, Castells argues that "the Arab uprisings were spontaneous processes of mobilization that emerged from calls from the Internet and wireless communication networks". He believes that without social media there would have been no protests whatsoever. Castells argues that mass self-communication challenges regimes in power because it gives the space for users to express their opinions by means that are otherwise not permitted (Castells, 2013). In this section, the extent to which scholars have agreed with Castells will be assessed, and the role that has been attributed to social media in the literature on the Egyptian uprising in 2011 will be discussed and evaluated.

Returning to Habermas’s concept of the public sphere (which was discussed earlier in the chapter), scholars who have further developed Habermas’ original work point us to a more nuanced understanding of the public sphere. Rather than considering the public sphere as a single entity, John Keane (1995) identifies a

macro-public sphere, meso-public sphere and a micro-public sphere. This offers a useful starting point from which to assess the potential impact of social media on the Egyptian rural public sphere and its role in the political uprisings of 2011. The micro-public sphere is represented in a variety of small-scale local spaces in which citizens argue and discuss issues of social, economic and political concern. This is distinguished from the meso-public sphere; this is the most familiar and publicly recognized sphere, representing a space that includes millions of people watching, listening or reading from a great distance. As such, these meso-public spheres are mediated by large circulation newspapers and by traditional mass media companies (Webster and Blom, 2004). Finally, the macro-public sphere resembles hundreds of millions of citizens connected by international media on a nation state level.

As emphasised by Keane, the micro-public sphere is a vital communicative space for all social movements. These social movements typically comprise low-profile networks of small groups, organisations, initiatives, local contacts and friendships. Additionally, such local networks utilise a variety of communication means such as telephones, faxes, photocopies, camcorders, videos and personal computers to question and change "the dominant codes" of everyday life. The micro-public sphere consists of communicative spaces such as mosques, churches, clinics, or even a political chat over a drink with friends. However, paradoxically, and as Keane suggests, the micro public spheres mainly draw their strength from the fact that they are mostly latent. Although they appear to be functioning on a private scale and are distanced from official public life, political parties and media publicity, they do in fact play a crucial role in challenging authorities precisely because they operate in unlimited ways that are worthy of the attention of civil society (Webster and Blom, 2004). Critically, social media transformed this micro-public sphere by opening up new possibilities and opportunities of communication between Egyptians. Although not at the forefront of the global explosion in social media use, Egypt was not immune to the rise of 'mass self-communication'.

The influence of social media in the Egyptian media system was already emerging prior to 2011. Internet and mobile phone penetration, the primary method for access to social media, had been increasing throughout the twenty-

first century; this did not only occur in western and northern states but also in less-developed countries. In particular, mobile social media services had become increasingly important in countries that had previously lacked a good IT infrastructure (Weber, 2011). Egypt is one such example of social media - in the form of blogs, Facebook and Twitter - evolving to become significant platforms for communication, organisation and political mobilisation (Lynch, 2013). Although blogs were initially published solely in English, the development of Arabic software led to the proliferation of blogs in Arabic. These blogs became widespread, thereby attracting a wider domestic audience. Elseewi (2011) contends that social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter were replacing the "transnationally—produced Arabic serial dramas", making ordinary citizens "the stars of their own mediated narratives." Beyond the cultural arena, however, blogs and social networking sites also worked to enable "alternative political voices to find audiences" (Elseewi, 2011) and Egyptian bloggers were becoming prominent because they tackled issues not discussed in politically controlled media channels. As such, these social media platforms offered a new uncensored avenue that invited media and public deliberation in discussing the social and political issues facing the nation.

Prior to the 2011 uprisings, social media, in its use by Egypt's citizens, became an agent for freedom, especially as compared to traditional media. For instance, April 2008 marked "the first Egyptian instigated cyber activism attempt" in which activists created a Facebook page to support textile workers in Mahalla's general strike (Eltantawy and Wiest, 2011). This was also referred to by Lynch as the 'Kefaya wave' that sought to challenge, via online blogging, Mubarak's son and his presumed inheritance of power (Lynch, 2006). Through social media, the Kefaya movement exposed issues that had been previously repressed into the public sphere and succeeded in galvanising public debate over these once-taboo subjects (Lynch, 2013). The Kefaya movement was a sign of the potential impact social media users could have on political debate and, as such, on the enhancement of the public sphere. Similarly, in 2010, a group of students created a new site (or group) on Facebook and Twitter called 'Rassd', meaning observe; this included audio-visual material as well as textual content. Sakr (2013a) observes that Rassd published videos of fraud and bullying relating to the 2010



elections. Throughout its lifetime, and particularly during the period of the uprising, Rassd survived government hacking and smear campaigns and eventually went on to expand its news operation.

Perhaps the most significant examples of social media depicting the micro-public sphere, however, were the “We are all Khaled Said” Facebook page and the use of social media by the Kefaya movement. Both these examples of social media activism began prior to the onset of the uprisings and continued beyond them. In terms of the former, “We are Khaled Said”, July 2010 marked its beginning. At this time, 3.58 million Egyptian Facebook users joined the "Kolona Khaled Said" or "We are all Khaled Said" Facebook group started by Google employee and Internet activist, Wael Ghonim (Sakr, 2013b). This group was based on the brutal physical abuse of an Egyptian male - Said - by police officers after he posted an online video of two police officers exchanging money after a drug deal.

While the details of this group were discussed in Chapter 1, it is important to note that in Said’s case and others, social media played an empowering role in the sense that it enabled the protesters to tell their own stories of the uprising while bypassing and disrupting the official narratives of Egypt’s state media. Using social media tools, ordinary Egyptians - without professional journalistic credentials - could (and did) spread images and information that had been intentionally blocked or distorted in the country's formal news media. As indicated by the British-Egyptian actor, Khaled Abdallah, this was one of the first revolutions in history to be filmed by its people rather than by a news organisation; this was only possible because of the Internet, information technology and social media (Sakr, 2013a). Blogs and social media sites supplied a plethora of first-hand information and images; ordinary bystanders witnessing brutality from a balcony or from other proximitous locations, managed to release images that they had taken with the camera of their mobile phones. Thus, Twitter, Facebook, online bloggers and mobile telephones all played a crucial role in propelling the 'rising tide of opposition' and succeeded in challenging the state controlled national media as they spread images and ideas of resistance and 'mass defiance' across Egypt (Cottle, 2011).

Moreover, the images, messages and narratives of the opposition were quickly and easily spread into the public sphere because of social media. People all over the world were able to access first-hand photos and reports from the scenes of events on the streets of Egypt (Nanabhay and Farmanfarmaian, 2011). This helped to build and strengthen ties among activists, and increased political deliberation between protesters in Egypt and those who supported the uprising internationally. Information about unfolding events was soon disseminated through social media technologies, offering encouragement and sympathy, inspiring and boosting Egyptian protesters and linking them not only with each other but also to their Tunisian counterparts (Khamis and Vaughn, 2013), and Egyptians abroad (Eltantawy and Wiest, 2011). Therefore, whilst Egyptians were watching events unfold in Tunisia, they were planning their own timely moves, and exchanging encouragement through support, ideas and information. Examples of this include messages exchanged between Egyptian and Tunisian protesters, wherein the latter advised the former to protest at night for safety, to use social media to convey their messages abroad for increased international pressure, and to wash their faces with Coca-Cola in order to reduce the effects of tear gas (Eltantawy and Wiest, 2011).

The effect of social media did not disappear even when the government disabled Internet access within the country. In response to this decision, protesters called friends abroad on landlines to ask them to tweet messages on their behalf, allowing them to continue taking advantage of the international connectivity afforded by social media despite government steps to hinder it. Similarly, “Speak to Tweet” - an initiative created by a team of engineers from Twitter and Google - and SayNow (a Google-acquired company that enabled activists to call with voice messages that were posted as Twitter messages) worked to diminish the government’s attempts to silence the protesters’ international connectivity (Amin, 2011). Indeed, the very fact that multinational and international companies such as Google and Twitter had become involved in the Egyptian uprising serves to demonstrate that social media was a method for attracting international support for the protests, and acted as a way to connect the micro-public sphere to the meso-public and macro-public spheres. As activists posted images, videos and written content regarding police torture of protesters and other events that

occurred during the revolution, international journalists abroad were given on-time updates of these events from individuals on the ground. In this way, social media enabled protesters to bypass the politically-controlled Egyptian media and tap into a network of journalists that operated outside the Mubarak regime's jurisdiction and did not need to self-censor. As a result, information was released by *Al Jazeera* and other international news organizations that could not be released by the politically-controlled Egyptian media. In this way, social media helped to extend the political space, establish connections with other social movements, publicise causes and bring to light instances of government abuse. This allowed worldwide recognition to be gained regarding the Egyptian cause. Furthermore, it serves as an example of Keane's micro-public sphere and its impact. However, this thesis seeks to study the rural populations' use and participation in this micro public sphere.

In addition to enabling the protestors to disseminate their own narrative of the uprising, social media was also used as a tool of cooperation and collaboration. Eltantawy and Wiest (2011) have suggested that savvy activists were able to access social media to initiate and organise a broad spectrum of dissension activities through the use of computers and smartphones, and that the various forms of social media technologies were utilised to organise and implement collective activities, as well as to promote a sense of collective identity and community among users. This is perhaps most evident in the emergence and use of the #Jan25 hashtag which appeared in more than 25 unique tweets per minute that day (Zirulnick, 2011; Eltantawy and Wiest, 2011). These tweets varied in content, comprising everything from warnings of tear gas explosions, to notifications of free food being handed out to protestors. This is one example that demonstrates the way in which social media facilitated cooperation among members of the public.

It is evident, therefore, that social media was used by protestors to tell their stories of the uprising, to bypass state-controlled media narratives while expressing their opinions directly in order to gain support for the uprising around the world, and to foster political collaboration and coordination. As a consequence, a number of scholars have argued that social media and the digital sphere in Egypt significantly contributed to a mobilising of protests, which

eventually led to the ousting of Mubarak in just 18 days. According to Linda Herrera (2011), the protests revealed the significant role of digital communication in the destabilisation of political structures to a level that provoked a response from the regime. However, Francis Lee (2015) argues that the revolution in Egypt cannot solely be blamed on what has come to be referred to as the 'Facebook Factor' as a range of other elements undoubtedly played a role in the ousting of President Mubarak. This disagreement has led to a growing debate among scholars of media studies regarding the role of online activism as evident by social media use in Egypt during the period. The major considerations of the new media phenomenon emerge from a 'liberation technology' hypothesis to that of a critical political economy (Diamond, 2010). Perhaps more moderate research on this area is slowly forming and it contextualizes an online public sphere linking it to other structural elements. Yet there seems to be little consensus on the idea of the online platform as a new form of public sphere in Egypt.

According to Herrera (2011), the growing popularity of Facebook in the Arab world, particularly in Egypt, is a response to the limits of the political economy within the nation's media landscape. The state controlled media was limited by a lack of resources, indicating a co-opting of most influential and prominent journalists, and largely ignored the service of the public. Moreover, she argues that the state-owned media lacked credibility through failing to mirror the increasingly plural public sphere and, as such, did not adequately guide processes of deliberation on issues which are socially relevant. Private media was controlled by media moguls. As such, private media was largely profit-oriented, and served the economic and political interests of its owners, meaning that it did not reflect the growing pluralism within Egyptian society as a consequence. Lee (2015) observes that in such a context, digital media such as Facebook serves as a communicatively-positioned public sphere. Due to its flexibility - and the difficulty that exists in practically administering regulative measures - social media provides the marginalised and the voiceless with a chance of circumventing the traditional exclusion barriers, avoiding censorship, and embodying the idea of a counter-public sphere or of a loosening of the constraints on the public sphere prior to the uprisings. This view suggests a public sphere which is anti-hegemonic and articulates specific societal positions or discourses,

and which therefore could play a pivotal role in undermining the Egyptian regime. However, all studies focus on urban citizens only; this thesis will differ in the fact that its focus is on rural citizens.

On the other hand, critics of the liberating role of social media in the uprising note that the blogosphere of Egypt had already become vibrant in earlier years, even before the uprising (Dutton, 2013). This had effectively covered sensitive topics such as harassment and torture perpetrated by the government. Additionally, owing to the otherwise controlled alternatives for political participation, Herrera (2011) suggests that the use of Facebook in the country was already noteworthy before the uprising. At the same time, social media was not the only channel that encouraged the public to be critical of the government. Broadcast media was responsible for opening up the debate and promoting various viewpoints in Egypt. In particular, satellite channels can be praised for this because they are slightly less controlled than their public channel counterparts. Although social media provided an avenue for individuals to express their opinions, it was not necessarily the first platform to facilitate the evolution of the public sphere. Anders Olof Larsson and Moe Hallvard (2015) take this further by arguing that television was responsible for promoting public and critical-rational debate, whilst also facilitating knowledge of the actions of the government.

Perhaps more critically, even though a wide range of research on digital media and the Arab Spring has focused on the level of access and use of social media, there has been only a limited investigation of normative criteria for other public deliberations. After the uprising that led to the ousting of President Mubarak, most researchers focused on examining the role of Facebook in perpetuating protests, mainly paying attention to access as a criterion of analysis. However, Werner Faulstich (2002) argues that the position of digital media as a possible online deliberative platform and extension of the traditional public sphere should be critically assessed. The democratic value of the public sphere is not predicated solely on access. According to William Dutton (2013), studies on western public spheres and democracies show that growing access does not necessarily imply a high level of deliberative quality, or even a logical and consensus-oriented process of decision-making. Dutton argues this despite the knowledge that social

media has been shown to lead to high levels of diversity and pluralism. Moreover, Lee (2015) suggests that where digital or social media should offer an ideal channel for diverse and pluralist political debates, it needs to connect with traditional forms of civil society and media, which depicts the meso-public sphere model explained by Keane.

From the previous sections in this analysis, it is clear that Egypt, like most other Arab countries, has a history of restrictive and monopolistic media contexts. For this reason, Egyptian citizens seem to have limited experience vis-à-vis negotiating their pluralistic interests in digital or rather online deliberations. As such, one of the main concerns of this study will be to analyse the deliberative elements of Egyptian digital media and their contribution to the post revolutionary public sphere in the country by focusing on the changes in political interaction. While focusing on rural citizens, it will take into consideration political interaction and not social media access only.

Overall, the precise role of social media technologies in the uprisings of 2011 remains a matter for debate. While Western mainstream media narratives at the time framed the Arab Spring uprisings as 'Twitter revolutions' (Bennett, 2011), scholars and writers such as Evgeny Morozov find that social media cannot be the reason behind revolutions. He finds that a Facebook and Twitter revolution is “a naive belief in [the] emancipatory nature of online communication that rests on a stubborn refusal to acknowledge its downside” (Morozov, 2011). Lynch (2013) states that, although protestors undoubtedly made use of social media, it is “surprisingly difficult to demonstrate rigorously that these new media directly caused any of the outcomes with which they have been associated”. This thesis will seek to make a contribution to this debate by analysing the impact of the symbiotic media relationship between traditional and social media on the public sphere by focusing on television and social media and its impact on rural Egypt. Through this, the intent is to develop a more accurate understanding and analysis of the manner in which these two - television and social media - interact, especially when combined as seen in the case of Egypt. This will, of course, require an analysis of each media independently before discussing their interaction.

### **3.3.1. From Spectating to Political Interaction: How Social Media Fermented Mobilisation Both Online and Offline**

Discussing the malleability of social networks and the opportunities and challenges these presented for young, politically motivated youth in Egypt, Paolo Gerbaudo (2012) presents *Shabab-Al-Facebook: the youth of Facebook*. With over 60% of the population under thirty, the youth, who as previously discussed grew up in a society where the media was consciously molded by a dictator, were now given the opportunity to gain raw and unfiltered information through a network of affiliates, adding to the lure of technology. Despite this, Gerbaudo argues that, because social media was firmly embedded in such a demographically young country, the Western media may have bought into the idea that this media (and the emotive atmosphere surrounding it) was solely, or even primarily, responsible for the political changes that occurred. Gerbaudo cites the dramatic toppling of Mubarak as leading to the appearance of the Muslim Brotherhood, who quickly showed that they were ready and willing to continue the repression of the previous regime. Similarly, the rise of the current leader Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who came to power following the end of Muslim Brotherhood rule, is largely characterized by the use of the same strategies and tactics. Through this scheme, Gerbaudo (2012) presents social media as a catalyst for social empowerment, which, without clear direction between the myriad of individuals it draws together, can ultimately disrupt or negatively impact any unity and progressive social change.

The failure to build consensus across chaotic meetings of individuals, many of whom were drawn together out of a sense of patriotism and yearning to have greater democracy, ultimately exposed rumours and false information, much of which was placed by social media ‘trolls’. A conduit initially viewed as empowering can also be used to spread paranoia; individuals connecting via Facebook, often with genuine information on their profile, can become dangerous if perceived as talking to some one who may conspire against them. Despite the portrayal of the Western Media, it is clear that the removal of Mubarak was not a unanimous decision among Egypt’s populace, with some Egyptians preferring his

regime due to loyalty, or the direct or indirect benefits they received because of it. Social media is presented by Gerbaudo as having quickly become a battleground between those organising rallies and meetings and those attempting to expose anonymous profiles, calling them out as traitors, criminals and even espousing claims that they were funded by Zionists to destabilise a Muslim country.

While, as previously discussed, social media allowed individuals to go beyond the traditional views of the public sphere for small, physical assembly, it fluidly evolved that such strict control over public assembly was lessened as a result. Given the dispersed nature of social media, its prevalence aided in the development of an uncoerced space for discussion that was not subject to the same level of strict control. When considering three of the core liberties for democratic freedom and expression - assembly, association and expression - Mubarak was certainly aware that for whatever bad words can be whispered between individuals, it was the actual assembly of crowds that could threaten his leadership. Gerbaudo presents social media as a necessary and logical response to the journey between individuals seeking to protest, yet growing up with full awareness of what would happen to them if trying traditional methods. While Gerbaudo (2012) highlights traditional methods of public assembly being hushed agreements to meet at sanctuaries of protest such as the handful of opposition newspapers, these were well monitored by police and could easily be contained with the instigators being duly harassed and punished. At best such acts would be minutes in duration, involve a hastily made banner and have a few slogans shouted to whoever happened to be walking by. With only a marginal impact on passers by, most likely concerned with not being associated and arrested, there was no conceivable awareness by any international media stream.

The use of social media to generate fluid assembly also helped to buttress this crucial missing link of understanding. In *Revolution in the Age of Social Media*, Herrera (2014) argues that many veteran protesters understood that many people believed they were either funded by a subversive source, or were simply mad. At the core of this view was a firm generational belief across social classes that Mubarak was an ingrained institution; without genuine and open discourse, few believed in the possibility of positive social change. It was perhaps in this belief between groups on social media that organisers sought to have people follow



them yet were anxious not to be seen as direct ‘leaders’. The emotive nature of protest calls for a persistent sense of spontaneity to fuel a cocktail of emotions - including anger and excitement - that fire off protests.

This is perhaps not as realistic as it sounds since any key movement includes the support of notable figures; a prime example of this in Egypt was Wael Ghonim famously starting the “We are all Khaled Said” as organisers sought to turn debate and yearning into action, social media became a platform to unite these individuals initially, first online but with the intention of translating this into physical action. Slogans such as “The Regime Must Go” serve as examples of the way in which newly forming social groups began to make the transition from virtual reality to physical protest. It is the anxiety that organisers held for those who may emerge as group ‘leaders’, which may be attributed to the fear that they were simply going to replace one dictator with a future other, who could be accredited to their own movement. In a nation with heavy corruption, poverty and inefficiency, such concerns could translate into reality in the event of a power vacuum. For veteran organisers with experience of agitation, they held the knowledge that a political void will always be filled with negativity for the emergence of any real democracy.

The empowerment of the individual, regardless of their social class, through participation with a handheld device (offering greater anonymity than Internet cafes) speaks to the citizen moving from spectator to active participant in the search to establish a fairer, more open democratic society. In *The Eyes of the People, Democracy in the Age of Spectatorship*, Jeffrey Green (2011) argues that the societal institution of democracy has generated a legion of spectators, those who simply exist yet do not actively participate in politics. Green argues this may be the case in Western nations where stable democracies have generated a kind of apathy to public assembly, shunning it as a thing of the past, and believing that “it can’t happen here”. In these nations, uprisings and brutal repression are limited to watching a far away land on the evening news. Those individuals - being unaccustomed to civil disobedience, civil unrest, and political uprisings - fail to grasp the level of psychological involvement that social media promotes among its users who wish to engage with the political process. While it is difficult, though by no means impossible, for a Westerner born into a stable democracy to

imagine the controlled environment faced by participants in the 2011 uprising, such images of swelling numbers of protesters fails to connect with what Green calls the “citizen being ruled”, individuals whose lack of interest for political engagement far exceeds their actual participation. Whether the Europeans sitting watching television can accurately understand the plethora of emotions and physical dangers that one faces when moving from spectator to participant is unclear, yet for those taking part in the 2011 uprising, it was this yearning to become an active participant that moulded their involvement to topple a dictator. However, one wants to clearly study these emotions of citizens in rural Egypt during the uprisings.

In *Mediation and Protest Movements*, Bart Cammerts, Alice Mattoni and Patrick McCurdy (2014) present these individuals now moving to be participants and argue that social media played a direct role not merely in organising individuals but in fueling their capacity to act. The establishment of communal dialogues across Twitter, Facebook and other social platforms established a wide system of networks not merely to consume media such as sharing experiences of protest events, but also to mould the discourse that was slowly evolving between the entrenched government and its supporters and those who aimed to topple it. Cammaerts et al. (2014) argue that media went from being consumed to actively produced and openly distributed among these widening social networks in order to gain new members, to shape how mediation would occur, to challenge those calling for more violent means, and to counteract the spreading false information. Protests are argued to represent performances that enshrine the physical product stemming from excited and passionate online debate.

The push by a movement to place themselves directly in harm’s way, and the use of the depiction of the human body to protest and change the organic nature of society, is discussed by *The Native Blogger of Cairo: Creative Insurgency in the Arab World* by Marwan Kraidy (2017). Kraidy argues that those who took part in the 2011 uprising are part of a long history of individuals using their bodies to physically protest oppression - from the infamous image of a Buddhist monk committing an act of self-immolation to the use of animal iconography by activists such as the Mubarak laughing cow - to rally those who were fearful of physically protesting against a patriarchal and foreboding leader. Acts such as

these are argued by Kraidy to stem from other known Middle-Eastern satirists such as the Syrian artist Ali Farzat who highlighted abuses committed by the Syrian regime. They act as symbolic events that, even if crushed, have largely achieved much of their objectives, particularly as a catalyst for further acts of political mediation between protesters and a drawing point for new members. The authors argue that it is this symbolism that promotes participation, and that it does this through recognition that enshrines resistance and a show of strength to mobilise beyond the virtual world against state oppression. The role of technology is not without its weaknesses. A particular concern is that members who are caught may be compelled to surrender their phones and login details, which may expose other members of a network to further police intimidation. It is this argument that fuels “trans-media mobilisation” (Kraidy, 2017) among individuals, turning them into activists to form a unified national movement identity for the 2011 protesters.

In *Social Media in the Arab World: Communication and Public Opinion in the Gulf States*, Barrie Gunter et al. (2016) discuss the presence of wider Arab themes across the Gulf, which were found through social media in the 2011 uprising. As this chapter has shown, the awareness by Egyptians young and old alike that the state had a tight grip upon media outlets was well known. Through this schema, they argue that the Arab press gave a ‘form’ of news that was read more out of habit than genuine insight. As social media opened the door to largely uncensored discussions, this created a flurry of debate for topics such as art, sex, comedy and music. When the medium is the message itself, the authors state that the discourse used by different groups is understood to differ from what they would say and do in real life. The authors cite awareness by protesters that the Egyptian Military’s Facebook page, which has millions of followers, uses rhetoric that greatly differs from the brutal and corrupt reputation that they hold. The juxtaposition of reality and virtual reality presented individuals who may normally be quiet and subservient to the government in their daily life, yet avidly, even violently anti-government online. This in part stems from the iconoclastic role held by social media, turning what was traditionally a majority of consumers for information into a roughly equal number of creators *and* consumers of digital content. This was in part fuelled for 2011 activists through the increased and instant form of

connectivity they shared with one another. Traditional barriers of isolation faced by those seeking to discuss and form groups with others were largely made porous through social media platforms. Despite this, the authors highlight that any such movements which fail to build unity and consensus across social networks can lead to polarisation and fracturing among members.

In totality, these elements, from the emergence of a political activist from the previously dormant identity of political spectator to the excitement and rapid spread of ideas and news would have arguably made the 2011 uprising impossible in their absence. Despite this the novelty of such methods of protest may offer diminished utility should they be needed for future acts of social dissension. A consistent after-theme that is discussed across several of the references presented here was an acknowledgement that future attempts may not be so immediately successful at mobilisation. Governments across the world, in particular the Gulf states have taken notice of the largely un-policed social media platforms with larger, faster and more robust crackdowns expected for those who agitate for social change online. It is important however, to further expand upon this and develop a broader understanding of the way in which such media networks converged and developed a fluid and wide ranging media landscape across Egypt which we will now turn to.

### **3.3.2. Al Jazeera and Social Media: The Impact of the Emergence of a Convergent and Symbiotic Media Landscape in Egypt.**

In making an assessment on the role of social media in the 2011 uprisings, it is important not to consider social media in isolation, but instead as part of the varied media ecosystem which characterises 21<sup>st</sup> century communications. Jenkins' (2006) influential work on media theory describes a process of 'convergence' whereby the online and digital media world has facilitated the emergence of a multitude of channels and sources as well as a collapse in the distinctions between media producers and consumers. This has several effects. First, this "diversification of communication channels...expands the range of voices that can be heard" (Jenkins, 2006). While some voices may be more prominent or prevalent, Jenkins notes that this diversification ensures that "no one voice speaks with unquestioned authority." Moreover, because of the collapse of

the producer-consumer distinction, access and political participation may increase, and the political scene may involve a greater sense of community, a stronger sense of trust in collaboration and collaborative problem solving, and a decrease in the reliance on so-called “official expertise” (Jenkins, 2006). This brings to light another effect of Jenkins’ view on convergence: the idea of the monitorial citizen. The monitorial citizen is one whom, according to Michael Schudson (1999), came about as the result of an explosion in information technology and the widening gap between the available information relating to politics and an individual’s ability to process it. As such, a monitorial citizen engages in political acts in a more individualised manner and is “not an absentee citizen but watchful, even when he or she is doing something else” (Schudson, 1999; Jenkins, 2006). Examples of this include viewers of television programs such as *The Daily Show*, who are being both entertained and informed through a show that mixes parody and reporting. This type of citizen, in this kind of media atmosphere, is one who will be accustomed to considering the news as something to be discovered through investigation of “competing accounts rather than something to be digested from authoritative sources” (Jenkins, 2006).

In this way, these separate forms of media, being part of the same ecosystem, will interact in such a manner as to complement or improve one another. Examples of this include “photographs of dead Americans returning from Iraq in flag-draped or the photographs of prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib, both of which entered the mainstream media as digital photographs, shot and circulated outside official military channels” (Jenkins, 2006). Jenkins quotes Jesse Walker, an editor at Magazine *Reason*, who states that the new media acts to transform the old media, ensuring that it is more transparent, quicker, and more interactive, because it has to be - rather than because it wants to be - in order to remain relevant in the face of competition and public critiquing (Jenkins, 2006; Walker, 2004). For this to occur, one need not do something as drastic as flying to Baghdad to act as an impromptu war correspondent. In fact, Jenkins brings to light the idea of “Photoshop for Democracy,” noting that something as simple as passing a political picture to a friend (or sending one through social media) is “no more and no less a political act than handing them a campaign brochure or a bumper sticker” (Jenkins, 2006). In Egypt, in the build-up to the 2011 uprisings,

an example of this can be seen: the “Khaled Said” Facebook Group, as mentioned previously, was created to highlight issues of police brutality and citizen safety through the showcasing of these instances in a picture form.

In fact, the relationship between social media and traditional media serves as a strong example of the manner in which convergence can lead to separate forms of media, being part of the same ecosystem, can act to complement or improve one another. Jenkins discusses ‘viral’ content on the Internet to highlight the relationship between these two forms of media; he notes that “[broadcasting provides the common culture, and the Web offers more localized channels for responding to that culture.” Jenkins ultimately finds that, while the online media may provide new ideas and alternative perspectives, the mainstream media will be “monitoring those channels, looking for content to co-opt and circulate” (Jenkins, 2006). This is of course particularly relevant to Egypt where, as already shown and will continue to be shown, the traditional media did in fact use content from social media to highlight significant events in the uprisings. The media in Egypt did, in the way Jenkins describes, transform and adapt on the basis of this convergence.

Media convergence can be driven as a top-down process when driven by corporations and a bottom-up process when driven by consumers, but both of them coexist in such a way that media companies and, more recently, consumers themselves have learned how to accelerate the flow of content across delivery channels (Jenkins, 2006). Social media is the newest, quickest and most accessible channel yet devised, the result of the rapid rate at which consumers have learned to use different media technologies in order to “bring the flow of media more fully under their control” (Jenkins, 2006). This has ultimately facilitated communication between people by connecting more social media platforms to each other and between social media users and traditional media professionals.

Admire Mare (2013) and Andrew Chadwick (2013) argue that there is a convergence between social media and mass media. Social media has been transformed from a personal perspective towards a focus on public views. Rather than relying on traditional media, social media has become the primary source of

breaking news. Rasmus Nielsen and Kim Schrøder (2014) posit that the increasing influence of social networks has led to a growing dependence among professional journalists on social media. Journalists reporting any news, such as elections or political activity, have to rely on social media to keep up. The recent trends have made social networks the de-facto channel for news. However, this need not imply that social media has replaced traditional media. Michael Stefanone et al. (2010) argue that social media in turn has been heavily dependent on professional journalism and mainstream media as the fuel for its news. Despite their ability to transfer information readily, traditional media is still the source that injects the most significant amount of fresh information into the daily news cycle. On many occasions, social media has been attributed as an informal source; individuals still rely on television and newspapers to verify information. Therefore, traditional media is attributed as an authoritative source of news. Stefanone et al. (2010) observe that television continues to carry the bulk of political news and is often used for political advertising.

Critics such as Sarah Joseph (2012) have observed that social media might not have had such a massive impact and mass media might have played a more significant role in the process. The claim for the influence of social media stems from Mubarak's influencing of traditional media, allowing them only to report favourable news on the government, which is related to the agenda setting function. It is more appropriate to consider it as a tool that was responsible for mobilising part of the total population to unite together against a regime that had repressed it up to that point. It better empowered the people to "know their rights" and ensured that they were "able to claim them" (Sakr et al., 2015). It is important to point out that social media alone would not have had such a phenomenal effect. Mass media played a pivotal role and even helped break down the barriers that social media had been subjected to, such as restricting communication and event coverage to mainly urban areas, since citizens in rural areas were less likely to have Internet availability. According to Nick Couldry, the intertwined relationship between traditional and social media during the uprising needs further analysis (Couldry, 2012). It is evident that, in many of the studies conducted, the focus on rural Egypt with regard to this symbiotic relationship is lacking or has been neglected in academic literature. As such, this thesis proposes

to consider this symbiotic relationship specifically within the realm of rural Egypt.

Therefore, even though it has been widely assumed that it is the new communication technology, represented by social media, which played the most significant role in mobilising people, other meso and macro-public spheres seem to have played an equally important role. In other words, there was a hybrid multiplication effect from all media (Chadwick, 2013). As Sakr explains, there is "evidence of hybridization between online and offline media" (Sakr, 2013a). Camera phones, YouTube, and blogs contributed to the circulation of television images, Facebook mobilised protests in Egyptian streets, television talk shows highlighted the protests, and word of mouth fed all of the above. Sakr (2013a) notes that the sheer "multiplication of different media space" such as broadcasting, reporting, printing, online and offline, all exerted tremendous pressure on policy makers. Such a situation arises because voices silenced in one space might instantly be heard in another, and attempts at censorship very quickly exposed. However, Andrew Chadwick (2008) explains that not every voice on social media will necessarily reach everyone as well. Therefore, the hybridization of media is important because it helps the circulation of more voices than social media would facilitate alone.

It may be argued, therefore, that a new defining characteristic in the area of media coverage has been the growth and expansion of the symbiotic relationship between traditional and social media. Such a symbiotic relationship has been extensively revealed by how mainstream media journalists have interrogated social networks for news and in turn, how the users have generated content derived from traditional media. Mare (2013) acclaims the role of social media in spreading cognitive dissonance, enabling citizens to be aware of the events happening in other regions. In Egypt, social media provided the avenue through which the public were able to learn of the atrocities committed on their fellow citizens; this is evident in examples such as "We are all Khaled Said". Although social media has been increasingly the source for news, Stefanone et al. (2010) argue that coverage based wholly on social media would result in fragmentation of national conversations and a narrowing down of perspectives to those of limited scope since like-minded participants only communicate among



themselves. Stefanone et al. relate the phenomenon to the echo-chamber effect. Therefore, mainstream media is still needed in society to facilitate wider coverage and discussion of national issues, as well as for its ability to prompt public debate over core issues within the public sphere. In this sense, *Aljazeera's* coverage of "We are all Khaled Said" is an example of this facilitation. The popular usage of social media has meant that the mainstream media no longer have full control over information in the public sphere for debate. However, Mare (2013) points out the need for mainstream media such as television to continue providing a pool of shared information upon which the public sphere may base their conversations and debates. Therefore, both forms of media are needed and their relationship is instrumental to providing citizens with a clear and broader coverage of the state of the nation. The idea that an online user on any social media platform or page may affect the user of traditional media, and vice versa, is referred to by Jenkins as the politics of convergence (Jenkins, 2006), which is why, in this thesis, social media is studied in a converged media environment.

In Egypt, social media complemented other media forms such as satellite broadcasting during the uprisings (Alexander and Aouragh, 2014). A clear example of the complementary relationship between old and new media was that of *Al Jazeera* which started streaming videos from Tahrir Square which had been uploaded by citizens on social media (Lotan et al., 2011). Additionally, mainstream media sometimes highlighted certain events during the uprisings which then made people turn to social media to express their opinions about them (Russell, 2011). For example, in Egypt, Facebook provided a platform for different activist networks - including the April 6 movement - to communicate with one another through the "We are All Khaled Said" page. (Storck, 2011). So it has been common for news to emerge from social media and then to become voiced and broadcasted in the traditional media, and vice versa. Another example is Wael Ghonim's interview with *Dream TV* on February 7, 2011 about his administration of the "We are All Khaled Said" page and its popularity during the 2011 uprisings. Within two days after the interview aired, 190,000 followers were added to Wael Ghonim's Facebook profile and began sharing and commenting on his interview on social media ([Nurwisah](#), 2011). Therefore, news that emerged on

social media would not go viral to the extent it did in Egypt without traditional media, since it is more accessible.

This symbiotic media relationship had an impact on encouraging citizens to participate in the public sphere with regards to political deliberation and interaction, which led to an evolution in the Egyptian public sphere during and after the uprisings. Armed with “camcorders, video phones, and first-person accounts, citizen journalists [can capture] major news events and [spread] the word by posting information” online. This information, in many cases, finds its way onto traditional news sources. In fact, during the Egyptian revolution, Sadaf Ali and Shahira Fahmy (2013) note that the relationship between social media and television was important in creating the balance between gate-keeping and citizen journalism. A symbiotic relationship could be observed between broadcaster and television networks and the revolutionary activists on the streets. The success of television media rested on the coverage of the protests. Before the uprisings, the united front between various outlets and media collectives pushed for the struggle against Mubarak’s regime. State-owned media praising Mubarak whilst denouncing the activists on the street resulted in relatively factual coverage by other networks. In a number of cases, journalists played a role in the rebellion. Simon Cottle (2011) observes that in one of the news centres, journalists locked out an ardent Mubarak loyalist who facilitated coverage of the actual facts on the streets. Steven Heydemann (2015) observes that different forms of media began working in a concerted form resulting in a powerful consensus that developed their level of content and influenced the Egyptian public, which in turn led to the evolving of a public sphere because citizens felt that there is more accessibility to expressing their opinions by participating in the public sphere, and as a result their despair started decreasing.

Online and offline media evolved and matured into a form of political synchronisation that was instrumental during the uprisings against the Muslim Brotherhood, which followed the uprisings against Mubarak (Tufekci and Wilson, 2012). The relationship between traditional and social media was more evidenced in the protests against the rule of Morsi in 2013. Anti-Muslim Brotherhood press and social media were responsible for coverage of the inhumane acts committed by the government against protesters on the street. It

may be observed that the functions of traditional and social media have overlapped, leading to competition for coverage. Larsson and Hallvard (2015) argue that the two forms of media coexist rather than compete through convergence of various aspects in reporting and coverage. However, the convergence between social and traditional media is facilitated because of the technological characteristics of the architecture of social media.

### **3.3.3. Convergence in Relation to Technological Characteristics**

The convergence between traditional and social media was facilitated because of different factors such as the technological characteristics that will be explained in this section. Due to these technological characteristics of the architecture of social media, along with the participation of users on social media, one can build a clearer picture of how convergence was created and how it played a role in facilitating deliberation between people.

Scholars have described the various features and architecture of social media and networked technologies. Danah Boyd states that in a networked society there are prominent features related to the technology involved (Boyd, 2014). These include persistence, visibility, spreadability and searchability. Persistence is the ability to maintain any form of communication for an unlimited time. Visibility is the feature by which users may interact with each other from every corner of the globe. John Thompson states that visibility is described as a "double-edged sword", since it enhances popularity and increases opportunities for communication, yet it is less controllable than other means of communication so it is a source of a "distinctive kind of fragility" (Thompson, 2005). Spreadability, the third characteristic, allows users to share messages at no cost. Finally, the searchability quality of finding any content easily is an added advantage of social media and the Internet (Boyd, 2014). Without these technological features, a networked society could not facilitate deliberation to the extent it currently does. If the 'architecture' of the technology on social media did not allow convergence to happen via the characteristics explained, less deliberation would have resulted between social media users on different platforms. Miller McPherson et al. (2006) highlighted that, in reference to a Pew Internet study, Internet users have larger networks of relations, implying that increased communication between citizens is

a question of quality vs. quantity (Rainie and Wellman, 2014). However, the argument with regard to the uprising is not a matter of the quantity but the quality. If the quality of the social media had been weak - with quality being defined as the impact of social media on satellite TV and the impact of social media as seen by the number of those using social media as compared to those affected by it - then the extent of circulation of news via traditional forms of media would have been minimal. This, in turn, would have affected the existence of convergence.

Whether communication between citizens on social media is a result of the introduction of this new technology or not is a controversial issue among scholars. Jose Van Dijck's focus on the effects of cultural practices in the usage of social media is based on the idea that communication between citizens is not mainly based on the presence of technology, but relates, at a deeper level, to peer pressure and to technology that values hierarchy (Van Dijck, 2013). Moreover, he supports Bennett and Segerberg's idea that what people call 'social media' should be instead called 'connective media' since it describes the technological features of social media rather than the social results or norms of the technology (Van Dijck, 2013). The culture of connectivity driven by connective media is identified as a separate area of research, and it might well be a concept that requires further examination (Nolin, 2014). It is vital to highlight that Van Dijck advises against a study of the back end as distinct from the front end since social media is considered as a stage of self-expression, whilst social practices and platforms are considered by him to be equally relevant. The conservative opinion is that the word 'social' suggests these stages are user-positioned, involved with participation and human association. Van Dijck considers social media to be an automatic system of production and operating influences, tracking and coding relations among individuals, things and ideas. Nolin would describe it as "creating the web social", which may be interpreted as "making sociality technical", with reference to the fact that these connections are facilitated by technological means (Nolin, 2014). The energy for connectedness among individuals is the product of social media businesses, and the approach for making profit is to apply coding technologies to make connectivity. As a result of this, social media businesses often highlight their influence to human connectedness whilst restraining back

end connectivity, pushing to make it nearly imperceptible. With reference to Orwell's *1984*, van Dijck characterizes this kind of rhetorical practice as a sort of Newspeak (Nolin, 2014).

Boyd (2014) explains that peer pressure makes users start using social media platforms, thereby affecting their communication norms. Peer pressure on users to use a certain platform rather than another is sometimes a crucial feature highlighted by scholars. In fact, users feel forced to do something owing to the norms of other users (Van Dijck, 2013). However, the values of hierarchy that Van Dijck finds are the main reason for helping social media to function the way it does are a combination of people's usage of the technology, and of platform owners who serve the needs that social media users want, thereby serving the hierarchy, which could not be otherwise achieved without such technology. Lisa Gitelman goes further here and highlights how recorded sound and digitally networked text first appeared as local anomalies only to become deeply embedded in the logic of public life and memory, to the point where the World Wide Web effectively ensures its own historicity by being used (Gitelman, 2008). Similarly, Jeff Jarvis agrees that technology usually creates its own norms. For example, the technology of the automobile changed the norms of road use from the 1930s to the 1990s since, prior to the existence of the car, the norms of road use were different (Salmon, 2013). Thus, if the technology behind social media does not serve the users' hierarchies, it will not function in the way it currently does. This explains why the architecture of social media technology is related to the resultant communication norms and cannot be considered a separate aspect since norms are set as a result of that technology. Thus, such a change in the norms of communication between citizens has resulted in connecting social and traditional medias.

Holly Crawford (Crawford, 1999) highlights the fact that social media provides a connection between offline and online worlds. Essentially, this is because social media offers an "immediacy of audience access" by virtue of the architecture of this technology. The debate over technological determinism might not seem relevant to the subject of Egypt's 2011 uprisings at first glance, but it is nevertheless important as it describes the ways that social media may introduce new means for people to communicate. Henry Giroux highlights that different

types of media motivate political engagement since they open spaces for criticism within the public sphere. Despite the success of social media being a question of quantity versus quality, scholars are divided on which is more important owing to observations on the topic being highly situational (Giroux, 2012). Moreover, this technology is not replacing collective identity yet; it is merely complementing face-to-face communication by allowing avenues that were not available through other means of technology (Boulianne, 2009; Jenkins, 2006; Giugni 1998). According to Peter Van Aelst and Stefaan Walgrave, such technology allows a two-way form of communication, unlike mainstream media (Walgrave and Van Aelst, 2006). The debate of technological determinism in this chapter is not to prove that it is the sole important aspect with regard to social media, yet it only demonstrates the importance of certain characteristics relating to the technology without neglecting the criticisms. Therefore, the norms resulting from the architecture of the technology helped to facilitate communication and create a symbiotic relationship between online and offline media.

Social media has introduced new norms of communication between citizens. According to Bertram Raven, social influence theory is based on the influence of other people, groups, or norms. According to social influence theory, three social processes affect individual behaviour: compliance, identification and internalisation (Kelman, 1974). Compliance means that individuals act in agreement or compliance with people who are important in their lives. For example, users may consider complying with the opinions of their managers (Zhou, 2011). Identification resembles the idea of being part of a community and not being left out. For example, social media users might feel they are more interactive in the community because of their participation online, which manifests the influence of groups (Zhou, 2011). Internalisation explains the acceptance of changes owing to agreement with other people (Dholakia et al., 2004). This theory validates how certain social media users may have been influenced to use social media or a certain platform because of the influence of others surrounding them, to whom social media had already become normalised. Such a position increases the number of users and validates why people change their communication norms in the event they need to identify with other users. As a result, the technological characteristics previously explained, in spite of

increased user participation being an issue of quality versus quantity, have introduced a new set of norms related to the technology itself, which resulted in the symbiotic media relationship between social and traditional media. These norms include communication with those outside of standard or pre-established groups, the routine of communication, and the social technology's use for discussion.

Such norms have merged the online and offline worlds, which brings us back to the topic of convergence. Van Dijck indicates that, with social media norms, online and offline worlds are now integrated (Van Dijck, 2013). There is no longer a clear-cut distinction between where one ends and the other begins. In other words, the dividing line between offline and online worlds has become blurred. This extension of the norms to and from the online world could not have occurred without the architecture of technology that helps in allowing users to communicate and participate instantly. In fact, the public and private spheres have also overlapped as a result of this enmeshment. According to Couldry, the idea of norms changing is depicted in the 'myth' concept. He explains that the "myth of mediated centre" is the media institution that offers society a 'centre' of values and knowledge. However, with norms within society changing because of social media, a new type of myth called the 'myth of us' has emerged, owing to users producing media content on social media (Couldry, 2012). The flow between the 'myth of us' and the "myth of mediated centre" explains the convergence and flow of information, over and into each other, between social and traditional media. Zizi Papacharissi (2010) suggests that what occurs is a sphere of connection and not isolation, as it serves primarily to connect the personal to the political and the self to the polity and society.

This connection between the offline and online world emphasises the complementary role between traditional and social medias, which in turn has helped in loosening the grip on controlling media, and motivating the political deliberation of users in the public sphere rather than feeling despair, which impacts political interaction. In Egypt, activists such as the April 6 movement used social media to spread messages because they knew that social media users would pass on the message to the community around them via mobile phones or by word of mouth. As such, even if they do not have social media access, the

message might reach them (Srinivasan, 2014). This shows that all spheres are connected and that boundaries between media have become unclear since the spread of politics on social media. If the technology that facilitates social media does not allow the previously-stated technological characteristics, it will not allow the possibility of instant usage and circulation of information (Papacharissi, 2010). However, this is considered to be the main pillar that allows users to communicate, share their daily updates and connect their offline world to the online one. It, therefore, connects all forms and sources of information. As a result, if the norms of communication between citizens had not changed on social media, the complementing role between both medias in Egypt would have not occurred to the extent it did. Although social media users formed a minor percentage of the population, their new norms of communication are what created an avenue for the complementary role of both media. Without these new norms of communication, social media would have not had news to disseminate, so it would have had nothing with which to complement traditional media. Therefore, the emerging norms of communication explained by Van Dijck and Papacharissi are related to the idea of the architecture of social media that led to the emergence of convergence, which, in turn, led to the evolving of the Egyptian public sphere by encouraging citizens to participate in it.

#### **3.3.4 Changed Norms of Communication and Technology**

Shifts in technological, ideological, generational and communicative trends, are encompassed by the agenda setting theory (and associated research concerns) and as explained in the last section, are of importance in relation to Egypt and the events leading up to and succeeding the 2011 uprisings. This is because the events in question demonstrably reflect rapid and profound shifts in society-state relations, shifts that are necessarily reproduced in numerous socio-structural versions (Pace and Cavatorta, 2012). Revolutions, after all, have “multiple causes, including internal power struggles, relations, support, or ideological influences from other countries; and social and economic conditions that harm certain groups” (Turk et al., 2014). Thus, it is logical that the Egyptian uprising was not simply *brought about by social media*, or any one other isolated factor; it pertains, rather, to complex, multifarious and interconnected causes of which social media are but one. Moreover, the relationship between social media and



traditional media within this broader framework is equally complex, seeing as the current globalised and technologized digital media landscape “has significantly upset the established mechanisms” of the communications industries (Meiselwitz, 2017). As a consequence, it follows that the nature of how people engage with, interpret and react to media has similarly experienced radical shifts. Indeed, in general, media consumption patterns are prone to exhibit the “co-existence of rapid and radical shifts” (Powell, 2013). The Egyptian situation might, furthermore, be seen as a prime case-in-point of such rapidity. As Joshua Stacher quite accurately explains: “in a mere eighteen days, Egypt went from a model of authoritarian durability under Mubarak to experiencing a historic political revolution” (Fiedler and Osiewicz, 2015). Resultantly, the case entails transformational rapidity in the extreme. So, in addressing the transformations of the Egyptian mediasphere, even if one confines analysis to the decade before the uprisings alone, one is dealing with vast and precipitous political, social, structural, cultural, technological and communicative change – in degrees which are perhaps without precedent.

The increasingly political nature of the shifts in media technology and consumption habits have already been addressed by agenda-setting theorists (Schudson, 1995), especially inasmuch as they relate to “fostering democratic citizenship” (Johnson, 2013). However, the particulars of the Egyptian mediasphere surrounding the 2011 uprising represent a highly unique case study in which each discrete phase in (what turned out to be) the revolutionary process saw distinct adaptations in the dynamic relationship between the public, the media, and the agenda which obtained. On this analysis, palpable distinctions could be identified within the “nature of the media system” itself, in the times running up to, during, and following the uprising. As Anthony Olorunnisola and Aziz Douai argue:

During the revolution the media played a role in mobilising political activists and coordinating protestors on the ground, as well as documenting arrests and abuse against the protestors, thus promoting political activism inside Egypt and boosting awareness on the international front. This role changed to engaging in nation building, democracy building,

and consensus building in the post-revolutionary phase, with a remarkable shrinking in the mobilisation function, which prevailed during the revolution (Olorunnisola and Douai, 2013).

So, the agenda-setting function and processes at work apparently shifted in line with the demands of the specific contexts at play; which is to suggest that multiple agendas were at issue. This implies that, in the Egyptian context, there were various topics of media attention, working in a pragmatic fashion to shift popular focus to whatever specific item demanded most immediate address. Accordingly, the position of agenda setting within this complex matrix of variegated causes and effects logically demands a critical approach with equal scope for complexity and diversity.

#### **3.4. Changing Landscapes of Place, Politics and Cognition: Social Media And Agenda Setting**

Media and technology researchers have argued that the contemporary world shows “signs that we are entering an era of unprecedented technological and societal change”, a time of “immersive virtual worlds and augmented reality” that is fundamentally changing the primary modes of “organising human interaction” (Olleros and Zhegu, 2016). It is difficult to overstate the technologically disruptive and socio-culturally transformative dimensions of these shifts. On this analysis, one can argue that all parts of the globe, and every element of human endeavour, comes in some sense or another under the influence of the media. This means that societies all over the world are “being reshaped, for better or for worse, by changes in the global media and information environment. So, too, are the everyday lives of their citizens” (Lievrouw and Livingstone, 2009). Furthermore, the purview of new media technology appears to comprise an ever-expanding compass of influence, extending to domains of experience that were traditionally excluded from technological mediation of this kind. The “digital influence” in question, then, is only increasing, coming evermore to intersect the seemingly physical and material domains of human experience, items of sexuality, gender, power and identity (Kroker and Kroker, 2013). In a similar

vein, it is hard to exaggerate the pervasiveness, the penetration of such new media into multiple spheres of experience, in today's world. Digital media devices are now a staple of everyday life in almost every aspect, including such mundane and pedestrian activities as eating and sleeping, exercise, commuting, dressing, and so forth (Felski, 2002). Indeed, from one perspective, it is arguably unrealistic to believe one can live beyond the reach of social media. This is the case even if the individual chooses to avoid directly interacting with software, because "much code is engaged, at a distance, in the provision of contemporary living" (Kitchin and Dodge, 2011). Hence new media represent a paradigm change in the very base-level ways in which society is structured.

Necessarily, such wide-scale, deep-reaching and profoundly resonant technological changes will exert a forceful influence on the nature, not only of mass communications, but of *all communication*. McCombs (2005) notes that the Internet has affected several radical transformations in the world of communications technologies. This included the technological advances that have led to numerous new platforms and devices coming to the fore. Also, it includes "E-mail, online newspapers, chat rooms and websites representing every ideological, commercial and personal niche [that] have changed the communication behaviours of millions of people across the world and opened vast new territories to communication researchers" (McCombs, 2005). The emergence of social media changed the traditional production/consumption paradigm, giving users the power to create and circulate content autonomously and with relative ease. This development has been accompanied by a new species of what has been called "interactive culture"; such culture enables users to simultaneously become producers, for "they participate in the construction of online spaces while at the same time consuming the content generated by others" (Gane and Beer, 2008). Hence "interactive multimedia" and "immersive technology" afford "telepresence" and "interactivity" in modes without historical precedent (Kacunko, 2015). This proffered uniqueness is evident in the continuous connectedness which characterises the new media-sphere, where new and pervasive imagined communities are in action, where subjects are perpetually connected as nodes in "virtual communities" constituted of "webs of personal relationships in cyberspace" (Wagner, 2001). The Internet has continued "this

turn toward living” in “networked societies”, where “boundaries are more permeable, interactions are with diverse others, linkages switch between multiple networks”; and “work and community networks are diffuse and sparsely knit, with vague, overlapping, social and spatial boundaries” (Wellman and Haythornthwaite, 2002). Considering the rapid, heterogeneous, unprecedented and seismic nature of these advancements in communications technologies, and their impact on diverse areas of society, agenda setting theory arguably faces a considerable critical challenge. A particular issue in this respect is analysing agendas will “become increasingly difficult as sources of news expand”, which, in turn, will render any measurement of the impact of the “news agenda” problematic as “people filter and personalise their news using new media technologies” (Chaffee and Metzger, 2001). These challenges are sizeable. After all, “we have witnessed the fastest evolution in communications technology in human history, and along with it the evolution of communication conceptions and theories to assess its impact” (Weinmann et al., 2016). However, the methodological difficulties at play are far from insurmountable. Simply, the critical apparatus needs to be re-calibrated to accommodate for the new forms of mass communications, addressing the fact that, as McCombs (2005) acknowledges, the Internet is now “the new frontier for research” in agenda setting (McCombs, 2005).

So, today, the mass media are - in line with Moore’s Law - in a continual and expeditious state of evolution and adaptation. Of key concern for agenda setting theory, here, is the way in which shifts in the nature of communications technologies allow Internet users to set their own news agendas, and to locate and collaborate with like-minded actors within virtual communities (around the world) – alternate public spheres. The agenda is no longer an issue which pertains solely to “elite members of the press” (McCombs, 2005) dictating the narrative. Nowadays, polycentric communicative networks render ever more important the role of the shared values of a particular, ideologically aligned community. Previously, Margaret Deery and Robin Shaw (1999) had theorised that group affiliations would bear a significant influence on the individual, in terms of how that individual decoded media agendas. Matthew Ragas and Marilyn Roberts (2009) hold that groups constitute highly significant units of analysis in the

context of new media, seeing as they serve an essential bridging function between horizontal and vertical media. So understood, people are seen to associate themselves, horizontally, via interpersonal and social interactions, with media relating to their personal interests; and, vertically, via mainstream traditional media (i.e. media sources in which the participant plays no agenda-shaping role). This confluence of horizontal/vertical media engagement has been termed “agenda melding”, and entails that “audiences are not passive but actively select messages from the plethora of those available”, with individuals “expressing and perhaps reinforcing their personal values and attitudes through the messages selected” (Kaid and Holtz-Bacha, 2008). Specifically as this relates to the new media-sphere, Donald Shaw and David Weaver note that “social media such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, and the availability of cell phones, email, and other media have vastly expanded the social landscape” such that we “mix agenda objects and attributes from a variety of media to construct a picture of the world” (Bruns et al., 2015). So, while agenda setting traditionally places emphasis on the “connection between medium and audience”, more recent approaches also look to the media choices audiences make, and how those “choices rise from their own established values and attitudes” (Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch, 2009). Therefore, in the words of Shaw and Weaver, agenda-melding represents a mode of combining different kinds of agendas whereby we “balance agendas of civic community and our valued reference communities with our views and experiences to create a satisfying picture of the world” (Bruns et al., 2015). On this view, then, agenda melding is not a substitute for media agenda setting; instead, it works to account for the reasons that media agenda-setting efficacy is variable among different groups, individuals and types of media.

Increasingly, then, the critical lens of agenda theory has been directed toward the more complex and hybridised communicative modes, which obtain in the contemporary new-media landscape, with “agenda melding” coming to particular prominence. With regard to radical politics and social media, therefore, agenda melding is at the forefront because media sources outside the mainstream may promulgate foment and, indeed, revolution in ways which institutional outlets cannot. Obviously this trait of social media poses particular implications for repressive nations where traditional media are tightly controlled. In the case of

the Tunisian uprising, for example, social media afforded an unprecedented tool for “amassing support, communicating with like-minded people, and spreading the word”, thus establishing a powerful exemplar (Killian and McManus, 2015).

A special point of strength is that social media, as networked technology possess something of “an ungovernable quality, resisting definition, operating through decentralised activities that make regulation or censorship increasingly difficult” (Lloyd, 2001). Moreover, because social media sources are virtual, decentralised and bi-directional, emanating from numerous sites simultaneously, they have no one physical source location (such as a broadcasting house, printing house, etc) which may be shut down. This creates a structural problem for repressive regimes who seek to occlude the information flow, because the flow has no tributary or outlet; instead, the information is multitudinously reproduced at multiple diverse sites, at numerous times. With social media, it therefore follows, the “efficacy is in its aggregate effect, an effect which is able to blunt traditional media’s singular agenda setting effect” (Meraz, 2011). In this regard, it follows that social media may be understood as a “reflection of the public agenda” (Garcia, 2014). Moreover, because social media users are participants in (horizontal) online communities, they have a (potentially) global group of collaborators who can help them spread their messages out there, even if governments seek to block or ban Internet traffic domestically. The issue is further compounded for would-be censors when such virtual communities utilise peer-to-peer (network) technology in order to disseminate communications. With peer-to-peer technology, each computer “running a distributed peer-to-peer client program becomes a node in a self-organising network of thousands of computers [. . .] because distributed file-sharing networks have no central server, they are very difficult to shut down” (Fries and Fries, 2005). Accordingly such networked technology, in the hands of the populace, represents a grave threat to the state censor indeed. Hence scholars note that, within the Arab world, “ruling elites fear the Internet as a conduit for political and moral subversion; and this fear has dominated the discourse on the use of the technology” (Hammond, 2007). Clearly, the transformation in technology and communication norms affected the way agenda setting function works, among with other aspects that will be discussed throughout the chapter.

As has been demonstrated above, then, there is a scholarly trend which espouses the putative liberating power of social media to disrupt traditional sites of agenda-building and agenda-setting. Thus, new media technologies have the potential to “give more power to people whose agendas would not normally be reported in the mass media” (Chaffee and Metzger, 2001). This is largely the consequence of the altered power relations enabled by structural shifts in production/distribution dynamics, whereupon the decentralised nature of the Internet means that, in contrast to previous times, all users have (potentially) equal opportunity to contribute to news discourse and thereby to shape news agendas.

In any event, there is a solid critical consensus attesting to the fact that, in one way or another, for better or for worse, these new technologies are fundamentally changing the nature of the relationship between the public and the media (see for instance, Gillmor, 2004; Boyd and Ellison, 2008; Karlsson, 2011).

#### **3.4.1. Agenda Setting, Agenda Melding: Leading up to, During, and After the Revolution in Egypt**

In the decades leading up to the revolution, the media sphere in Egypt witnessed many changes, small transformations which together led to a profound transformation.

The case is complex. The true trajectory of the Egyptian media-sphere remains to be decided. What is clear is that online technologies and social media will necessarily play an important role in whatever is to come. One study declares “that Egypt is among the top five countries in the world in terms of Internet users, Facebook, Twitter, and other forms of social media and exchange-of-information vehicle” (El-Bendary, 2013). Moreover, in the post-revolutionary turbulence, social media platforms continue to provide a site in which dissident or otherwise marginal views may be expressed and, therefore, circulated more widely. Thus, the social media landscape, while increasingly fragmented, nevertheless offers a vital resource in enabling those voices who wish to expose the regime’s human rights violations, without the fear of repression coming to them; this is particularly relevant inasmuch as social media offer a certain amount of anonymity. The rapid rate of technological advancement, in conjunction with the

increasingly expansive applications of pervasive media, throw further uncertainty on the future of mass communications in general and regarding Egypt in particular. This does not, however, mean that agenda setting theory will have no place in whatever media paradigm comes to crystallise. Indeed, as Hoi Tran (2014) argues, even though developments which come out of online technologies have failed to completely revolutionise the “traditional understanding of agenda-setting theory”, they nevertheless have transformed the “complicated relationships through which the media agenda is built” (Bruns et al., 2015). Following this analysis, it seems reasonable to assert that new developments in technology and communications will necessarily spawn tandem developments in communications theory. At this particular time, in which Egypt is still undergoing a transformative phase, agenda-setting theorists must pay particular attention to new forms and themes that emerge in the communications landscape. In this vein, the impact of a convergent media environment on the uprising is one such new form that must be considered.

### **3.5. Exploring the Impact of the Convergent Media Environment on the Uprising using the Concept of Social Capital**

Technologically, as previously explained, social media facilitates new forms of communication between individuals and groups of people, which are then used in a convergent media environment. These forms of communication build on longstanding cultural norms and practices, such as the development of trust and relationships, exchange of information and goods, and collective action. Indeed, an emerging trend in the sociological academic literature of the last 30 years has been the discussion and analysis of the concept of “social capital” – a term used to describe the political, economic and social value of ‘social networks’. In order to contextualise this analysis of social media more fully, this section will highlight the key contours of recent thinking on the importance of social capital with a particular focus on its impact on collective political action in rural Egypt. Moreover, as part of the aim of this thesis is to explore social media use in rural areas in the context of the convergent media environment, some of the literature regarding the varying ways in which social capital operates in urban settings will also be discussed.



### **3.5.1. Background: the concept of social capital**

The term ‘social capital’ may first have appeared in a book published in 1916 by author Lyda Hanifan who described it as “those tangible assets [that] count for most in the daily lives of people: namely goodwill, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse among the individuals and families who make up a social unit”. It was not until the 1980s and 1990s, however, that the term became consistently adopted and explored in the academic literature. Whereas ‘physical capital’ describes physical objects and human capital, and which attributes political and economic characteristics to the individual, ‘social capital’ is described in relation to the interactions and discourses within a group of individuals (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Coleman 1988). Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, for example, differentiated social capital from economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). He defined social capital as, "the aggregate of the actual or potential resource which are linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu, 1986). He clarifies that it is the sum of the resources, which may be actual or virtual, that individuals or the group accrues as a result of their relationships (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Similarly, Mikael Rostila indicates that social capital refers to the social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that are derived from them. Thomas Sander defined social capital as the collective value of people who know each other (which he referred to as social networks), and have norms of reciprocity that are characterised by the desire to do things for one another (Sommerfeldt, 2013).

The literature on social capital consists of two strands: the first strand focuses primarily on internal relationships within a collective group or organisation (bonding). This refers to the establishment and use of social capital within homogenous groups (Putnam, 1986) and the relationships individuals have with people close to them, such as family and friends (Aldrich and Meyer, 2014). The second strand of social capital literature focuses on external relationships that actors develop and maintain with other actors (bridging) (Putnam, 1986; Adler and Kwon, 2002). ‘Bridging’ describes the way in which social capital is used by individuals in social networks to deploy financial or human capital or form organisations and networks with other groups of people (Burt 1992, 1997; Portes

1998; Knoke 1999). Daniel Aldrich and Michelle Meyer (2014) observed that the horizontal networks formed as a consequence of ‘bridging’ between individual citizens and heterogeneous groups are instrumental in achieving cohesion and pushing for a common cause that is of benefit to the whole community. These heterogeneous groups can also be responsible for driving political change through the ability to share, debate and formulate ideas aimed at promoting the public good.

Robert Putnam (1995) observed that social capital could be categorised into two sub-sources which he described as consummatory and instrumental. For Putnam, consummatory social capital means “features of social organizations, such as networks, norms, and trust, that facilitate action and cooperation for mutual benefit.” Consummatory capital is built up by maintaining societal contracts, following rules and obeying laws. By contrast, instrumental social capital is based on one’s societal surroundings and location – social capital as understood in this sense is accumulated through activities that establish and facilitate social obligations between individuals. Instrumental social capital is based on the premise that individuals will donate their resources without necessarily seeking payment, but owing to the fact that they are members of the same social structure (Aldrich and Meyer, 2014). Resources do not have to be explicitly financial but may involve time and energy. Individual devotion to facilitating a better environment may therefore be described as the donating of resources, in this case one’s self for the public good. Viewing instrumental social capital in this light helps describe how groups at the forefront of political protest contribute to society by pursuing political change.

To what extent, then, has social capital been viewed in the literature as a factor in the formation of political movements and political change? Although a relatively new concept with regards to politics, researchers have argued that social capital is an important indicator of political participation. Social capital has been viewed as an antecedent in the development of civil society and behaviour which promotes the public good at the political level. It has been regarded as necessary for citizens and civic communities to demand more efficient public services and responsible leadership from their political institutions and personnel, raise concerns about actions undertaken by the government, and participate in

both elections and political protests (Zúñiga et al., 2012; Teney and Hanquinet, 2012). Francis Fukuyama (2006) argues that social capital has even facilitated the politicization of apolitical environments. The potential strength of social capital as a vehicle for political change is also evidenced by circumstances in which ruling governments have attempted to disrupt the formation of social capital in order to maintain power (Sommerfeldt, 2013). Whether citizens are actively engaged and involved in the political arena or are alienated and cynical non-participants, however, depends on the level of social capital within their respective community. The following section explores both non-geographic and geographic factors for variations in social capital. However, the discussion is contextualised through the latter since one of the key aspects being explored in this thesis is whether social media use and political participation varied in rural areas of Egypt during and after the Egyptian uprisings.

### **3.5.2 Key factors affecting social capital in society**

Other scholars argue that there are variations in the level of social capital depending on a range of geographic and non-geographic factors (Stephan et al., 1997). Social capital varies depending on certain non-geographic criteria such as education, access to technology, and cultural practices (Teney and Hanquinet, 2012) as well as political and religious ideologies or other cultural norms. However, it is clear that geographic location also appears to play an important role. Sandra Hofferth and John Iceland (1998), for example, found that people living in rural areas are much more likely to exclusively interact and exchange information as compared to those living in urban centres. The sense of cooperation in agrarian and tribal communities is higher than urban areas, partly due to pre-existing social relations in small groups of people that facilitate sharing of social capital (Geys and Murdoch, 2010; Putnam, 2000). According to Putnam, it is classified as “thin” trust because it is a generalized form of trust in the community as a whole not with close people and family, which would be classified as “thick” trust (Social Capital A Review of the Literature, 2001). It is possible that the growing accessibility of mass media is breaking down the boundaries between rural and urban social capital, as social interactions more closely align to national and even global norms disseminated in more homogenous media narratives (Valenzuela, 2013). However, demonstrates that

regional variations in access to infrastructure, social amenities and education still affects levels of social capital (Hopkins and Westergaard, 2004). Rural societal structures also appear to have different understandings of trust whereby certain local individual elites more clearly affect the decision-making of those lower in the hierarchy than they do in urban areas (Hopkins and Westergaard, 2004). For example, during the parliamentary elections in 2015 in Qalyoubia, one of Greater Cairo's governorates, which has a rural population, the majority of farmers trusted the opinions of the head of a trusted family and voted for the candidate that he recommended, who ended up winning the elections (Saif, 2015). As stated by Mohamed Moussa, one of the farmers who voted in this election, "if the head of the Saif family recommends someone then he is the most trustworthy candidate" (Moussa, 2015). Rural environments also tend to have a collective environment fostered by trust among individuals whereas urban centres tend to have higher levels of individualism (Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs, 2011).

The literature seems to suggest that social capital in rural and urban areas vary in key ways. This is significant as the uprising in Egypt was carried forward by a younger, urban, and technologically-savvy elite. This demographic is more likely to have had a higher level of social capital in terms of access to information, education, and social contacts. It perhaps belonged to a more individualistic and larger society which made engaging in politics in urban areas more straightforward, yet engagement in politics in rural areas was not as straightforward and related to more factors such as trust in the hierarchy of certain rural areas. Perhaps the rise of social media is able to explain this paradox. The following section will consider what impact social media has had on our understanding of social capital and, among that, if social capital differences in different areas affect political participation.

### **3.5.3. Social Capital and Social Media**

Aldrich and Meyer (2014) argue that public enlightenment leads to increased political engagement and social media has had a profound influence on people's access to political information. One particular element of a new digitally connected public sphere is access to social media tools that facilitate the easy

exchange of information and the opportunity to relate to people in completely new ways (Lee, 2015). The question arises, therefore, as to whether these new forms of social capital engendered by social media are distinct or merely an extension of the traditional concept of social capital. Homera Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2017) presents social media social capital as a novel empirical and conceptual construct that complements the traditional face-to-face form of social capital. Based on data collected in the US, in the form of a two-wave panel, the study tested whether online social capital and offline social capital are related. Additionally, the researchers sought to establish how the two forms of social capital can relate to various types of citizenship, both offline and online. The findings indicated that social media social capital and offline social capital exhibit distinct features and patterns, leading to different understandings of citizenship and varying levels of participatory behaviours in politics. Analysing their conclusions, based on theoretical developments in the field of pro-democratic political discussions and social capital, it can be argued that social media provides a unique form of weakly regulated deliberation and communication platforms which engender social capital, allowing citizens to collectively add their voice in the political conversations in their countries, yet whether it complements traditional social capital or not differs from each country to the other based on its circumstances.

Another sense in which social media has altered the nature of social capital is in the emergence of new ‘trusted’ actors who are – at least in part – trusted on the basis of an established online presence. If social capital’s importance can be magnified in the political environment by the ‘presence of capable agents’ who are responsible for helping the public in decision-making - as Robert Jackman and Rose Miller (1998) contend - then it is possible that the online environment has led to the emergence of new political ‘leaders’ who foster new forms of social capital. With reference to Egyptian uprisings, this can be seen in the actions of citizen journalists and bloggers such as Wael Ghonim who fuelled the uprisings by informing the public about the atrocities committed by Mubarak’s regime (Heydemann, 2015).

Critics of social media have pointed out how they weaken strong bonds in favour of a range of weaker connections. However, a number of studies have

suggested that weak ties are important (Granovetter, 1985) and, perhaps, politically so for political activity and large protests which rely on people cooperating with people they have never met before. Large political protests require ‘bridging’ connections and this is precisely what social media has provided. One aspect of this research that naturally arises from the research questions is the idea that regional differences in social capital may impact the usage of different media; while not explicitly investigated, this research does take into consideration that there are slight variations between governorates in this regard.

### **3.6. Conclusion: The contribution of this thesis to the academic literature**

This chapter has provided an extensive overview of the literature concerning the political context of Egypt prior to the uprising in 2011, the Egyptian media system in relation to Habermas’s concept of the public sphere, the emergence of the convergent media environment affected by agenda setting techniques, and the emergence of social media in the context of the concept of social capital. From the analysis above, a number of gaps in the literature can be identified. First, although a number of studies have explored the role of social media in political uprisings and in Egypt in particular, there remains a need for further empirically-tested findings. In particular, many studies consider social media tools in isolation whereas the aim of this thesis is to consider their role in the political uprisings in the context of a convergent media system in which satellite television was also a key player. One of the aims of this thesis is to take a more focused and detailed approach to television and social media use in Egypt’s varying regions. Second, most of the studies have focused on urban Egypt while neglecting rural areas, which represent half of the population; yet rural areas are the focus of this thesis. Third, few studies have sought to understand how varying levels of social capital in rural areas might provide a window into how social media use affected the course of the uprisings and its relation to political participation.

To address these gaps, the following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. To what extent did social media change individual norms of political interaction with the public sphere of rural Egypt during and after 2011 due to its convergence with television media?
2. How does social capital in rural Egypt affect the political interaction of citizens in the public sphere considering the social media access circumstances?
3. How did media coverage of the uprisings impact micro public spheres and so feelings of empowerment and social capital in rural Egypt?

## **4. Chapter 3 - Qualitative Research Method, Going Beyond Urban Egypt**

### **4.1. Introduction**

This section provides a description of the research methodology adopted in the collection and analysis of data relating to the media environment of Egypt, before and after the uprisings. As observed by Gary Thomas (2011), the methodology of a study defines the specific stages in which the researcher will obtain data relevant to the research objectives. The stages of conducting the study involve selection of a suitable sample size, collection of data, and data analysis which will culminate in the presentation of findings. Thomas argues that selection of an appropriate methodology is central to any research study as it determines the accuracy of the conclusions drawn. In this case, a qualitative approach has been chosen. According to Alan Bryman (2012), a qualitative approach offers a rich and comprehensive picture of why people act the way they do and how they act and feel about different situations. A qualitative approach can provide new insights about and around the topic, which may not have been envisaged in research plans and objectives. This chapter will analyse why this specific methodology has been selected, how it assists in achieving the research goals of this thesis, the limitations, and any ethical considerations associated with its use. It is important to begin, however, by acknowledging that in order to select suitable methods, researchers should be aware of their situation within philosophical research paradigms and should employ a coherent research design (Singmann and Klauer, 2011).

### **4.2. Research Philosophy**

One central aim of any piece of research is to create reliable and valid findings. In recent years, the idea that social phenomena can be ‘objectively’ observed in a ‘detached’ manner has been heavily criticized in the social sciences. Aware of these limitations, researchers have increasingly used a ‘reflexive’ approach to ensure they are aware of the ways in which their own background, sample selections, methods, framing and communication style influence their research findings (Malterud, 2001). It is particularly important, as highlighted by



Mike Pedler (2012), that any researcher be aware of the social forces which might influence the manner in which he or she conducts research and analyses findings. As well as helping in increasing awareness of limitations and biases within the research, Wesam Darawsheh and Mandy Stanley (2014) argue that a reflexive stance promotes an enriched research engagement, which may help to provide an extensive analysis and conclusion to the study. Beyond my personal role, 'reflexive' research in social theory is a stance that emphasizes the circular relationship between cause and effect. This is particularly important when studying a new media environment, which appears to be characterized by the interactive flow of information between producers and consumers, rather than the pre-21<sup>st</sup> century norms of broadcast and mass media. One of the aims of the research of this thesis is to examine the relationship between the media and the actions of the public by analyzing how the two factors influenced each other during the uprisings of 2011. Here, again, a reflexive understanding of these processes will be helpful. Having outlined the broad philosophical underpinning, the overarching approach to the research will now be considered.

#### **4.2.1 Research Approach**

Deborah Gabriel (2013) describes a research approach as the guiding theoretical principle of how a study is conducted in order to achieve the objective of answering the research question. According to Henrick Singmann and Karl Klauer (2011), researchers may adopt two main approaches to conducting research: deductive or inductive. In many studies, however, researchers move back and forth between the deductive approach, which is based on identifying and testing theories or hypotheses, and the inductive, which tends towards developing a theory from the 'bottom up' through case studies. For this study, three central research questions have been formulated, which are open to exploration, but implicitly contain deductive theoretical propositions which will be tested during the course of the research. The first of these is:

1. To what extent did social media change individual norms of political interaction with the public sphere of rural Egypt during and after 2011 due to its convergence with television media?

The underlying assumption within this question is that social media and its convergent relationship with television has in fact made a difference to Egypt's public sphere. The openness of the question, however, facilitates a more inductive approach whereby research 'on the ground' will allow flexible consideration of what impact social media has had, rather than being limited by narrower assumptions.

The second and third research questions are:

1. How does social capital in rural Egypt affect the political interaction of citizens in the public sphere considering the social media access circumstances?
2. How did media coverage of the uprisings impact micro public spheres and so feelings of empowerment and social capital in rural Egypt?

Similarly, these questions contain the underlying assumption that social capital does affect political participation of citizens in the public sphere and that rural and urban cultural differences are likely to be a factor. However, the theory behind social capital's role will be built by inductively considering the data from Egypt's governorates rather than starting out with a strict set of hypotheses. In this way, the thesis will move back and forth between the deductive and inductive approaches.

#### **4.2.2. Research Design: A Qualitative Research Approach**

In any research design, it is essential to define the systematic formula and method the study will employ to meet the objective of answering the research questions (Boeije, 2009). Bryman (2012) underscores the need to select an appropriate methodology to develop data collection approaches and analyses that lead to accurate results from which comprehensive conclusions may be drawn.

A qualitative research approach has been chosen for this study. This method was chosen based on the necessity of the research to analyse the impact of the media during the uprisings, and attempting to understand the motivation for the use of social media during the period. According to Lisa Slevitch (2011), the qualitative approach involves the use of non-numerical data which is descriptive

in nature, as opposed to the quantitative approach which relies on numerical and empirical analysis of statistical data. Irene Gialdino (2011) points out that qualitative research is informed by the constructivist stance and is therefore subjective in nature. Constructivism emphasises the use of the researcher's knowledge and understanding to interpret natural phenomenon to develop knowledge. When conducting primary research, it is often necessary to apply personal knowledge and thoughts in the interpretation of reality. As such, the qualitative design provides an effective approach for examining and evaluating the responses of the participants in the field. The use of descriptive data facilitates an in-depth analysis of the reasons or motivations which underpin the phenomenon (Mack et al., 2011). Therefore, the method will prove effective in the analysis of the use of social media and television during the Egyptian uprisings, and in the acquisition of information regarding such usage in the Egyptian governorates.

The qualitative approach yields a number of advantages. For instance, Stanley Thomson (2011) notes that it enables the application of simple structural techniques in the data collection process. Hence, it is possible to acquire data from a wide range of sources, which enhances the validity of research and the generalizability derived from the analysis of data. The facility to collect views and experiences provides a critical component to an understanding of the actions of people and their motivations towards behaving in a particular way (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, using a qualitative approach will enable an understanding of motivations relating to the use of social media in the Egyptian uprisings. To understand a certain aspect more profoundly, one has freedom of exploration since qualitative research is not limited to definable variables. As such, it is possible to make in-depth exploration through the use of complex questions. The ability to explore deeply enables further understanding of the central themes of the phenomenon being studied. Mack et al. (2011) cite that the qualitative approach tends to avoid prejudgments by analyzing the views of the subjects from their own perspective.

However, the qualitative research method bears limitations which may impact how the study is carried out. For instance, Mack et al. (2011) point out that collection of qualitative data is often time-consuming. Hence, it is difficult to

conduct research using large samples, which may increase the possibility of generalizing the findings. Furthermore, qualitative research is dependent on the skill of the researcher. Since the research is intended to create a general picture regarding the impact and usage of mass media during the Egyptian uprisings, a small sample size may limit the potential to draw relevant insights that represent those of the entire population. However, this study collects data from different governorates to minimize the effects of such limitations, and ensure that the findings provide an accurate representation of the population during the uprisings. Despite the limitations, the method is considered appropriate owing to the importance of descriptive data, and the need for in-depth exploration of the issue of social media use among the population.

In this study, an iterative approach has been employed in the service of the qualitative design. First, population data was used to help with selection of the representative sample for Egypt's rural governorates. After identification, a qualitative approach was implemented to target the people living in the selected governorates. The specific method that was adopted for use in collection of data in the field is semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews illuminate in-depth individual experiences, perceptions and understandings of their use of social media, the state of the public sphere and the extent to which they feel they are able to participate in politics. The method was intended to enable the gathering of data relating to social networks, general media habits and the use of social media. In this way, the idea was to use the advantages of the qualitative approach to improve the validity, reliability and value of the study. The scope of each method in answering the research question is explained in more detail in the sections that follow.

The aim of the sample of governorates was to select a range of governorates in terms of total geographical population and percentage of the population defined as rural. This was intended to enable an assessment of the circumstances of rural areas in terms of their social capital, social media and media use, and level of political participation that has not been focused on previously in relation to the 2011 uprisings. In order to produce a sample that would appropriately represent the whole of Egypt, it was necessary to select a governorate from each of the four geographical regions, namely: Nile Valley and Nile Delta, Western Desert,

Eastern Desert and Sinai Peninsula. Therefore, the selected governorates were Qalyoubia, Minya, South Sinai and Menoufia. For the rural areas, Qalyoubia was chosen because it is a mixed governorate with villages and a city, and close to Cairo and the Delta governorates. The study also selects the South Sinai governorate because it has tribal traditions that need to be assessed whilst considering social capital. The focus was also on Upper Egypt’s Minya because it is one of the main governorates in that region. Finally, the last governorate selected was Menoufia because it is one of the most populated governorates in Egypt.

<b>Governorate</b>	<b>Total Population</b>	<b>Urban Population (%)</b>
Qalyoubia	5,105,972	44.7%
Menoufia	3,941,293	20.6%
Minya	5,156,702	18.9%
South Sinai	167,426	51.1%

Urban Population in Four Key Governorates in Egypt (Total & Percentage)

Source: (CAPMAS, 2015)

#### **4.2.2.1. Semi-Structured Interviews**

From the demographic data, purposive non-probability sampling was used. This sample of individuals who gave their permission to be contacted were selected for follow-up semi-structured interviews. It has been noted that non-probability sampling is useful if one wishes to study “particular phenomena with a potential to generate valuable insights” and that non-probability sampling can be used for studying “existing theoretical insights or developing new ones.” As such, a non-probability sample allows for precision and exploration, both of which are key for qualitative research. The open nature of purposive non-probability sampling allows for an expert to select “cases with a specific purpose in mind” (Showkat and Parveen, 2017), further enhancing the exploratory nature of the research (Tansey, 2007).

Semi-structured interviews are carried out in a fairly open framework allowing for focused conversational communication. Such structure allowed for deviation from the structured questions as needed and in order to acquire in-depth data on specific aspects of importance (Peters and Halcomb, 2015). This, once again, was aided by the purposive non-probability sampling, which allowed for the choosing of a sample divided along social, political, and gender lines across all four governorates. This in turn allowed for wider exploration of the subject, as well as opportunity for unexpected themes to arise and be considered, as will be discussed later in the chapter. The semi-structured interviews were used to attempt to unravel social media aspects such as access, whilst also exploring barriers that respondents faced in terms of access to social media. Interviews were used to examine social media barriers and access in the respective governorates. It was also the objective of the research to uncover data regarding the political interaction during the uprisings whilst considering the aspect of social capital among political participation. The semi-structured interviews therefore played a central role in determining the political climate during and after the uprisings by learning from the respondents about their support for political movements, and about whether they were involved in the parliamentary elections. Such an approach aided in analyzing political interaction through a determination of political participation of people in the governorates before, during and after the uprisings. This method's suitability in comparison to others was affirmed in the sense that it allowed for a close analysis of the differences in feelings and actions that interviewees expressed from one area as compared to another. If other methods had been chosen that did not include direct contact, such as questionnaires, it would not have been possible to view and record reactions, which are important in such research for the evaluation of how different citizens react in one area compared to another. These reactions were significant for the demonstration of the validity of the social capital concept in the context of this research.

Given the importance of the semi-structured interviews as primary sources of data for this research, several criteria were identified early on for who to interview. At the outset, it was decided there would be 12 interviewees from each of the four governorates - Qalyoubia, Menoufia, Minya, and South Sinai - for a

total of 48 interviewees. Each region had criteria to ensure variety, and to provide insight on tensions within the community as a result of politics. Different perspectives were needed, so there would need to be social media users as well as non-social media users to uncover the differences in how interviewees received and circulated information. Males and females were also required to highlight whether gender-based differences existed.

Given these needs, six criteria were decided on. First, one individual would need to be influential within the governorate. This was the member of parliament, or the individual financially supporting the member of parliament's campaign. This individual was, at a minimum, forty years old and male; generally, this influential individual would not use social media, though his supporters and campaign might. Second, one interviewee would be an opponent of the first individual. This opposition could take many forms; the individual could be an unsuccessful challenger for the parliament seat, the supporter of the unsuccessful candidate, or the financial backer of the unsuccessful candidate. Typically, this individual would also be male, and would commonly be a social media user since their support would not be as strong in the governorate and, as such, social media would be used to compensate for that lack of an established base. Generally, this individual would be younger than the first individual, meaning that they would also be more familiar with social media. The third and fourth individuals would be female, and both would be highly involved in supporting the current member of parliament (or his financial backer) and the unsuccessful candidate, or his supporter or financial backer. In both cases, this female would be influential in society, not necessarily educated, and non-social media users since word-of-mouth representation is more common in the governorates being discussed.

Finally, two male and two female voters who supported the influential individual would need to be interviewed, and two male and two female voters who supported his unsuccessful opposition would need to be interviewed. Ideally, one male and one female from each political camp would be a social media user, and the others would be non-social media users. The intention here was balance; interviewing both social media users and non-social media users would illuminate the differences between them in terms of how they received information, how

they circulated information, and how they were affected by both the information and social media in general.

However, one important aspect that was decided upon was that, depending on the level of saturation of information, the number of interviewees per region could increase or decrease. In the end, this was necessary for Minya and South Sinai, since high levels of repetition and saturation were reached relatively early in the semi-structured interviews and, as such, it was not necessary to interview specifically based on those criteria. Regardless of social standing, gender, or influence, interviewees in South Sinai and Minya provided answers that proved similar enough to each other that no new information was being provided. This was the case in terms of answers to the pre-set questions and the questions that naturally arose from them. As such, for Minya and South Sinai, only six interviewees were necessary. This, as will be highlighted in the following chapters, relates to the cultural and communal realities of these governorates. For Qalyoubia and Menoufia, in contrast, twelve interviewees were in fact needed for each governorate. Therefore, there was a total of 36 interviewees, instead of the intended 48.

During the conversations themselves, it was necessary to ask the respondents an opening question regarding the research, which in turn provided them with the option to accept or decline participating in the study, and to state how they feel and their position on the subject. Agreement to participate was followed by asking the individual pre-set questions and answers recorded using audio equipment and paper. All interviews were fully audio-recorded. This data was supplemented by information acquired from data on demographics, and observational notes taken shortly after completion of the interviews.

The pre-set questions each related to at least one specific research question, although the answers received may have illuminated on others. In many cases, the questions themselves were open-ended yet allowed for engagement with the key topic. For the first research question - if social media changed individual norms of political interaction with the public sphere of rural Egypt during and after 2011 due to its convergence with television media - interviewees were asked questions that related to their media consumption and involvement in political discussions.



Examples include questions about whether social media was considered important before the uprisings, if interviewees used social media for updates and how, their general routines during the 18 days of the 2011 uprisings, with whom interviewees discussed politics, and how the uprisings affected their consumption of media. The aim of these questions was to establish interviewee viewpoints on the media and political interaction, and to allow for open-ended discussion regarding whether there were differences after 2011 as compared to before.

For the second research question - how social capital in rural Egypt affected the political interaction of citizens in the public sphere considering the social media access circumstances - the pre-set questions focused on community, interviewee opinions on strangers, where interviewee information on the uprisings came from, what interviewees viewed as being necessary in a parliamentary candidate, and how (or if) the uprisings changed interviewee views on politics. These questions allowed for links to be made between social capital, political interaction, and social media; as the following chapters will show, these were related and, as such, answering this research question required an analysis of all three factors.

Finally, for the third research question - how media coverage of the uprisings impacted micro public spheres and so feelings of empowerment and social capital in rural Egypt - the pre-set questions delved into the trustworthiness of different forms of media, how controlled each form of media was, how interviewees felt about the uprisings and about not being physically present in the epicenter of the protesting at Tahrir Square, as well as the differences in their feelings generally between 2011 and 2013 in regards to their community and their view on politics. Empowerment, as an emotion, required questions that delved into the emotional state of the interviewees rather than simply their opinions. As such, it was never addressed directly in the pre-set questions; rather, the pre-set questions allowed for answers that would address 'empowerment' implicitly.

Of course, other pre-set questions were asked that were open-ended and allowed for the semi-structured interview to evolve naturally and touch on the three research questions eventually. While this may have been time-consuming to an extent (Newton, 2010), it allowed the interviewer-interviewee relationship to

progress, while giving flexibility for unexpected themes to arise as will be shown later in the chapter.

### **4.2.3. Limitations**

Although flexibility in interviews helps in the acquisition of in-depth data, Lisa Given (2008) suggests that it may lessen reliability. Given attributes this to the provision of a diverse range of information and respondents, providing unnecessary descriptions where simple answers would suffice. Nigel Newton (2010) notes that interviews may be time-consuming to set-up and carry out. In addition, interviews may be costly owing to the need to travel to different geographical regions to interview participants face-to-face. Finally, a number of studies have indicated that the interviewee/interviewer relationship and interaction significantly affects the nature of the data collected. As a result of these concerns, particularly reliability, secondary data (as well as statistical evidence) has been found, and conditions have been placed regarding its collection, in order to ensure reliability through diversity and range.

### **4.2.4. Secondary Data Collection**

The data from the semi-structured interviews was complemented by relevant secondary data, including general websites, journal articles, government websites and mass media outlets including newspapers and their websites. The use of this secondary data was intended to serve two distinct purposes. Mass media outlets and their websites, as well as general websites, were used to cross-reference dates, events, and timelines as iterated by the interviewees. General websites and journal articles were used for the same purpose, with the addition that general sentiments and qualitative data related to the sample of semi-structured was also considered. In this fashion, the accuracy and generalizability of the semi-structured interviews was considered in light of the viewpoints of the time, in order to better understand whether - and how - their sentiments were reflected outside of the sample.

The secondary data collected in this thesis arose out of three distinct needs. First, if an interviewee (or multiple interviews) referred to a particular piece of

data - for example, including a Facebook page, a news channel, or an opinion stated by some public figure - then this was researched, and the interviewee's comments were considered in light of the findings. Second, if there was some informational gap in an interviewee's comments, or some sentiment of uncertainty, secondary data was used to verify the statement. Examples of this include dates, locations, or statements made by news outlets or government figures. Given that the topic of this study - the 2011 uprisings and their immediate aftermath - occurred between 3 and 7 years before the semi-structured interviews took place, some confusion was to be expected; secondary data filled this gap. Third, secondary data from the above-mentioned sources was used to provide contextual information regarding the time period, the timeline, and the political background in which this topic is embedded, and for the purpose of assessing after-the-fact statements from the semi-structured interviews in light of statements made at the time by citizens, the media, and other relevant parties.

In addition to relevant secondary data, statistical data was collected in relation to populations, demographics, urbanisation and Internet usage in the governorates. Once again, this arose out of several needs. The difference between statistical data and other secondary data however lies in the fact that the former was primarily relevant prior to the onset of the semi-structured interviews. First, given the importance of the semi-structured interviews and the consolidation of a range of governorates in terms of geographical population and percentage of the population defined as rural - to enable an assessment of the circumstances of rural areas in terms of their social capital, social media and media use, and level of political participation - statistical data regarding the governorates was necessary. This included which governorates to choose, Internet usage in each area, population size, and urban versus rural populations. On the macro level, the urbanisation level of Egypt was also significant.

There was however one notable exception, wherein statistical data was collected after the onset of semi-structured interviews. This was done to assess interview findings in terms of sub-thematic concerns, such as age difference, changes in voting behaviour, and Internet usage increase. Since these will be discussed in the following section, it is sufficient for now to note that statistical data always operated secondary to the semi-structured interviews in the sense that

its initial use was to identify necessary information for choosing the governorates assessed, and its later use was to provide quantitative feedback for the qualitative findings of the semi-structured interviews. In any case, the specifics of their use will be detailed in the following section.

#### **4.2.5. Data Analysis**

According to Karen Robson and Lawrence Neuman (2014), data analysis covers the approaches with which collected data is evaluated and interpreted in order to identify relationships with the proposed research questions. In order to effectively analyze and relate the information obtained from different respondents, it was necessary to have a structure for organizing and evaluating the data. Therefore, thematic analysis has been used for analyzing the data recorded from the semi-structured interview. According to Bryman (2008), the purpose of thematic analysis is to organize data so that one can “extract core themes that could be distinguished both between and within transcripts.” The primary benefit of thematic frameworks stems from the purpose of data analysis in general; Bryman (2008) notes that, since the data analysis phase is “fundamentally about data reduction,” unless one finds a way to reduce the amount of data collected “by grouping textual material into categories like themes [...] it is more or less impossible to interpret the material.”

The strategy used for organizing the thematic analysis conducted in this thesis is Framework, which was developed by the National Centre for Social Research (Bryman, 2008). This is a form of matrix “for ordering and synthesising data” by constructing an index of themes and subthemes (Bryman, 2008; Ritchie and Lewis, 2003), as seen in the Appendix. These themes can be common ideas, recurring motifs, or repetitive phrases, thoughts, or terms that occur within or across the semi-structured interviews. Through thorough re-reading of interview manuscripts, these common motifs are discovered and “applied to the data, which are organized initially into core themes, and [...] then displayed in terms of sub themes within the matrix and for each case” (Bryman, 2008). As the next section will highlight, some themes for this thesis were considered prior to the semi-structured interviews - and brought forward through the initial questions that make up the interviews - while others arose naturally.

Given Bryman's insights, this research has used a thematic framework for organizing and deriving meaningful insights from the interview data. A thematic framework was also used to analyze data collected on the influential media during the Egyptian uprisings, in order to facilitate the drawing of relevant conclusions about the research. Since it is always possible that important questions and issues not extensively explored may emerge in subsequent analyses, especially in a thematic analysis where some themes are considered beforehand and others arise naturally based on the semi-structured interviews, it was necessary to determine whether participants would be willing to participate in a re-interview if necessary. In any event, re-interviews did not prove necessary.

The second component of data analysis entailed comparison and identification of insights from statistical data obtained from official agencies and secondary sources. For instance, the statistical data collected provided an insight into Internet coverage in Egypt, which, in turn, facilitated the determination of Internet access before and after the uprisings. Other insights that were obtained from the statistical data collected are information relating to the age group of those who use and have access to the Internet, in comparison to the age group of individuals actively involved in political activities such as voting. Another aspect was a focus on the identification of relevant insights with regard to voting percentages between 2011-2015 per governorate. This entailed a comparison of the age groups involved in political participation, the changes in terms of enrolment in new political parties, and the number of candidates participating in parliamentary elections compared to pre-2011, since there has been only one parliamentary election post-2011.

The data analysis approaches were aimed at comparing the data obtained from the rural governorates in order to develop trends that relate to social media and television media usage in the regions. Statistics from secondary sources regarding Internet usage, television and social media were compared for different regions to determine trends in the media environment. The statistical data was used to corroborate the findings of the qualitative research. In addition, analysis also entailed comparing and relating information between the primary and secondary research in order to get a comprehensive view of the media environment before and after the uprisings. In the end, the objective of the analysis was to compare

the overall results of the study to the hypothesis presented by previous research regarding the media influence on the uprisings in Egypt.

#### **4.2.6. Themes of Primary Research**

Given the use of thematic analysis in this research, it is important to consider the themes themselves as well as their effect on the thesis. It must be noted here that the use of semi-structured interviews allowed for some themes to be considered beforehand, and for others to arise naturally as a result of commonalities in interviewee input and evaluation of their responses with the aim of extracting “core themes that could be distinguished both between and within transcripts” (Bryman, 2008). The core themes that were considered beforehand were change in political engagement before and after the uprisings, trust in media before and after the uprisings, strength of social ties prior to and after the uprisings, and convergence within the media in the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings. The two themes that arose naturally through the semi-structured interviews were the normalization of social media, and the expansion of social capital.

These themes aided in the analysis of social media’s role in affecting political interaction and interaction norms in rural Egypt, the role of social capital in the 2011 uprisings, the effect of social media on social capital, the viewpoint regarding the media during and after the 2011 uprisings, and the effect of social media and social capital on the public sphere. Given the three central research questions of this thesis, these themes enhanced the investigation and were considered throughout the analysis. As such, this section will highlight the relevant themes in terms of their relationship to the three central research questions of this thesis. For a deeper look into these themes, the Appendix provides a sample of the Framework matrix by which each theme was organized.

In terms of the first research question - the role of social media in relation to its effect on political interaction and interaction norms in rural Egypt - there were two common themes across all four of the governorates in which semi-structured interviews were conducted. The first of these was convergence. When asked

questions related to the media - such as how the uprisings affected their consumption of media, or the main form of media interviewees used during the uprisings - statements relating to convergence appeared consistently across all four governorates. Several sub-themes became evident when reviewing the transcripts, including: 2011 and convergence, and 2013 and convergence. The second theme, strength of social ties, also appeared consistently across the four governorates. Questions relating to discussion of politics, parliamentary elections, and community all yielded commonalities, and became sub-themes as a result. All four governorates placed importance on these areas and, as such, its importance as a theme was confirmed.

The second research question, which addressed the effect of social capital on political interaction among rural Egyptians in the public sphere with a consideration of rural interaction with social media, also led to several themes becoming evident in the semi-structured interviews. The primary theme, that was considered beforehand for the purpose of this thesis was that of political engagement before and after 2011. A key sub-theme here was engagement in parliamentary elections as compared to presidential elections. A second sub-theme was social capital as relating to political engagement, and whether the former strongly impacted the latter. Interestingly, one theme that arose naturally from discussions related to this research question was the normalisation of social media over time, which implied a connection between social capital and social media that had not been initially considered in the case of rural Egypt. This became a topic of interest; the following chapters delve deeply into this.

The final research question, which covered the effect of media coverage on the uprisings in rural Egypt in terms of the media's role in invigorating micro-public spheres and contributing to the strengthening of social capital in rural Egypt, was analysed using interview data which fit into two broad thematic areas. The first of these themes was trust in the media, with the sub-themes being state media as compared to private media, social media as compared to state media, and use of social media in state and private channels. A second theme, and one that arose naturally from the transcripts, was the expansion of social capital across

governorates both rural and urban, with the prime sub-themes being bridging, engagement in presidential elections, and discussion with strangers.

Earlier in this chapter, it was mentioned that the three central research questions were formulated with implicit deductive theoretical propositions, but were broad enough to facilitate a more inductive approach whereby research ‘on the ground’ would allow flexible consideration of what impact social media has had. The themes that arose naturally from the transcripts of the semi-structured interviews exist primarily due to the flexibility of this approach, and their exploration in this thesis lies in the openness of the research questions as well as the broad flexibility of the semi-structured interviews themselves.

In any case, as previously mentioned, these themes have proven useful for the analysis of the three central research questions, as well as in terms of fulfilling the aim of this thesis as a whole. For each research question, these themes were explored, allowing the data to be organized in such a fashion as to support a systematic qualitative analysis. As mentioned, the Appendix provides more detailed information by highlighting a sample of the Framework used for each theme.

#### **4.2.7 Ethics for Primary Research**

Ethics in research govern the application of ethical principles in the process of conducting studies. Bryman (2012) emphasizes the concept of informed consent and discusses the need to reveal as much information as needed to the participants. The principle of informed consent requires researchers to gain permission from an individual before conducting the study. Susan Kirk (2007) argues that informed consent can only be given upon clear comprehension and appreciation of the facts and consequences of the action. The first step in formulating an ethical approach is the full disclosure of the objectives and intentions of the study. Hence, the research ensured that participants were aware and understood the nature and objectives of the study, so that they were able to give their consent in an informed manner before proceeding. An information sheet was provided to all participants, including an outline of the aims and



objectives of the interview, information about how their data would be used, and an option of withdrawing from the study at any time by contacting the researcher.

Bryman (2012) suggests other important aspects of research ethics such as anonymity and confidentiality. As Kirk (2007) suggests, ethical concerns are likely to arise over the right to privacy which might stem from covert methods that violate the principles of informed consent, leading to the potential invasion of privacy of the participants. Ethical concerns are likely to arise owing to potential sensitive information that may have been shared during the study, facilitating the need to protect the identity of the participants. To avoid any ethical concerns, this research sought to ensure that confidentiality was upheld. Since the interview sessions were recorded, respondents were informed of this and assured of confidentiality of any sensitive information revealed.

### **4.3. Conclusion**

The discussion of the methodological approaches used within this research provides a guiding principle on how data was acquired, organized, and analyzed in order to draw findings and conclusions to inform the answering of the research questions. The selection of qualitative research methodology is considered pivotal to the study since it becomes the basis for an underpinning of the outcomes and findings of the research. The design entails the collection of descriptive data, and the data collection process is achieved through primary and secondary approaches. This enables the development of extensive analysis owing to the dynamic data obtained. Qualitative data was obtained mainly from primary sources. The research sought to employ interviews as the primary methods for collecting data. However, data was also acquired from secondary sources including census data, Internet coverage and usage, and social media usage. Since primary research is part of the data collection method, ethical considerations were engaged to ensure that correct principles were upheld throughout the interaction with the respondents and handling of their personal data. After the collection of data, analysis ensued to derive conclusions from the data gathered.

In conclusion, all the methods chosen for this research are the most suitable for the type of research, as explained in each method chosen. They have helped to provide the information necessary to answer the research questions previously

stated. The semi-structured interviews led to the gathering of information regarding television and social media use in relation to political participation and the factor of social capital, as well as others as highlighted in this chapter's discussion of themes and the Appendix. Finally, the statistical data assisted in presenting figures that support the research being addressed as a secondary source, and therefore helped in gathering the information needed to be analyzed to form conclusions for the research questions and the aim of the thesis.

## **5. Chapter 4 - Convergence: Social Media, Television, and the Changes in Political Interaction Norms During and After 2011**

### **5.1. Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the role of social media by studying the way it's been used in relation to political interaction and its impact on rural citizen interaction norms during the 2011 uprisings. Through this, the first research question - To what extent did social media change individual norms of political interaction with the public sphere of rural Egypt during and after 2011 due to its convergence with television media? - will be assessed.

The primary aim of this chapter is to clarify the link between social media and television. By doing this, the chapter will avoid assessing the impact of social media solely, without taking into consideration traditional media and the changes in the media environment that took place during the 2011 uprisings which impacted political and social capital norms due to the link between social media and television (convergence). These media changes have provided an appropriate context for important shifts in individual norms of political interaction with the public sphere of rural Egypt during 2011 and after due to convergence of social media with television media. This chapter will focus on changes in individual political norms due to the 2011 uprisings and until 2015, which will include the 2013 uprisings, the presidential election before it, and the parliamentary elections of 2015 because of the convergence of social and traditional media. In terms of traditional media, television will be the primary focus because it is the most used form of media in rural Egypt as previously explained. Particular data about each form of media being studied in this thesis, collected from the interviews, will be highlighted and analysed. The chosen data was considered relevant for this study and helpful in understanding the media environment of the uprisings' impact in rural areas of Egypt and the timing and effect on political norms on the rural population. Taking into consideration that the 2011 uprisings offered the opportunity to test different theoretical approaches concerning the influence of social media, some statistical data and theoretical studies will be presented and

discussed throughout this chapter to complement the analysis of the interviews, their aim being to offer additional perspectives on this immense topic and deconstruct it from several angles.

Comparisons between social and traditional media are made to reach a better understanding of how much each online and offline information channel has contributed to the 2011 uprisings, together with different cases that were constantly referred to in the interviews presenting different social media pages or satellite channels that were of considerable relevance during and after the 2011 uprisings. Both online and offline forms of political interaction have been presented and analysed in the context of rural Egypt, for a clearer understanding of the extent to which these media sources have impacted and mobilised citizens in these neglected areas.

It is important to note here that, although each governorate chosen for analysis in this thesis has similar characteristics that impact their norms in terms of their culture, there are differences between the four chosen regions as well. These similarities and differences in characteristics have been addressed previously in order to build a proper analysis about these rural areas; these must be kept in mind throughout the remainder of the thesis for a full understanding of the impact rural Egypt and social media had on Egypt's political scene and interaction norms respectively. These characteristics relate to the individual norms of the governorates and, as a result, it is important to appreciate how social media impacts their norms of political interaction before making conclusions about the impact of political interaction norms directly. Moreover, the role of convergence in each area must be explained as well in order to assess the real impact of social media and the extent of its impact among with the timing on norms of political interaction.

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section comprises a breakdown of the four forms of media that existed during the 2011 uprisings as identified by the findings of this thesis, each stage being characterized by a difference in the media's contribution and intervention during a specific period of the 2011 uprisings. Interviewee data is used to highlight the clear demarcations between these forms in terms of contribution and timeline, and the extent to

which they actually did exist as asserted here. This breakdown of the uprisings will also be necessary information for the following section, which will deal with the protest patterns in the four geographic areas chosen for semi-structured interviews and analysis both before the 2011 uprisings and in their first stage. The third section will then address the Egyptian social media public mobilisation during the 2011 uprisings, focusing specifically on the “We are All Khaled Said” and “The April Movement” Facebook groups. This will be followed by a discussion of mobilisation and demobilisation frames and, finally, a brief discussion on online versus offline forms of political interaction in 2011. Ultimately, the discussion in these sections will support this chapter’s ultimate aim of clarifying the link between social media and television, and ensuring the effect of convergence is adequately considered. Through this, the effect of social media on the norms of political interaction in rural Egypt’s public sphere will be more visible and clearly understood, since the convergence between social media and television will be related in relation to this chapter’s main question.

## **5.2. Four Phases of Media Contribution During the 2011 Egyptian Uprisings**

During the 2011 Egyptian uprisings, four phases of the media’s contribution and intervention have been identified; each phase was bound to a singular time period within the 2011 uprisings’ timeline, and involved clear differences in media use and contribution. These phases were identified as a result of consistent demarcations being made during semi-structured interviews regarding different media contribution dependent on what point in the 2011 uprising’s timeline was being discussed. Secondary literature was then used to delve deeper into these phases.

One needs to understand how rural Egyptians were impacted by different media types during the timeline of the 2011 uprisings and the four distinct periods of it. The influence and usage of media in rural Egypt was not examined by other academics to relate it to their change in political norms in order to have an accurate image of the frame of the events to analyse the changes in norms in rural areas. This is the reason why throughout this chapter we take into consideration two of the most important *Facebook* pages – “The Sixth of April Movement” and

“We Are All Khaled Said” (hereafter “April Movement” and “Khaled Said”) – as social media examples and two Egyptian satellite channels as traditional media examples, *Dream TV* and *ON TV*, since they were mentioned in the interviews frequently. *Dream TV* was Egypt’s first private satellite channel, starting in 2001. It is owned by a businessman who, after opening the channel, had constant legal issues with the government in most of his businesses; as a result, his viewpoints consistently opposed Mubarak’s regime and he allowed talk shows to present their opinions openly. *ON TV* is younger, starting its activity in 2009. It is a private Egyptian satellite channel, gaining a huge number of viewers because its presenters came from very different political groups and represented a wide range of political perspectives particularly opposing the regime. Some of its presenters were former *Al Jazeera* presenters such as Yousri Foda. After the 2011 uprisings, some of the *ON TV* presenters engaged in political life and founded new political parties.

*The first phase - awareness*

Rural citizens did not use social media to a great extent before the 2011 uprisings started, due to different barriers to social media that have been discussed previously. For example, Interviewee K in Qalyoubia, mentioned

*"I barely used social media before what happened during the uprisings"*  
(K, 2018 in Qalyoubia).

Interviewee A, in South Sinai, stated that

*"I sometimes used social media before the uprisings but mainly for entertainment, when the uprisings started I was not sure how credible the information was that was being updated about the uprisings itself"* (A, 2018, in South Sinai).

In Minya, Interviewee D, said, *"one was not used to use social media and particularly for politics"* (D, 2018 in Minya). In Menoufia, Interviewee E, explained *"he did not have much time to use social media during 2011 uprisings because was busy, and concerned about securing families and neighbors"* (E, 2018 in Menoufia).

In all instances, social media was not a priority. If used, it was primarily for entertainment. Generally, it was given low priority as shown by Interviewee E from Menoufia's statements. However, for social media users interviewed, usage fluctuated during different stages of the uprisings. The first stage of the media's role was identified as taking place before January 25<sup>th</sup> – the day considered the beginning of the 2011 uprisings. The period before January 25<sup>th</sup> consisted of large mobilisation campaigns via social media such as the previously mentioned Khaled Said page and April 6th Movement page on Facebook, aiming to gather as many followers as possible to encourage involvement in future protests. This was inspired by the Tunisian revolution. On January 16<sup>th</sup>, the "April Movement" posted online that government members had been warned via text-messages they would suffer the same fate as the Tunisian President and government, which had been overthrown days earlier. However, "Khaled Said" stated a day prior to the uprisings beginning that the aim of the protest to come was not to overthrow the Mubarak regime; rather, the aim was to force him and his government to listen to the citizens' demands. The page's posts related to the general need for a new political philosophy, with increased focus on the public's needs and economic grievances such as "the emergency laws, the dictatorship of the regime, the double standards in enforcing the law, as well as the deteriorating economic conditions" (Tinoco, 2013). Both pages used various effective strategies to get people's attention and prepare them for the protests. They posted national songs and online and offline posters and banners containing all kinds of patriotic messages, such as: "We can, yes we can, with hope and honesty, we can!" or "I'll sleep and wake up on a new dream: Egypt for sure, is returning back to me!" Social media used social capital resources and contacted educated people such as doctors, professors, lawyers, engineers, and teachers and asked them to join the marches. "Khaled Said" focused, for instance, on using technology to contact people and it received unprecedented positive responses all over the country and from abroad (Eltantawy and Wiest, 2011). Social media users organised text-message campaigns before January 25<sup>th</sup> and encouraged people to spread the call for protests among mass media and celebrities. For example, Interviewee I, in Qalyoubia, explained,

*"when the Internet was blocked and telecommunications was not stable some protestors started circulating information about updates going on in Tahrir Square" (I, 2018 in Qalyoubia).*

Interviewee C, from South Sinai, mentioned, *"sometimes updates were sent via text messages as well not only updates on social media" (C, 2018 in South Sinai).*

The use of text messages was a clear confession by social media users that they were aware social media was not the norm of communication for all Egyptians. Page members were encouraged to use pictures, with the protests details appearing as their profile picture, and to share videos and posters on their official Facebook pages to make them visible for their family members and friends. On one hand, both above-mentioned Facebook pages urged the Egyptian citizens to be of "one heart" and, several days before the protests, they posted details about protest times and locations, together with phone numbers of people from various governorates who could give information about these protests. They were aiming to organise simultaneous protests in different Egyptian cities. On the other hand, the pages' administrators advised people to avoid any provocative religious and political slogans in order to prevent blame or persecution from the police. Phone numbers of lawyers affiliated to the "Front of Defending Demonstrators" were posted online, to make people feel secure. Furthermore, the pages posted messages underlining the importance of responding to political provocations with calmness and good faith.

The day of January 25<sup>th</sup> was not a random choice for the protestors; it held significance. January 25<sup>th</sup> was Egyptian Police Day, commemorating the army's resistance to the 1952 British massacre in Egypt, prompting the army to organise a coup against King Farouk later that year. The choice of this day, together with all other calls for action made both pages' administrators and supporters confident that January 25<sup>th</sup> would again represent a turning point in Egypt's history. Prior to the January 25<sup>th</sup> uprisings, *Dream TV* highlighted the planned protests, reporting only that these movements were organised (Tinoco, 2013). Interviewee E in Qalyoubia, explained,



*"Mona El Shazly the television presenter on Dream TV at the time of the 2011 uprisings mentioned that some protests will start prior to the 25th of January by a few days by referring to the facebook page 'We Are All Khaled Said'" (E, 2018 in Qalyoubia).*

Interviewee I in Qalyoubia, mentioned,

*"ON TV, however, showed a bigger interest in the online wave of activism and reported that over 60,000 participants had announced their intention to participate in a revolution against corruption" (I, 2018 in Qalyoubia).*

Many other political movements announced their participation in the protests, such as the *Kefaya Movement*. The Muslim Brotherhood did not publicly announce it would adhere to it; it questioned the seriousness of the events, but gave its followers permission to participate, if they felt it was right. For example, Interviewee B from South Sinai explained,

*"I knew people who were Muslim Brotherhood members or supporters that were informed by their heads in the Muslim Brotherhood hierarchy that they can participate in the 2011 uprisings at least until the events were clearer, regarding whether they will be for a few days or lead to actual change" (B, 2018 in South Sinai).*

*Dream TV* continued to make statements about the impact of the Tunisian revolution and about the organisation of protests in Egypt, while presenting as well that a pro-Mubarak protest attracted 200 people, and on the organisation of police forces that were prepared for the day of January 25<sup>th</sup>.

According to the semi-structured interviews, when the interviewees were asked about when they first learned of (or heard about) social media pages such as those discussed their answers indicated that their discovery occurred during this first phase. They mentioned the following:

Interviewee A Qalyoubia: *"heard about the 2011 uprisings [in that phase] mainly from television programs that referred to the different pages on social*

*media such as Khaled Said and the April 6<sup>th</sup> Movement*"(A, 2018 in Qalyoubia). Qalyoubia's Interviewee F also heard about the 2011 uprisings at the same time, and in the same way (F, 2018 in Qalyoubia).

Interviewee D in Menoufia mentioned: "*different television talk shows on private satellite channels such as Dream TV referred to social media pages such as Khalid Said the night before the first day of the uprisings*" (D, 2018 in Menoufia). Interviewee G concurred regarding this timing (G, 2018 in Menoufia).

Interviewee B in South Sinai: "*heard mainly about social media usage of pages on satellite channels*" (B, 2018 in South Sinai). Interviewee F agreed (F, 2018 in South Sinai).

Interviewee A in Minya: "*heard about social media pages on a television program on a satellite channel*" (A, 2018 in Minya), and Interviewee D, also from Minya, heard the same (D, 2018 in Minya).

Therefore, it is clear satellite television was their original starting point of finding about the beginning of the 2011 events and referred social media users to certain social media pages.

#### *The second phase - monitorial*

The second phase of the media's role refers to the period between January 25<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>, when thousands of Egyptian citizens went out onto the streets throughout Egypt. The police responded with violence, starting a series of violent and deadly events. Friday, January 28<sup>th</sup> represented a turning point for the uprisings because it witnessed an unprecedented number of people participating in the protests and, in addition, this time they had only one request: Mubarak's resignation and the end of his regime. That evening, President Mubarak offered his first television speech, speaking about a movement of saboteurs who were trying to destabilise Egypt and subject the people to terror. Although he announced that he accepted the resignation of Ahmad Nazif's government, people decided not to leave Tahrir Square and other protest centres until Mubarak

resigned. The “April Movement” and “Khaled Said” pages were reposting the events on the ground. The “April Movement” focused its posts on the violence of the police forces against the peaceful protesters, reporting kidnappings of activists across the country and highlighting the unprecedented size of the protests. It constantly encouraged adherence to the ethos of the protest movement and organised a public strike demanding, for the first time, President Mubarak’s resignation. Similarly, “Khaled Said” used, again for the first time, the word “revolution” on their online posts, starting on January 26<sup>th</sup>. *Dream TV* and *ON TV* mentioned the thousands of protesters demanding their rights for decent lives and jobs, while also sharing relevant posts that had been initially released on social media. Unlike state channels that only mentioned smaller reports about the thousands of protesters, while their main emphasis was on the disorder caused by protests. They also emphasised that the Upper Egypt citizens had not responded to the calls for protests. They called the protesters “rioters” and accused them of inciting people to violence, also underlining the fact that the Egyptian stock market had suffered losses of around 30 billion Egyptian pounds, suggesting the leaders of the protest movements should be arrested. They made every effort to put the protesters in a bad light. The protesters were presented as aggressors causing economic losses, facilitating prisoners’ escape, stealing weapons and sabotaging public and private properties. As a result, Internet and mobile phone services were cut by the government to limit the converging of news by private satellite channels like *Dream* and *ON TV* on picking up information from social media platforms, in their desperation to stop the people, while they eventually lost control of the numerous citizens who were on the street after this breakdown (Tinoco, 2013). However, during this phase, the media was not broadcasting or informing citizens what was happening within rural Egypt. Therefore, from the semi-interviews conducted, one started collecting insights on their behaviour.

All interviewees that were social media users in Qalyoubia explained they were not used to using social media prior to these incidents for politics. They mainly used it for socializing and entertainment. For example, Interviewee I, explained, "*my usage for social media was mainly to socialize with my friends and relatives that have social media accounts on platforms*" (I, 2018 in Qalyoubia)..

However, all non-social media users in Qalyoubia explained that they began hearing about social media pages from people around them that used social media, or from different television programs. For example, Interviewee B said, "*I started hearing about social media updates [between January 25th and January 28th] on television programs.*" (B, 2018 in Qalyoubia).

In Menoufia, it was slightly different in terms of grouping all social media users or non-social media users. For example, some social media users continued to use social media only for entertainment and socializing, while others started using it for politics as well. On the other hand, all non-social media users were not necessarily concerned about politics generally during this phase because some of them were very concerned about securing their neighbourhood, neighbours, and families. As such, their interest in following media was minimal; they were aware that important information would arrive through word of mouth updates or their relatives' experiences. For example, Interviewee J, explained: "*I wanted to make sure my family and people I care about were okay before being updated about politics*" (J, 2018 in Menoufia). Similarly, Interviewee L, stated: "*Security was a main issue and my focus was on it more than what was going to happen at this point*" (L, 2018 in Menoufia).

In South Sinai, during this phase, social media users were following news on social media pages, yet had not used it for politics or news prior to the uprisings. However, they were not relying on it alone because they were being updated via television and word of mouth from the heads of tribes who had connections with people in the police and government. For example, Interviewee A, explained:

*"Social media was mainly for socializing before the 2011 uprisings yet, after the uprisings, following news on it was becoming more popular but information coming from the heads of tribes and interconnected family was still very important and what people relied on the most, along with television"* (A, 2018 in South Sinai).

Similarly, Interviewee E, stated:

*"Although social media usage changed, from being just for entertainment and socializing to being updated about politics, it is still not as important as information from the head of tribes" (E, 2018 in South Sinai).*

In Minya, social media was not used for political interaction to the same degree as other areas; while, in some cases, social media provided information relating to politics, the priority in Minya was to use it for social purposes. However, many non-social media users received updates through television channels which shared social media content as part of their programming, reflecting the convergence between social and traditional media at the time. In any case, both social media users and non-social media users in this area were concerned mostly about security during this phase, more than any other area. Political interaction was not a priority. This was clearly related to the fact they felt they were distant from urban areas and that, as security was already an issue in urban areas, rural areas would be even more insecure.

For example, Interviewee E, mentioned:

*"Security at this stage was my major issue among with many others because on the 28th of January the police seemed to collapse all over Egypt and many attacks and crimes were happening all over Egypt. Putting in mind that Minya is farther from many of the urban areas, and police is not as prevalent as in urban areas, many families I know were terrified and concerned about what would happen to us" (E, 2018 in Minya).*

Similarly, Interviewee A, explained:

*"Cairo was collapsing security-wise at this time so imagine further areas such as where we are placed; so honestly my main concern was securing everyone I could and that is why I started getting involved in securing our neighborhood among with other men" (A, 2018 in Minya).*

These examples highlight that the sense of insecurity for citizens of Minya was, to them, based on the idea that urban areas were more secure and had

increased police presence. Even if untrue, these comments show this viewpoint played a role in the decisions of Minya citizens during the time period.

In all four governorates, to varying degrees, social media began to be considered a source of information. While, as shown, this was not in line with previous usage, social media began to be viewed as an option, albeit one that was not as significant as word of mouth or television.

### *The third phase - concern*

The third stage of the media's role refers to the period between January 29<sup>th</sup> and February 2<sup>nd</sup> 2011. President Mubarak named a vice-president for the first time in his 30 year dictatorial rule, giving him instructions to start negotiations with the opposition. He also formed a new government, but the protesters remained on the streets and continued calling for his resignation. On February 1<sup>st</sup>, Mubarak delivered a second televised speech, cataloguing people's demands as legitimate and promising he would do his best to fulfil them. He stated that he had no intention of running in the September 2011 elections, which would have been his fifth term and that he just wanted to spend his last months as president arranging for an organised and peaceful power transfer to a new president. He made emotional statements, reminding the Egyptian citizens that he had served for over 60 years, and that he would like to die peacefully in his beloved country.

His speech had some echoes, dividing the citizens in two. A significant number of protesters believed Mubarak had offered enough to cease protests and that he should not be humiliated anymore, given his age; the other group declared themselves outraged by his "fake" speech. Some supporters of the President even gathered in Tahrir Square to march for Mubarak, with violent clashes erupting between the two opposing groups and resulting in deaths. For example, Interviewee I from Qalyoubia, mentioned,

*"the uprisings were one of the most important events in Egyptian history giving a chance to citizens to express their rage clearly against Mubarak and his regime, which is why I participated in Tahrir Square events" (I, 2018 in Qalyoubia).*

On the other hand, Interviewee B from Qalyoubia, stated,

*"citizens could have given Mubarak a chance to perform what he promised in his 2nd of February speech because he clearly understood that people are now out of their silent mode and he seemed like he was saying the truth"* (B, 2018 in Qalyoubia).

This division among the population is the reason why the February 2<sup>nd</sup> was declared the bloodiest day of the 2011 uprisings and has received the name of the “Battle of the Camel”. The events of this day turned the crowd once more against Mubarak whose resignation became again their common goal.

Since the Internet had been cut between January 28th and February 2nd, social media platforms did not play a significant role during these very important events. Despite this, it is important to note that cutting the Internet did have an effect in this phase; the lack of online communication channels catalyzed some citizens to become involved directly through offline methods, including going to Tahrir Square or other protest sites. For example, Interviewee I in Qalyoubia, explained,

*"when the Internet was blocked I wanted to go to my friends in Tahrir Square because I could not reach them and felt like I am missing on a historical event that I want to join because I cannot see much updates about it"* (I, 2018 in Qalyoubia).

Interviewee G, in Menoufia, mentioned

*"after the Internet communications were blocked many people felt they had to physically join Tahrir Square to show their strength regardless of Internet communication"* (G, 2018 in Menoufia).

In any case, after users regained their online presence, the online activists’ goal was to weaken sympathy for Mubarak by permanently posting movies cataloguing police abuse of citizens, which satellite channels started circulating constantly to reach out to more areas all over Egypt. As Interviewee A in Qalyoubia explained, *"the television circulated social media news as well"*(A,

2018 in Qalyoubia). Interviewee B from South Sinai, stated, "*many of the news circulated on social media was then amplified on television channels as well*" (B, 2018 in South Sinai). The national state channels, however, took a different approach; these channels called for people to return to "normal life" and end the chaos.

It is important to remember that, regardless of whether interviewees were social media users or not, there was no access during this phase to Internet. Therefore, all citizens were updated about events in Cairo via television or word of mouth from people they know that commuted to and from Cairo. However, whether they were social media users or not was related to what they were concerned about during this phase. For example, non-social media users were more focused on security for their families and neighbourhood parallel to politics, while social media users were not focused on security as much.

For example, Interviewee G in Qalyoubia, a social media user, explained "*I started commuting to Cairo after the Internet was blocked because I felt I needed to be closer to the centre of events not just around my people*" (G, 2018 in Qalyoubia).

Similarly, in Menoufia, Interviewee I, another social media user, said:

*"the social media updates I was seeing on social media platforms before the Internet was blocked aroused my feelings to actually go to Tahrir Square because of the amount of people there when the Internet was blocked because I felt I am missing the motivator of my feelings towards what was happening. Tahrir Square was not the only place with interaction but it was a symbol, like the pyramids being a symbol of Egypt, yet all of Egypt has much more historical sites"* (I, 2018 in Menoufia).

In Minya, Interviewee E, a social media user, stated:

*"one had to start finding updates from people they know or from television because of the Internet blockage, yet the blockage did not*



*hinder us from being involved or lose interest in knowing what was going on because it was the whole nation being involved"*(E, 2018 in Minya).

In South Sinai, Interviewee C, a social media user, explained: *"I started getting news during the blockage from television and word of mouth from people closer to Cairo on the phone"* (C, 2018 in South Sinai).

On the other hand, Interviewee E, in Menoufia, a non-social media user, explained: *"the amount of chaos going on all over Egypt made me very concerned about our families and neighbourhoods parallel to the events going"*(E, 2018 in Menoufia).

In Qalyoubia, Interviewee B, a non-social media user, explained:

*"I was very concerned about the security of the neighbourhood and families because after the blockage of the Internet and the clear aggression between different people everyone felt insecure and I was following television to find the updates but to also see to what extent is the aggression between people. It was like an explosion of different feelings from different people leading to seeing things that were not visible in Egypt before to that extent"*(B, 2018 in Qalyoubia).

Similarly, Interviewee D in Minya, a non social-media user, said: *"I just wanted to make sure my family was okay security-wise because of the chaos and I was following the updates to find out when I could go back to work because of my needs"* (D, 2018 in Minya).

While finally, non-social media user Interviewee F in South Sinai, said: *"after the Internet was blocked social media users stopped updating me on social media updates so everyone relied mainly on television, yet security was the main focus to find out if people can move around safely or not"*(F, 2018 in South Sinai).

Therefore, whether they were social media users or not, the differences mainly came depending on the circumstances they were living in and sense of feeling they felt in their community of the rural area they are in. In this sense, some

citizens became more involved in offline forms of political participation, while others increased their use of television or focus on security for their area. As such, this phase was characterized primarily by concern, and the beginnings of catalyzation.

#### *The fourth stage - catalyzation*

The fourth stage of the media's role took place between February 3<sup>rd</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> and began with a reduction in protester activities, after the "Battle of the Camel". They were still asking for Mubarak's resignation and opposed his last attempt to regain the people's support on February 10<sup>th</sup>. He had a television speech in which he announced that he transferred power to the recently named vice-president. Nevertheless, his speech angered people even more than before. On February 11<sup>th</sup>, the Supreme Council of the Egyptian Armed Forces finally met without the President. The crowd was thrilled when the vice-President announced his resignation. At this stage, Facebook users continued to post evidence about the fact the regime was manipulating the masses and the messages that people were receiving via different national channels of communication. *The April 6 Movement* emphasised that the regime was seeking to play for time by trying to have a dialogue with the people via national television, while killing, torturing and arresting thousands of people. *The April 6 Movement* described those who resisted until the end as free Egyptians who had not fallen for the regime's manoeuvres. Both Facebook pages posted many live events from Tahrir Square, describing it as a "virtuous city", in order to encourage people to continue the protests and to show to the whole world that Muslims and Christians protected each other during their respective prayer times, that no one was discriminated against, and that no crimes against humanity took place. Similarly, like the previous phases, satellite channels converged the videos and posts of social media users for celebrating and shared the feelings of the people in Cairo all over Egypt.

During this phase, the Internet blockage was removed. Therefore, the social media users in rural areas were back to using social media and updating their social circles, which included non-social media users at the time. Focus by rural citizens was mainly on the resistance by the regime and the political and structural changes. However, some areas focused more on using social media to

remain apprised of when they could return to work and bring in income for their families because many of them didn't work in companies, but rather on a daily income basis.

For example, in Menoufia and Minya, some of the non-social media users explained:

Interviewee K from Menoufia said,

*"I was concerned about what will happen to the country and its impact and if the change is for the best, but I don't have time to spend not working because my family needs money and I work on a daily-basis income" (K, 2018 in Menoufia).*

Similarly, Interviewee E in Minya, mentioned that *"I wanted to know what would happen but, in the end, my main issue was staying home securing my family and not bringing in money for my family" (E, 2018 in Minya).*

However, this was not mentioned in Qalyoubia or South Sinai by interviewees in the same circumstances. This is primarily because each governorate was, to some extent, unique in terms of historical and socio-cultural concerns. Minya's interviews were generally characterized, as previously mentioned, by a focus on financial security. Menoufia's interviewees similarly mentioned this, though to a lesser degree. In Qalyoubia and South Sinai, this was less of an issue due to greater financial security in Qalyoubia and a tribal support network in South Sinai that minimized this concern.

As shown in this section, the four phases of the uprisings appear distinct, and are clearly demarcated by different forms of media contribution. As a result, it is clear that social media usage during the 2011 uprising was not consistent, whether one was rural or urban. Usage of social media, the reasons for that usage, and the extent of that usage, varied based on the time-period, whether one was a social media user prior to this time, and which specific governorate one resided in. Due to this variety, it is important to understand the view that rural citizens had on protesting in general, as well as their history of protesting, and the variations that exist between governorates in relation to this topic. This will allow

for a greater understanding of the variation in interaction norms and social media usage prior to, and during, the 2011 uprisings.

### **5.3. Protest Patterns in the Rural Areas Prior to (and During) the First Stage**

Despite numerous analyses on the role of urban citizens in politics, rural areas have also played a significant role in the political sphere, and rural involvement in political matters has had an impact on society at large. In this section, the tradition of protests in rural Egypt will be demonstrated in the data presented in order to show how rural citizens were concerned politically about the country even before their exposure to social media or its popularity. This political concern, prior to the 2011 uprisings, was a noticeable characteristic of these rural areas and their populations. For example, in the interviews conducted, it was shown that (in Menoufia and Qalyoubia in particular) citizens of rural regions had a strong political sense, even prior to the uprisings, and that this political sense was characterised by strong relationships within their social groups. In Menoufia, Interviewee B explained that:

*"we constantly followed the news on television even prior to the popularity of social media and were concerned about the needs of the population from living, not from the media only" (B, 2018 in Menoufia).*

Similarly, Interviewee C in Qalyoubia - explained that,

*"regardless of media we are always concerned about politics because it affects our infrastructure and living needs in further areas from urban parts of Egypt" (C, 2018 in Qalyoubia).*

On one hand, rural citizens proved disinterested in the information presented by social media, especially when over 50 years old, and on the other, their access to social media in particular was quite restricted due to infrastructural and financial barriers. Besides young people, most interviewees from rural areas had never used the Internet and social media for information before the uprisings, yet they had been politically active and participated in various ways, formal and informal. This involvement included acts such as starting small illegal political parties, discussing problems with their social circles, presenting concerns to their

member of parliament, and voting for parliamentary candidates. The urbanisation changes that their societies suffered because of the so-called democratic political strategy of Mubarak's Egypt affected them at various levels. They had no access to land in the same way they did before; they were forced to pay higher fees to rent the land; and they suffered numerous humiliations concerning access to basic human needs, such as having a decent infrastructure or even drinking water. These difficult living conditions led them to protest several times, long before 2011, creating a path - even a sort of tradition - in protesting against the unfair political regime (Saad, 2016). As such, as this section will highlight, the rural regions of Egypt had a long history of political involvement, formal and informal, and this political involvement operated largely independent of social media.

Changes in the rural areas in the 1980's made the Egyptian middle class more visible than it had previously been. Many changes in the daily life-style of common people appeared: traditional mud-brick houses were replaced with concrete red-brick ones, furniture was adapted to a more urban style, and electrical appliances together with rooftop satellites started appearing in almost every home. The rural areas suffered a strong process of urbanisation. Tensions between the old and the young, between the educated family members and the uneducated have also appeared and triggered different forms of protest both inside and outside the family domain. Some negative changes also occurred after this urbanisation phenomenon, one of the most important concerning agricultural dynamics. Interviewee E in Menoufia reflected this when he explained,

*"after the urbanisation that happened and many fellahins getting rid of their land we had to find jobs anywhere even if we had to go to Cairo on daily basis, which makes life very exhausting because transportation is very crowded and takes over 2 hours"* (E, 2018 in Qalyoubia).

However, as underlined by researchers, the various changes to rural life generated a severe decline in the agricultural sector, a phenomenon that was deliberately neglected by the state, which reduced the role of small farmers in the economy (Wikileaks, 2010). After this period of urbanisation, approximately 80% of former farmers had jobs in a sector other than agriculture. The process of liberalisation reached its climax in 1992, due to a legislative measure – the Law

of 96 – permitting market forces to be the only player determining rent-values of land. This led to a dramatic situation for both rural and urban citizens because unemployment increased due to the fact that they lost land, among with many price increases in crops that were being grown on their lands. Interviewee E in Menoufia, stated,

*"It's been so long that we have been living in tough circumstances after we lost our family land and had to spend so much money on transportation to get employed in further areas. For example, I work in a factory in Cairo ... and it takes me almost 2 and a half hours, on a daily basis in the morning and again at the end of my shift, on top of the exhaustion, and the money spent on the transportation"* (E, 2018 in Menoufia).

The 1992 legislative measures generated a major crisis during 1997, which was a culmination of the long-term changes in political orientations, of strong structural shifts in terms of the rural area structure and a power shift at a national level. Some academics define this period as the start of continuous rural resistance, because these five years witnessed major acts of rural protest that could have been much worse, given the dramatic reality of poverty. However, the resistance reflected in this period is not quite close to the 2011 uprisings in terms of time and could be considered part of the area's history. Despite this, more than 3 interviewees above 50 years old in each governorate spoke about the nature of politics in their area as far as these times in order to show they were informed citizens and had an awareness of Egypt's political situation over the years and different periods in Mubarak's regime. For example, interviewee C in Qalyoubia said,

*"many urban citizens or people are unaware of our life style and assume we are ignorant people that are not aware of the country's needs, yet we know so much because we have suffered a long time based upon political and legislation decisions, more than other citizens"* (C, 2018 in Qalyoubia).

Similarly, interviewee B in Menoufia explained,

*"the history of the area we are living in has formed or impacted to a great extent people's form of resistance and anger towards the Mubarak regime long before the 2011 uprisings"* (B, 2018 in Menoufia).

Nevertheless, the resistance movements did not have much of an impact and the rural population ended up simply coping with the situation, rather than obtaining results (Assad and Rouchdy, 1999).

On the one hand, researchers qualified these coping mechanisms of the rural population as resourceful creativity and, on the other hand, they analysed the dramatic consequences that these coping strategies had on the Egyptian economy and social development. Law 96 coincided with the beginning of the school year and, since rural citizens suffered from high levels of poverty, their first solution was to cut expenses. To do this, they started preventing children from going to school, a measure taken especially for girls. The desperate situation put Egyptian families who used their children for agricultural labour (rather than sending them to school) under pressure. Another alarming and dramatic coping strategy consisted in a change of diet which involved eating less in terms of both quantity and quality of food. The peasants who used to grow their own crops became a part of government bakeries, reducing, at the same time, meat consumption and dairy products. "Sleeping early in order to avoid feeling hungry" was reported "as one strategy used by evicted tenants to cope with the new situation" by the Egyptian Land Centre for Human Rights (Saad, 2016). The farmers required to pay rent for their land also faced a dramatic growth in rent which generated a general tendency to endanger the necessary food resources for their families.

Interviewee E in Menoufia explained, *"many tenants (fellahins) lost their job as tenants and that is why many of us go to Cairo on a daily basis for work"* (E, 2018 in Menoufia).

Similarly, Interviewee D in Qalyoubia added,

*"we had to sell everything we owned to live including the jewellery of my wife, and many of my relatives and friends did the same, which made us*

*feel humiliated among our family because we put them down" (D, 2018 in Qalyoubia).*

The side effect of this situation had gender implications. The trust women had in their men as the major breadwinners decreased dramatically. Moreover, in Qalyoubia for example, the fact that farming was (and is) the primary rural occupation, this lack of trust ultimately led to the population's female population becoming stronger. This was reflected both by interviewees in Qalyoubia and in the participation of females in elections being the highest in Egypt. In contrast, Menoufia, which abandoned farming as an occupation entirely, did not experience this strengthening of the female population.

Interviewee L in Qalyoubia explained,

*"I had to act and find a way for my children till my husband finds a job so I worked as a seamstress for a while" (L, 2018 in Qalyoubia).*

Similarly, another female interviewee H in Qalyoubia, over 60 years old responded,

*"we are considered strong and free women in comparison to other areas around us because we work and help our families, we don't consider women working a shame" (H, 2018 in Qalyoubia).*

The coping mechanisms used by the rural population in order to survive those hard times also had political costs. Peasants protested in various ways during the 1990s by "fighting against unjust landlords or by participating in broader nationalist struggles" (Saad, 2016). Unprecedented political activity was registered in rural areas during this difficult time, including protests against legislative measures taken by the government and the organisation of over 200 "formal agricultural conferences that played a vital role in conveying farmer opinions to the authorities" (UK Government, 2013).

Protests manifested in various ways, including telegrams that were sent to the press, President Mubarak or the Minister of Agriculture. Different petitions emerged and people gathered together to sign them. Many rural citizens hung



black banners on their roofs. Others formed large groups to stop trains, block highways or destroy agricultural cooperative registers. Around 7,000 tenants gathered together under the Tagammu' Party's initiative and organised small protests. All these resistance acts were more remarkable than they seemed at first, because these people faced brutal interventions by the police, including torture, arrests, and detention. The officials enforced a brutal ban of public meetings in order to cover up the dire situation of the rural population (Saad, 2016).

Nevertheless, the peasants did not stop their resistance and the 2000s brought a new wave of unprecedented protests by rural citizens that proliferated and was much more diversified and better organised. The Land Centre of Human Rights recorded an astonishing 61 different forms of protest across the rural areas of Egypt, resulting in more than 1300 arrests (Lchr-eg.org, 2020) in the ten years prior to the uprisings during the controlled media environment. If the previous acts of protest were almost exclusively concentrated at the agricultural centre, the new wave of protests addressed more complex political issues, attacking in a direct manner the nature of state power, the state's institutions and the symbols of capitalism, demanding better infrastructure, portable water and better housing. Interviewee H in Qalyoubia, explained, "*infrastructure investment always required pressure on the government to be done*" (H, 2018 in Qalyoubia).

The thousands of rural citizens participating in protests that preceded the 2011 uprisings shared many characteristics and values with the protesters during the 2011 uprisings. For instance, people began gathering in larger groups to protest on a larger scale, depending on the situation that demanded such actions. Concerns for road safety and an increased number of accidents, for instance, gathered more than 1500 rural citizens to block roads for two consecutive days, demanding the amelioration of the strains on infrastructure and the installation of speed breakers before entering a village. Many accidents in which children, young people and their parents had been killed turned into violent demonstrations on behalf of the villagers because their demand for safer roads, which ran through their villages, had long been ignored. They held the governors responsible for the accident victims from their villages and protested for many days when such tragedies happened (Maati, 2011).

Protests demanding access to clean water were also very numerous and virulent during the 2000s and this was also the case in other governorates besides those focused on in this thesis. For instance, at this time villagers from different villages organised protests in front of the Governorate's capital Zaquaziq to protest about the lack of drinking water. They also engaged the media in their endeavour and reported their situation to different newspapers. For the same reasons, other villagers from different villages gathered together, setting fire to car tyres and blocking international roads. They persisted with their protest until Mubarak gave instructions to the government for the resumption of the water (Ismail; n.d.).

Violent protests against the installation of mobile phone towers have also taken place in rural Egypt, the main concern being health and the protection of the environment. Even though the protests were well organised, they became very violent almost every time. Interviewee C in Minya explained, "*previously when we had a protest fearing mobile towers one of the protestors was shot*" (C, 2018 in Minya). Similarly, Interviewee D in Menoufia, said "*we constantly had protests about the places of mobile towers for the health of our families but it resulted in violent conflicts*" (D, 2018 in Menoufia).

In Menoufia a long and bloody conflict emerged between the villagers who were protesting and the official police forces that were defending a wealthy landlord and member of the National Democratic Party, which was being paid for placing the mobile tower on his land. People had banners with messages such as "The Government is finished, the age has started where the right is to be taken by the power of people". Interviewee F in Menoufia explained,

*"even women protested against the mobile tower issues because they were concerned about the health of their children and tried destroying the mobile tower by going into the yard of the landlord where it was placed"* (F, 2018 in Menoufia).

Women led the operation, because it was thought that it would prevent the crowd from being attacked. Both men and women were beaten with the engineers and the workers being severely injured in the process (Mousa, 2015).

All these patterns of street protest, with people showing their anger, started in the rural areas and led the road to the 2011 uprisings. The protests were characterised by high levels of organisation, in the different regions of the country at the beginning, putting into practice very well devised tactics, such as blocking highways or protesting in front of governorates' institutions. Most important is the fact that almost all the time these protests proved to be effective and people attracted the government's attention and responses ranged from attempts to quell the protests, not only through violent interventions, but also through responding to their demands. The rural protests were highly political with citizens only not protesting for their necessities, but also for general demands related to the quality of Egyptian life. Their initiatives eventually were part of the 2011 uprisings. Another huge wave of organised labour protests, including violent strikes, sits-in or various demonstrations were taking place all over the country, culminating in the three day strike of al-Mahalla al Kubra Spinning and Weaving Company in 2007. These workers gained a bonus increase promised to them and their success inspired many other workers from other industries to follow suit. Similarly, major strikes took place in the textile industry, in Menoufia and in some other governorates. Interviewee A in Menoufia, stated,

*"when the factory workers in Mahalla gained their rights it encouraged us to protest for it as well and, at the time, I did not have time to follow the media closely, yet had time to fight for my right" (A, 2018 in Menoufia).*

All these past examples show the political sense that rural citizens had because they were trying to express their opinions to the government even before the 2011 uprisings. They were not secluded politically from urban Egypt, yet they were not focused on by the media because of the assumption that they were not politically interacting and by intentionally being avoided by the nation state's agenda setting channels to avoid covering their protests. The erosion of the boundaries between rural and urban areas of Egypt inspired people to protest for common goals, even though on the surface, the rural problems seemed different from the urban ones.

Protest patterns that formed in rural Egypt prior to the 2011 uprisings show how involved they were in being politically interactive as part of their norms

because they were trying to protest for their needs when they could, or when they had the time; when they did not protest it was due to life needs, whether financial, infrastructural or otherwise. Considering the large phenomenon of urbanisation, the rural population is not as ignorant or secluded as people might assume on the outside, bearing in mind that the percentages of urbanisation were raised by 80% from 1996 to 2008. Researchers argue that the Egyptian villages suffered visible transformations towards urbanisation, but, at the same time, they lack the majority of the facilities available in urban life, such as electricity or drinking water: “Most of those neo-urbanites, no longer engaged in agriculture, have to earn their living and make their settlements habitable by themselves—without services from the state and, indeed, without its recognition” (Bayat and Denis, 2000). Therefore, the increased features of urbanisation without being accompanied with the necessary services have caused villagers to take to the streets and organise serious protests across the country, inspiring urban citizens too and opening a wide road to the 2011 uprisings. For example, Interviewee A from Minya, mentioned,

*"many services around where we live have been ignored by the government because the spot is not on areas like where we live since it is far from the capital, which built rage within citizens but with despair because our voice is not necessarily reflected in the media. Therefore, we often had to try to create more noise than normal to get attention in front of governmental institutions" (A, 2018 in Minya).*

Consequently, one should pay more attention to the political norms of the rural citizens in the 2011 uprising to assess their political interaction. Therefore, having discussed these protest patterns, taking into consideration the previously discussed barriers to social media in the area, it is now necessary to use this information to analyse the impact of social media within a convergent environment on affecting political interaction norms. This will be done in the following section through an evaluation of online and offline mobilisation frames throughout the 2011 uprisings and their aftermath, in order to assess their effect on the uprisings themselves and the interaction norms of rural citizens in relation to these uprisings. By doing this, the thesis will move closer towards reaching

some conclusions on the extent of change on political interaction norms in rural Egypt during and after the 2011 uprisings.

#### **5.4 Television & Social Media: Mobilisation & Demobilisation Frames during the 2011 Uprisings**

Although, social media usage was minimal in rural areas during 2011, one needs to find the link it created to the political interaction for rural citizens that used social media. As already stated, the events of 2011 that ended President Mubarak's long regime, revealed the huge potential of social media, by playing a crucial role in the mobilisation of public will, defined as "a social force that can mobilise organically, or with external support and influence, to become a political lever for social change it has the potential, if adequately resourced, organised and mobilised, to serve the impetus for social change" (Salmon et al., 2010). Researchers in the field have underlined three interconnected ways that social media contributed to the 2011 uprising: "enabling cyberactivism, a major trigger for street activism and encouraging civic engagement" by determining the organisation and mobilisation of activists and their political protests (El Nawawy and Khamis, 2013). Philip Howard defines the concept of cyberactivism as "the act of using the Internet to advance a political cause that is difficult to advance offline, (...) its goal being often to create intellectually and emotionally compelling digital artefacts that tell stories of injustice, interpret history, and advocate for particular political outcomes" (Howard, 2011). These uses should be kept in consideration when taking into account rural social media users as compared to urban users, and the ways in which each contributed.

For example, the "We Are All Khaled Said" page, created by Ghonim, was the most popular page on social media for rural citizens. Interviewees from all governorates mentioned this. Interviewee F in Qalyoubia, mentioned: "*the first page I heard about when social media was discussed was the one related to Khaled Said*" (F, 2018 in Qalyoubia). Interviewee A in Menoufia, explained: "*I always heard news about Khaled Said page when social media was mentioned*" (A, 2018 in Menoufia). Interviewee D in South Sinai, stated: "*I joined the Khaled Said page when the uprisings started*" (D, 2018 in South Sinai). Interviewee B in

Minya, said: "*the first page I constantly followed was Khaled Said page then joined others*" (B, 2018 in Minya).

Ghonim felt the suffering of the Egyptians under Mubarak's regime. He was reliably informed that over 40% of Egyptians were living below the poverty line. He was also well aware of the level of corruption that took place in the administration, the economic downturn and the urgent need for real political change. By anonymously creating this Facebook page he raised awareness among the young educated people of Egypt and gave them the courage to ask for justice. As he contended, "the main purpose of the Facebook page was to mobilise public support" for Khaled Said's case (Ghonim, 2012). In his book, entitled *Revolution 2:0*, he outlined very clearly the aims of his Facebook page: to raise awareness by making people read its posts, to prompt them to interact with its content and with one another, to get them involved in its online campaigns, to encourage them to get involved in sharing and developing its content and, most importantly, to entreat them to take action by taking to the streets:

The page needed to speak directly to its members and convince them to be active participants [...] and it [...] was also important to break free from all barriers of fear that controlled so many of us.

(Ghonim, 2012)

Using the Facebook tool, Ghonim organised the first silent and nonviolent protest that took place in Alexandria. People wore black T-shirts and stood side by side with their hands up. The success of the first activists' group gave him hope and courage to extend the scope of his Facebook page to an international level. He took this decision after surveying around 1,300 people who supported him – a total of 78% (Ghonim, 2012). A measure of the huge influence his page was having can be seen by the fact that it reached around 250,000 followers in less than two months. This event created a sense of unity between people and made them overcome the fear that had previously made them accept an abusive political regime. The Internet communication, via this page, promoted a culture of tolerance and acceptance, despite the fact that the majority of its members were anonymous. Most of them used only their initials or nicknames; this anonymity gave them more flexibility in communication and interaction. The page actively

shared the events of the Tunisian Revolution, which created a wave of great enthusiasm among Egypt's youth. The page played a critical role when the events of January 25<sup>th</sup> 2011 exploded and received very important support during the "day of anger" on the 28<sup>th</sup> of January 2011, when the police cracked down on protesters. Ghonim claimed that during these events his page represented all Egyptians and did not reflect the agenda of any political party, and that its message opposed all forms of injustice, brutality and torture. Interviewee D from Menoufia, explained, "*We Are All Khaled Said's page expressed many issues Egyptian citizens lived within and represented the rage a lot of people around me felt*" (D, 2018 in Menoufia). Similarly, Interviewee E from Qalyoubia, stated, "*We Are All Khaled Said page summarized what could not be explained on media monitored by the government or controlled by the government*" (E, 2018 in Qalyoubia). This Facebook page created a shift in the political scene and gave power to social media users. However, when analysing the interviews in the rural areas for this thesis, it was clear that they all heard about the page and were informed about it but that this information came either from television programs on satellite channels like *Al Jazeera* - which then encouraged some of the young interviewees to start checking it directly on social media - or by social media users that lived in Cairo rather than being participants on the page from the first day.

Interviewee J in Qalyoubia, explained: "*The first time I heard about the Khaled Said page was on a television program that was on Al Jazeera Channel or Dream TV; I do not remember exactly*" (J, 2018 in Qalyoubia). Similarly, Interviewee I in Menoufia, said: "*I constantly heard about the Khaled Said page on different television channels, which encouraged me to see what was on it*" (I, 2018 in Menoufia). Moreover, Interviewee E in South Sinai, stated: "*I don't think I heard about the Khaled Said page except from one of the television programs on the first day of the uprisings*" (E, 2018 in South Sinai). Finally, Interviewee D in Minya, explained: "*I never knew about the Khaled Said page except from the television talk shows*" (D, 2018 in Minya).

The remaining interviewees that did not use social media, even after they heard about the page from television, got to know the updates of the page from

people in their own social circle that started using it. Therefore, they were updated about it constantly via word of mouth in their circle.

Interviewee C in Qalyoubia, explained:

*"I was never a social media user till now, yet my son and younger relatives were so I started to ask them what was going on the Khaled Said page and other pages as well"* (C, 2018 in Qalyoubia).

Interviewee B in Menoufia, said:

*"I never used social media but my campaign manager for the parliamentary elections started then and used to update me on the news"* (B, 2018 in Menoufia).

Interviewee B in South Sinai, stated: *"I knew about it from my niece because I was not good with technology"* (B, 2018 in South Sinai). Finally, Interviewee D in Minya, mentioned: *"social media was too sophisticated for me but any of the younger family members used to update me about updates on social media"* (D, 2018 in Minya).

Many of them joined social media later but not when the 2011 uprisings started when they found that some updates from places such as Tahrir Square were circulating information quicker than television. This was obvious in the following responses:

Interviewee C in Menoufia, explained

*"I had to learn to use social media because I was very worried about what was going on and sometimes news on social media was quicker"* (C, 2018 in Menoufia).

Interviewee A in Qalyoubia, said:

*"I learned after the uprisings to use social media because I felt sometimes I can have quicker access to instant updates generally, yet I did not have time from the stress we lived with to learn about what was going on during the 2011 uprisings"* (A, 2018 in Qalyoubia).



Interviewee D in South Sinai, mentioned:

*"I joined Facebook and started using social media closer to the 2013 uprisings due to usage of it by then and because of the hatred me and my family had towards the Muslim Brotherhood. During the 2011 uprisings I was not as interested because, as a governorate generally, we had sympathy towards Mubarak and were upset about the outcome of 2011 because he gave us security during his times. Sinai generally needed security stability more than anything due to its location and security circumstances"*(D, 2018 in South Sinai).

Interviewee D in Minya, explained:

*"I started using social media a year after the 2011 uprisings because I felt no change happened with all what happened in 2011 and now I needed to state my opinion"* (D, 2018 in Minya).

A significant influence to consider as aforementioned, is the role played by word of mouth, face to face networks and communications, which is obvious in the past interviewee comments of non social media users that used to ask the social media users around them about social media news during 2011 uprisings. In Egyptian society, they are referred to as *shillas* or trust circles surrounding people who share common interests and grievances. These face-to-face interactions played a crucial role in spreading news in rural Egypt.

Interviewee F in Qalyoubia, explained: *"Khaled Said page and such pages on social media bonded people together when they were from different areas rather than our area"* (F, 2018 in Qalyoubia). Similarly, Interviewee I in Menoufia, stated: *"When I started using social media to follow updates about Tahrir Square I felt I was closer to the people in these areas by hearing about their updates"* (I, 2018 in Menoufia).

Also, Interviewee D from South Sinai, mentioned:

*"The use of social media pages during the uprisings led to a connection with other Egyptians from different areas, which broke the feeling of*

*always feeling that South Sinai is on its own and secluded from the rest of Egyptians" (D, 2018 in South Sinai).*

Interviewee I from Menoufia, commented: *"It was the first time I feel that Egyptians from different areas of Egypt were discussing one issue" (I, 2018 in Menoufia).*

Therefore, it gave rural citizens some sense of uniting by an invisible bond of shared feelings with people in other areas that were then spread to non-social media users in their rural areas via convergence and circulation of the information on traditional media and through word of mouth. Mark Granovetter (2011) has described this type of movement in his so-called theory of "the strength of weak ties". In contrast, in South Sinai and Minya their bond with people in different areas of Egypt was slightly different. For example, Interviewee E in South Sinai, explained:

*"due to our location being far from the urban capital and geographical characteristics while living in a tribal culture we were focused more on the impact of what was happening on our area because during the Mubarak regime we were in peace compared to other times. Therefore, one was following what was happening on social media with more focus on what is the destiny of our area if the regime changes not on the impact on all of Egypt and if it will benefit the whole country. As a result, this stress made me not bond much with people in other areas through social media, and instead I just used it to be updated" (E, 2018 in South Sinai).*

In Minya, Interviewee C, stated:

*"I checked what was going on to be updated about the situation because I was very concerned about the security in the area so our neighbours and families don't get harmed" (C, 2018 in Minya).*

Therefore, clearly the Granovetter theory was more obvious in Menoufia and Qalyoubia than in South Sinai and Minya due to their local differences. For example, South Sinai's location always made people feel that they were in an

unstable situation, which in turn made them more concerned about their local impact by what was happening; this motivated some people who use social media to follow updates for that reason. Due to the tougher financial circumstances in Minya and distance from urban areas the sense of insecurity they have in the community led them to focus on social media to try to be updated about the security of their area rather than bonding externally like Qalyoubia and Menoufia when they used social media. However, in each governorate the focus point they had when using social media by any social media user was spread in their circle via word of mouth and originally referred to on television, yet encouraged them to be updated on social media.

#### **5.4.1. Mobilisation and Demobilisation Frames**

Some conclusions can be drawn from this information regarding the changes that traditional media and social media went through during the 18 days of the Egyptian 2011 uprising. Online social media had a major contribution, indeed, but they have represented only a spark from the 2011 uprising itself. The Said page and April 6 Movement page successes were due to several factors. First of all, they had based all their success on the social capital concept (which will be analysed closely in the next chapter) meaning that they knew that Egyptians cared a lot about social relationships and created strong bonds inside their small social circles. Even though limited Internet connection was available all over Egypt, particularly in the rural areas due to the culture of rural citizens as well as the infrastructure of the area, the information gathered from social media was then spread through word-of-mouth or satellite television. Online activists counted on the fact that, in the rural areas, people would at the very least talk about what was happening on social media and ask the community members who did have access to the Internet what was happening in the political scene, since word of mouth culture is very common in the rural areas. (Stefanone et al., 2010). Moreover, when important news was circulated on social media, satellite channels picked it up and circulated it as well as previously explained in the convergence concept. According to the interviews, most rural citizens rely mainly on television as a form of media, which means that they did not necessarily need social media to find out the updates happening. However, social media had the power to

contribute to the building of a stronger social capital, by bringing new people together and forging new relationships across the different areas of Egypt. Finally, modern technologies, such as mobile, had made it possible to access the social networks from anywhere and at anytime, giving them the opportunity to post live coverage which allowed them to gain trust among the citizens who were being manipulated by the state through made-up scenarios transmitted via the classic information channels (Tinoco, 2013). Therefore, the changes that happened during the 2011 uprisings in the previously explained phases with regards to the start of clear spark of social media usage and its relation to television media mainly impacted rural citizen norms by becoming part of the media access they look upon and by time increase in usage but not necessarily in relation to affecting political interaction.

Concerning the television media, the cases of the two previously presented satellite channels can be analysed in relation to their convergence with online social media. *Dream and ON TV* constantly circulated or converged information from social media such as interviewing Wael Ghonim and discussing his Facebook page and posts on *Dream TV* or Yousri Foda constantly interviewing governmental positions to discuss with them the situation and videos posted on social media on *ON TV*. While, on the other hand, the national state channels continued presenting their agenda as the government's channel. Social media pages, however, kept presenting the national state channels' claims while posting the reality alongside it in order to prove the state channels were deceiving their audience. First of all, it intentionally set an agenda that moved people's attention from the most important events taking place in their country to some less important facts or to situations that could make them sympathise with the Mubarak regime and hate the "rioters"; it simply failed to write about important facts happening on the streets, such as the protests, the violent police intervention, the various acts of an informal political nature, and more. Secondly, it turned the attention of citizens in a different direction, in order to keep them distracted and repeatedly reported about a shocking terrorist event that took place in Egypt on New Year's Eve, claiming that Egypt was again the victim of terrorist organisations (The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, 2016).

As evident from the above mentioned facts, the private television channels and social media have created various mobilisation and demobilisation frames. The mobilisation frames are characterised by the “collective definition of issues, which requires emphasising their social character and stressing collective responsibility as well as suggesting solutions on a structural level” (Deci and Ryan, 1991). In terms of social media and private channels, their framing proved successful in that it aligned with the issues that its viewers wished to consider. The lack of success of state channels is due to the fact that, as previously mentioned, it refused to consider those same issues. Interview data from all four governorates highlight this to be the case.

For example, in Qalyoubia, Interviewee K mentioned: *"I always followed private satellite channels because the state channels were not saying the truth"* (K, 2018 in Qalyoubia). Interviewee L in Menoufia, explained: *"The state channels are controlled to a great extent by the government"* (L, 2018 in Menoufia). Interviewee E in Minya, said: *"I barely believed anything on any state television channel, yet was interested to see what the government wanted to convince the people with"* (E, 2018 in Minya). Interviewee F in South Sinai, stated: *"No one watched the state channels because they did not say much about what was going on"* (F, 2018 in South Sinai).

The *Facebook* pages together, with the private satellite channels, which according to the interviews are the channels rural citizens watched have created this social frame by encouraging citizens to take part in the 2011 uprising and to demand political changes, emphasising that the protest had to be well organised and structured in order to realise the collective goal of a new Egypt. On the other side, national channels sought to demobilise the protests and presented facts in ways designed to downplay their significance, claiming that the events were organised by special groups who did not reflect wider public opinion (Tinoco, 2013). However, rural citizens interviewed used national state channels just to see what the government wanted to tell the people, while understanding it was not the truth.

The differences between state and private channels had a marked effect during this time period. Television, especially *Al Jazeera*, played a very important role during the credibility crisis, because:

One of the features of the uprising was the gradual undermining of state TV and newspapers, to the extent that journalists began to resign as the public saw the ludicrous coverage for what it was. Also, instrumental in this process was the contrast provided by transnational satellite TV channels, like *Al Jazeera*, whose reporting was often influenced by information and footage coming from citizen journalists on the ground.

(Idle and Nunns, 2011)

In Qalyoubia and Menoufia, almost all interviewees mentioned that *Al Jazeera* was one of the main channels that they watched from the non-Egyptian satellite channels. In Minya and South Sinai, interviewees that watched television exclusively were aware of the updates on *Al Jazeera*. Generally, all interviewees that mentioned *Al Jazeera* clarified that the importance of it was the updates it provided that were not provided by other Egyptian channels in the same detail or to the same extent. There are at least two important aspects that have to be underlined, concerning the credibility crisis. The first concerns the contrast between the independent, authentic and vibrant non-mainstream media and the restricted, controlled and much more constrained state media. There were very clear differences between the citizens who were reporting live real facts happening on the ground and the propagandistic national media that delivered to the public orchestrated agenda setting through the national television.

The second aspect refers to the discrepancy between the reality of the 2011 events during the uprisings and the national Egyptian television coverage, which was presenting a distorted image that, was unreflective of the reality and was playing down the severity of the protests. *Al Jazeera* played a crucial role by presenting minute by minute comprehensive and explicit images and details of the events with even less control on their news feed than private Egyptian satellite channels. The channel represented the perfect synergy between the online and offline media, because it was a traditional form of media, which also broadcast a lot of online material. This led the Egyptian government to close their Cairo

office and block the channel's transmission via satellite, which is a confession of the strength of television similar to the implied confession made by shutting down the Internet service. Nevertheless, Egyptians found a way to watch *Al Jazeera* via some other satellites such as Arabsat and Hotbird (Khamis and Vaughn, 2011). As a result, rural citizens mainly followed private satellite channels not state channels because they were less controlled in presenting news.

Conflict is another feature of the mobilisation frame, stressing the difference between "us" and "them", where "us" represents the people, and "them" represents the regime (Deci and Ryan, 1991). The conflict has been largely presented on *Facebook* and by satellite channels, while national state channels deliberately tried to demobilise people by presenting Egypt and President Mubarak as victims of foreign external forces trying to destabilise the country. In the end, it's obvious that the online social media had an important role in the 2011 uprisings, but its force became real only when it was combined with television. The two media – the new and the old – became truly strong when they worked in a synergistic way. When the Internet was shut down, the satellite channels were the only source for transmitting the news and keeping people together. Television media had various levels of contribution to the resignation of a president who appeared to have one of the most stable dictatorships in the Arab world (Tinoco, 2013). The fact that the media connected people from the online environment to those who were offline offered a new dimension to social capital for the uprising. When the Internet was shut down and the online voices had no power, the offline protesters met the online ones and formed an even stronger force (Stefanone et al., 2010). This was obvious by the interviewees' answers about when they started going to Tahrir Square and meeting people outside of their normal social circle during the phase when the Internet was blocked.

The discrepancies between the facts presented by private channels on television and the distorted agenda setting presented by the national television means that the Egyptian uprisings grew bigger as the protests continued and went from the level of a popular uprising to a conflict that involved the national administration, including the Ministry of Information. This draws our attention to the fact that the 2011 uprisings also generated communication between the

President, the government, and the protesters. The relationship between the three parties was tense, especially given the unethical methods used to impede the protesters; the shutting down of Internet and mobile services in order to limit social media users, which has been previously discussed, is an example of this. While this did catalyze offline political involvement, it also increased anger among the populace at the time. As mentioned previously, this lasted for seven of the 18 days discussed and, in any case, the people eventually discovered creative ways to stay informed and communicate during this blackout (Ishani, 2011).

However, the government decision to shut down Internet and cell phone services was a failure and generated a bigger wave of protest. No longer able to communicate with their friends by means of social media and Internet, people - especially the young and educated - took to the streets in huge numbers, fearing that they would be massacred and aiming to protect one to another (Maaty, 2011). Consequently, the lack of online information and virtual communication prompted people to connect with each other in reality gathered by thousands in the Tahrir Square of Cairo as mentioned in the previous responses by interviewees. Therefore, denying Internet access directed people to a real-life offline activism on the streets, which led the uprising to grow even larger (Idle and Nunns, 2011) since demands for social, economic, political, and infrastructural change had all been requested by the people for years prior to the 2011 uprisings. The shutdown was circulated in rural areas via television as well and motivated some of the young rural interviewees to participate in the protests on Tahrir Square in Cairo, particularly interviewees younger than 30 years old based in Menoufia and Qalyoubia, which are closer to Cairo than the other governorates being studied. On the other hand, online media operated on the presumption of the existence of huge social capital, because it had previously gathered a lot of disparate small groups and made a huge community out of them. When citizens faced the Internet blackout, they were already connected, they already knew that going outside onto the streets would enable them to hear a common voice asking for the same thing: the end of Mubarak's regime. They knew how numerous they were; such knowledge encouraged them to lose their fear. They found the courage and the resources to join the offline protesters and to



form a bigger and a stronger protest. For example, in Qalyoubia, Interviewee I explained,

*"as a social media user and young guy in my 20's during the 2011 uprisings I was encouraged to go to Tahrir Square often; yet when the Internet blacked out I spent all my days there to be part of the event and get the feel of what was happening constantly in a community setting" (I, 2018 in Qalyoubia).*

Interviewee G in Menoufia agreed (G, 2018 in Menoufia). This is how social media transferred its initial power offline and connected common citizens from both urban and rural areas under the umbrella of a common protest movement against corruption, injustice and poverty. In other words, the social media users, working together with traditional media such as satellite televisions, had the power to connect otherwise fairly weak ties – which referred to the online activists – to the strong ties, which were defined as the offline protesters, people who were more traditional and who went directly onto the streets (Stefanone et al, 2010).

Nevertheless, as previously explained in this chapter, social media had the power of creating a wave that impacted a lot of people, even if they were not using the Internet and occurred instead through word of mouth or television-social media convergence. The online activists counted on the strong relationships built especially between rural people who regularly used their social circles for news and who asked the community members using the Internet for information related to the political sphere. Therefore, social media accessed a larger social capital than that created through the online networks and this fact was confirmed in the elections that followed the 2011 uprisings (Utz and Muscanell, 2015). Regardless of rural Internet usage for politics, these citizens were politically informed because of the convergence of social media with television.

According to Castells, social media transcends the limits of place. Protesting was changing from spaces of places to spaces of flows since it was being extended in many areas at the same time (Castells, 2012). He defined space as,

“the material support of time-sharing social practices” and, “space of flows” (Castells, 2012), as “being part of a context whose functional logic is based on real time interaction, no matter in which places its constitutive elements are located” (Stalder, 2006). He argued that the time sharing social practices did not require physical existence because of the new technologies in our network society, which make the society function in a different way in the way information and communication move, yet our society is becoming constructed around flows (Castells, 1996). For example, in Qalyoubia, Interviewee I, stated:

*"when I started commuting to Tahrir Square on a daily basis, particularly when Internet was blocked and all my updates were from television, I updated my social circle when I went back to Qalyoubia" (I, 2018 in Qalyoubia).*

Therefore, blockage of the Internet led the interviewee to follow the events through television more and motivated him to go to Tahrir Square. This, in turn, led Interviewee I to pass on information via commuting on a daily basis and his family checking on him via telephone, leading to a flow of information through several means. In the case of Egypt, the space of flows in some rural areas took place because of the amplifying effect of traditional media such as television and telephone communication, rather than through the Internet and social media. This was particularly true during the period where the state had shut down Internet services, but was generally the case both before and after this phase since the main Internet users were in the urban areas. Despite the fact this lack of Internet access has led to generalizations that political interaction was low in rural Egypt, this was not the case. Interviewee I's comments highlight Castells' space of flows concept, as well as high levels of political interaction in the informal sense. This, combined with voting levels which were consistently higher in rural Egypt than urban Egypt, further support the idea that a lack of social media access did not amount to a lack of political interaction or engagement. In Qalyoubia, for example, the voting rate for the presidential elections was 55.23%. Similarly, Menoufia had the highest voting rate in all Egypt at 62.6%. In contrast, Cairo and Alexandria's voting rates were 51.5% and 50.2% (Pres2014elections.org, 2014) respectively, despite being urban governorates, protest centres, and areas with high Internet access and usage. These high rates in rural areas, as compared to

urban governorates, support the fact that rural citizens were being informed during and after the uprisings about the updates based on the flow of information they were getting in rural areas through their interaction with urban governorates because of the convergence of traditional and social media alongside their social capital. Studies show that new technologies are helping in spreading information in geographically dispersed areas (Brainard and Siplon, 2000; Elin, 2003; Myers, 1994). However, Shaun Moores disagrees with Castells definition of place in comparison to his concept of space of flows since he claims that a place is a 'self-contained' area while, on the other hand, he is claiming that (due to technology) spaces of places are becoming spaces of flows (Moores, 2003). Moores' opinion describes Egypt's situation more clearly because, in Egypt, Tahrir Square was the starting place of the uprisings, which is a contained area with boundaries, while other governorates in Egypt started protesting in the main squares of their city based on the flow of information they got. It clearly explains that the concept of "space of flows" resembles the information moving people in different contained areas with boundaries, yet different "places" via technological means. Thus, the case of Egypt shows that the "space of places" and the "space of flows" complement each other because the flow of information makes protestors in different parts of Egypt gather in certain places, which are basically contained areas. Thus, despite the social media barriers, the freedom to connect across space and the amplification that happens because of the convergence of media played a role in encouraging citizens to politically participate even if it was through informal means.

Analysis on social and traditional media have been made in order to achieve a better understanding of how much each of the online and offline information channels have contributed to the 2011 uprisings, together with different cases that were constantly referred to in the interviews, presenting different social media pages or satellite channels that were of considerable relevance during the 2011 uprisings. The online and offline forms of activism have been presented and analysed in the context of rural Egypt, in order to come to a clearer understanding of the extent to which these media sources have mobilised citizens in these neglected areas. Some studies have been mentioned to create the necessary contextual frame for the analysis of the thesis' unstructured interviews that have

been conducted with various Egyptian citizens from the four governorates for this thesis.

As already underlined in this thesis, social media networks were in the centre of events during 2011 in Egypt, which were “widely referred as the Arab Spring uprising or revolution” (Chebib and Sohail, 2011). In this chapter we investigated the role that social networks, such as *YouTube*, *Facebook* and *Twitter*, played during the 2011 uprising and how they have facilitated political mobilisation and the “creation of a new Arab public sphere” (Chebib and Sohail, 2011), which indicates a change in the norms of political interaction in rural Egypt. These social networks have created a certain power balance between the political authoritarian regime and the civilian activist, allowing, to a certain degree, rural citizens to become informed and get involved in the events of 2011 and later on, in 2012 and 2013. Four distinct phases that the social media networks have gone through were described and analysed via the answers of interviewees to assess them in rural Egypt. All these phases demonstrated that social media networks had a role in “generating and shifting the power” of common people (Howard and Hussain, 2011), yet with not much focus on rural citizens, which was what was focused on in this chapter.

By these new norms of communication, many people became citizen journalists - as defined by Sadaf Ali and Shahira Fahmy (2013) - and they helped, together with Facebook’s page administrators, to build a parallel agenda which, unlike that of the national media, presented what was really happening in Egypt. Moreover, for non-social media users they were updated in rural Egypt via convergence with television and word of mouth. In a different study, Khamis and Vaughn (2011) underlines the importance of *Facebook*, *YouTube* and *Twitter* as channels to make public the regime’s abuse of its citizens, helping people to get organised in order to combat repressions. These platforms also shaped public opinion by making citizens’ voices heard and presented to the people the agenda setting that really mattered, i.e. that which was not the product of state power. The study’s conclusion was that “the balance of both political and media power has shifted unpredictably and will continue to do so”. For example, this can be seen in the differences in social media usage between 2011 and 2013. However,

its full relation and effect after the 2011 uprisings on rural Egypt will be explained below.

The dissatisfaction of elections' results and the triumph of Muslim Brotherhood after the first democratic presidential elections unleashed political powers that threatened the uprisings in 2011. This situation generated another wave of uprisings in 2013 and eventually led to a military intervention that removed the Muslim Brotherhood president to maintain the stability of the country in face of the millions in the uprisings in 2013. This, in turn, led to some protests that "countered the counter-revolution and led to demands for the return of legitimacy to the people and for a respect of the outcomes of the 'Jan 25' revolution" (Castells, 2012).

All these studies show that the role of social media networks has varied at different stages and has changed a lot during the revolutionary events. These changes resulted in a new set of power structures that have changed the individual norms with regards to politics of the Egyptian society. For example, in Qalyoubia, Interviewees G explained: "*When the uprisings in 2013 started one was used to using social media in relation to politics more than previously and updating people in our circle*" (G, 2018 in Qalyoubia). Interviewee J made a similar statement (J, 2018 in Qalyoubia).

In Menoufia, Interviewee L stated: "*The norm of using social media during the 2013 uprisings was much more regular than in 2011*" (L, 2018 in Menoufia). Interviewee A agreed (A, 2018 in Menoufia).

In South Sinai, Interviewee C, explained:

*"in 2011 everything was new to how we were used to deal in terms of politics and media influence, yet in 2013 among with the anger we had towards Morsi's rule social media usage and if not usage but updates through users around me was more regular and often throughout the day"* (C, 2018 in South Sinai).

In Minya, Interviewee E, mentioned: "*although one was used to hearing more about social media in 2013 uprisings more than in 2011 still television was very important for updates*" (E, 2018 in Minya).

Therefore, usage and inclusion of social media more often in their daily usage increased as time passed after the 2011 events rather than during the 2011 events.

### **5.5. The online and offline activism during the 2011 Egypt uprisings**

In order to understand the real degree to which the Internet influenced the events during the Egyptian uprisings, it is very important to understand the difference between the Internet as a space where people collectively expressed their dissent towards the dictatorial regime and the Internet as a tool that was used to generate a shift in the collective consciousness, which will therefore explain the impact of social media on the norms of rural citizens. This level of understanding will bring to light the difference between the online and the offline activism during the 2011 Egyptian uprisings (Alexander and Aouragh, 2014) and after it.

While many researchers put a considerable emphasis on the role of social media and the public's online mobilisation during the Egyptian uprisings, the facts have proven that when the government shut down Internet services for almost a week - removing almost any possibility of communication and mobilisation - this action neither stopped, nor prevented the activists from gathering outside in the streets and communicating with each other. Almost all of the semi-structured interviews done (with the results presented in this chapter) show that the interviewees in rural areas do not necessarily associate the 2011 uprising with social media.

To overcome this perspective, some researchers have distinguished between the Internet as a space of manifestation which had a crucial function in the articulation of the collective critique towards the existing political and social regime and the Internet as a tool (especially Web 2.0) used in the actual practice of the uprisings. Their studies showed that the powers attributed to *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *YouTube* are rather particular to Western collective behaviour and beliefs, while in the Arab world, one has to take into consideration the

explanatory primacy of a decades-long history of various social and political protests, especially when it comes to Egypt. We can start with the US invasion of Iraq, which generated a huge protest in the Arab world and continue with the 2004-2006 demonstrations against calling for constitutional reforms, movements which also prompted judges to get involved with them, demanding to reduce the state's influence in the elections. Large strikes had also taken place later on in the textile sector, encouraging workers to protest against Mubarak who triggered many other subsequent protests because of the police torture he inflicted upon the protesters (Saleh, 2012). The death of Said and the state's attempts to influence the 2010 parliamentary elections also created frustrations and a desire among the people to get things changed. The events from Tunisia gave Egyptians the final push, showing them that change is real and possible and that a dictator can be toppled (Alexander, 2011).

## **5.6. Conclusions**

During this chapter, different analyses and examples have been presented, with a particular concentration on social media, and the old media focusing on television as the most used traditional media form. The Internet indeed played a very important role in the organisation of the uprisings and in creating an appropriate context to develop it, but, at the same time, the old media, together with simple citizens from the rural areas, had already prepared the appropriate historical context to determine such a huge event long before it came to pass. Many researchers had the tendency of putting too much emphasis on social media, bravely stating that the Egyptian uprising was, in fact, a *Facebook* and *Twitter* uprising. The statistics, interviews, and references presented during this chapter showed that, first of all, only a small number of people had Internet access, in comparison to the entire Egyptian population to have an instant impact on norms solely. Second of all, many people in some rural areas (the most predominant type of area in Egypt) have limited use of Internet connection, yet they had been organising protests way before the 2011 uprisings actually took place. Thirdly, when the government shut down the Internet and mobile phone services, the social media became useless locally and the protests had to be sustained by real actions in the streets. Fourthly, the online activists realised the

scale of the protests and the dangers faced by citizens when they were forced to leave their computers or phones and protest in the street. At those times, the satellite channels were the only source of information for the people and the online activists realised that the classic face to face meetings in special places was much more effective and better organised. Nevertheless, in the end, findings show that the online and offline groups managed to work together and get connected during the Internet blackout, which demonstrated that both the Internet and the protests enhanced the creation of a stronger and wider social capital yet not necessarily for rural citizens.

Given the aim of this chapter to answer the first of this thesis' research questions - to what extent did social media change individual norms of political interaction with the public sphere of rural Egypt during and after 2011 due to its convergence with television media? - the assessment of this chapter yields the following response. Social media did undoubtedly play a role of some kind as examples such as "We are All Khaled Said" and the organizational context of organizing the 2011 uprising. However, the historical context of rural Egypt, as combined with the fact that the Internet was shut down during a significant period of the uprisings themselves, highlights that social media was not the prime motivator of the 2011 uprisings. Moreover, the history of political engagement and interaction in rural Egypt, as well as the importance placed on personal, cultural, and familial relationships, further limited the role that social media could play in changing individual norms of political interaction within the public sphere. As such, while social media was a motivator, these factors support the view that it was not the prime motivator in relation to the changing political interaction during the 2011 uprising and its aftermath.

This chapter presented after the analysis of the interviews in rural Egypt and references further supports that individual norms started changing after the 2011 uprisings was over. Moreover, people had had enough time to understand more about social media; this in turn affected their interaction norms with regards to politics towards the beginning of the 2013 uprisings. This can be seen in the increase in mobile Internet penetration, from 73% in 2011 to 80% in 2013



(Information and Communications Technology Indicators Bulletin, 2015). However, the next chapter will explain social capital traditions of rural citizens because it is related to the slower usage of social media and its impact on political individual norms among with what was explained in this chapter. This will further explain why more time is needed to affect the political interaction of rural citizens because they are used to discussing politics and acting upon it in a certain context. This chapter among with the next chapter create the link in presenting the impact of the changes of norms due to the different media environment among with the traditional social capital norms in impacting the feelings of empowerment and social capital in rural Egypt.

## **6. Chapter 5 - Political Interaction & The Public Sphere: The Impact of Social Capital on the 2011 Uprisings and its Aftermath**

### **6.1. Introduction**

This chapter concentrates on the social capital of the rural areas. In particular, the discussion of this chapter centers on how rural citizens re-conceived and were mobilised to engage with many aspects of the social and political life before, during and after Egypt's 2011 uprising. A prime focus here is that social capital in rural areas has a great impact on individual norms of political interaction and affects their impact on using and accepting social media usage. As such, this chapter addresses the second research question of this thesis: How does social capital in rural Egypt affect the political interaction of citizens in the public sphere considering the social media access circumstances?

The data presented in the previous chapter explored the political values and norms commonly in relation to social media shared by the Egyptians, in rural areas which had often been ignored in academic literature. As a continuation, this chapter will focus on the impact of social capital in affecting the political values in rural Egypt. In order to understand the relationship of the rural population – represented by farmers and Bedouins since they compose the majority of the population in the areas covered - we have taken into account several factors. First of all, the previous discussion in Chapter 1 on formal and informal participation in rural Egypt - which detailed what political participation and interaction mean for rural Egypt, and the manner in which it existed before, during and after the 2011 uprisings - was necessary in order to find out the concepts that explain the particular historical context of political norms in these areas, and is the assumed context for this chapter. In terms of this chapter specifically, the different forms of political participation are analysed, with the aim of clarifying the level of political engagement by rural Egyptian citizens and the extent to which the existing rural social capital has contributed to it. The comparisons between different forms of political participation in different rural areas to the events have also been a big part of this study to present the differences and similarities of the political environment in the areas studied. Secondly, there is a strong need to

rethink the context of the uprisings in terms of the role of rural citizens, the impact of social capital, and how social capital relates to social media, as well as how this has to be presented, in order to have a wider vision of the protests that took place before and during the 2011 uprisings while focusing on rural Egypt. This complements the historical context that was discussed in the past chapter before the uprisings in terms of the protests patterns that have characterised the rural area, in order to have a clearer image of rural citizens in Egypt. Last, but not least, an actual analysis of the political participation has been made for the areas deemed relevant to this thesis and the changes in the individual norms in relation to social capital that appeared during and after the 2011 uprisings. Taking these factors into account, the chapter aims to present the role of social capital for the rural Egyptian citizens in the uprisings that took place in 2011, in order to present a more accurate perspective of this crucial event in the course of Egyptian history, focusing on rural citizens and their characteristics. All the data has been interconnected and analysed, in order to obtain a more accurate image of how (or whether) social capital has impacted the rural citizens during the 2011 uprising.

One facet of political interaction that will be addressed continuously throughout this chapter is the distinction between parliamentary and presidential elections in terms of rural involvement, as well as how this was impacted by both the 2011 uprisings and the social capital of rural Egypt. This is for several reasons. First, as mentioned previously in Chapter 1 and subsequently in this thesis, presidential elections were less important to rural citizens prior to 2011 and, as such, their importance in the aftermath of the uprisings can serve as a useful indicator for changes in political interaction and interaction norms. Second, the importance of parliamentary elections was also considered briefly in Chapter 1. This chapter will expand on this, in order to show that the relative importance of parliamentary and presidential elections serves as a useful indicator of social capital and, as such, changes to this importance will be useful for the analysis conducted throughout this study. This will allow a deeper understanding of rural political interaction.

Indeed, the Egyptian 2011 uprising could have been characterised as an urban phenomenon, because the most visible events took place in Tahrir Square. The

actual physical presence of citizens forming huge crowds happened in that particular place. For various reasons, analysing the role of citizens coming from the rural areas was harder to achieve, but the landscape of the Egyptian uprising and the struggle for social justice and dignity would not be complete without bringing to light the critical role played by the rural population in this story. Their story may be less spectacular as compared to the farmers' demonstrations, but it is at least as important as all the other groups who participated in the 2011 uprisings.

Despite the astonishing power of the Egyptian 2011 uprisings, the dominant ideas concerning the Arab population among academic circles has long been distorted by stereotypes related to the unchanging Arab culture and Islamic tradition that represents the essence of the Arab population, leading to the conclusion that an Arab society such as Egypt was always destined to be ruled by dictatorial political leaders. However, the 2011 Egyptian uprisings have triggered a much more dynamic discussion about Arab society, dislodging some stereotypes while generating new questions and research perspectives (Saad, 2016). The 2011 uprising has brought to light some groups that researchers have ignored for a long time: women, farmers, workers, religious minorities, and the youth, among others. These categories of citizens have proven to be politically important during the uprisings and consider that researchers still have not put enough emphasis on their role. They have fought for their rights and became visible, carving their rightful place in the new reconfigured Arab political scene.

## **6.2. The Definition Of Social Capital in Rural Egypt**

After the 2011 uprising, there was a lot of hope among the citizenry that a new form of formal political participation would emerge that was more meaningful, more representative and would allow citizens to impact governance. This is particularly in relation to the presidential elections since, as has already been mentioned and will be discussed in greater depth, formal participation in relation to parliamentary elections was already consistently high. Many hoped that some of the most important people from the informal political movements would get involved in the formal politics and form new national parties or reform the existing ones, with the idea that this would lead to greater representation for the

people of Egypt and the aspirations of the 2011 uprisings. Indeed, a number of new parties were formed in the post-Mubarak era and the protesters gave hope to ordinary citizens that things could change for the better. For this reason, one of the biggest changes resulting from the uprisings was the much larger rate of declared intention to participate in the elections, among both activists and regular citizens.

For example, in Menoufia, Interviewee G explained,

*"the importance of voting was more obvious after the 2011 uprisings and finally we saw queues for voting in Egypt which was not seen in the Mubarak regime because during the Mubarak regime citizens felt that the regime would not allow anyone to win elections besides Mubarak"* (G, 2018 in Menoufia).

In Qalyoubia, Interviewee B, stated,

*"people were participating in presidential elections much more than before 2011 uprising because they felt it was not a known decision about the elections before even voting and that their vote could actually lead to change"* (B, 2018 in Qalyoubia).

In Minya, Interviewee F mentioned, *"the idea of voting after 2011 was much stronger in the society because one felt like his vote is actually counted not controlled as before 2011"* (F, 2018 in Minya).

In South Sinai, Interviewee E said,

*"the importance of presidential elections and constitutions was more obvious than it was prior to 2011 uprisings because before 2011 uprisings results were pretty much controlled through restrictions on who could run for presidential elections"* (E, 2018 in South Sinai).

The fascinating aspect of this involvement in politics is that the reasoning behind political involvement - and the considerations that went into deciding who should be voted for - were unique in rural Egypt. Interestingly, for the citizens of rural Egypt that were interviewed, "social capital" seemed to have a local

definition that is different to the global conception of social capital. Describing the idea of the social capital concept in global terms refers to the ability to have strong political views and to make decisions on the basis of political measures. Areas with such citizens are considered to have high social capital measures. However, with regard to rural Egypt, it seemed like people felt much more comfortable making political decisions based on the local knowledge gained from their social bonds with families that are related to politics in the area around them. For example, Interviewee I in Qalyoubia mentioned,

*"I would still vote for the candidate known the most in the area I live in because - through his connections and loyalty to the land, people, and families - we will have a better representative than someone who has less connections with everyone living in the area"* (I, 2018 in Qalyoubia).

Interviewee G in Menoufia further explained that *"voting for the candidate we know the most with a history in politics and knowing our land is the most appropriate decision for the way rural people live and think"*. In this way, even the increased declared intention to participate was based on social ties, a family's history, and *"loyalty to the land, people, and families"* (G, 2018 in Menoufia).

Moreover, rural citizens don't consider that basing their decisions on such measures is low social capital because they believe that, for example, candidates with family history in the area will continue to serve the needs of the people in the area because they have an emotional connection to the families and land around them due to their family history. This assertion was common among interviewees, and seems to be the cause for a much larger body of individuals participating in parliamentary elections versus their national (presidential) counter-parts. For example, Interviewee B, in South Sinai, stated, *"the rotation of candidates based on the tribe's turn in the area ensures safety and working together for the best of the area - which is in a fragile situation - rather than voting on an unexpected basis"*. Interviewee B's statement connects voting to stability in a clear manner: by giving each tribe a rotation and providing consensus on leadership, there will be minimal disruption caused by disagreement internally. According to Interviewee B, "voting on an unexpected basis" - or,

voting against the established rotation - would threaten the stability of the already-fragile governorate. This issue is, of course, avoided with the rotation system, allowing all tribes to “work together for the best of the area” (B, 2018 in South Sinai). Similarly, Interviewee E in Minya said,

*"candidates that have roots in the area are the best option to vote for, regardless of their political views, because they understand the different aspects of the area among the families, as well as the differences between them; this serves our needs better than someone not aware of these details"* (E, 2018 in Minya).

Moreover, this connection to the land and the families living within it feeds into their policies and decision-making in a way that is based on knowledge and trust. This is particularly clear in the South Sinai example where the “rotation of candidates based on the tribe’s turn” ensures stability, cooperation, and an overall cohesion that best suits the area. Therefore, rural citizens are not making such decisions thinking they are living within low social capital measures; this makes it seem like rural Egyptians have a localised definition of social capital within their boundaries. The localised definition of social capital in rural Egypt is not affected by the fact that they vote based on social connections and traditions. On the contrary, they find that voting based on social traditions and norms is considered social capital. Moreover, they consider it a strong form of social capital because they are convinced to vote this way based on experience; they have not been pressured to do so. It is simply that their focus is based primarily on the unique issues of their region, as opposed to the national concerns of Egypt as a whole. Furthermore, the concerns that this method of voting is related to are in fact real: social structure, as well as levels of safety, infrastructure, and financial stability do in fact vary based on region. Therefore, the difference between local Egyptian social capital and global social capital is that voting the way rural citizens in Egypt vote is considered a low form of social capital since it is not based only on politics, yet rural citizens did not feel that they are forced to do so. For example, Interviewee I in Qalyoubia mentioned, *"voting based on social connections is based on the needs of the area, not fear; this is the best way to operate in our area"* (I, 2018 in Qalyoubia).

In Menoufia, Interviewee G explained,

*"if I had the option to vote for someone else besides the candidate known the most in the area I would still vote for the candidate I know the most because he knows best about the area through his family since childhood"* (G, 2018 in Menoufia).

In South Sinai, Interviewee B stated, *"if I had the option to vote differently I would still choose the way it is to ensure security and norms we live in and believe in"* (B, 2018 in South Sinai).

In Minya, Interviewee E said,

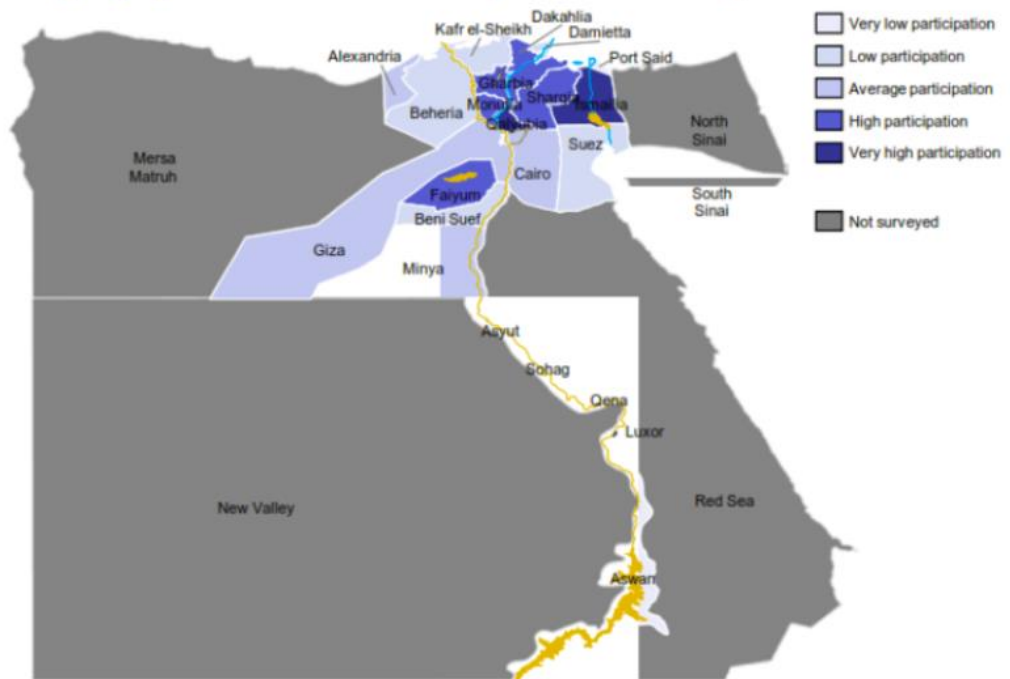
*"voting for someone unknown in an area like Minya is very risky and could make problems between families because of the traditions people live in and not knowing past issues between families that might lead to problems if not taken into consideration"* (E, 2018 in Minya).

This local idea of social capital is taken into consideration while analysing the interviews and patterns found from interviews in this thesis. While this section has only used examples of formal political participation, the remainder of this chapter will also highlight that this local social capital also exists in informal participation. Therefore, looking at the formal and informal participation in rural Egypt it is important to link this concept because it explains the primary evidence presented in terms of the impact of social capital on political participation.



### 6.3. Social Capital & The Motivations For Political Interaction in Rural Egypt

The geographical distribution of the participants in the protests



(Erle et al., 2012)

As shown by the map above of the geographical distribution of the participants in the 2011 uprisings, high participation levels were not necessarily registered in the urban governorates, but were more so in the governorates dominated by rural areas. Menoufia and Qalyoubia, two of the governorates that have been chosen to be analysed for this study, are prime examples of this. On the other hand, Minya and South Sinai registered lower participation levels, but they are also governorates with a lower rate of rural inhabitants than the other two mentioned above. Indeed, the interviews done in these governorates indicated that the political participation in the rural areas has been determined almost entirely by the social connections people have had for a long time and by their common desire to have a better life. Their social capital has not been particularly affected by political campaigns or by the information presented by the media to a great extent, but rather by the fact that their local leaders indicated that participation in protests was the best way to represent the interests of their communities. This is a

strong characteristic of the rural citizens, especially those who were living in visible poverty.

In Minya, for instance, the interviews showed that the more financially stable people were, the more politically informed they were, and they even at times relied on social media information presented by other community members who had access to the Internet. For example, in Minya, Interviewee A mentioned, *"Using social media gave an additional avenue of information to access among other medias"* (A, 2018 in Minya).

On the other hand, less financially stable citizens in this governorate (especially given the geographical distance from Cairo) tended to focus more on their daily financial needs. For example, Interviewee D from that region stated *"I live in tough financial circumstances and don't want to waste time watching media that could be controlled, which is why I prefer getting information from people I know"* (D, 2018 in Minya). This makes some sense given the fact that social media use - and even regular consumption of media - requires time, and some access to a computer, mobile phone, or Internet. Lower financial stability would limit all of this.

This was the same regardless of gender. In Minya, the interviews indicated that the females coming from less financially secure families relied much more on being updated by their social circles than from media sources, whether social online networks or even television. Their explanation was that they trusted their social sources more and they did not believe that getting news from any media source would make a difference for them. For example, in Minya, Interviewee F explained, *"I knew information from people I trusted and knew how they think because I trusted it more than media and because I had no time to spend on media and leave my work. I am a porter so even during the uprisings I did not stop working"* (F, 2018 in Minya). Similarly, also in Minya, Interviewee D mentioned:

*"updates about news from people I trust are important because I don't have time to watch media often because of my work circumstances"*

*while knowing people you trust can give you the summary of the updates and view needed" (D, 2018 in Minya).*

Once again, it was a mixture of societal ties and financial or time constraints that minimized the use of social media and led to a reliance on the social networks already in place.

Another example of this reliance on “getting information from people [they] know” can be seen in South Sinai. Interviewee B, from that region, explained: *"the tribal tradition we have passes on information to the members of the tribe and it gets passed on through their families so information through the circle surrounding us is enough" (B, 2018 in South Sinai).*

The difference between both areas is that Minya has less of a tribal nature and tougher financial circumstances than South Sinai. As such, in Minya, the reliance on trusted individuals within social circle is based on ease, limited time to consume media as a result of financial constraints, and concision. On the other hand, South Sinai’s tribal nature (and the tribal nature of the neighbouring regions) means that this kind of hierarchical passing of information is cultural, rather than situational. In both cases however, the result was the same: interviewees, for the most part, trusted their social connections more than any other form of media, and relied on these social connections for news.

Another important piece of evidence gathered from the interviews conducted is the fact that none of those interviewed who were older than 50 years had used the Internet before the 2011 uprisings, which means that the high level of participation in the uprisings was not determined by social media networks, as stated by several researchers in the field whom we have already mentioned throughout this thesis. Instead, their high level of political interaction and participation was once again determined by their social groups and especially by the local leaders who had the power to move their people and make them act. For example, Interviewee H in Qalyoubia, an influential female who was a part of parliament member’s family and supported him politically, explained:

*"during parliamentary elections prior 2011 and after as well I always spent time with people that live in my neighborhood to explain to them the benefits of voting and who is the suitable candidate in the area because they trusted me and did not necessarily understand all the aspects related to the elections so sometimes needed guidance and explanation" (H, 2018 in Qalyoubia).*

Also, Interviewee B in South Sinai, stated,

*"during elections I had to collaborate with people in our community to explain to them the benefits and logic of any rotations for parliamentary elections happening so even the coming up generations understand why things happen this way in our tribal community" (B, 2018 in South Sinai).*

So, once again, in the rural areas researched the power of social ties was greater than any form of media, social media or any other information channel. The rural citizens of Menoufia and Qalyoubia were, indeed, more politically interactive and participated much more in the uprisings, because they were more concerned about the financial and security problems. South Sinai's citizens, as just discussed, were not as involved because their tribal form of organisation protected them more from the financial crisis and created a systemized form of culture, while in terms of politics they had different members from various families acting (on a rotating basis) as representatives of their community in relation to the official institutions of the state.

Regardless of these differences in circumstance, one commonality among interviewees of the four studied regions was that they wanted to show how much they knew about politics and had tried participating through informal political acts prior to 2011; this is because they feel there has been no focus on their role in such an important event in the history of Egypt. This is particularly significant given that this political involvement occurred in a time where national elections were considered as having no real impact or value and, as such, any successful act of informal political involvement was rare. In Qalyoubia, Interviewee C explained, *"even before 2011 people tried protesting about their needs; however*

*there was never the intensity that would make a difference because of the political apathy people were feeling" (C, 2018 in Qalyoubia). In Menoufia, Interviewee H stated,*

*"I participated in some protests when something impacted our area - such as the mobile towers - but it was not covered immensely by media, so it did not necessarily reach the people and officials in the urban centers to make a difference" (H, 2018 in Menoufia).*

In Minya, Interviewee E mentioned, *"the lack of infrastructure we live in compared to other areas of Egypt hindered us from spending time on participating in politics but did not mean we did not want to or were not aware of the updates" (E, 2018 in Minya). In South Sinai, Interviewee F said,*

*"South Sinai is a governorate engaged in politics ever since years because of its volatility and situation, which makes the citizens in South Sinai very aware of the importance of politics and interacting into it. But we first needed to secure our politics in terms of stabilising South Sinai before anything else" (F, 2018 in South Sinai).*

These comments all highlight an interest in political participation, and a motivation to attempt to change the status quo. However, depending on the governorate, different concerns arise. In Qalyoubia and Menoufia, as shown by the previous interviewee comments, it was a matter of not having enough reach or media coverage to enact that change. For Minya, political involvement was limited by infrastructure but this did not limit residents of that region from being as politically informed as possible. The same awareness of the *"importance of politics"* can be seen in South Sinai, though in their case security concerns limited engagement. All of this highlights that politics, and political interaction, was of prime importance in these regions. However, a common comment was that lack of media coverage and local limitations hindered the ability of rural citizens to successfully make the changes they desired. Despite this, political activity was considered of the utmost importance, as highlighted by these interviewees. No interviewee disputed that politics was important.

Moreover, this is borne out in secondary data, where researchers in the field have discussed on numerous occasions a sort of tradition or pattern concerning the protests in the rural areas of Egypt prior to the 2011 uprisings. These researchers assert that this behaviour actually could have been part of the build up of anger towards the ruling regime more than one would expect (Nour, 2015; Saad, 2016). In particular, small farmers called “fellahin” had a crucial role in the course and development of the 2011 uprisings, which form the majority of rural citizens in Qalyoubia and Menoufia. However, as previously mentioned, the geographic, safety and cultural complications of analysing this, as well as the stereotypes of the ‘passive or indolent peasant’ limit one’s ability to fully rely on this. (Scott, 1985; Fegan, 1986; Adas, 1986).

However, the tradition of protests in rural Egypt - discussed in the previous chapter - was demonstrated in the various analyses of data presented in this thesis to show how citizens in rural areas were concerned politically about the country even prior to social media usage or popularity. In the interviews done for this thesis, patterns showed the fact that in Menoufia and Qalyoubia in particular, the people have always had a great political sense, being characterised by strong relationships within their social groups. On one hand, they proved not to be particularly interested in the information presented by social media, especially in the above 50 years age bracket, and on the other hand their access to social media in particular was quite restricted due to mainly infrastructure and financial barriers. Besides young people, most interviewees from the rural areas had never used the Internet and social media channels of information before the uprisings, yet they had been active and participated in various ways, formal and informal. The urbanisation changes that their societies suffered because of the so-called democratic political strategy of Mubarak’s Egypt affected them at various levels. They did not have the same access to the land as before; they were forced to pay higher fees to rent the land; and they suffered numerous humiliations concerning access to basic human needs, such as having a decent infrastructure or even drinking water. These hard times made them protest several times, long before the 2011 uprisings, creating a path, even a sort of tradition, in protesting against the unfair political regime (Saad, 2016).

This motivation of rural Egyptians to be politically involved continued into the 2011 uprisings. A study conducted by Refaei (2012) presents statistics that show rural Egyptians were quite active on a daily basis during the uprising, even though many of them did not actually directly participate in the events. In this study, it was shown that the difference between the involvement of urban and rural citizens - 53.2% and 47.5% respectively - was negligible, despite rural citizens having high barriers such as limited Internet, geographic limitations, and restrictions due to infrastructural and financial issues (Refaei, 2012). A more detailed study investigating informal participation in political life, especially during the 2011 uprisings, reveals the factors that prompted citizens to get involved in the events. A very important aspect of the following image is represented by the involvement and engagement percentages of the rural population. Even though their access to the Internet was much more limited in comparison to the citizens living in the urban areas, the degree of their involvement was bigger. Figures show that, for almost every particular aspect investigated by the researchers, the percentage was higher in rural areas than in urban areas in almost every instance (Refaei, 2012). For example, researchers found that rural areas were more active than their urban counterparts in terms of discussing politics, social networking regarding politics, protest participation, and participation in sit-ins or acts of civil disobedience. This engagement can be seen in formal political participation also, with increases seen in membership of political parties. For example, the Tagamo party - a socialist party in Egypt - saw membership increase by more than double, with Interviewee G from Qalyoubia stating that "*the amount of members in the Tagamo Party increased from 2000 members in Qalyoubia to 5000 members*" (G, 2018 in Qalyoubia), which serves as an example of rural Egypt's consistently high level of participation and involvement.

#### **6.4. Social Capital and the Context of Political Participation in Rural Egypt**

The 2011 uprisings undoubtedly had an effect on political participation in Egypt, particularly rural Egypt. This is strongly related to the social capital of rural Egypt, and the effect on this social capital by the success of a political act as

significant as the ending of a 30-year dictatorial regime. Concerns that had existed prior to 2011 - political apathy, political isolation between governorates, disinterest in national politics - were all affected by the success of the uprisings. This effect can be seen clearly in interviewee data. For example, when discussing political isolation between governorates, interviewees in all four regions had continuously made comments consistent with the idea that *“voting for the candidate [they] know the most, with a history in politics and knowing [their] land, is the most appropriate decision for the way rural people live and think.”* This comment, made by Interviewee B, in Qalyoubia is one which other interviewees across all four governorates have agreed (B, 2018 in Qalyoubia). This viewpoint was centred around the idea that each governorate had unique problems based on their social, political, and economic conditions; these problems could in turn only be solved by someone who was aware of these social, political, and economic conditions. Those outside a governorate were viewed as strangers and almost insignificant to the political and personal lives of rural citizens. In the aftermath of 2011, however, this began to change. Social connections were still vital - and remained the most important factor in politics - but an acceptance grew of Egyptians outside of each region. This was based on the idea that governorates shared common concerns. The realization that this was the case had a positive effect by decreasing feelings of isolation and increasing levels of communication between governorates. While this did not always lead to agreement between individuals communicating across governorates, it is important in the sense that it highlights the idea that social media played a role in increasing communication and involvement between governorates. This, in turn, increased interest in national politics and political participation at the national level.

For example, Interviewee K in Qalyoubia, mentioned: *“Regardless of any changes in the media environment...after 2011 discussing voting and politics became more common with people you do not know as much”* (K, 2018 in Qalyoubia).

Similarly, in Menoufia, Interviewee H, stated:



*"Because all families know each other by reputation not necessarily each person voting is mainly based on social agreements before 2011 and until now even when it has been more common to discuss voting with people not in your social circle after 2011 and 2013 uprisings"* (H, 2018 in Menoufia).

In Minya, Interviewee D explained:

*"In the end, voting is mainly based on social aspects rather than political campaigns, although these campaigns have increased after the uprisings and led to discussions about politics with strangers more than prior to 2011"* (D, 2018 in Minya).

While in South Sinai, Interviewee B, mentioned:

*"People always vote here based on the agreements between head of tribes and their family members since years till now; even after 2011 when it was more common to discuss politics with people you do not know necessarily personally"* (B, 2018 in South Sinai).

Complementing this, it has also been shown that the 2011 uprisings generated discussions, debates and different forms of online and offline discussion among many Egyptian families on a daily basis that did not occur to the same extent prior to the 2011 uprisings. This shows that the collective perception of the citizens had been impacted upon and had shifted due to the 2011 uprisings. Clearly, the quotes just mentioned highlight the fact that discussion of politics with strangers became a more common phenomenon following 2011, and that this phenomenon included rural citizens. Moreover, the amount of time discussing politics in general increased to sometimes almost every day, which had not been the case prior to 2011. Interviewee B in South Sinai asserted that they had *"reached the point that [they] gathered on a daily basis as a family to discuss the uprisings during the 18 days of protesting at Tahrir Square"* (B, 2018 in South Sinai). Interviewees H and C in Qalyoubia agreed (C, 2018 in Qalyoubia; H, 2018 in Qalyoubia).

However, it is clear that citizens of Minya and Menoufia - governorates with less financial stability - were not spending as much time discussing politics with strangers. This can be seen in the statement made by Interviewee D in Minya that *“it is just easier to stick to what is more familiar and not spend much time on finding who is best because the needs of life are too demanding to focus on other issues,”* as well as in the statement of Menoufia’s Interviewee H that *“sometimes change may not be the best decision and people are exhausted with work, to cover their needs, so prefer sticking to the option they are more familiar with”* (D, 2018 in Minya; H, 2018 in Menoufia). In both these examples, the interviewees are referencing participation in the form of discussion within their social group as being ‘easier’ and ‘more familiar’, as well as implying that it is less ‘demanding’. This is in contrast to South Sinai and Qalyoubia, which did discuss politics, and more often. Minya’s citizens, as previously mentioned, experienced insecurity that caused them to focus more on their financial needs, while Menoufia’s citizens migrated to other areas on a daily basis and were exhausted more than citizens of the same status in Qalyoubia and South Sinai.

However, by the 2013 uprisings, and during Morsi’s presidency, citizens in all these areas relied on informal political participation centered on online and offline discussion much more than they had during the 2011 uprisings; by 2013, it was something they had adapted to and were more accustomed to engaging in. This is evidence of a growth in social capital both internal to rural Egypt and in terms of the relationship rural Egyptians had with those outside their areas. Moreover, the strengthened social capital and increased informal political participation had the effect of “bridging” (Hawkins and Maurer, 2009) and other theorists of the concept. In essence, in the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings and certainly by the time of the 2013 uprisings, the local social capital of rural Egypt had expanded to include areas outside of one’s local geographic region. This expansion led to increased input in formal and informal political involvement at the national level; one example of this (in terms of increased formal participation) can be seen in the increased interest in presidential elections since, unlike previously, the cultural and geographic gaps between rural and urban became blurred. The local social capital of rural Egypt had, in effect, expanded to include other citizens who were once considered “strangers”. As a consequence, political

involvement was no longer fully rooted solely in the idea that each governorate was separate. The cohesion and push for a common cause that existed in the aftermath of 2011 had led to the formation of a relationship between the governorates, which is related to the expansion of the local form of social capital to include those outside of the region. It is important to consider this in the context of 2011 and the viewpoint of rural Egyptians at that time.

While this increased interest in presidential and national politics had an effect on formal participation, namely in terms of increased voting in 2011 as previously discussed, there was also a large element of informal political participation at the national level. People's perception of politics prior to 2011 was quite different than it was in the aftermath of the uprisings; the main reason for not getting involved in the 2011 uprisings was the fact that citizens did not believe that they could change anything in the political sphere at the national or presidential level. Their political apathy - revealed by answers that indicated there was "lack of time" or that they had "no interest in politics" - reflects the 30-year influence that the dictatorial Mubarak regime had on Egyptians. This affected involvement in informal political acts, but could also be seen in the low voting rates that existed prior to 2011. Outside of interviewee data, this political apathy has been studied to find similar results (Erle et al., 2012). When asked about their motivation for non-participation in protest and other forms of informal political acts, 23% asserted their disinterest in politics, an equal number stated that they had no time, while the remainder expressed fears of personal safety or the belief that it would not have any effect. Only 7% of those asked expressed disagreement with the aims of the protests or the manner of self-expression (Erle, et al., 2012). This highlights that, prior to the 2011 uprisings, political apathy was higher and was based primarily on a sense of powerlessness to enact change. The success of the 2011 uprisings changed this, sparking an increase in informal political participation by the time of the 2013 uprising.

Political apathy, seen in the previously-mentioned interviews, was obviously clear for the less financially stable in Menoufia and Minya more than South Sinai and Qalyoubia (D, 2018 in Minya; H, 2018 in Menoufia). Clearly, after the 2011 uprisings, in all the rural areas people started being more open about discussing

politics openly with people that they did not speak to about this topic before. However, as time passed, political apathy decreased and, by the time the 2013 uprising began, rural citizens were encouraged to participate more than in 2011. This is because they felt that 2011 proved that they could change the regime. However, based on the previous quotes, it is clear that political apathy exists more in Minya and Menoufia with citizens that have less financial stability than the other areas due to insecurity and exhaustion of citizens previously mentioned.

Another important study that investigated almost the same characteristics concerning the level of participation in the 2011 uprisings, revealed that almost a fifth of the population did not tolerate any form of public demonstrations against the government. This group mainly consisted of people that represented the extremities of the society: the lowest and the highest socio-economic classes. On the other hand, those in the middle class were the most engaged in the protests and demonstrations. What is truly important for this thesis is the fact that, although the rural citizens had limited access to social media, the percentage of those who had never participated in informal political events, and did not see the need for them was lower than that in the urban area: for rural citizens, this was 6.2% compared to 8.4% for urban Egyptians (Refaei, 2012). This demonstrates the power of social capital that exists in the rural areas of Egypt that was focused on in interviews. The interview data supports this view that rural people were used to socialising, creating strong relationships, counting on each other, getting the latest news from one another, and basically gathering together for any situation. Interviewee B from Qalyoubia, mentioned: "*social relationships between people and families in Qalyoubia is very important*" (B, 2018 in Qalyoubia). Interviewee A from South Sinai, explained: "*the tribal nature and structure in our areas forces families to socialize together and collaborate on decisions with regards to the community*" (A, 2018 in South Sinai). This affected formal participation as much as it did informal participation. This was obvious from the interviews, especially when interviewees explained the manner in which they decided whom to vote for. The quotes below show that formal political involvement - regardless of whether the voting regional, parliamentary, or national presidential elections - had its basis in social ties and the relationships of rural citizens.

For example, in Qalyoubia, interviews concluded the meaning in the following words:

Interviewee A noted that *"regardless of political campaigns in the end voting was based on social connections"* (A, 2018 in Qalyoubia).

Interviewee B stated that,

*"heads of big families agreed on who to vote for and then the head of each family explained the benefit to his family whether for the parliamentary elections or presidential elections mainly after 2011"* (B, 2018 in Qalyoubia).

Interviewee J remarked that,

*"even if I did not want to vote for the same candidate as my family just for the change in the end I knew that this candidate knew more about the area so it is more suitable to vote for him"* (J, 2018 in Qalyoubia).

Similarly, in Menoufia, Interviewee C mentioned: *"all voting was based on social connections; this is a fact and I don't know if people want to change it"* C, 2018 in Menoufia).

Interviewee H explained: *"social connections affected all elections. Even when it was presidential elections, if the parliamentary candidate is supporting a certain candidate for the presidential elections it had an influence on rural citizens"* H, 2018 in Menoufia).

Interviewee I, stated: *"when new candidates started running for parliamentary elections they needed social consent by the big families in the area so the people vote for them or either they would not win"* (I, 2018 in Menoufia).

In South Sinai, Interviewee A, explained: *"It is simple as agreeing on who to vote for when based on tribal consents"* (A, 2018 in South Sinai).

Similarly, Interviewee B, mentioned: *"even when there were some Muslim Brotherhood followers or supporters they resembled a small percentage in South*

*Sinai and voting was mainly according to the agreements made by the head of tribes. It is the tradition" (B, 2018 in South Sinai).*

While in Minya, Interviewee C, stated: *"people either voted for the familiar candidate because that is how our needs get answered or just don't vote if they feel there is no need" (C, 2018 in Minya).*

Also, Interviewee F, explained: *"voting based on social connections and cultural attachment to the area makes more sense in areas that are conservative like Minya because they will understand the norms of each family" (F, 2018 in Minya).*

This data highlights the strength of rural Egypt's social capital as it existed. However, it is also clear that the social capital being highlighted here is the local form of social capital as previously discussed and defined in this chapter, as opposed to the conventional global definition. Citizens in these areas are convinced that voting based on personal connections and social ties is safer and more appropriate in these areas, and that it leads to greater representation. This was especially the case, according to interviewees, when considering the unique challenges of each region and the tailored knowledge that a candidate from the region would have when compared to a candidate without history in the region. For example, in Qalyoubia, Interviewee F, explained,

*"the difference between a representative in the area with a history to one without is that they understand how land ownership has changed over the years and the origins of families to be able to understand their mentality and, based upon that, deal with issues if there are any" (F, 2018 in Qalyoubia).*

Similarly, in South Sinai, Interviewee B noted that

*"the rotation of candidates based on the tribe's turn in the area ensures safety and working together for the best of the area - which is in a fragile situation - rather than voting on an unexpected basis" (B, 2018 in South Sinai).*

In both instances, the unique challenges of the region are relevant to the voting patterns, and the social aspect of voting addresses these challenges in some fashion. As a result, voting patterns typically adjust in rural Egypt to address social and societal history as opposed to political considerations such as campaigns or ideas. In contrast, the conventional definition of strong social capital is based on political considerations only, and does not address social connections and societal ties. Political considerations, in this sense, refers to an understanding of politics that is related to decision-making based on political campaigning and objective, uncoerced or conventional voting. The local social capital of rural Egypt shares the fact that it is uncoerced; however, its difference lies in the importance it places on social connections to the region, societal ties, and the tailored knowledge that only exists if one has family history in the region. This is, of course, only possible because of the importance placed in rural Egypt on parliamentary elections; as previously discussed, presidential elections prior to the 2011 uprisings were not considered to be as significant to addressing the needs of citizens since the issues faced by rural citizens were ones that they considered unique to their areas, rather than the nation as a whole. As such, these interviews highlight that the local social capital of rural Egypt is both strong in the sense that it is uncoerced and based on the society's viewpoint that voting in this manner will prove advantage, and unique to the historical and social environment of the region.

In any case, it is clear that this form of gathering together and systematically organizing as if it is a set protocol is a major characteristic of the rural areas. It demonstrates that social media did not have a particularly big impact, a view that is emphasised by many researchers that have already been presented in this thesis, because these rural individuals did not need any outside impulse to act. They were accustomed to acting together, due to the strong familial, social, and cultural bonds that naturally arise in these rural areas, and which interviewees in this thesis have already highlighted to be of high importance. Even the actual physical participation in the uprisings events revealed that the urban population were engaged to a greater extent primarily due to geographical reasons: the actual

events took place in urban centres, especially in the capital of Egypt. The degree of involvement in rural areas when compared to urban centres must be analysed with this taken into consideration. Participation, if defined as presence in the protest sites, may lead to the assumption that urban residents were more involved. This, however, is not the case when one takes into consideration all forms of political participation, as well as the unique limitations - geographical and otherwise - faced by rural citizens. In Qalyoubia, Interviewee D, mentioned,

*"I knew people that worked in Cairo and were not able to vote because they did not have time to leave work in Cairo and make it to voting in the voting center they are registered in according to the ID"* (D, 2018 in Qalyoubia).

In Menoufia, Interviewee K stated

*"it was hard to make it to voting although I wanted to during some of the elections after the 2011 uprisings because my work was not where I was registered and sometimes roads were not safe after the hectic times since 2011 to go and come on the same day for work"* (K, 2018 in Menoufia).

In Minya, Interviewee B said *"[he] wanted to vote but at some times the roads were blocked to where [he] needed to vote because of the infrastructure updates needed to be done since years"* (B, 2018 in Minya). In South Sinai, Interviewee A, said, *"After 2011 it was not safe to live in South Sinai for my family and I moved to Cairo which made voting every time hard because of the distance as well to South Sinai"* (A, 2018 in South Sinai). These examples all show a commonality in the sense that geographic limitations - combined with security and safety concerns related to the roads in the aftermath of 2011 - severely limited physical engagement. As a result, the assumption that urban citizens were more involved is erroneous if this is not taken into consideration.

However, if we take into consideration the degree of political involvement in terms of the desire of people to get informed, discuss events, express opinions, plus the effort made to go from home to the protest or voting centres, the rural population demonstrated a greater level of political engagement in comparison



with the urban population. Studies have shown this to be the case: in regards to engagement through discussion, the rural population were at 39.1% compared to the urban population's 31.9%. Similarly, regarding demonstrations, it was 62.7% rural compared to 59.6% urban, and for actions against state institutions and symbols, it was 90.9% in rural areas compared to 59.5% in urban areas (Refaei, 2012). This is due to the social capital power present in the rural areas. Thus, it is clear that access to social media, or the lack thereof, did not in fact hinder political involvement in rural Egypt and that, moreover, political interaction was strongly related to the social capital of the regions. Unlike urban areas, rural Egypt was less ideally situated for protest and yet still managed to engage and systematically organize. As such, social capital aided the involvement of rural Egypt despite geographic, communication, and information constraints that did not exist (or existed to a lesser degree) in the urban centres that housed the protest sites.

#### **6.5. Social Ties, Forms of Political Participation, & The Effect of the 2011 Uprisings**

Egypt's political scene suffered dramatic changes during, and after, the 2011 uprising. After President Mubarak's resignation, people continued their massive protest, asking for an end to the oppressive and dictatorial regime. Having their epicentre in Tahrir Square of Cairo, the uprising had an unprecedented force and united many people with a common goal (Refaei, 2012).

This common goal was a reversal of policies that stemmed from the failures and inconsistencies within the Mubarak regime in the preceding years. While acting as a democratic leader in the eyes of his international counterparts through his concessions allowing a number of small political liberties such as minor factory worker protests, minor criticisms, and the occasional disagreement on his decision-making, Mubarak simultaneously attempted to disrupt and weaken the social ties that existed in Egypt. This can be seen through his refusal to legalize protesting, his limitations on formal participation in the form of restricting the right to start political parties, as well as the fear engendered by the nation's security forces through consistent arrests, interrogations, torture, and imprisonment. However, this dual role ultimately led to the situation that

hastened the end of his regime. The democratic facade opened a space - inadvertently - for a variety of youth movements and activities on behalf of civil society. These movements - prime examples being the Kefaya Movement that was formed in 2004, the “April 6 Movement” that was formed in 2008, and the “We are All Khaled Said” Facebook group - managed to exist almost unnoticed and breach state security as a result. As has been previously mentioned, they united people of very different political interests and orientations, and their consistent calls for political changes inspired people to create other groups, even in cases where they were not successful, thereby causing a shift in the collective consciousness. Examples of these smaller groups include “March 9 Movement”, “Youth Movement for Justice” or “Workers for Change”. All these groups started to meet each other and they discovered that they had very similar interests and grievances; they also realised that they had an enormous potential to succeed when acting in unison, as a bigger movement, rather than as smaller independent units. Essentially, their meetings revealed to them that they could make a real impact only by acting together (Refaei, 2012), which helped in creating the micro public sphere. This enabled them to create a bridge over the political regime and to gain support from many people, who could organise private meetings to exchange ideas, plan, and mobilise.

It became evident through these groups that the discussions on social, economic and political issues could actually lead to changes in these areas if organized and directed in a more deliberate fashion. The studies in the field show that political values and norms of the protests that took place in Egypt in 2011 have to be regarded as a whole. First of all, in terms of the demands that gathered thousands of people together, under the same goal. Second of all, it is in terms of the common values shared by those involved in informal political acts and by the youth movements. Thirdly, it is in terms of how all these have reflected on the Egyptian society after the uprisings (Joya, 2011).

Outside of this, however, there is also the matter of how this interest relates to social media. On one hand, it is normal to assume that informal political participation was closely related to online activity, and that those engaged in these acts found themselves a lot more involved in the facts, news and

information that took place in the online environment in terms of engagement and awareness. On the other hand, due to the limited access to the Internet in the rural areas the fact that they were still involved in revolutionary action to such a high level is astonishing. This is evident in a particular study related to online activity and informal political engagement. In this study, it was shown that only 8% of the average citizens followed blogs, and that only 28% of those engaged in informal political acts did the same (Erle et al., 2012). This highlights that the majority of informal political participation may not, in fact, have been based on online activity. This fact can be explained by the theory of Murdoch and Putnam who have stressed that the level of cooperation in the rural, agrarian and tribal communities had always been higher due to small social groups sharing and exchanging social capital when gathering together (Murdoch, 2000). In fact, these small social groups operated as their own proto micro-public sphere since they allowed for the discussion and exchange of information, in an uncoerced environment, relating to politics as well as social and economic issues that the citizens found relevant.

For example, in South Sinai, Interviewee A explained,

*"The tribal nature of South Sinai, due to the fact that each tribe lives in a certain part of the desert because they know the part they live in best, means that all tribes have to connect with each other and agree on a plan for the leading tribe for a current time frame. In this way, the leading tribe rotates every few years. The leading tribe is the tribe that provides the member of parliament who runs for elections for during that time frame so we know who is winning in advance because we believe this is the best way to live in security in Sinai; it is very close to many borders of other countries which makes it a volatile area" (A, 2018 in South Sinai).*

This internal cooperation exists in a different form in Qalyoubia. For example, when interviewing Interviewee B, a member of parliament whose brother had been the previous member of parliament, this interviewee received a phone call from his brother. In this phone call, Interviewee B was informed that a member of one of the families had passed away and that they had a small house; as such, it

was decided that Interviewee B's own home would be opened to the public so that the funeral could be held there. Moreover, because there was another funeral that day in another house in the area, each of the siblings would have to attend one of the funerals so that none of the families were upset. This was clearly a common incident. When asked about it during the interview, Interviewee B simply stated that

*“we have to help and stand with all the families in our area because as a member of parliament, and because of the history we have as a family in the area, it makes them feel better and feel like they are not alone during such times. We attend all weddings as well; it is our community from ages and my father used to do the same thing”* (B, 2018 in Qalyoubia).

This, of course, was based on the societal ties of the region and the social capital within it. In the same manner that South Sinai's Interviewee A mentioned that agreement was of paramount importance and everyone was aware of election results beforehand due to this agreement, Qalyoubia's Interviewee B ensured that everyone's needs would be met in terms of weddings, funerals, and other significant events. This is a form of “thick trust” that exists between an established social group. If the Internet had a certain contribution, then it is because it helped the transfer between ‘thin’ trust – which is the general trust between citizens of the same country or group – and the ‘thick’ trust – which is the trust existing between the members of a strong social group (Putnam, 2000). The power of social media bridged the two types of trust and created a strong bond between all the participants at the 2011 uprisings, even though they were physically or emotionally implicated. Evidently, this was one of the roles of social media at the time (Gibney et al., 2013).

Referring to the interviews and studies presented which give indications matching the interview results among the informal participation that generated the uprisings, changes in the political norms had taken place to a certain extent, including the fact that the President resigned. However, the political system had not been completely changed and the political actors remained almost the same, even though they claimed to have different intentions, with the old values

remaining deeply rooted in the larger political scene and even in the larger majority of the population. For example, some families involved in politics that dealt with the previous regimes changed the head of the family to someone younger to give the impression that they are supporting the change as well. For example, Interviewee I from Qalyoubia, explained: "*Saif family has always been in the parliament and after 2011 uprisings they changed the candidate for the parliament from their family to prove that they believe in change like the uprisings*" (I, 2018 in Qalyoubia).

It is not necessarily the case that changing the candidate is in fact real change because it is the same family; rather, this was seen as a public change to match the change happening in the country. The studies and the statistics showed that Egyptians could be highly involved in the local problems and that they are able to change things at a local and national level. Their informal political participation created a space for local mobilisation that led to bigger events and to further formal participation in political life (Friedman, 2011; B, 2018 in Qalyoubia; B, 2018 in South Sinai) not because of social media only but the event as a whole.

The interviews that have been done for this study revealed the fact that the rural population was less involved in informal political participation, such as social media activities or in discussions about media and television information, because most of these people relied on the information they were receiving from their social circles. Once again, it was the social ties that proved stronger than any other form of communication and information, as existing because of the social capital in the region. Nevertheless, if we only compare the actual number of people participating in the protests from the rural and urban areas, we can conclude that the urban population was less involved, because if we regard the statistics, the percentages of informal participation in the rural areas was greater than that in the urban areas. The rural citizens proved to have a greater political sense than their urban counterparts, even though their level of media exposure was lower in a very significant way. According to the interviews, their informal participation in political life is less traceable, because it consisted more in family gathering and discussions between closed groups. It is essentially operated as a proto micro-public sphere that relied on live communication and discussion.

Moreover, the interview patterns showed that people aged 50 and over do not trust social media directly and instead rely on their social circles to get the latest news and television, due to cultural attachment to television for the older age. For example, Interviewee H in Qalyoubia mentioned,

*"I am aware that social media has become important for people around me and relatives that are younger than me but maybe my generation made it harder psychologically to rely on it because I was not used to this form of media. However, I asked younger relatives if something on social media was found that was not on traditional media because I did not feel that all information on social media was accurate" (H, 2018 in Qalyoubia).*

However, in the interviews done we interviewed as well people over 60 years old, which had the same belief except if they were strong opponents of the Mubarak regime. For example, Interviewee C - a resident of Qalyoubia who had been involved in politics for decades with a strong opposition to the Mubarak regime, and who had run, and lost, against the incumbent in the parliamentary elections - explained, *"Social media was a very important form of media that helped me in expressing my political views that was hard to express on traditional media even prior to 2011 uprisings because it was opposing Mubarak's regime"* (C, 2018 in Qalyoubia). These circles rely, in turn, on their local leaders who they trust, follow and respect. People aged 50 and above preferred to get their news from their social circles or from the other younger family members who had access to the Internet and other media information – they did not use these sources of information themselves.

#### **6.6. Social Capital & Formal Participation in the Aftermath of the 2011 Uprisings**

While the informal political involvement had been largely used during Mubarak's presidency and during the 2011 uprising, even though it was considered illegal, there were also some forms of formal political participation, such as the presidential or parliamentary elections. In terms of the presidential elections, the view rural Egyptians had prior to the uprisings was very much

negative. The assumption was that it did not have an impact on the results and, as such, was not significant. However, according to Refaei (2012), this changed after 2011 and rural Egyptians began to view voting as more important. The view that voting lacked significance prior to 2011, and that it would begin to have an impact in the aftermath of the uprisings, is borne out in the interview data conducted in this thesis.

For example, Interviewee E in Minya explained, "*presidential voting before 2011 did not necessarily make a difference in the political outcome yet it started impacting political results after the 2011 uprisings*"(E, 2018 in Minya).

In Qalyoubia, Interviewee H stated,

*"voting in the parliamentary elections has always been a major event in Qalyoubia, yet not presidential elections because before 2011 the outcome was known anyway. However, after 2011 people were encouraged to participate more in presidential elections than before because they felt change could start happening"*(H, 2018 in Qalyoubia).

In Menoufia, Interviewee J mentioned, "*I was more encouraged to vote after 2011 in presidential elections because I felt my vote could make a difference, unlike prior to 2011*"(J, 2018 in Menoufia).

Finally, in South Sinai, Interviewee D explained,

*"I always voted for parliamentary elections even before 2011 but not necessarily for presidential elections except after 2011 because it seemed like it was different in its relevance compared to before 2011"*(D, 2018 in South Sinai).

These are the effects of a dictatorial regime that makes people act with apathy and ignorance when it comes to any political action. After Mubarak's resignation, the 2011 uprisings made Egyptians overcome their fear and become more aware of their political rights. For instance, people continued the protest even after Mubarak resigned, and they have continued to create social movements and to get

involved in different political parties, some of them created during the 2011 uprisings (Nasser, 2010). Moreover, given the increased communication that arose between regions because of the uprisings, it seems as though the idea of making a difference on the national level began to arise as well. For example, in Qalyoubia, Interviewee I explained, "*Social media gave me a chance to understand different perspectives about politics with people I did not know and were from different parts of Egypt*"(I, 2018 in Qalyoubia). In Menoufia, Interviewee H, mentioned,

*"The awareness that happened about politics in discussion between strangers gave me a chance to start discussing politics with people from other governorates not just people in my social culture and circle"*(H, 2018 in Menoufia).

In Minya, Interviewee A said, "*Discussing politics or at least hearing about it from people with different backgrounds after the uprisings exposed me to a different experience about politics*" (A, 2018 in Minya). In South Sinai, Interviewee E, explained, "*As a citizen with a different cultural background to other Egyptians in different areas being able to engage through different forms of media gave me an additional perspective*" (E, 2018 in South Sinai).

One interesting facet of the previously-mentioned data lies in the consistent iteration that parliamentary elections, unlike their presidential counterparts prior to 2011, did matter. In rural areas such as the ones focused on in this thesis, parliamentary elections were not superficial events because of the social capital culture in these areas that led people to become very concerned about voting for the head of family they trust the most and believe in. They feel that, at least in their specific territory, they can have their say. Due to this strong local social capital, Mubarak's regime regularly attempted to locate and co-opt the strong heads of families in the rural areas, since they were aware of the relationship and trust that existed between these family heads and the citizens of their areas. By co-opting these key individuals, who would have won their parliamentary elections regardless of the regime's support, the Mubarak regime made it appear as though they had reached a majority in parliament under the ruling regime's party. This in turn made it appear, to citizens of rural Egypt, as though voting in



parliamentary elections made a difference to the governance of the state and created a kind of connection between the regime and the citizens of rural Egypt. It is interesting that this policy was based on necessity; given the importance of social connections and social capital in these areas, as this thesis has discussed in great detail, it would have been difficult (if not impossible) for the Mubarak regime to successfully appoint anyone other than these key family heads. (C, 2018 in Qalyoubia; G, 2018 in Menoufia)

For example, in Qalyoubia, Interviewee K, mentioned:

*"I always participated in the parliamentary elections because it affected our day to day life in the area we are living in and I always chose those I was familiar with regardless of the campaign" (K, 2018 in Qalyoubia).*

In Menoufia, Interviewee L, explained:

*"Since politics on the bigger scale was hard to affect at least I had to vote for the parliamentary elections because they can represent our needs with the government and if we choose someone we are not familiar with and their family representing us becomes much harder in terms of understanding our needs. Our parliament candidate must be living with us not just from Menoufia and has money and based in Cairo because they will never understand our needs"(L, 2018 in Menoufia).*

In Minya, Interviewee F stated:

*"Our parliamentary candidate is the only hope we have because even if they are not great they will definitely be better than the government so I always make sure I attend the parliamentary elections" (F, 2018 in Minya).*

In South Sinai, Interviewee E, said:

*"Before the elections we pretty much know who is our parliamentary candidate and I prefer being in connection with them because through*

*our interconnected relatives and families since we are a small population it is best we support the candidate so when a day comes and I need him"*(E, 2018 in South Sinai).

Thus it is clear, from both the interviewee data and the Mubarak regime's policy of co-opting rural members of parliament into the ruling party, that political involvement in rural Egypt was considered highly significant. As such, parliamentary elections were not superficial affairs. In fact, the high level of political involvement in rural Egypt required the Mubarak regime to adjust to the realities of this strong emphasis on parliamentary elections in order to successfully maintain a parliamentary majority without causing strife between the state and the citizens of rural Egypt who placed great importance on which individual from their area was present in parliament. This is due to the social ties and resulting localised social capital of these regions. This local social capital meant that rural citizens placed great value on their parliamentary representative as their voice for representing "[their] needs to the government." Nevertheless, unlike parliamentary elections, presidential elections were mainly superficial events presented to the population because, during those pre-2011 years, there was only one presidential candidate and only one political party. This led to the view that voting would have no effect.

The knowledge that this was the case clearly affected political involvement. For example, as previously mentioned, the 2005 presidential elections involved multiple candidates, but citizens regarded this with suspicion and voter participation was low as a result (Lynch, 2006). This is, of course, despite the fact that the Egyptian citizens identify more with formal politics, as presented by Refaei (2012) and borne out in their actions regarding parliamentary elections. However, the 2011 uprisings affected this, both decreasing that level of suspicion and distrust as well as highlighting that Egyptians, while identifying more with formal politics, were not averse to informal political acts if needed. After 2011, voting participation increased in line with the new viewpoint that voting at the national level would have more of an impact, given the results of the 2011 uprisings. By November 2011's elections, voting had reached an unprecedented 76%, showing the impact that all the factors involved in the 2011 uprisings had

on the citizens (Erle et al., 2012). According to statistics, 79% of those involved in informal political acts intended to vote in the People's Assembly elections, and 76% of citizens in general intended the same (Erle et al., 2012). Interviewee data also highlights this change in the aftermath of 2011. For example, in Qalyoubia, all interviewees that did not vote prior to the 2011 uprisings began to vote after 2011. In South Sinai, the same situation occurred. However, in Menoufia, interviewees that lived in low financial circumstances and worked far from home were not as motivated to participate in all elections; they would participate if their working circumstances allowed them. Minya was similar to Menoufia in this regard.

Admittedly, as discussed, formal political participation of some rural citizens was lower than in the urban areas. However, this was due only to geographical factors in some rural areas; of course, this affected some governorates more than others based on distance and infrastructure. First of all, some rural citizens work in other governorates than their home governorate, which would not allow them a direct, formal participation due to the rules of the government that people had to vote in their home governorates. Nevertheless, these people have always had an interest in being informed about what happens in their country, and this political and civic sense was demonstrated during the 2011 uprisings as well as by the interview patterns presented in this thesis. The interviews for this study in the previous chapter showed that when accessing social media after the 2011 uprising or other media channels, all the interviewees were engaged only for political purposes, just to be updated and to have a clearer idea about what was happening in their country. Usually, the community leaders conducted this operation and then gathered people from their community to discuss the relevant updates and how they should represent their community in the future. This happened in all the rural areas covered, with only minor differences; for example, in South Sinai, this occurred within the confines of a tribal system whereas for Qalyoubia it was family leaders (B, 2018 in Qalyoubia; I, 2018 in Qalyoubia). Menoufia and Qalyoubia which are the governorates with the biggest number of rural population, also proved to have the highest rate of political participation, even greater than the citizens from Cairo, which was the focal point of the 2011 uprisings.

## 6.7. Conclusions

This chapter focused its attention on what truly happened in the rural areas of Egypt during the 2011 uprisings and their aftermath up to 2015, with the aim of discovering to what extent social media and the traditional media, when converged, contributed to changing individual norms with regards to political participation. Given the fact that Egypt has more than 50% of its population located in rural areas, the opinions of different scholars that the uprisings were urban in nature or based on social media in execution can be considered as at least superficial, if not exaggerated. Different studies and statistics have been analysed from multiple perspectives and all have shown the same patterns. First of all, the rural areas had a tradition of gathering people in large groups to protest against different unjust laws, political movements or decisions affecting their lives. This is what researchers have theorised as the power of social capital and refers to the strong connection that people have created within their small groups formed completely distinct from the existence of any new or old media. Second, rural citizens have always proved to have high levels of political sense, political engagement and responsibility in terms of political participation. They have manifested their interest in many instances prior to the 2011 uprisings and continued to do so during and after the 2011 uprisings. Thirdly, their access to the Internet has always been lower than in the urban areas, due to geographical, financial and traditional issues which are specific to the rural areas and rural communities. So, taking into consideration the evidence, if Egypt is more than 50% rural and if the rural citizens have, on the one hand, very low access to the Internet and, on the other hand, high political involvement prior and during the 2011 uprisings, the contention that social media had the most important contribution to the uprisings is not very accurate or, at least, it does not present a complete picture of the events that took place. This is why the power of social capital has to be taken into account in order to have a complete image of what truly generated the 2011 Egyptian uprisings.

In terms of social capital, this chapter has aimed to assess how social capital in rural Egypt affects the political interaction of citizens in the public sphere considering the social media access circumstances. This chapter has highlighted

the existence of a local definition of social capital that, while different to that found in the conventional global definition, has come to exist as a result of the unique historical, geographic, and societal realities of rural Egypt. This local social capital - a social capital focused primarily on the importance of social connections, societal ties, and a candidate's tailored knowledge of the region as found to work through family history in leadership and responsibility in the area - limits the idea of voting solely on the basis of political considerations, campaigns or ideas at the local and regional levels. The importance of this local social capital to the political scene in Egypt can be found in the Mubarak regime's attempts to co-opt local leaders into the national party, as previously discussed, as well as in the high involvement of rural citizens in politics prior to, during, and following the uprisings of 2011. However, it is important to note that a version of the global conventional social capital still exists in the presidential elections, though even this is tinged by local social capital. The uprisings of 2011 and, to an extent, 2013 served as an example of "bridging" in the sense that communication with "strangers" in the follow-up of the 2011 uprisings led to an expansion of the local social capital to include those outside the region and, as a result, an increased interest in national politics such as the presidential election. This bridging brought local ideas of political involvement, and the local social capital, to the national level. Social media did play some role in this bridging. This is in contrast to the pre-2011 period, where rural focus was almost explicitly on parliamentary elections due to the view that these elections actually had an effect on the lives of citizens in the area, as well as the fact that social media use for politics was more of a novelty in 2011. One result of this is that presidential elections follow neither the local nor the global social capital definitions fully; instead, depending on whether citizens are from urban or rural areas, voting for presidential elections can be based on either political considerations (in the manner of conventional social capital) or societal considerations in a similar way to the decision-making that occurs in parliamentary elections. This issue is further exacerbated by the fact that political understanding, and voting based on political considerations, is a novel idea in Egypt given the country's history as a single-party state. It may be possible that eventually the local social capital will disappear and be replaced by the conventional social capital over time. However,

this is dependent on many factors, including an increased reliance and understanding of political considerations by rural and urban Egyptians.

A general overview of the context of political interaction of Egypt's rural areas has been presented and correlated with the data gathered in the interviews that have been conducted with ordinary citizens, especially for this research. The correlation between older and more recent data revealed that the rural communities maintained a strong emphasis on their traditional information sources - such as their local leaders, social groups and family members - as well as, to a lesser degree on information from the media. This is their specificity, their way of living, but, at the same time, this did not prevent them from getting involved in political life, or from organising especially informal forms of political participation, such as smaller or larger protests. This is the reason why the huge protests that took place during the 2011 uprisings were not such a novelty for the rural citizens who were already accustomed to confronting the authorities and fighting for their rights.

Moreover, different types of barriers to social media access have also been presented in previous chapters as strong evidence that the 2011 uprisings were not based on social media use; rather, they were uprisings that represented all Egyptian citizens and that expressed their common voice calling for radical change in the political system. This affected their norms because of the whole experience not social media solely. The barriers that have been presented - such as economic, geographic, educational, language or security issues - are so evident that no one can or should ignore them when speaking about the levels of participation in the events of 2011.

In the end, this chapter was dedicated to the analysis of a part of the data gathered via the interviews taken for this study and correlated with various studies, in order to demonstrate the tremendous contribution that the rural population had in starting the 2011 uprisings, and to show that social media was not the main factor in this picture in impacting political interaction individual norms. The intention of this chapter was far from wanting to diminish social media's contribution; it was rather to bring to light what many researchers have omitted: the role of the rural citizens who were not influenced and motivated

much by the social networks with regards to their norms, but had the same voice in terms of desiring, at any price, the end of the unjust and humiliating political regime run by Mubarak. Moreover, previous studies were referred to so one can relate to them because they were done at an earlier time than when the interviews conducted for this analysis were done. The idea of the understanding that rural citizens have as well of their idea of social capital is very critical in the way they are impacted by social media in relation to their political interaction because they have a much more local view of how politics should be in their areas. Therefore, the fact that norms changed slowly in rural areas as compared to urban is clearly related to the local idea of social capital and its impact on political interaction.

## **7. Chapter Six - The Transformation of Media and Its Impact on Social Capital of Rural Citizens After the Egyptian 2011 Political Uprisings**

### **7.1. Introduction**

During the previous chapters of this study we have demonstrated that the uprisings that started in 2011 in Egypt and resulted in the resignation of President Mubarak and other huge changes on the political scene, was not necessarily triggered by social media. Moreover, the role of social capital and social media in rural Egypt as relating to the uprisings, political interaction, and political involvement have been shown. However, it is still very important to bring to light what happened after the 2011 uprisings and how the media has or has not contributed to the political changes and in convincing people to get involved in the political development of their country (Khamis and Vaughn, 2011).

After the 2011 uprisings, the media continued its activity and its coverage, and maintained its impact on the micro public spheres. Many people who did not even access social media sources during the uprising began to do so after the uprisings of 2011. There was a clear increase in the number of social media users in rural Egypt, with the number of Twitter users rising from 19.3 thousand in 2010 to 129 thousand in 2011. Similarly, the number of Facebook users doubled, from 4.2 million in 2010 to 9.4 million in 2011 (Information and Communications Technology Indicators Bulletin, 2015). During this period, there was also an increase in read-only rates and interaction in discussions related to politics on social media platforms directly, rather than just via convergence of social media news via television. In fact, by 2011, the number of social media users being updated on politics through their phone reached 64%; by 2012, 57% of Egyptians used social media to “participate in political life, sharing and expressing their political views and opinions, through different smart-phone applications” (Information and Communications Technology Indicators Bulletin, 2015). This is because it gave citizens a chance to express their opinion via new means than their previous nature.



This chapter focuses on the media and public sphere changes that occurred after the 2011 uprisings, analysing how they both changed and to what level the uprisings produced profound transformations. The transformation of media is analysed in order to find out how it impacted the micro public spheres and to what extent people let themselves be influenced and impacted by media coverage. Moreover, the chapter also analyses the power of social media with the aim of finding out if its effects are as strong as previously claimed in regards to the period of the uprisings in 2011. Also, this chapter includes an analysis on whether or not there was an impact and immersion of social media in the rural areas and the extent to which rural citizens have been empowered by it. The agenda setting of old and new media are also studied in correlation with two critical aspects of this thesis: social capital transformation in contact with media sources and political involvement of citizens in the political sphere. The main aim is to discover the extent to which the 2011 uprisings determined power shifts and changes in the public sphere and social capital norms in order to analyse any changes that happened to feelings of empowerment in rural Egypt.

The analysis of citizens' behaviour and their level of involvement in both parliamentary and presidential elections were also considered to be of great importance for the aim of this study, which is to discover the extent to which the media and social media influenced Egyptian politics during and after the 2011 uprisings by analysing what are the changes in their feelings happening about politics along with their political involvement.

## **7.2. The Media Background after the 2011 Uprisings, and During the Build Up to 2013**

In 2011, in the midst of the Arab Spring and the series of political changes occurring across the Middle East, the media gained a lot of attention. In fact, the 2011 Egyptian uprisings in particular received a lot of attention in terms of social media usage and the effect of this usage on the mobilization of Egypt's citizens as they went out to the street to protest for their rights (Campbell 2011; Castells, 2012; Howard and Hussain, 2013). In general, scholarship has placed a strong emphasis on the media during this time, underlining that the new media had been preceded by active political and social actions, and that the new media continued

this process by having a long lasting impact on liberalisation processes and on real transformations in the society to which they belong (Brisson and Lee, 2011).

Social media was not the cause of the 2011 uprisings that took place in Egypt, as we have already demonstrated, particularly in the case of its effect on the rural citizens that represent more than half of Egypt's population. The most important pre-conditions of the 2011 uprisings were economic and political. People had suffered for a long time from poverty and inequality, and were dominated by an oppressive, corrupt and rigid political system. However, in order to find out details about the evolution of Egyptian society in the aftermath of the uprisings, and to analyse it, the media is an important source that has to be analysed, because the media tool is a useful indicator of what happens in a society. As Habermas states, the ideal public sphere acts as an informal environment for the discussion of politics in an equal uncoerced manner. After the uprisings, the media was expected to become a part of this, and to act to facilitate the exchange between the citizens and the government. In an increasingly globally mediated context, the media - be it social media, national television, or satellite television - is an important catalyst and tool in generating changes and at the same time in impacting opinions, actions, and ideas. The diversity of media channels and tools offers flexibility and organic development and the power of online networks increased, even in Egypt where Internet penetration and mobile telephones have rapidly increased in recent years after 2011. These aspects could have been the missing link between the vibrant social media and the rather inactive civil societies in terms of political participation (Walker and Orttung, 2012). This assertion will be discussed in this chapter in order to highlight that it was, in fact, the missing link. The diversity and penetration issues, in particular, will be significant since (as Habermas discusses) the adequacy of a public sphere is largely dependent on both the quality of the discourse itself and the quantity of political participation

More recently, researchers have discussed journalism, in its various forms of expression, as "a culture that has to be grown and taken care of, as a system of shared beliefs rather than strictly professional practices" (Khamis and Vaughn, 2011). Bordieu recognised the journalistic field as "an autonomous system unto

itself, a field of activity with its own laws that cannot be understood by looking only at external factors” (Bourdieu, 1998). The journalists are directly linked and influenced by the economic and political fields, and this was very clearly shown in the context of Egypt. The Egyptian mass media held critical importance in the 2011 uprisings and their aftermath, in different ways. While the “national media” (composed of newspapers, TV or radio channels) was used massively, and relied upon heavily, by President Mubarak to influence public opinion, other media - both traditional and unconventional, such as social networks, satellite channels or private channels - played a crucial role in counterbalancing the state’s forces, mobilising people and updating them with an alternative method for gaining credible, objective and uncoerced information.

For example, Interviewee A, in Qalyoubia, mentioned: "*private channels were less controlled than state channels*" (A, 2018 in Qalyoubia). Also, Interviewee E, in Qalyoubia, explained: "*state channels were controlled by the regime according to their agenda*" (E, 2018 in Qalyoubia). Similarly, Interviewee D in Menoufia, stated: "*everyone mainly watched satellite channels like Dream TV and Al Jazeera*" (D, 2018 in Menoufia). In South Sinai, Interviewee A and B, stated: "*satellite channels are more informative*" (A, 2018 in South Sinai; B, 2018 in South Sinai). While in Minya, Interviewee F, explained: "*any state media was very controlled*" (F, 2018 in Minya).

The interview data clearly highlights that interviewees from all governorates were aware of the national media’s use as a part of the state propaganda machine. As a result, this awareness had an impact on both trust and viewership. For example, In Menoufia, Interviewee I mentioned that they "*preferred watching private and international satellite channels because they were not controlled like state channels*" (I, 2018 in Menoufia). In Qalyoubia, Interviewee G, stated, "*after I realized that state channels tried to avoid covering Tahrir Square during the start of the uprisings I stopped watching it at all and watched private channels such as Dream TV and CBC*" (G, 2018 in Qalyoubia). In South Sinai, Interviewee F, explained, "*I watched mainly private channels because they were more updated and covered social media updates as well*" (F, 2018 in South Sinai). In Minya, Interviewee D, said, "*Al Jazeera was always showing live coverage unlike*

*state channels which made me always watch it [before 2013] among other private channels only"* (D, 2018 in Minya). Evidently, either because of inadequate coverage relating to the uprisings (as evident in the comments of Qalyoubia's Interviewee G) or inadequate coverage of social media (as seen in South Sinai's Interviewee F), it was considered across all four governorates that the national media was less truthful, honest, and objective than its private counterparts. This impacted its audience.

As such, the role of state media can be understood within the broader context of how the evolution of media has influenced the relationship between the citizens and the state. In the case of Egypt, media had already clearly been used as a tool of mass control and persuasion for many decades, because Egypt was a state run by a dictatorial regime. The mass media was under the close control of the government which used it to choose what to make public and what to conceal from view, what to transmit to the people, and what to make them believe or not. This, of course, stifled the creation of a genuinely uncoerced public sphere. In fact, it became difficult (if not impossible) to discuss politics in a manner that was rational and free of government interference, especially if one relied on state media. As a result, the conditions of a public sphere, as outlined by Habermas and discussed in Chapter 2, were hindered. It is important to note here, however, that the existence, and growing prevalence, of satellite channels and social networks ensured that this stifling was more limited than it otherwise could have been. As the interview data highlights, the state media was considered to be "controlled by the regime according to their agenda" in contrast to satellite channels, which were viewed as "more informative" or "not controlled like state channels." This shows that rural Egyptians were aware of the intended purpose of state media - to manipulate public opinion in favour of the regime - and that they avoided this media as a result. As such, it can be assumed that state media in this time had little impact on invigorating (or harming) the micro-public sphere, and did not unduly or negatively impact feelings of empowerment or the build-up of social capital in the area. As a result, satellite channels and social media acted more as a public sphere than the state channels; satellite and social media served as a counter-balance to the government controlled media, leading to a public sphere that was more genuine and uncoerced but, of course, still imperfect.

Nevertheless, it remains the case that the state-owned media content in Egypt was shaped by the regime's desire to enhance its image and underline its leadership among citizens. Since the 2011 uprisings, some drastic changes occurred in order to reform the Egyptian media; one of the most important of these changes was the abolition of the Egyptian Ministry of Information. This measure had as its purpose the ending of government control and manipulation over media and marks the beginning of the process of media liberalisation, encouraging private media ownership that would give airtime to many different voices. This would have completed the formation of an uncoerced public sphere, in theory, since all forms of media would be devoid of government coercion.

Yet, in practice, the media landscape in Egypt did not change as much as expected after the 2011 uprisings, as the country is still undergoing a democratisation process. The media apparatus is still strongly connected to the political regime. As such, despite the fact that policies were enacted officially that would have helped in the creation of a genuine public sphere, the reality is that these policies had little to no effect. For instance, The Ministry of Information was later replaced by SCAF six months after the January 2011 uprisings. Osama Heikal, a former military correspondent, replaced the former Minister of Information and was named the new head of the same Ministry. Later on, another individual close to Mubarak, Major-General Ahmed Anis, replaced Heikal in the same position. The 2012 Government – The Muslim Brotherhood – made some changes, but brought people who came from the same military-backed government of Mubarak into the same position (Issawi, 2012). This is the reason why the image of the media was one of a platform transmitting the government's messages, and not of a journalistic tool that disinterestedly and objectively updated people about what was happening in different parts of the country. This image was highly prevalent, with interviewees from all four governorates stating something to the effect that the media was a government tool. For example, In Qalyoubia, Interviewee I asserted that "*state media was constantly supporting the agenda of the regime so not all information was the true reality*" (I, 2018 in Qalyoubia). Similarly, in Menoufia, Interviewee A mentioned "*the media environment was very controlled because of the regime's constraints on information*" (A, 2018 in Menoufia). In Minya, Interviewee D stated that "*the*

*country was in chaos and the government was controlling the information to limit the chaos"* (D, 2018 in Minya). While in South Sinai, Interviewee B, explained that *"the interference of the government in media played a major part in what was being transmitted on media"* (B, 2018 in South Sinai).

It is interesting that the relationship between the government and the media in Egypt is in fact similar to the example of Europe, as Habermas discusses it. The public sphere in Egypt, like in Europe, was deteriorating - and was not being re-established - because of powerful government interests dictating and influencing the nature of political debate (Habermas, 1989). Osama Saraya, the former chief editor of *Ahram*, confirmed that "the main function of state media was to embellish the face of the regime, not to monitor it" (Issawi, 2012), while Abdalla Kamal chief editor of *Roz el Youssef*, a newspaper known for campaigning against dissidents, affirmed that "I was working in politics. This is common, even in Western Media. There was no real political life and media was replacing the lacking political parties so it was overwhelmed by politics" (Issawi, 2012).

As a result of these views, restructuring the media sector was one of the major topics of the 2011 uprising's debate. However, the drastic measures have never been taken, and for different reasons. First of all, major cuts would have greatly increased unemployment, a move which would probably have generated a dissident movement. Many courageous ideas - such as following the BBC's example of demanding media independence from the state - have been discussed, but none of these became reality. The idea just mentioned is particularly interesting when one considers Habermas' views on the public sphere. If implemented, media independence would have allowed the traditional media to behave, in some fashion, like social media in the sense that it would be free from government interference. This would have allowed it to become an environment for rational and uncoerced discussion. Moreover, this independence may have allowed for some kind of avoidance of Habermas' assertion that public spheres, such as those in Europe, decline due to powerful interests by the government. By operating wholly separately from the state, the interests of the government would no longer be relevant in the sense that those interests could no longer dictate the nature of political debate. Finally, without government interference, traditional

media could return to the view held in agenda setting theory of a direct correlation between the media and the public, since government needs and desires would not interfere externally. However, this idea, along with many others, never occurred.

The second reason the restructuring never occurred was that the sudden transformation of an extremely politicised media into a decentralised one would have been a major challenge. Every time a satellite private television program had tried to find its way in the media scene, gaining a large audience and building a new culture in terms of media practices – such as the case of *25 TV* that was shut down approximately one year after the uprisings – they were shut down by the regime. This is another example of how government interference hindered the direct correlation that should exist, according to agenda setting theory, between media and public agendas. The permanent manipulation of media by the state that took place for decades in Egypt, together with the decline of professional journalistic standards, led to great reductions in audience numbers particularly for state media and to a continuous erosion of trust among the citizens, which was depicted in the responses presented above in this chapter. Secondary data supports this, with studies showing that “private satellite stations aren’t operating away from government or economic pressures, yet they are considered the most attractive platforms to the audiences” and that “national television has not seen actual change in terms of conversion from being the mouthpiece of the government to an actual public service broadcaster.” One of the best examples of why the media was losing its audience was an edited photo published by the newspaper *Ahram* where Mubarak was shown walking ahead of all participant leaders to a Middle East peace convention, while, in fact, he was in second place. Asked about this incident, the chief editor responded that the photo was not edited under his directions and that he was not aware of this event (Issawi, 2012). If the state-run media had audience numbers that were quite low before the 2011 uprisings, its broadcast describing the protesters as “agent of foreign hands” or even as “prostitutes” led to a major reduction in its audience (Issawi, 2012). Interview data, seen below, supports this viewpoint.

In Qalyoubia, Interviewee I, explained: "*The media still seemed controlled after the [2011] uprisings because the SCAF replaced the Mubarak regime*" (I, 2018 in Qalyoubia).

Similarly, in Menoufia, Interviewee H, mentioned that, before 2011, "*The media said what the [Mubarak] government wanted and that is why people kept going back to Al Jazeera channel because they felt Egypt had no control on it like other channels*" (H, 2018 in Menoufia).

While in Minya, Interviewee D, stated: "*Media [during the Mubarak regime] did not always give all the updates about what was happening*" (D, 2018 in Minya).

In South Sinai, Interviewee B, said: "*[After 2011] the government sometimes interfered to avoid chaos and insecurity however, the past regime [of Mubarak] always gave an impression that corruption was happening so people always felt that something big is being baked or hidden*" (B, 2018 in South Sinai).

This interview data highlights the fact that the trust by Egypt's citizens of the state media (and by extension, the state) in general, and the trust of rural citizens in the state media and the state in particular, was hindered greatly by the media's actions. For example, Interviewee H's statements seem to strongly imply that rural citizens viewed the media as an extension of the state. This view runs counter to the Habermasian ideal of a public sphere that is uncoerced and devoted to the establishment of a genuine space for political discourse and debate. As such, they stopped watching state media, or minimized its role by watching private channels. As previously shown, this was due to the viewpoint across all governorates that private media was less controlled. In this sense, it becomes clear why social media was important. Because the media "said what the government wanted," social media - and, to an extent, satellite channels like Al Jazeera - were viewed more favourably by comparison since the state could not do the same thing. This can be seen in usage rates of social media for political discussion: in 2011 alone, 64% of mobile users accessed political and news sites or applications for the purpose of political engagement. Satellite and social media were viewed as being less likely to fall under the influence of SCAF, the Ministry



of Information, and the government in general (Information and Communications Technology Indicators Bulletin, 2015).

On the other hand, when channels such as 25 TV or Al-Jazeera did gain large audiences by discussing topics that were in line with the public agenda, and trusted by the audience, the government's involvement led to them being shut down, or their influence being otherwise limited in some fashion. This, similarly, limited the ability of the media to invigorate micro-public spheres or enhance feelings of empowerment or the build-up of social capital. For example, In Qalyoubia, Interviewee E explained:

*"During the 18 days of the 2011 uprisings I was constantly following Al Jazeera and mainly private channels because the state channels were hiding many updates. However, Al Jazeera was constantly attacked by the government and their office was closed down so it showed to the people that they were showing updates that the government wanted to hide" (E, 2018 in Qalyoubia).*

Similarly, in Menoufia, Interviewee D mentioned:

*"Al Jazeera and similar channels are what updated viewers on what was going on more than state channels which showed that during 2011 Egyptians trusted what was being viewed on Al Jazeera. Maybe when the government started stopping the Al Jazeera transmission it was a catalyst for people to believe in it more as a counter-reaction to any action the government was taking, similarly to when they cut the Internet for a week and it increased the amount of people in Tahrir Square and other gathering points in Egypt" (D, 2018 in Menoufia).*

Both these examples show that there was a distinction between private channels and state channels in the sense that the former were trusted and the latter were viewed as an extension of the state. The statement by Menoufia's Interviewee D is interesting since it highlights the view that government's attempt to limit *Al Jazeera's* influence actually backfired, causing viewers to trust it more. This is compared to the shutting down of the Internet, an act which served as a catalyst for physical and offline informal political acts. In this sense, the private

channels and social media may have invigorated the public sphere in the sense that the government's negative reaction to them motivated political involvement. Interviewee D's comments are particularly significant given the below statements, which both highlights the importance of private channels in general and *Al Jazeera* in particular. In Minya, Interviewee A stated, "*Most viewers of television channel followed private channels during 2011, yet Al Jazeera was on the top of the list of private channels for updates*" (A, 2018 in Minya). In South Sinai, Interviewee B mentioned something similar, noting that "*Al Jazeera was one of the main channels followed by Egyptians during the 2011 uprisings due to the amount of live coverage they showed Egyptians that other channels did not. However, during the 2013 uprisings the trust Egyptians had in Al Jazeera decreased hugely*" (B, 2018 in South Sinai).

Interviewee B's comment is particularly interesting, since it highlights a decrease in the Egyptian population's trust of *Al Jazeera* by 2013. This was a common claim that can be seen in both interview data and secondary research by other scholars. By 2013, the population had begun to view *Al Jazeera* as an agent of foreign manipulation, and there were assertions made that foreign nations such as Qatar (where *Al Jazeera* is headquartered) was taking advantage of the popularity of the program by using it for the purpose of propaganda. This was based on *Al Jazeera*'s support of the Muslim Brotherhood in direct contrast to the negative opinion Egyptians had regarding the Muslim Brotherhood at the time. *Al Jazeera*'s support was considered a part of Qatar's tendency to support Islamist groups, with scholars such as David B. Roberts noting that Qatar "has developed a reputation for engaging with and supporting Islamist groups around the Middle East" as well as specifically "groups related to the Muslim Brotherhood" (Roberts, 2019). In this sense, *Al Jazeera* began to be viewed in a similar light as the state channels previously discussed in this chapter. *Al Jazeera*'s continued criticism of Egypt's political landscape was no longer aligned with the viewpoint of its citizens and, as such, the trust placed in the program by those citizens dissipated. *Al Jazeera*'s support of the Muslim Brotherhood at a time where, as shown, Egypt's citizens were no longer supportive of that regime can be seen as a trigger for this shift in opinion.

These interviewee comments have highlighted the effect that these governmental actions have had on the rural citizens views of the state-run media in detail, these views being primarily rooted in distrust and a motivation to act in response. Nevertheless, some media continued biased reporting, even after the 2011 uprising ended and the Mubarak regime had been abolished. One of the best examples was the Coptic demonstration that was brutally repressed by the police while the television presenter Rasha Magdy was desperately calling for citizens to defend the police from the “violent protesters”. The official media comments after this coverage were astonishing: “This was not incitement to violence. The presenter was politically emotional. We admit this is a mistake. The presenter was investigated and she is back to work now”, while the state TV “did not show footage of killed demonstrators to avoid fueling tension” (Issawi, 2012).

Nevertheless, it is important to note that some changes did occur after the uprisings, two of which are notable. First of all, the dissident voices had the chance to be heard over voice-only interviews on talk shows while they were at Tahrir Square, or on talk shows after they returned from Tahrir. Also, the news sources had been diversified and the official sources were not the only sources considered to be truthful. Both measures led to the recovery of a part of the lost audience. These measures also affected the national state media, which faced a lack of resources and great social capital losses, with it struggling to survive in the open market of media competitors.

However, as previously mentioned, obedience and bureaucracy within the system did not totally disappear, especially because the sudden resignation of Mubarak left the journalists without directives:

The idea of prohibited information no longer exists but journalists are used to it. They continue to define new red lines even if no one asked them to do so. They had to be reassured by the publication of the information by private media to consider the news as non-prohibited

(Interview with Gamal Fahmy, the first secretary of the journalists Syndicate, in Issawi, 2012).

Many journalists who were trying to do their job (and to broadcast facts as they were truly happening) faced bureaucratic and censorship measures, or at least attempts to censor them:

Our correspondent was not relying on the news provided by the official news agency as we used to do. He was in the street, when the police issued a communiqué saying that they did not use gunfire, our correspondent was reporting live showing us the empty cartridge in streets. We were telling what we were seeing and not what we were told to say. (...) Our major problem is our editors who still follow the old practices, such as waiting for the government to issue a communiqué before reporting on the events. The quality of reporting is very much linked to the personality of the editor of the day. There is no clear editorial policy.

(Interview with a Nile TV reporter, in Issawi, 2012)

As such, as already discussed, the relative changes that took place in the media's practices have not been sustained, especially among the media state houses. Ideas that may have supported a new uncoerced media were never implemented or were abandoned, while strict control under Mubarak became self-censorship and a culture of fear under SCAF and Morsi. However, the population started to distinguish between two obvious structures: the state-controlled media and the public private media representing people's voice. This can be seen in statements made from all four of the governorates in which this thesis conducted interviews.

Interviewee E in Qalyoubia mentioned: "*Generally, control in private media was definitely less than state media to an extent because it was more of indirect control on private media*" (E, 2018 in Qalyoubia). Interviewee D in Menoufia, explained: "*Everyone mainly used private media or Al Jazeera not state media anymore*" (D, 2018 in Menoufia). Interviewee C in Minya, said:

*"The coverage on private channels was less controlled than state channels and even if it is the same no one will forget that in 2011 when the uprisings started the state channels were showing the Nile*

*very calm and not saying much about protests while other private channels were showing Tahrir Square" (C, 2018 in Minya).*

Similarly, in South Sinai Interviewee A, explained: *"All media was monitored by the government however private media had less interference so watching it was better than state media that did not give much information" (A, 2018 in South Sinai).*

The lack of professional journalistic standards did not clearly highlight these differences and many journalists ended up transforming their free journalism into expressions of personal and biased points of view or frustrations. Moreover, the accuracy of the reporting itself was skewed. SCAF and military institutions remained relatively untouched because of fear and Law 313 that prohibited coverage without consent of the Director of Military Intelligence. Any deviation of this could lead to arrest, torture, and other serious repercussions (Walker and Orttung, 2012). Under the Muslim Brotherhood's regime, this continued with over thirty legal trials against journalists, intimidation by the state, claims of defamation, and other forms of abuse against media staff (Issawi, 2012). A small group of media staff vehemently protested against this state control and pleaded for media independence. However, their protests have never been broadcast and most of the time they were dismissed as people making chaotic expressions of their personal frustrations (Walker and Orttung, 2012). Although the government denied it, the trend was to marginalise any voices of radical or critical opinions concerning the government. There were even rumours about a black-list with of persona non-grata journalists who had criticised the regime, rumours which were not denied by the head of the news department: "if a guest is employing obscene expressions and using our platform to settle personal accounts, he cannot be a regular guest with us. I asked the staff to invite the wise people and the moderate voices; those who have constructive opinions that unite and not divide" (Issawi, 2012). Thus, clearly, a comparison of the media prior to 2011, when compared to the media in the build-up to the 2013 revolts, shows that the media had not changed as a result of these uprisings and that any changes that occurred were only superficial or repressed by the state.

### 7.3. Social Media after the 2011 Uprisings

During the 2013 uprisings in Egypt against the Muslim Brotherhood regime, the state media and the private media immediately supported the people and adopted a nationalist tone, representing the government as being evil and anti-nationalist.

After Morsi resigned, there was an unprecedented wave of anti-media repression, while the media focused on glorifying the army and representing it as the saviour of the country from the Muslim Brotherhood government, which was labelled as a secret terrorist movement. Nevertheless, the propagandist voice of private media dissolved the difference between the state media and the independent media. It became more difficult to identify the sources, and harder to distinguish them. This was borne out in the interview data. In Qalyoubia, Interviewee F explained,

*"there was a point during the 2011 uprisings where it was very chaotic in terms of the source of information. People were getting different updates not necessarily knowing originally where the news started because of the intensity and volatility of the event"* (F, 2018 in Qalyoubia).

In Menoufia, Interviewee A mentioned, *"sometimes I heard updates or news about what was going on but did not know exactly the source of the update"* (A, 2018 in Menoufia).

Similarly, In Minya, Interviewee C stated,

*"there were some situations where one found an update but did not know the accuracy of it or source because information was moving rapidly and through different forms of media besides word of mouth, which resembled the chaos Egypt was in"* (C, 2018 in Minya).

While in South Sinai, Interviewee D asserted that

*"all types of media were updating Egyptians and adding to that were the discussions between families about updates and the origin of*

*where or how the information was found got lost during all this intensity" (D, 2018 in South Sinai).*

This is interesting since it highlights a more unified viewpoint, dissolving the difference between state and private channels. Unlike in 2011, where the state and private media held different perspectives and aired different news, the 2013 uprisings did not seem to have this issue. The result of this is that, unlike during 2011, interviewees could not distinguish the different sources. One fascinating aspect of this is the fact that it clarifies the extent to which the 2011 uprising was characterized by a difference in content between private and state channels. A further consequence was that interviewees were no longer certain of the veracity of the statements made in the media. Interviewees from Minya and South Sinai referred to discussions being necessary given the confusion, and even those in Qalyoubia mentioned that it was “chaotic” during this time.

Another difference between 2011 and 2013 is that, during this second uprising in 2013, social media use in rural areas through direct usage was much higher since the concept was no longer new to them. It is not necessarily that they did not still rely on certain social capital norms in relation to politics, but more users in rural areas were familiar with being updated about politics via social media than in 2011 (G, 2018 in Qalyoubia; J, 2018 in Qalyoubia; E, 2018 in Minya; A, 2018 in Menoufia). However, the social capital norms in Qalyoubia and Menoufia were less rigid than South Sinai and Minya in Upper Egypt. The amount of responses in relation to social media usage becoming more regular towards 2013 in Qalyoubia and Menoufia was more frequent than in South Sinai and Minya, though the phenomenon existed in all four governorates.

Interview J in Qalyoubia, explained, *"when the usage of social media became more of a routine for people sometimes it was harder to realize where information originally started social or traditional media"* (J, 2018 in Qalyoubia).

Interview H in Menoufia, stated, *"as time passed and people were more aware of social media as part of the media the boundary between social media and traditional media lessened"* (H, 2018 in Menoufia).

Interviewee E in Minya, mentioned, "*as time passed people did not focus much on which type of media was presenting which information*"(E, 2018 in Minya).

Interviewee D in South Sinai, said, "*although social media took time to become more normal when it became more used it diluted much of the information on both forms of media*"(D, 2018 in South Sinai).

The acceptance of social media, and its increased regularity, in Qalyoubia and Menoufia is related to the normality they have in discussing politics in comparison to South Sinai and Minya based on their political participation and closer distance to Cairo making them less rigid about their norms because of visiting Cairo more often and merging their norms with those of Cairo citizens. The interviewee responses above highlight this normalization of social media across the four studied regions, as well as the differences between them in terms of how they viewed social media use. In Qalyoubia and Menoufia, it is clear that the boundary between traditional and social media lessened, and it became more common to use and trust either of them. There was no inference in either of these governorates that one form was lesser than the other. In Minya, it seems similar in the sense that the distinction between the forms lessened, though it seems to be the case that there was some kind of distinction. The South Sinai interviewee, however, clearly highlights a distinction by noting that the normality of social media led to the information presented in the news being "diluted" in some fashion.

In any case, another important factor for the increase of social media use is related to the fact that interviewees realized the speed of social media in providing updates during the 2011 uprisings through the convergence concept. Therefore, they started using social media more regularly, even on mobile phones, despite the fact that the infrastructure in the area has not improved much since 2011. This was obvious by the high mobile penetration on the Internet in all rural areas after 2011 uprisings. The following interviewee comments clarify this:

Interviewee J in Qalyoubia, mentioned: "*it became more regular to use social media over time because citizens understood it more*" (J, 2018 in Qalyoubia).



Interviewee H in Menoufia, explained: *"over time, non-social media users knew about social media and either became users or followed the social media updates through people they knew"* (H, 2018 in Menoufia).

Interviewee E in Minya, stated: *"understanding more about social media led people to start accepting it as a form of media more than before"* (E, 2018 in Minya).

Similarly, Interviewee D in South Sinai, explained: *"the fact that we live in a tribal community slowed down the use of social media because it was not a priority in how people decide what to do in our community, yet as time increased so did its usage"* (D, 2018 in South Sinai).

These interviewees bring to light two facets of social media use. First, the normality of social media in the aftermath of 2011 is further emphasized, with interviewees from all four governorates conceding that usage noticeably increased. The second facet shown is their perspective on this usage. Once again, Qalyoubia and Menoufia's interviewees use terms that denote understanding and an implicit judgement being made about its positive benefit. In terms of the latter, Menoufia's interview highlights that even non-social media users came to rely on it in some fashion. Minya's interviewee takes this a step further, using language that highlights acceptance of social media, as well as understanding. South Sinai's interviewee, on the other hand, notes that social media use increased but almost reluctantly, taking time to highlight that it was not a priority on community decision-making and even explicitly stating that the tribal societal framework limited the significance of social media. Thus, we can see here that as social media usage increased, its benefits became accepted, but that its use was subject to the societal considerations of the specific governorate. It is no coincidence that South Sinai's interviewee was less enthusiastic about social media use, given the previous discussions throughout this thesis on social capital norms and rigidity within Lower Egypt's governorates. However, in any case, it is somewhat clear that the acceptance of social media for communication - presumably with those outside one's immediate region - does highlight an enhancement of the public sphere, and an enhancement of social capital through

increased communication with other Egyptians, a fact that has been discussed here and in the previous chapter.

As already discussed, several times in this chapter and previously within this thesis, the media sphere suffered many fluctuations in the years after the 2011 Egyptian uprising. Even though the political system prevented any profound transformation on a large scale, there have been many notable transformations at a lower scale, at the level of private publications, satellite televisions or even at the level of individuals – meaning that there have been many journalists who had the courage to cover the news in ways very different from state-controlled media. Online social media contributed a lot to these transformations, first of all because it gave people the opportunity to make their voice heard, to express themselves freely and even to become citizen-journalists, when it was needed. In this sense, social media has operated in a manner that is consistent with Habermas' views on an ideal public sphere, or the more nuanced view of micro-public and meso-public spheres. Again, this serves as an example of the enhancement of the public sphere and the empowerment of rural Egyptians. This is in contrast to the state-controlled and private (or satellite) channels, which were wholly controlled or strongly influenced by state intervention, and thus subject to censorship or public distrust.

For example, in Qalyoubia Interviewee B, explained:

*"I was not a social media user but as parliament member it was necessary to assign someone in my office to start following its updates to find more about people's feelings because it gave some citizens in the area a way of expressing their views and as their representative I had to know about it"*(B, 2018 in Qalyoubia).

In Menoufia, Interviewee F, mentioned:

*"the idea of connecting with people in other areas we don't know and feeling the community and its nationalism towards Egypt triggered emotions that made people express their opinions on social media just to even feel they can express themselves"* (F, 2018 in Menoufia).

In Minya, Interviewee C, explained: "*it gave a form of expression for citizens if they wanted and made them feel they had the choice*" (C, 2018 in Minya). Finally, in South Sinai, Interviewee D, stated: "*it made me feel I can share my opinions with someone besides the tribes we live in*" (D, 2018 in South Sinai).

This data shows us that social media has become embedded to some extent in Egypt's political scene. In Qalyoubia, it became necessary for a member of Parliament to develop a social media presence in order to adequately support and represent his citizens. This highlights the importance placed on parliamentary members being aware of citizen views, as well as the need for a social media account in order to hear those views. This seems to be, once more, an expansion of the public sphere due to social media. Similarly, in Menoufia and Minya, social media use was a method of political involvement and the expression of political opinions. In South Sinai, it caused a loosening of the tribal framework to some degree, allowing greater communication with the rest of the country. The interview comments from Menoufia, Minya, and South Sinai are of particular interest given the previously-discussed idea of a local social capital in Egypt. As Chapter 4 highlighted, this local social capital was based on the idea that local concerns could only be addressed by locals given their unique nature and the manner in which they understood the nuances of that society. The interviewees from Menoufia and Minya, and South Sinai in particular, provide the idea that there may be a movement toward the global conception of social capital. These statements highlight the idea that empowerment and social capital within Egypt's governorates was moving away from the definition provided in Chapter 4, and towards the more familiar conception, because of the communication capacities of social media.

There are studies showing that in 2013, Egypt was among the top five countries in terms of Internet users, which means that people started to extensively use *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *YouTube* and any other forms of information exchange platforms (El-Bendary, 2013). They managed, as the interviewees data just mentioned highlights, to develop a public sphere through the use of social media that allowed for trust between the 'reporter' and the 'viewer' in a manner that did not exist with traditional or (to a lesser extent) in private media. This

happened because, after the 2011 uprising, the traditional media was still controlled by the state power and the citizens did not feel it was free enough. Therefore, social media became the new environment where people continued their common cause against the abuses of the political system and, at the same time, a place where they were able to pursue their own agenda setting, i.e. to decide by themselves the important stories on which to focus. The public sphere of Egypt organised in such a way to create their own channels of breaking news, outside the manipulated agenda setting of the media and outside of the obedient journalists' coverage to the Muslim Brotherhood regime. They created an environment where they could discuss political issues and debate on any theme they considered important on the daily agenda setting (Heydemann, 2015) because Egyptians felt what they aimed for in 2011 uprisings was not being achieved. Therefore, by 2013, rural citizen norms have been trending towards an increase in social media access; as a result, social media was used more in 2013 than 2011. This is particularly the case since, in 2013, rural citizens were angrier regarding the failure of the 2011 protests to reform society fully and the fact that the government changes were moving in the wrong direction.

#### **7.4. Power Shifts and Changing Norms in the Social Capital and Public Spheres**

What was truly unique in the case of Egypt was the fact that changes in the political scene have not been triggered by the media, but by the popular mass informal political involvement that has been present both online and offline. Both uprisings in 2011 and 2013, rather than being organised by political parties or institutions, largely represented the voice of the people. The uprisings, thus, act as evidence of the strength of the public sphere, and evidence of the strength in Egypt's social ties. Social capital was enhanced by the use of social media - both in terms of the increase in usage and the manner in which this usage occurred - but was not caused by it. The same can be said for the public sphere; the discussions, debates, and communication with strangers that occurred in the aftermath of 2011 (as discussed in the previous chapter) positively impacted a pre-existing public sphere that had its foundation in the social ties of rural Egypt. This enhancement of the public sphere and social capital - and their importance to

the political changes that occurred - can be seen in the fact that political change occurred in 2011 (and again in 2013) despite the fact that the political, economic, and media systems had not witnessed profound changes in that time. It was rather the public will, the social capital, the relationships created long ago between people who are motivated by the media and have forced it to make a range of changes in its structure, rather than go backwards. For example, Interviewee G in Qalyoubia, explained,

*"In 2011, people were angry from circumstances of living and the inability of having a voice that could make a difference in the country that made them feel like they just have to live in silence. In 2013, they gained a voice to express their opinions so - because many Egyptians including me felt like they were losing Egypt again to another identity which is the Muslim Brotherhood represented by Morsi - they felt that they must save the country again from living in silence again" (G, 2018 in Qalyoubia).*

In Menoufia, Interviewee C, stated,

*"In 2011 Egyptians were waking up from a long nap in politics, yet in 2013 they became more alert so it did not take them as long to resist the Muslim Brotherhood and move into the 2013 uprisings with the support of the army" (C, 2018 in Menoufia).*

Moreover, In Minya Interviewee F, said, *"If people did not feel like they have to move nothing would have happened in the 2011 and 2013 uprisings"* (F, 2018 in Minya). Finally, Interviewee E in South Sinai mentioned, *"Definitely, in 2013 as a citizen of South Sinai, and given the circumstances we lived in, we had to move regardless of the impact of the media on us to save our area from being sold to outsiders again"* (E, 2018 in South Sinai). It is clear here that individuals were motivated by the success of 2011 (as evident in comments from Qalyoubia and Menoufia), and that the common viewpoint was that the Muslim Brotherhood needed to be removed. Despite the fact that social media aided in this viewpoint becoming widespread, it was not the root of this viewpoint. Groups like *Tamarud*, for example, operated on Facebook, but also handed flyers out in the street that

urged citizens to move against the Muslim Brotherhood and Morsi's presidency less than one year after it began. This was not based on social media; it simply serves as an example of social media aiding a movement that was operating both online and offline. Rather, this seems to highlight that the public wished to resist the Muslim Brotherhood in order to improve their country. Admittedly, references to "waking up from a long nap in politics" and becoming "more alert" may partially be related to the quicker communication that social media provided, yet it is clear that this was not itself the motivation.

Even the political reform, although very superficial, was triggered by the force of social capital, by the resistance of the people and not by the media structures, as is the case in developed countries, where the media represents a strong balancing counter voice for state power. Therefore, in the case of Egypt, even though not all citizens of Egypt had access to the Internet, social media enhanced social capital in rural areas mainly after 2011 uprising, which was tested clearly in 2013 where there were many more protesters present during the uprisings. While this will be discussed in more detail in this chapter, it is sufficient to say here that the 2011 uprisings brought to light a public sphere - consolidated by the strength of the rural citizens' social capital - that could operate more freely because of social media access and the uncoerced environment it engendered.

In this regard, Interviewee B in Qalyoubia, mentioned that:

*"Although I am not a direct social media user, people around me updated me about social media, and it was clear that the importance of it was sharing information with Egyptians not in our rural area" B, 2018 in Qalyoubia).*

Additionally, Interviewee G in Menoufia, mentioned: *"Locally the use of social media did not make any people get to know each other more it was knowing the people we did not know in other parts of Egypt"* (G, 2018 in Menoufia). Interviewee C, in Minya, stated: *"Social media helped in connecting us with people far away in Cairo by being updated about Tahrir Square not about Minya"* (C, 2018 in Minya). Finally, Interviewee E in South Sinai, said: *"It was*

*interesting to find information about people in other parts of Egypt directly not through television"*(E, 2018 in South Sinai).

Even though some studies in the field showed that social media made the relationship between people weaker and more superficial (Heydemann, 2015), in the case of authoritarian and corrupt political regimes, such as Egypt, social media created stronger bonds between people, together with a real bridge above the controlled media, a bridge that linked people together with credible information about events that were taking place in Egypt, such as abuses, police violence, arrests, manipulated trials, etc. (Stefanone et al., 2010). All interviewees agreed in this regard, noting that the significance of social media was rooted in the manner in which it expanded the public sphere, increasing social ties between governorates. The interviewees in Qalyoubia, Menoufia, and Minya state this directly by mentioning that locally “the use of social media did not make any people get to know each other more” but that, rather, “the importance of it was sharing information with Egyptians not in [their] rural area.” This was an expansion of the public sphere through the new-found ease of communication, and represented increased social capital only in the sense that those once considered strangers were now interacting. Interviewee E from South Sinai, explains, *"the benefit of social media lies in the fact that it was direct, rather than through some form of structured media like television"*(E, 2018 in South Sinai). Similarly, Interviewee I in Qalyoubia, mentioned, *"using social media gave me a chance to state my opinion directly and viewing others without someone filtering what could be said on channels by editors"* (I, 2018 in Qalyoubia). As such, while social media may not have aided in connecting individuals with others in their area, it allowed for political discourse and debate to occur with those who existed outside of their regions, and for that discourse to be trusted since the government could play little to no role in influencing it.

This leads to the conclusion that the real shifts took place beyond the officially structured political parties or institutions. The real power in Egypt lies in what we call social capital or public spheres “in which the contest over public opinion has begun, with governments spinning public relations and political challengers trying to widen the definition of authoritarian censorship” (Hafez, 2008). The

2011 uprising and what happened after it clearly showed that traditional media had less power to challenge the government than expected, while the real challenge came from the social capital of rural areas, which included various groups of leftist, Arab nationalists, secularist, feminist, Islamist etc, who were able to strongly influence public opinion and to generate huge movements outside the media who were united against Mubarak and later on, against the other oppressive governments installed after his resignation. The 2013 uprising was clearly a massive popular movement, a large mobilization based on the social capital of the region that gathered together people from various groups and beliefs and united them through the strong bond of their unique voice calling for real changes (Ledwell, 2012). It was social capital and the solidification of the public sphere, aided but not created by the use of social media, that helped create this gathering.

As Castells affirmed, “the move towards mass self-communication is fundamentally changing the relationship between everyday individuals and the institutions that once dominated the communication infrastructure and means of cultural production” (Castells, 2009). He describes the social capital as a “network society” in which the power centres are in “communication nodes”, where institutional media no longer occupies a position of primacy: “power is no longer located in one particular social sphere or institution, but it is distributed throughout the entire realm of human action” (Castells, 2009). Illustrating this very phenomenon, Qalyoubia’s Interviewee A explained,

*"In the end, even if you were not a social media user, because of the gatherings between people and different types of people and media, consumer information from different media forms was shared. So the knowledge coming from different media forms, even if you were not a user of it, was shared and, based on it, citizens decide whether to follow more news or join in discussions on social media platforms"*  
(A, 2018 in Qalyoubia).

This serves as an example of power being distributed through different mediums, and across a wide range of actions. Similarly, in Menoufia, Interviewee G mentioned that *"due to the intensity and value of the uprisings, participating in*



*politics while feeling it could make a difference, motivated me and people around me to participate in expressing political opinions"* (G, 2018 in Menoufia). Finally, in South Sinai, Interviewee D noted that *"after the 2013 uprisings one felt that he was part of Egypt as a whole not as a separate area and needed to constantly follow and engage into politics more than before"* (D, 2018 in South Sinai). All these examples highlight the manner in which power became dispersed, and involvement was no longer dependent on "one particular social sphere or institution" (Castells, 2009). Instead, different media forms, actions, opinions, groups, and individuals hold the power. Rural citizens were not dependent on one particular media form or another, and became aware that their involvement was what mattered in the sense that the strength of their social capital and collective action could affect outcomes. Social media was simply one method from which this could occur.

Therefore, the benefit of convergence between both medias was that it supported making information reach the public, and empowered citizens to start using social media more after 2011 in order to consolidate their opinions and begin to feel comfortable using this new form of communication to influence public perception. Maybe the most important aspect that has to be taken into consideration in this situation is the fact that the goal of citizen journalists is very much different from the goal of institutional journalists. The use of online networks did not cause the 2011 uprisings, but it certainly gathered disparate individuals together under the common voice of protests against a humiliating and dictatorial regime in different areas of Egypt and not making rural citizens feel as isolated citizens in Egypt. The many years of such a regime had shifted the collective consciousness of the rural Egyptians and caused them to extend their trust no further than their immediate acquaintances, such as their tribe, their family, their neighbours or their co-workers. The lack of social trust was also the product of a lack of social interactions that have been caused by isolation, poor infrastructure and high distances in the rural areas. This is why the people – who were fragmented in various public spheres, such as the rural areas studied, felt they protested for so long about politics – used the online space to grow their power after 2011 when they had a better understanding of social media and to spread their word to the urban areas that have not focused on them. In Qalyoubia,

Interviewee I, explained, "*using social media gave me a chance to interact with people I did not know that were not particularly from Qalyoubia*" (I, 2018 in South Sinai). In Menoufia, Interviewee H mentioned, "*social media helped me in exposing myself to understanding the opinions of people living in urban centers about politics*" (H, 2018 in Menoufia). Interviewee C in Minya mentioned something similar, stating that "*when social media helped in grouping people from different parts of Egypt, it made the collective feeling stronger than when each area was living in its own bubble*" (C, 2018 in Minya). Finally, In South Sinai, Interviewee E discussed the fact that "*after the uprisings social media gave us the first chance to collaborate with people in different areas of Egypt and made us think about other areas more than just South Sinai only after we got used to social media so around the 2013 uprisings*" (E, 2018 in South Sinai). These all serve as examples of the manner in which social media aided in the expansion of social circles, and an enhancement of rural Egypt's social capital through greater ease in communication between previously isolated regions.

Again, this highlights the role of social media in creating a wider public sphere by decreasing the lack of social interactions caused by isolation and distance. In this way, fragmentation decreased and an uncoerced space for political discourse grew through social media. Especially in the rural areas, this happened at a very low level before the uprising, but after these events more people wanted at least to spread their news and opinions to people out of their social circle. Even non-direct social media users in rural areas, who were mainly above 50 years old, unless they held leading positions in political parties opposing the ruling party, relied on having access to social media from through other family or group members who used the Internet (Ledwell, 2012). This was highlighted previously in relation to Qalyoubia's parliament member. Therefore, it is clear that the public sphere was enhanced through the use of online social networks and that, as a result, a stronger and more widespread social capital came to exist. Interviewee B from Qalyoubia's comment that the importance of social media was based on the fact that it allowed "*sharing information with Egyptians not in [their] rural area*" is only one example of this (B, 2018 in Qalyoubia).

The interviews that were done and analysed for this study showed that, at least in the rural areas, people still preferred their social circles to the social media networks as explained and quoted in Chapter 4. However, even though these actions appear more like an activist endeavour, rather than a journalistic one, people had a common goal: to support the public interest. Even though the Egyptian government had been accused for decades of injustice, it was the image of a young man killed and disfigured by the security forces which led people to engage in massive protests, which were also inspired and mobilised by the online dissemination of this cruel image. This is borne out in interview data. In Qalyoubia, Interviewee E, said, "*Khaled Said was resembling the symbol of injustice over the years of the Mubarak regime*" (E, 2018 in Qalyoubia). In Menoufia, Interviewee A, explained, "*the way Khaled Said was treated irritated many Egyptians and moved them regardless of if he was a drug addict or not*" (A, 2018 in Menoufia). In Minya, Interviewee D mentioned, "*many mothers were moved by Khaled Said's mom and her statement about him which helped in moving people after feeling he was a victim of the corrupt police managed in Egypt*" (D, 2018 in Minya). In South Sinai, Interviewee E, stated, "*Khaled Said was the most important catalyst in instigating people's feelings*" (E, 2018 in South Sinai). All of this highlights that national sentiments did exist in 2011, and immediately prior to the 2011 uprisings, despite the fact that these rural areas mostly focused on their own areas. The abuse of Said, and the subsequent creation of the Facebook group "We are All Khaled Said" brought a light to this example of injustice, and mobilized the public. In this way, social networks did in fact operate in a journalistic fashion.

Even though citizen journalism has many times been characterised as amateurish, the 2011 uprising demonstrated that the media practices needed to undergo a very profound change not only in terms of gaining independence from the state, but also in terms of storytelling. The citizen-journalist delivered authentic experiences accompanied by videos, images and testimonials that - despite the fact they were not professional - had the power of generating real emotions and empathy. This kind of journalism was closer to the specificity of the Egyptian citizens who were reacting to what their neighbours told them rather than to what they were reading in a newspaper or watching on TV (Ledwell,

2012). Social media, in this way, acted as an online version of the community-mindedness that already characterized rural Egypt when it came to discussing, verifying, and trusting information about politics.

Interviewee B in Qalyoubia, explained, "*when social media became more common it became as an extension of the social circles in rural areas*"(B, 2018 in Qalyoubia).

Interviewee G in Menoufia, stated,

*"social media usage helped connecting the social circles in the rural communities with people in other parts of Egypt, so exposing the social circles in rural areas to other social circles that might not necessarily be rural social circles"* (G, 2018 in Menoufia).

Interviewee D in Minya, said,

*"social media extended the form of media people in our rural communities could be exposed to even if it won't change their minds but it adds to the methods of news in the rural community they are living in if they can use it"* (D, 2018 in Minya).

Interviewee E in South Sinai, mentioned, "*using social media connected information to the information we got through traditional media and in social circles in our tribes*" (E, 2018 in South Sinai).

Before, during and after the uprising in 2011, the Egyptian audience reacted to real experiences that the new media managed, at some point, to offer. The ordinary voices of ordinary people had more and more authority in a state ruled by a deaf dictatorial regime and by a state-owned media, leading to a dramatic change in the journalistic coverage after the 2011 uprising. Even though the political regimes that came after Mubarak tried to control them at no cost, some independent media managed to represent the voice of the people (Ledwell, 2012).

On social media, the debate is centered around what it is called "discussion groups", which refers to the "cascade effect in which "non-experts rely on non-experts" which can lead to the "fortification of errors" (Sunstein and Thaler,

2008). Nevertheless, the diversity of opinions offered by social media environments also offers the opportunity to get many recommendations and many counter-opinions so that the system is self regulatory and the members of a really strong community will not accept within their social groups information they consider fake. The reason why social media enhances, in fact, social capital, is the fact that with limited social capital, such as with members of a neighbourhood or even of a family, one never has the chance to exchange information at a higher level. In social media networks, one can extend their social circle and build bridges to those outside their immediate circle, meaning one can participate in a more heterogeneous discussion and engage in different polemics and controversies, as well as share ideas and information, which increases access to a large amount of information (Sunstein and Thaler, 2008). Social capital is used to make connections and to exchange information and, in the case of rural Egypt, social media contributed heavily to the construction of an interactive culture enabling people of very different environments to participate in the creation of a virtual community where the elite members of the press were no longer dictating the agenda setting (Srinivasan, 2014). This is because rural citizens used these social media platforms to reach people in urban areas and express their opinions in the rural areas. Unlike urban citizens, rural citizens generally felt secluded from the rest of Egypt and, as such, benefitted from social media in the sense that they could connect to the rest of the country, speak to other Egyptians, and feel closer to their fellow citizens as opposed to isolated to their own governorate alone. For example, Interviewee I in Qalyoubia, explained, "*the idea that I could interact with other Egyptians in other urban areas added a form of communication for a rural citizen like me*" (I, 2018 in Qalyoubia). Interviewee G in Menoufia, stated, "*communicating with Egyptians in different parts of Egypt was very interesting during the uprisings because it gave a collective feeling to citizens being grouped as all Egyptians*" (G, 2018 in Menoufia). Interviewee A in Minya,

*"the use of social media and communicating with Egyptians in different parts of Egypt gave an option that did not happen before in terms of communicating between citizens that gave me a sense of*

*feeling that I was an Egyptian not just a citizen from Minya" (A, 2018 in Minya).*

Interviewee E in South Sinai, stated, *"using social media made me feel slightly better that I am not a citizen from South Sinai secluded from all events if they are not happening in South Sinai as before"* (E, 2018 in South Sinai). According to the previous quotes it is clear that social media connected different people on its platforms. Even though the rural citizens did not have Internet access to the same scale as their urban comrades, the boundary between the online and the offline environment became weaker and weaker, because in one way or another, the information was spread across all houses and families. Interviews showed that many citizens living in the rural areas over the age of 50 years had never accessed social media or had social media accounts, but they did ask members of their community about the online information and had further discussions with the members of their social groups (C, 2018 in Qalyoubia; B, 2018 in South Sinai). The interviews that have been done for this study confirmed these findings and also the fact that younger citizens – up to the age of 40 – started to use social media after the 2011 uprisings and continued to increase. Many people from rural areas preferred to remain traditional and haven't accessed social media, but their social interactions with family members and close social group members have been impacted by what happened in the social and converging media environment. In fact, the creators of social media movements, such as the administrators of different successful *Facebook* and *Twitter* pages counted on this behaviour and knew that their messages would also be spread around via word of mouth (Erle et al., 2012). Therefore, rural citizens that became social media users used the media to spread their opinions to urban areas not the other way around. They impacted the media by explaining their opinions and it increased their social capital by feeling that their opinion can be heard in other areas such as through the space of flows concept.

### **7.5. The Effect of the 2011 Egyptian Uprisings on the Electoral Framework**

As already discussed, the 2011 uprisings represented a traditional mode of political participation in Egypt and marked the beginning of a series of

transformations in the political system of this country. After the resignation of President Mubarak, studies showed that almost all citizens had strong feelings of nationalism (Ellison, 2015; Sakr, 2013a), as they were all proud of being Egyptians, but their political values and trust were affected by the divisions in the country, in terms of religious and national identity. The oppressive governance from the previous 40 years caused them to be highly unsupportive of the majority of political actors and institutions. Their feeling that Egypt would remain corrupt and lacking in civil liberties in the future was still present; this is revealed in the following statistics gathered between August and October 2011, all of which highlight that trust in the majority of political actors was low. For Islamic Charities and the press, those who chose “no confidence at all” or “little confidence” number 39% and 59% respectively. For religious groups and parties, this was 60%. Finally, in terms of the police, civil society organizations, unions, and political parties, the statistic highlights that 61%, 63%, 70%, and 76% chose “no confidence at all” or “little confidence” respectively (Erle et al., 2012).

The effect of this can be seen when looking at formal participation in the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings. After SCAF took power of the state, a constitutional review committee was founded and a referendum for a constitutional declaration organised. During this time, the restrictive measures against forming political parties was removed and over 80 parties were formed. Parliamentary elections were organised between November 2011 and January 2012. These elections were proclaimed as being “the first honest national elections of any sort held in Egypt since the overthrow of the monarchy in 1952” (Ifes.org, 2013). The Islamists, run by Muslim Brotherhood’s Freedom Justice Party, had an overwhelming victory, taking 47% of seats. As already demonstrated, citizens from rural areas proved to have a very strong political consciousness, as they participated massively in both parliamentary and presidential elections. Turnouts showed that around 72% of the rural population took part in parliamentary elections. In May and June of 2012 Egypt faced the first free presidential elections; the first round held thirteen candidates and the second round held only two - the Muslim Brotherhood’s Mohamed Morsi, and Ahmed Shafik, a former Mubarak regime Prime Minister (El-Mallakh, 2017). These elections gave many rural citizens mixed feelings. For example,

Interviewee F in Minya explained that *"everyone thought the candidate from Mubarak's regime would win because they had their old connections"* (F, 2018 in Minya).

In any case, Morsi won the election. A total of 51.8% of the population of Egypt participated in the presidential elections and the turnouts fell below 50% for all votes that followed it (El-Mallakh, 2017). The main grievances of the citizens were related to political freedoms, civil rights and economic issues. In Qalyoubia, Interviewee I stated, *"the fact that I knew that normally votes were forged did not make me feel my vote will make a difference right away after 2011 uprisings. I could not believe that the Mubarak regime style of elections was over"* (I, 2018 in Qalyoubia).

In Menoufia, Interviewee G, explained, *"my vote never made a difference before so I felt like the change would not happen immediately and that maybe corruption would still be there in voting"* (G, 2018 in Menoufia).

In Minya, Interviewee B, said, *"I did not feel like my vote would make a difference and I was busy so was not keen to put in the effort for a wasted vote"* (B, 2018 in Minya).

In South Sinai, Interviewee A, mentioned, *"I knew that many people would vote anyway and did not feel like my vote would make a difference"* (A, 2018 in South Sinai).

As the interviewee comments seem to imply, the voter turnout was not as high as expected: in the first round only 46% of the citizens participated in the presidential elections, while in the second round the percentage increased to 51.8% (El-Mallakh, 2017). These figures show that, first of all, people were not used to taking part in free elections and, second, they still had no trust that any real change would happen. For example, in Menoufia, Interviewee G stated: *"why would elections make a difference this time? The government always did what they wanted so this time it would have been the SCAF instead"* (G, 2018 in Menoufia). The 40 years of dictatorial rule made them uninterested in engaging in formal political activities. Also, the percentages show that when people had only two choices, in the second round, their participation in the elections was not much



higher than in the first round, which means that they did not trust either of the candidates (El-Mallakh, 2017). This is evident in one Qalyoubia interviewee's statement, Interviewee C, who asserted that "*the rule of Muslim Brotherhood was using religion to mix it with politics and that was [negatively] impacting the identity of Egypt*" (C, 2018 in Qalyoubia). Of course, this is only one example; the statement made by Interviewee G in Menoufia - that everyone believes "*the candidate from Mubarak's regime would win because they had their old connections*" - and Interviewee F in Minya's opinion that the elections were essentially meaningless since the "*government [has] always [done] what they want*" equally apply to this point (G, 2018 in Menoufia; F, 2018 in Minya). These examples all highlight that the presidential elections may not have been viewed as truly honest, and that citizens were unconvinced by either the candidates or the process. This may be due to the actors involved, as the trust in political actors further highlights, or it may simply be due to unease at elections. In terms of the latter, the 2005 elections show that this situation can be viewed with suspicion and that this suspicion can impact involvement (Lynch, 2006). In any case, in all elections, rural participation was much higher than Cairo, which is the biggest urban city and where Tahrir Square is.

The participation in parliamentary elections was much higher than that in presidential elections, because, once again, the rural areas made their presence felt. For villagers, the elected parliamentarians represent the mediators between their community and the state, which provided their direct representatives. Therefore, the rural citizens had a greater interest in participating in parliamentary elections, which was why the participants' percentages were higher. Nevertheless, Morsi's victory was very much due to the high presence of rural citizens in the presidential elections, because rural Egypt had a long history of support for Islamists. In Qalyoubia, Interviewee F, mentioned, "*I was never a Muslim Brotherhood supporter, yet when it came to the first elections after 2012 I thought if the other option was from the past regime why not try another option maybe it would be better*" (F, 2018 in Qalyoubia).

The rural local leaders were especially nostalgic for the public order they had experienced before the 2011 uprisings, so the support of the countryside again

was a major contribution to the elections' results (Abadeer et al., 2017). In South Sinai, Interviewee C, said, "*stability was needed with having a president and regime in place, which motivated people to be more keen on voting in the first presidential elections after the 2011 uprisings*" (C, 2018 in South Sinai).

However, the Morsi regime did not prove to be very different from the previous one and, on the contrary, the Muslim Brotherhood did everything possible to embody the Mubarak regime's old state mechanism – the army, the police and the bureaucracy – even naming the former Mubarak staff to the head of the most important state positions. Despite continuous protests and proposals suggested by informal political movements and human rights organisations, Morsi never cleaned the political apparatus and used the same old state-practices, such as torture, detentions and even killings. Consequently, the people mobilised again. In fact, the number of protests in 2013 were higher than at any time in the history of Egypt – 3817 different protests were staged during one single year (Ifes.org., 2013). Once again, like 2011, there was a disconnect between the public sphere and the state in terms of their desires, political opinions, and views on political discourse. This seems to have played a role in the re-mobilisation.

The corrupt traditional media broadcasting state-controlled news, together with the oppressive Morsi regime, was responsible for replacing the excitement generated by the parliament elections with a sense of despair and scepticism towards politics, among all citizens. In Menoufia, Interviewee D, explained, "*I voted because I felt that I have a personal civic and political sense of duty, a to contribute in change*" (D, 2018 in Menoufia). He voted because he felt that his vote was not a simple transaction with the state, but a responsibility that has to be taken personally. Thus, it is clear that there was also a disconnect between the public sphere - as seen through social media and local discussion - and the traditional media. The views of the citizens were in conflict with the views set out by the media and the state. As a result, the public sphere - and, consequently, the strong social capital that existed and was enhanced by social media - strengthened the desire to re-mobilise. This situation may explain why the number of protests were much higher in 2013.

Interviewee F in Menoufia, explained: *"I just voted because I felt the country needed me to move not that I really believed the change would happen"* (F, 2018 in Menoufia).

Interviewee G, also from Menoufia, stated:

*"Morsi's rule made Egyptians feel as if we are going backwards and not that 2011 led to change, which encouraged people to move more than 2011. Even when people voted for Morsi in 2012 they did not expect him to interfere [with] religion to that extent. He was focusing on [the] Muslim Brotherhood, not Egypt"* (G, 2018 in Menoufia).

Interviewee K in Qalyoubia, mentioned: *"I was motivated to participate this time because people around me were all motivated, and seemed like they were supporting each other via discussions to participate, and encouraging everyone else to be involved for the benefit of our country"* (K, 2018 in Qalyoubia). Similarly, in Minya, Interviewee F explained: *"The way Egypt was heading under the Muslim Brotherhood did not look like Egypt. It seemed like another country"*(F, 2018 in Minya). Even in South Sinai, Interviewee B who used to support the Muslim Brotherhood, explained: *"They shocked Egyptians and made people hate them in a very short time, which depressed everyone who participated in 2011 uprisings"*(B, 2018 in South Sinai).

After the 2011 uprisings and the parliamentary elections, Egyptian citizens truly believed that their vote would not be just ink on a piece of paper, which was how they felt during the Mubarak regime that had used them only as a façade of democracy. They hoped that their sacrifices would really count and that a new political order would be installed. However, they soon realised that the electoral promises and the liberal democratic ideologies did not represent a guarantee for a better future but were rather a metaphorical form of political expression. Therefore, they also understood that they had to fight for their rights by all available means. After the new wave of 2013 uprisings, the intention to vote again was generally rated at under 50%, although in the rural areas people still proved to be motivated, as is revealed the table below, representing the four governorates chosen to be taken into account for this thesis.

Governorate	Population	Urban Population	Rural Population	Political Participation in Presidential Elections 2014
Qalyoubia	5,105,972	2,280,927	2,825,045	55.2%
South Sinai	167,426	85,502	81,924	45.4%
Minya	5,156,702	973,418	4,183,284	35.4%
Menoufia	3,941,293	812,833	3,128,460	62.6%

Political Participation in Presidential Election, 2014 (CAPMAS, 2015)

The voter turnouts were indeed 47.5%, which is under 50%, and once again people proved to be more excited about participating in the voting process in the rural areas than in urban ones. After the 2013 uprising, citizens from the rural areas had two different opinions about the abolishment of the Morsi regime. Some of them were excited and truly believed in their social force, and its implications for democratic power, considering that any president coming after Mubarak and Morsi should understand that the people represent a force and that they would bring him down if he failed to deliver on what he promised. Interview data suggests that this opinion was brought about by the understanding of rural citizens that their social capital could be used to enact change, and that the use of this social capital would align Egypt's politics with the desires of the public sphere.

For example, Interviewee B in Qalyoubia, explained: "*It was necessary for the Muslim Brotherhood to understand the strength of Egyptians and the support of the army for the people when needed regardless of the regime*" (B, 2018 in Qalyoubia).

In Minya, Interviewee C, explained: "*So many things were going on and no one knew what to do but it was clear that the country was messed up and something had to be done hoping that Mubarak regime would not come back*" (C, 2018 in Minya).

In South Sinai, Interviewee B explained: *"Although I supported the Muslim Brotherhood they clearly were not the right decision and they had to be removed"* (B, 2018 in South Sinai).

In Menoufia Interviewee J, said: *"Egypt was not Egypt with the Muslim Brotherhood; we had to act and show them our strength"* (J, 2018 in Menoufia).

The other group in rural Egypt were concerned that if Morsi went away, it will be much easier for the Mubarak state to return to power. As such, this group was more hesitant to act, despite knowing that they could. They held the opinion that it may be more beneficial to wait since there was a risk that any action may aid in the Mubarak regime returning. The interview data below highlights this.

Interviewee I in Qalyoubia, stated: *"The main fear I felt during the 2013 uprisings was the return of the Mubarak regime"* (I, 2018 in Qalyoubia).

While Interviewee C in Menoufia, explained:

*"It was a very critical time; no one knew what was the right move, whether to wait or support the 2013 uprisings because the Muslim Brotherhood was heading in the wrong direction. Would the Mubarak regime take over again or what would happen?"* (C, 2018 in Menoufia).

While Interviewee F in South Sinai, said: *"If there was a guarantee at the time that the Mubarak regime would not return I would have not hesitated about supporting the 2013 uprisings"* (F, 2018 in South Sinai).

Clearly, both groups were motivated to vote by their different beliefs. Regardless of which group they were in, however, rural citizens had a higher engagement level, which had ramifications for voter turnout. For example, Suez (an urban governorate) had a turnout of 18.1%, while South Sinai's turnout was 41.6% (Pres2014.elections.eg, 2014). As such, it is clear that these different beliefs may have played a role in political participation, but that the urban versus rural nature of the actors was still more significant.

The newly elected president after the 2013 uprisings was the former defence minister, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, who was elected with around 97% of the votes because he conducted the operation to overthrow Morsi. A very important aspect that can be underlined from the 2014 voter turnouts is the fact that, since the villagers were less exposed to the media agenda setting than their urban counterparts, their collective mindset acts in a freer way. Even though they listened closely to their local leaders, their way of acting was more independent than in the urban areas, being less demoralised and discouraged. Unlike the hard life and lack of resources they face on a daily basis, their political sense is much stronger than in the urban areas (El-Mallakh, 2017).

However, dissatisfaction in the elections' results and the triumph of the *Ikhwan* (Muslim Brotherhood) after the first democratic presidential elections generated some political powers that have created a counter balance to their own uprisings. This situation generated the 2013 uprising that eventually led to a military intervention. It "countered the counter-revolution and led to demands for the return of legitimacy to the people and for a respect of the outcomes of the 'Jan 25' revolution" (Castells, 2012).

## **7.6. Conclusion**

After the 2011 uprising, the media continued its activity and its coverage, still impacting micro and macro public spheres. Those citizens who had not even accessed media and especially social media sources, became more open to its use after the 2011 uprising. While their specific opinions of the value of social media varied based on governorate, all agreed that reliance on social media for information became more commonplace and accepted.

In terms of state media, there was little impact on feelings of empowerment or the enhancement of the public sphere. This can be seen in interview data highlighting knowledge of the regime's control of state channels. However, this was not the case with private, satellite, and social media. In these cases, it seems to be the case that there was an invigoration of the public sphere and an increase in feelings of empowerment. For private and satellite channels, their closure motivated citizens to go out and physically protest, as mentioned in the interview

data throughout this chapter. For social media, this invigoration of the public sphere and enhanced empowerment is evident in many areas. First, this can be seen in the increase of citizen-journalists and Facebook groups that arose to discuss issues of political, economic, and social significance. Second, the invigoration of the public sphere and enhanced feelings of empowerment is evident in the increased communication between once-strangers, and the transfer of “thick” trust, as mentioned in this chapter. Finally, social media trust in the aftermath of 2011 led to its greater use and growth in rural areas for direct communication relevant to politics. The parliament member from Qalyoubia (Interviewee B) highlights this clearly (B, 2018 in Qalyoubia).

Generally, the analysis of the results of the interviews, supported by statistics, demonstrated some other very interesting and important factors that are considered useful to the goal of this thesis. First of all, it proved to be the case that the 2011 uprising was created and enhanced by the social capital of Egypt’s citizens - a majority of which were, as discussed, rural. These citizens, due to a unity of aim, acted in a unified manner in order to protest against civil, political, and social injustice. Despite the fact that - as seen by the 2013 Muslim Brotherhood regime - little change had occurred to the state apparatus in the aftermath of Mubarak’s resignation, this was not due to disinterest on the side of Egypt’s citizens. In fact, the uprisings of 2013 highlight a renewed interest in politics, a decrease in political apathy, and a motivation to continue to use the enhanced social capital achieved in 2011 in order to enact change. This, essentially, caused a shift in power; a public sphere began to arise that included communication between distinct governorates, and an interest in national politics followed. Despite little effect on the political system, there were in fact changes at the individual and social level.

With regards to voting, the high voter turnout in the parliamentary elections - both before and after the uprisings - demonstrated a very important issue: despite claims that social media negatively impacts social capital, the fact that voting in parliamentary elections was (and remain) high indicates that this is not the case.. In a state ruled by a 40-year dictatorship, social media empowered people, instead of destabilising their level of connectivity. Relations between people had not

become weaker and more superficial. On the contrary, in times of instability, high corruption, and high control over traditional media, social media maintained a strong level of social interaction between people who could express themselves freely, who were able to get updated and find out real coverage of the facts and who could even participate in agenda setting by becoming citizen journalists. Even though people from rural areas did not have access to the Internet due to various barriers, they were still impacted by the fact that members of their community updated them concerning the social media coverage. After 2011, norms began to change and social media use became more prevalent than it had been before 2011. Rural citizens then used social media to express their opinions to urban citizens, empowering and enhancing the pre-existing social capital that existed in their areas. This chapter demonstrated that the citizens from the rural areas had again been a force for political change through significant political engagement. Their political and civic sense was demonstrated during the elections. This was especially the case when it came to the parliamentary elections. On one hand, their hope and desire for a democratic regime made them overcome economic, cultural and geographic barriers and fears, and brought them out to vote in high numbers. On the other hand, they proved that they were not naïve and easy to deceive. Once they saw that the new Morsi regime was not what they were expecting it to be, they did not hesitate to protest again and to be present once again in the 2013 uprising, in higher percentages than the urban citizens, in the new presidential elections.

In conclusion, a number of profound transformations did take place in Egypt after the 2011 uprisings, but they were mainly visible in people's collective consciousness, because they realised the power they held together. Social media - along with some private satellite television channels, newspaper publications and some individual courageous professional journalists - empowered the people, including those from rural areas, to take action and to fight for their rights.

The aim of this chapter was to respond to the third research question of this thesis - how did media coverage of the uprisings impact micro public spheres and so feelings of empowerment and social capital in rural Egypt? It has been shown that media coverage, particularly in the form of private television and social



media, strengthened the micro-public spheres of Egypt by increasing the links between governorates, and emphasizing the strength of Egypt's citizens to enact political change. This positively impacted social capital as well as feelings of empowerment. State media remained unchanged and, therefore, did not affect feelings of empowerment in either direction; as previously shown, the citizens of Egypt viewed state media as part of the state propaganda machine and did not trust it. This viewpoint expanded to include *Al Jazeera*, albeit in a slightly different form, in the build-up to 2013. However, the other forms of media did in fact play a role in feelings of empowerment and the strengthening of Egypt's social capital, as well as in the formation of more connected governorates. In fact, the expansion of social capital to include strangers, and the overall acceptance that disparate governorates did in fact share commonalities is highly significant. This impacted national elections, connectivity both online and offline, and decreased levels of political apathy within the country. As such, media did play a role that cannot be neglected.

## **8. Conclusion: Rural Egypt (2011-2015) & What Comes Next**

Throughout this thesis, interview data has been collected and analysed from interviews in four rural areas in Egypt: Qalyoubia, Menoufia, Minya, and South Sinai. This data - in combination with secondary data, statistics, and academic research from a variety of fields, including communication studies and politics - has been used in order to examine and assess the impact of the new media environment, specifically the synergy between social media and satellite television, on the public sphere and political interactions of rural Egypt in order to ultimately analyse the role social media played in neglected areas of Egypt during the 2011 uprisings. In order to achieve the aims of this study, an assessment has been conducted of various areas that touch on this overarching subject. The first of these areas was an analysis of the role of social media in relation to its effect on political interaction and interaction norms in rural Egypt. This was followed by an assessment of social capital, as well as the manner in which the social capital of rural Egypt affected political interaction among rural Egyptians in the public sphere, taking into consideration the state of rural interaction with social media. Finally, the effect of media coverage on the uprisings was considered in rural Egypt with a focus on the media's role in invigorating the micro-public sphere and an assessment of its contribution regarding the strengthening of the social capital within rural Egypt. Through each of these areas being considered, the relationship between social capital, media coverage, political interaction and interaction norms has been clarified.

As such, a conclusion has been reached on the impact of the new media environment on the public sphere and political interaction within rural Egypt, specifically in terms of the effect of social media: it was found that social capital - more than any other aspects, including social media and the new media environment - played the largest role in the uprisings of 2011 and their aftermath. The new media environment and social media did affect political interaction and the public sphere in the sense that they expanded the conversations that were already occurring in each governorate, which had a positive effect on social capital. Moreover, given the lack of trust in the media, and the prevalent idea that

state news was controlled by the state, social media acted to provide updates ‘from the ground’ and brought to light the perspectives of the common citizens. Thus, while social media and the new media environment did undoubtedly play a role, neither of them acted as the decisive factor in relation to the 2011 uprisings and their 2013 counterparts. In order to reach this conclusion, this thesis was divided into six distinct chapters, each dealing with one specific element of the overarching aim.

The first chapter of this thesis delved into the contextual background of the subject in order to provide a suitable foundation for all subsequent analysis. A brief overview of rural Egypt was provided, as was a brief outline of the historical, social, and geographic differences between the four chosen regions. By highlighting these differences, it was shown that these four regions provided enough diversity from which one could derive commonalities and differences relevant to this study. Following this overview, an outline was provided of formal and informal political participation in Egypt, highlighting the definitions of each as well as the prevalence of each form of political participation within Egypt. Given that one focus of this thesis is the manner in which the new media environment affects political interaction and interaction norms, this section was necessary in order to provide a baseline from which any analysis would start. It was shown that formal and informal participation existed in Egypt, that the importance placed on parliamentary elections in rural Egypt highlights a greater connection with formal participation, and that informal political participation did exist through both online and offline acts. These acts existed partially as an inadvertent effect of the Mubarak regime’s attempts to appear pro-democratic internally, and partially through the response of citizens to injustices that arose through the regime’s authoritarian methods and infringement of civil rights. Given the existence of these informal political acts, the following section elaborated on social media access in rural Egypt in order to clarify the limitations that exist in these areas. It was shown that economic, linguistic, educational, infrastructural, and socio-political barriers limited social media use in rural Egypt prior to 2011 and that, as a result, social media usage was minimal. This meant that the idea of the uprisings as a “revolution [that] began on Facebook” was, at the very least, an incomplete analysis of the situation (Vargas, 2012). The final

section of this chapter dealt with the relationship between the media and the state, both prior to 2011 and in the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings. It was highlighted here that the media faced many challenges prior to 2011 that arose due to its relationship with the state. Centralized printing, censorship by the state, bureaucracy to limit the creation of new channels, threats of imprisonment, and a culture of fear and self-censorship existed in pre-2011 Egypt. This limited the media's ability to act in an uncoerced manner and operate as an objective public sphere. This continued in the aftermath of the uprisings, despite the attempts of several journalists to enact change. The aftermath of 2011 was characterized by a continuation of the self-censorship culture, the continued threat of imprisonment by the Muslim Brotherhood, fear of SCAF, and a culture of obedience ingrained into the sector from years under Mubarak.

Having provided this contextual background, the second chapter then provided a background to the theoretical underpinnings of this thesis. Among others, this chapter considered the political context of the Egyptian media system, public sphere theory, agenda setting theory, relevant studies and practical examples relating to social media, convergence theory and the manner in which private, state, and international broadcasting proved significant in 2011, as well as the concept of social capital. In essence, this chapter provided an overview of relevant scholarly research of significance for the purpose of this study and its objectives regarding the investigation of social media, political interaction, and rural Egypt. Much of this data was used throughout the thesis in order to highlight or evaluate the practical considerations found through the interview data. As such, this chapter was fundamental for the findings of the study.

Having considered the theoretical and contextual aspects of this study, the thesis began to address the question at hand: what was the new media environment's effect on the public sphere and political interactions of rural Egypt, taking into consideration the synergy between social media and satellite television, and - given this - what was the role played by social media in rural Egypt during the uprisings of 2011? As determined in Chapter 4, the idea that the 2011 uprising was a Facebook or Twitter uprising was shown to be incomplete. It was found through primary interview data, as well as through a number of

secondary statistics and academic research, that the number of people with Internet access was small compared to the population of Egypt. Due to this, it is unlikely that social media - or Internet usage - could have an instant effect on the norms of the Egyptian population. In fact, when taking into consideration rural Egypt, the idea that Internet usage strongly impacted political interaction norms to the extent that an uprising occurred becomes even less likely. First, this is because rural Egypt already had a long history of protesting political and socio-economic injustice, a history which predates the prevalence of social media in Egypt. An example of this can be seen in the crisis that arose in the aftermath of the 1992 legislative measures, discussed in Chapter 4, which highlight the existence of rural resistance prior to 2011. These examples of resistance, it has been shown, could have created a path or tradition of protesting against the regime, and this period could in fact mark a period of continuous rural resistance in Egypt. Researchers such as Saad (2016) have discussed this topic, and agree. In addition, the idea that social media impacted political interaction and interaction norms - and that this impact was responsible for the execution of the 2011 uprisings - does not take into account the vast infrastructural, financial, educational, and socio-economic barriers that limited social media usage within rural Egypt. Given that over 50% of the Egyptian population is rural, these limitations are highly significant. Interview data supports the impact of these limitations.

Finally, it must be taken into consideration when evaluating the significance of social media that the Mubarak regime shut down the Internet and mobile phone services relatively early in the process of the 2011 uprisings. During this time, social media usage was non-existent and its communicative and collaborative opportunities were functionally useless. Because of this, the protests had to be sustained through offline activities and real actions on the streets. This led to a situation wherein those engaged in the informal political acts that sustained the uprisings became aware of the scale of the protests and physical danger of those involved through action outside of computers, phones, and mobiles, but rather through the street. In some cases, this was because the individuals commuted to the protest centers, as they were already accustomed to for work. For others, who were more isolated like South Sinai, it was a matter of word-of-mouth combined

with television. In essence, communication and information-gathering was sustained only through satellite television, or direct involvement. Furthermore, organisation and effective planning could only be sustained through face-to-face interaction at protest centres such as Tahrir Square. This is not to imply that social media had no impact on political interaction whatsoever. The findings show that online and offline groups that were engaged in informal political acts maintained communication while the Internet was shut down. Moreover, Facebook groups such as “We are All Khaled Said” and the “April 6 Movement” did connect users under common concerns such as police brutality, economic inequality, and civil injustice. However, in terms of execution, much of the uprisings entailed offline action and face-to-face interaction.

This brings us to the concerns raised during Chapter 5, during which this thesis evaluated the significance of social capital, as well as the manner in which the social capital of rural Egypt affected political interaction among rural Egyptians in the public sphere, taking into consideration the state of rural interaction with social media. In this chapter, it was found that social capital within rural Egypt operated in a manner that was unique and somewhat distinct from the classical conception of social capital. This local social capital has come to exist as a result of the unique historical, geographic, and societal realities of rural Egypt. Each governorate in Egypt was focused on addressing different issues and, as such, had a quasi-unified perspective on which issues were of the utmost importance. For example, in South Sinai this issue was security. Given the governorate’s border and security issues, the interview data found that this concern was consistently addressed. For Minya, security was less of a concern than financial stability. Moreover, because of the unique historical, geographical and societal realities of the regions, different norms existed. The more conservative approach in Lower Egypt regarding female public involvement is an example of this. In any case, these considerations and unique concerns led to regional focus on social ties and the viewpoint that the issues faced by each region were unique to that region and could only be appropriately addressed by an individual with a local connection. As social capital was experienced primarily due to the importance of social connections, societal ties, and a candidate’s tailored knowledge of the region as found by family history in leadership and responsibility in the area, this

phenomenon diminishes the idea of voting solely on the basis of political considerations, campaigns or ideas at the local and regional levels. Moreover, this leads to a situation wherein national elections are considered far less important than their parliamentary counterparts.

One effect of this local social capital can be seen in the fact that rural political involvement has always been high. In fact, as shown throughout this thesis, the four governorates studied consistently highlighted the importance of parliamentary elections. This led to the Mubarak regime's efforts to co-opt parliamentary members from rural regions into the ruling party in order to maintain a majority, highlighting the strong impact of this local social capital. However, this also shows that rural political activity prior to 2011 was high and consistent despite the barriers to social media use in the areas. After 2011, rural involvement in parliamentary elections remained high. However, an interesting development was the increased interest in presidential and national concerns. Many interviews spread across all four governorates noted that the 2011 uprisings invigorated interest in national concerns, and that this was because of the view that change may finally be possible. This is, of course, in contrast to the previous viewpoint that the presidential elections were predetermined and voting would not make a difference. As Interviewee B in Qalyoubia and Interviewee A in South Sinai stated respectively, the 2011 uprisings encouraged the opposing viewpoint that each area was a "*part of Egypt as a whole not a separate area*" and that, as such, these individuals needed to "*follow and engage [in] politics more than before*" (B, 2018 in Qalyoubia; A, 2018 in South Sinai).

This change - from disinterest in national politics to a motivation to engage - was at least partially aided by social media. Unlike the pre-2011 conditions, where each governorate was more siloed in terms of interest and engagement, the use of social media during the 2011 uprisings and its aftermath led to a situation wherein rural citizens began to communicate more with those outside their areas whom they had previously considered "strangers." Commonalities in circumstances and interests arose during these discussions, as did the viewpoint that each governorate could be viewed as a "*part of Egypt as a whole not a separate area.*" This "bridging" brought local ideas of political involvement, and

the local social capital, to the national level. Social media played a role in this, since it allowed for that communication to occur organically, and supported uncoerced and personal engagement. This is in contrast to the pre-2011 period, where the focus of rural Egyptians was almost explicitly on parliamentary elections due to the view that these elections actually had an effect on the lives of citizens in the area. The evidence of this can be seen in both the interview data of this thesis where it is explicitly stated, as well as in the percentages for voter turnout in the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings. The voter turnout figures were considered unprecedented; for example, the November 2011 election turnout was 76% compared to 23% during the 2005 presidential elections. Moreover, as previously stated, the rural areas exhibited a higher percentage of involvement in the form of voting in presidential and constitutional elections than their urban counterparts. This highlights that rural political involvement was high, and that social media acted in such a fashion as to create a bridge between areas in the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings, lessening the isolation and disinterest in the national level.

However, it is important to note that these changes do not justify the theory that the uprisings could be seen as a ‘Social Media Revolution’ or a “revolution [that] began on Facebook” (Vargas, 2012). Between 2011 and 2015, social capital was the key motivator. As mentioned, the history of uprisings in rural areas, the initial period of the 2011 uprisings where the Internet was disabled by the state, the relatively significant percentage of the population that relied on word-of-mouth rather than media for information, and the general infrastructural barriers that limited social media use, when combined, all highlight that the 2011 uprisings (and their 2013 counterpart) were not based on Facebook, Twitter, or any other social media. Instead, social media enhanced the actions that were already taking place, increased the engagement that was already occurring, and highlighted the commonalities between the rural areas in terms of their concern. However, as mentioned, these actions were already occurring. Offline engagement was taking place, and formal political participation (in terms of the parliamentary elections) was already considered important. In this sense, social media existed as another option for informal political engagement, one that allowed citizens to engage in a local and uncoerced space with relative ease and



over extended distances. However, it was one of many forms of informal political engagement, all of which were reliant on social capital (Lilleker and Koc-Michalska, 2016).

Of course, one interesting implication of this is that the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings lessened the extent to which rural areas operated with a local definition of social capital. At present, engagement with presidential elections in Egypt follow neither the local nor the global social capital definitions fully; instead, depending on whether citizens are from urban or rural areas, voting for presidential elections can be based on either political considerations - since the conventional definition provides “the necessary basis of a common language for analyzing capitalization...of social- and individual-based resources for certain utilitarian outcomes” - or societal considerations in a similar way to the decision-making that occurs in parliamentary elections. This issue is further exacerbated by the fact that political understanding, and voting based on political considerations, is a novel idea in Egypt given the country’s history as a single-party state. It may be possible that eventually local social capital will disappear and be replaced by conventional social capital over time. However, this is dependent on many factors, including an increased reliance on, and understanding of political considerations by rural and urban Egyptians; this question does serve as a potential subject for further study.

Having shown the importance of social capital in rural Egypt during the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings, as well as the manner in which this social capital affected political interaction and was affected by social media, it was significant to highlight the effect of media coverage on the uprisings in rural Egypt. This final consideration, with a focus on the media’s role in invigorating the micro-public sphere and contributing to the strength of social capital, allowed for further clarity regarding social media and its impact. It was found that the state media continued its role as a part of the state propaganda machine after the 2011 uprisings, and remained uncritical of state authority in its coverage, which continued to impact micro and macro public spheres by causing doubt in the mind of Egypt’s citizens regarding the veracity of the claims made. Moreover, those citizens who had not even accessed social media sources became more open to its

use after the 2011 uprising. While their opinions of social media varied based on their governorate, all agreed that reliance on social media for information, and trust of that information, became more commonplace and accepted.

Moreover, it is clear that regional differences relating to citizen viewpoints on social media did exist, but that these were minor and ultimately had little impact for the purpose of this thesis. As mentioned previously, the histories of Egypt's rural areas are deep and unique; the result of this is that the citizens of the governorates associate themselves more strongly with the region than they do with the country overall. While this is significant, and a topic that could itself be subject to research, its effect on social media use was minimal. There were, however, minor differences that deserve attention here. For example, Qalyoubia and Menoufia were governorates that were geographically closer to Cairo and, as shown in Chapter 6, normalized some of the norms in Cairo of discussion in general, and political discussion with strangers in particular. As such, the distinction between social and traditional media lessened more notably, and more quickly, in these governorates. In Minya, attitudes toward social media were characterized more by disinterest or a lack of time rather than distrust; however, even in the case of this governorate, it is clear that the distinction between the different forms of media (new and old) lessened, though it seems to be the case that there was still some kind of distinction. In relation to South Sinai, the governorate's tribal system and security concerns led to a more conservative approach to social media and a slower thawing of distrust. An example of this exists in the comments made by Interviewee D of South Sinai, where a distinction is clearly highlighted when he notes that the normality of social media led to the information presented in the news being "diluted" in some fashion. However, despite this, all governorates did display a decrease in distrust of social media and some form of normalization. Having noted these distinctions however, it is important to note that this is of course an area that could be studied further, especially given these findings.

In any case, it has already been stated that media coverage - both before and after the 2011 uprisings - was plagued by a variety of issues, including censorship by the state, bureaucracy to limit the creation of new channels, threats of

imprisonment, and a culture of fear and self-censorship. This limited the trust that rural Egyptians had in relation to the media. Several interviewees noted this, discussing that they used social media, private channels, and *Al Jazeera* because of the fact that the state media was controlled, propagandist, and censored. This finding proves that the 2011 uprising was created and desired by the common people, and was executed primarily by individuals gathering together in order to achieve a common goal. These individuals realised that their social capital was their most important asset and that they truly had the power to generate waves of protests and changes, to a certain extent at least. The fact that the corrupt system continued to exist and to act as an oppressive regime even after Mubarak's resignation - through the Muslim Brotherhood and SCAF - was not the fault of ordinary people, but rather highlights the view of the elite and political institutions was not in line with that of the remainder of Egypt.

This engagement in rural Egypt can be seen, once again, with the high voter turnout in November 2011. The parliamentary elections, prior to and after the 2011 uprisings, highlight the strength of rural Egypt's formal political interaction. The increase in formal political participation on the national level shows that this strength grew to include Egypt as a whole. Interaction with social media had not affected social capital in a negative way. In a state ruled by a 40-year dictatorship, social media empowered people, instead of destabilising their level of connectivity. Relations between people had not become weaker and more superficial. On the contrary, in times of instability, high corruption, and high control over traditional media, social media maintained a strong level of social interaction between people who could express themselves freely, who were able to get updated and find out real coverage of the facts and who could even participate in the creation of the agenda setting by creating relevant first-hand media reports, and feeding that content into the media. Rural-urban communication increased, commitment to enacting political change was sparked, and the idea that each governorate was separate and independent decreased since it became clear what a unified aim could accomplish. This emphasises, once again, that it was in fact the social capital of Egypt that most affected the 2011 uprisings.

Given the importance placed on regime change within academic fields such as political science, history and law - as well as the importance placed on the new media environment, social media, and interaction norms in fields such as sociology, communication studies, and journalism - this thesis has contributed to knowledge within the field of communication studies in two ways. First, it has placed social capital within the context of political interaction and regime change, discussing one way in which these areas can interact and the effect of this interaction. The relationship outlined between rural Egypt and political interaction, and the manner in which rural Egypt's political interaction played a role in the outcome of the 2011 uprisings and their aftermath, is significant. Previous research had, for the most part, neglected the role of rural Egypt, preferring to focus instead on the protest 'hotspots' of Tahrir Square in Cairo, or on Alexandria. By distinguishing between physical presence at protest sites and other forms of political engagement, the role of rural Egypt has been highlighted as being more significant than previously thought. The second manner in which this research has contributed to knowledge is through an analysis of social media's effect, both in regards to regime change as well as political interaction and social capital. As mentioned throughout, the idea that social media can impact interaction norms is not new. It has been studied by many theorists such as Elsewi, Castells, and Jenkins. This thesis, however, has shown that social media can act to expand social capital, bringing disparate groups of a population together, and igniting an interest in national discussions. While the claim that the 2011 uprisings were a "Social Media Revolution" is erroneous, it is undoubtedly clear that social media did in fact play a role in the size of the 2011 uprisings, the reaction to the 2011 uprisings, and the aftermath of those uprisings. This opens up an avenue from which other areas of the world in the midst of regime change or uprisings can be analysed in the light of the ubiquity of social media, whether these are closer to home - as in the case of Morocco, Iraq, Algeria, Lebanon and Sudan - or further out geographically and culturally as in Armenia, Hong Kong, and the "Latin American Spring".

Regarding the wider applicability of the research conducted in this thesis, there are many factors to be considered. First, the concern highlighted by Kabbanji

(2011) - that researchers within the social sciences have a tendency to focus on the elites and middle class, on the political authorities, and on the centres of demonstration - may be alleviated to an extent. This thesis builds on a body of work that focuses not on those elites, but on the segments of society that have been ignored in previous studies. This method - while it is only one method from myriad others - may be duplicated in studies of similar geographic areas with similar cultural heritages to achieve the same results. Second, and perhaps more importantly, the idea that social media can lead to changes in interaction norms and expansion of social capital is one that should be given particular emphasis. Disconnection, especially in this era when a variety of methods exist to alleviate (or entirely abolish) the idea of disconnection, is a topic that has potential. The ubiquity of social media, and the changes it may have caused in rural areas that were previously disconnected, is a relatively new consideration; social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have not yet reached their twentieth year. As such, the study of the effect of these platforms on society, interaction norms, public spheres, and social capital will only continue to grow. This thesis points to one avenue in which they can be studied, but there are many more.

On that note, throughout this thesis, agenda setting has been discussed as a significant theory for any analysis of the media landscape. This media technique, it has been shown, is being used in Egypt. However, due to changes in technology, as discussed in the literature review, the methods of agenda setting are also changing. It has become easier to identify the common thoughts, concerns, and desires of citizens due to their ability to create content and share it online. Moreover, any attempt to counteract this content creation and sharing is fraught with difficulty. Within this study, it has been shown that agenda setting was embedded within the regimes of Hosni Mubarak and Mohamed Morsi, both directly through control of printing presses and indirectly as regards to a culture of fear, bureaucracy, and legal limitations within the media sphere. However, due to the changes that have occurred in the media environment, this is an area that deserves its own research since further study will clearly allow for a greater understanding of the interaction between agenda setting, authoritarian states, and a media landscape shaped by changing technology. In particular, regarding Egypt, the period of this thesis proves insufficient for answering this question. Between

2011 and 2015, Egypt's media landscape (as has been shown) was in a state of change, and continues to be in one. A longer study, taking into consideration the period beyond 2015, could prove beneficial for a greater understanding of the importance of agenda setting and the impact of changing technology.

However, despite the above discussion of the findings and wider applicability of this research, it is important to note that this research (like all research) has its limitations. The most obvious of these limitations relates to the findings of the research: they are specific to the cultural, historical, and socio-political realities of rural Egypt. As such, while they may point to patterns or trends that may exist in other areas, no finding can be considered without taking into account the context of rural Egypt. In a wider sense, this research is also limited by its focus on a particular level of urbanisation. Egypt's population, as has been noted throughout, is largely rural. Many of the findings in this thesis assess the importance of Egypt's rural population in light of the fact that it makes up a majority of the population, and that an event as nationally significant as the 2011 uprisings were to Egypt would likely impact them. As such, a focus on a state that is largely urban may not reach the same conclusions and, in fact, may not deal with the same concerns whatsoever.

More generally, it is important to note that, as discussed in Chapter 3, the findings of this research were based on qualitative data gathered in the form of semi-structured interviews, wherein some themes were considered (and confirmed or refuted) beforehand and other themes emerged naturally from the discourse that occurred. As Chapter 3 highlights, this came with several benefits; however, one limitation is that there is no formulaic approach to implement if one wishes to conduct the same research in another geographic region. The research developed organically and, as such, is based on the contributions of those individuals who were selected for interviews and accepted. There is no guarantee that this effort could be duplicated. A second limitation lies in the fact that, being based on semi-structured interviews in rural areas, any researcher must deal with the linguistic and cultural barriers that arise in that context and the consequences of that. As Abu-Lughod (1986) states, the "degree of contact individuals [from these regions] had with those outside the community varied tremendously." This

may be due to personal avoidance, circumstances, disinterest, infrastructural barriers, cultural traditions as in the case of Upper Egypt, or anything else. This leads to a situation wherein contact, communication, and the development of a thesis is made difficult.

Finally, the very nature of semi-structured interviews brings with it a focus on the opinions, thoughts, and recollections of those involved in the events themselves. While this is beneficial in the sense that the topic being discussed was social media as relating to interaction norms and the public sphere, it also comes with the potential cost to accuracy that arises from asking individuals to remember events that occurred over five or eight years earlier, and to distinguish between occurrences that were sometimes separated by hours or days. In this case, secondary data and previous academic research proves useful. However, for events that did not achieve as much media attention as the Arab Spring, this may be an issue.

In any case, given these findings, there are some implications for further study of this subject that should be considered. The first of these is the change in social capital, and whether the pattern that this thesis has elaborated on - of the local social capital moving towards the classical conventional definition - continued after 2015. Given the unique socio-political and geographical features of rural Egypt, and the difference between each region, a study of whether social media use helped develop a conventional social capital from its unique counterpart would be a study that is fascinating for the field. Another subject that may warrant consideration, related to this one, is whether this normalisation of digital media for political interaction has continued (or even been enhanced) in the aftermath of the ousting of the Muslim Brotherhood regime, and how this newfound connection between rural and urban citizens has impacted political interaction following 2015. Similarly, further research may consider the manner in which the newfound acceptance of social media has impacted the state media of Egypt. As mentioned, even in the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings, state media remained characterized by state censorship, self-censorship, bureaucracy to limit the creation of new channels, threats of imprisonment, and a culture of fear. However, given two separate and successful uprisings to oust two separate

regimes, it may be worthwhile to consider whether the state's institutions - namely, the media in this case - adjusted given the population's view of their untrustworthiness.

Finally, one element that deserves its own study is the role of transnational media. While Aljazeera has been mentioned throughout this thesis as an example of a transnational "leading news channel in the Middle East," (Yehia, 2011), it is not the only transnational news channel that played a role during the uprisings. It has been focused on primarily due to the fact it was strongly entrenched in Egypt as a news source during the time, and as a strong source to contrast against state media. Other studies have been conducted to highlight the unique way in which *Al Jazeera* portrayed the uprisings, and the effect this had on news practices within the Middle East. However, other transnational news channels such as BBC Arabic and *Al Arabiya* also played a role. This area deserves further study for three reasons: (i) the reliance on Al Jazeera within Egypt as a trustworthy source of news decreased significantly in the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings, as mentioned briefly in this thesis, potentially opening up space for other transnational news channels to impact the sphere, (ii) even during the period between 2011 and 2015, channels such as BBC Arabic and *Al Arabiya* played a role in highlighting the difference between state and transnational media which has not been discussed and, as such, the differences between their practices and those of Al Jazeera may provide significant insight into role of media in that period, and (iii) a significant period of time has elapsed since 2011, allowing room for more in-depth study on the impact of transnational media channels such as BBC Arabic and *Al Arabiya* in the aftermath of the 2013 uprisings. Given this, the role of transnational media should be considered as an avenue for further research.

In any case, it has become clear that a number of profound transformations did take place in Egypt after the 2011 uprisings, but they were mainly visible in people's collective consciousness, because they realised the power they held together. Social media - along with some private satellite television channels, newspaper publications and some individual courageous professional journalists - empowered the people, including those from rural areas, to take action and to



fight for their rights. However, it was the social capital of the region that determined, executed, and followed through on this.

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## **11. Appendix**

### **11.1. Themes Framework**

Within this Appendix, examples of the theme Framework used in this thesis will be shown. These examples provide an overview of the themes that were considered for the analysis of this paper, and act as the primary evidence from which the three central research questions were considered. The intention of this appendix is to allow for a greater understanding for how the interviewee data used in this thesis was collected, organized, and then synthesized in order to formulate the analysis that forms the basis of this thesis.

The four overarching themes that were considered prior to the outset of the thesis were: (i) political engagement before and after the uprisings, (ii) trust in media before and after the uprisings, (iii) strength of social ties prior to, and in the aftermath of, the uprisings, and (iv) convergence within the media in the aftermath of the uprisings. In terms of all four of these themes, changes that occurred in the aftermath of the 2011 and 2013 uprisings were considered, with each being considered separately after the interview data was collected..

The two themes that arose naturally as a result of the semi-structured interviews were: (i) the normalization of social media, and (ii) the expansion of social capital. These themes, as mentioned, were not conceived of prior to the interviews. However, the interview data highlighted clearly that these were considerations that needed to be taken into account.

Thus, this appendix serves as an example of the manner in which all these themes were considered, and should be taken as a sample of a larger undertaking.

### 11.1.1. Themes Considered Beforehand

#### 11.1.1.1. Political Engagement Before & After the Uprisings

	<b>Parliamentary vs. Presidential Elections</b>	<b>Social Capital &amp; Political Engagement</b>
Interviewee (Gov)	Quote	Quote
<b>South Sinai B</b>	“parliamentary elections have always been a major event even before the uprisings, yet presidential elections have become more important after the uprisings”	“during parliamentary elections prior 2011 and after as well I always spent time with people that live in my neighborhood to explain to them the benefits of voting and who is the suitable candidate in the area because they trusted me and did not necessarily understand all the aspects related to the elections so sometimes needed guidance and explanation”
<b>Qalyoubia H</b>	“residents of Qalyoubia are always very keen on choosing their parliamentary candidate because it is part of the history for them since years unlike presidential elections”	“social connections are related to political events and voting for many people in Qalyoubia including me”
<b>Minya A</b>	“parliamentary elections is an event that I grew finding my family and people around us very involved in”	“due to our isolated area and distance from Cairo social connections are major in relation to politics because reaching the government is hard without the parliamentary representative”

### 11.1.1.2. Trust in Media Before & After the Uprisings

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>State Media vs. Private Media</b>	<b>Social Media vs. State Media</b>	<b>The Use of Social Media by Traditional Media</b>
<b>Qalyoubia A</b>	“satellite channels are less controlled in comparison to state channels”	“social media allowed more information compared to state channels that were converged via satellite channels”	“heard about social media pages on satellite channels”
<b>South Sinai F</b>	“satellite channels showed more detailed and true information than state channels”	“social media updates were on television as well”	“heard about social media updates from satellite channels”
<b>Menoufia A</b>	“I avoided watching state channels because all the information was on satellite channels”	“social media connected Egyptians so was different in comparison to state channels”	“first social media page I joined was Khalid Said
<b>Minya B</b>	“preferred satellite channels because they were more updated than state channels”	“state channels did not show any social media updates”	“first social media page I accessed was Khalid Said”

### 11.1.1.3. Strength in Social Ties Before & After the Uprisings

	<b>Community</b>	<b>Politics &amp; Parliamentary Elections</b>
<b>Qalyoubia H</b>	“heads of families always discuss political decisions”	“parliamentary elections are a major event for families because they want someone with a history in the area that knows all about it”
<b>South Sinai B</b>	“heads of tribes rotate for parliamentary elections due to the tribal nature we live in”	“the relation between tribes allows the rotation for elections”
<b>Menoufia I</b>	“voting for familiar candidate in parliamentary elections is very important”	“the parliamentary candidate voted for normally is someone familiar with our area and needs”
<b>Minya F</b>	“Minya is a secluded part and our social connections is what makes us powerful as a community when we need to”	“parliamentary elections resemble importance to get our needs done through our candidate”

### 11.1.1.4. Convergence In the Media After the 2011 Uprisings

	<b>2011 &amp; Convergence</b>	<b>2013 &amp; Convergence</b>
<b>Qalyoubia B</b>	“heard about social media updates from my campaign manager but was my first time to know about it”	“I became more familiar about finding about social media updates but through younger people around me”
<b>South Sinai A</b>	“social media updates on television were happening but were not relying on it completely”	“social media became more normal and used by 2013 uprisings”

<b>Menoufia C</b>	“my family members started using social media”	“by 2013 social media became more natural for them”
<b>Minya E</b>	“television was the main news source”	“social media became as normal as television by 2013”

## 11.1.2. Themes That Arose Naturally

### 11.1.2.1. The Normalization of Social Media

<b>Governorates</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2013</b>
<b>Qalyoubia I</b>	“started using social media constantly for politics not entertainment only”	“became more used to use it for politics in 2013 uprisings”
<b>South Sinai E</b>	“social media was still new for politics”	“became more normal to use it for politics in 2013”
<b>Minya B</b>	“social media was a new media form”	“social media was much more common in 2013”
<b>Menoufia E</b>	“was too busy for social media in 2011”	“started using it after 2012”

### 11.1.2.2. The Expansion of Social Capital

	<b>Bridging</b>	<b>Engagement in Presidential Elections</b>	<b>Discussion with Strangers</b>
<b>South Sinai F</b>	“feeling that all Egyptians were connected whether via social media or convergence of medias encouraging flow of communicating”	“people were more encouraged to participate in presidential elections after 2011 uprisings”	“discussing politics became more common after 2011 uprisings”

<b>Minya A</b>	“meeting and discussing politics with people you don’t know allowed people to make new relationship”	“presidential elections became an important after 2011 uprisings”	“talking to strangers about politics became more normal”
<b>Qalyoubia I</b>	“making new relationships out of Qalyoubia whether from Tahrir Square or social media was a new addition”	“definitely I was more encouraged to join and vote in presidential elections because I felt my voice will make a difference”	“after the 2011 uprisings it became normal to discuss politics even with people you don’t know not just family”
<b>Menoufia L</b>	“feeling that all Egyptians are speaking about same issues and discussing it was the achievement of the uprisings”	“presidential elections became more important after 2011 unlike before the uprisings”	“the fact that presidential elections became more important encouraged people to communicate about politics more even with strangers”