

Facebook as a Nation-Wide Civic Education Classroom Listening to the Voices of Egyptian Secondary School Students

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Abstract

If established democracies can not flourish without democratic citizens, societies in transition to democracy are much more in need for democratic citizenship. Given the weak role of the Egyptian formal education system in preparing citizens for their roles in a democracy, that the author documented in a previous study, he now makes use of the focus group method to identify the role of Facebook use in non-formal civic learning among a sample of general and commercial secondary school students, through listening to students' experiences. The study found that civic learning outcomes of secondary school students are now very much better than they were in 2005. Students' experiences showed that Facebook use is crucial to their civic learning. Most importantly, the Facebook was found to blur the differences in civic learning outcomes between general and technical secondary school students. Just as the Facebook helped the "Facebook revolution" of January 25, 2011 to succeed, it is now contributing to a greater revolution in children's and young people's political culture and civic learning.

Keywords: facebook, civic learning/education, citizenship education, secondary school students, Egypt.

INTRODUCTION

At last, Egypt rebelled for freedom and is currently on its "future map" for building its democratic state. The constitution is being modified, and parliamentary and presidential elections will follow. At last, the Arab peoples –or at least some of them- are on their way to join democratic societies, a fact that refutes the argument adopted by some authors stating that Arabs are exception to the democratization movements spreading throughout the world (e.g. Wright, 1996).

However, rapture of the moment should not make us forget that democracy is not irreversible, if really established. As societies move to democracy, they can also turn back to despotism. Democracy is not just a political arrangement. It also assumes a democratic society. Even well-designed institutions are not enough. A well-ordered polity requires citizens equipped with the appropriate knowledge, skills, and traits of character (Galston, 2001, p. 217). Democracy is, therefore, dependent and contingent upon citizens or in the words of Sir Bernard Crick (2008, cited in Print & Lange, 2012, p. 1) "democracy depends on all of us: the price of liberty is not just 'eternal vigilance', as Abraham Lincoln said, but eternal activity".

Yet, people are not born equipped with the facts and responsibilities associated with democratic citizenship. Although people are born free, according to the law of nature, they need to acquire freedom and learn how to practice it responsibly. In the words of Alexis de Toqueville, "habits of the heart," that's the dispositions that are necessary to nurture the

democratic ethos, are not inherited, but must be consciously acquired generation after another, by means of "apprenticeship of liberty" which he considers the most difficult form of apprenticeship that all democracies need (Barber, 1997, p. 85). In the same vein, John Dewey contends that "democracy has to be born anew every generation, and education is its midwife" (Jamieson, 2013, p. 65). With such ideas in mind, the founding fathers of the American nation advocated public education.

Thus, public education as a whole emerged as an answer to the question of preparing children for democracy and citizenship in a democratic society. In a democracy, citizens must be literate, cognizant of the institutions of their society, and capable of participating in the political life. With democracy and its institutions and inherent culture getting more complicated, literacy in itself proved to be insufficient for competent citizens. So educational systems adopted some form of formal education of citizenship qualities, whether in separate subjects under such titles as civic education, education for citizenship or education for democracy, or integrated in other relevant subjects.

Nevertheless, civic education outcomes are not satisfactory. In the United States, the level of civic knowledge among students is far from ideal, and the role of civic education in schools is far from secure, as evidenced in students' performance in civic education (Ibid., p. 73), or their political participation which is one indicator of long-run outcomes of civic education (Kahne, Lee & Feezell, 2012, p. 2). In Europe, the International Civic and Citizenship

Education Study (ICCS) concluded that civic education is regularly taught in 24 countries, and that European students attained scores in the ICCS test that were higher than the average for all participating countries. However, the results showed considerable variation in civic knowledge among and within European countries (Kerr, Sturman, Schulz & Burge, 2010). Thus, there prevails a widespread concern for the outcomes of citizenship education in Europe (Print & Lange, 2012, p. 1).

In Egypt, there is yet no separate subject for the formal teaching of civic education or citizenship education. But this does not mean that this kind of education is not delivered at all. Civic education is integrated in such subjects as languages, history and national education. Yet outcomes of civic education are far from satisfactory. "Teachers, curriculum, activities, and administration in public schools have failed to promote or support democratic values and practices," mainly as a result of the absence of political will (Faour & Muasher, 2011, p. 19). In a survey of the outcomes of civic education among a representative sample of third general secondary grade students (11th graders¹), the author found civic education outcomes as follows (Kassem, 2008):

- 1) Civic knowledge: 58.1% for democracy, 46.2% for civil society, 46.2 for government institutions, 62.7% for effective citizenship, 55.3% for international citizenship.
- 2) Civic dispositions and attitudes: 47.7% for democracy, 58% for civil society, 48.8 for government institutions, 65.7% for effective citizenship, 62.5% for international citizenship.
- 3) Civic climate and practices: 31.4% for democracy, 25.3% for civil society, 32.6 for government institutions, 35.8% for effective citizenship, 35.5% for international citizenship.

This means that almost half, more than a third, and less than two thirds of general secondary school students lack the knowledge, values and skills required for competent democratic citizenship, respectively.

As a result, civic education in Egypt needs help from outside the formal educational system. Today, media constitute a crucial source of civic education and legitimization of political power. Over the course of the last decade, the Internet has granted the public a new world of information. With the increased access to information related to every aspect of our lives, the relationship between democracy and education is bound to change (Willinsky, 2002, p. 376).

Since January 25, 2011, much has been written about the role of social media, particularly the Facebook in political change in Egypt, that's in facilitating communication, planning, organization and mobilization among protesters (e.g. Tufekci & Wilson, 2012; Salanova, 2012; Safranek, 2012). But none noticed its educational role in providing its users with civic knowledge and information, fostering their civic dispositions and attitudes, and promoting their civic and political participation. This educational role of the Facebook in Egypt is being intensified as millions of Egyptians- mainly children and young people- are discovering it after the widespread discourse on the "Facebook revolution". While tens of thousands of Egyptians- and Tunisians before them- have discovered the political potential of the Facebook, millions of Egyptians, mainly children and youth, are now discovering its educational potential.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In light of the above mentioned realities, the problem of the current study was stated as follows:

To what extent do the Facebook compensate for the negligence of formal civic education in Egypt by providing its users with civic knowledge and information, fostering their civic values, attitudes and dispositions, and promoting their civic and political participation?

This main question was analyzed to the following secondary questions:

1. Does the Facebook provide its users with the civic knowledge and information they need to be active responsible citizens in a democratic society?
2. Does the Facebook develop in its users the civic values, attitudes and dispositions they need to be active responsible citizens in a democratic society?
3. Does the Facebook nurture in its users the skills and practices they need to be active responsible citizens in a democratic society?

AIM OF THE STUDY

The study aimed at identifying the role of social media, particularly the Facebook, in non-formal civic learning among Egyptian secondary school students.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The study investigated an alternative route to civic learning, that's through the Facebook. In addition to building a knowledge base, recommendations can be raised to increase its educational influence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Civic Education: Definition, Aims, Components Definition

There are different terms used with, and different definitions given to, civic education. In Great Britain

(1) Now the 12th grade of pre-university education, after returning the 6th primary grade with the 1999-2000 cohort, that was omitted in mid-1980s.

and several European countries, the term education for citizenship or citizenship education is used, while in the United States, the term civic education is used. The last term has spread all over the world thanks to American research institutes and grant programs. But aims and content are the same.

In his MA dissertation thesis, the author reviewed all the available definitions of civic education and citizenship education and compromised the following definition:

Civic education is the formal intended preparation for conscious, active, responsible, moral citizenship at local, national and international levels; in the framework of the rights and responsibilities of democratic citizenship; for the purpose of enhancing constitutional democracy, political participation, social responsibility and community involvement; through providing the required knowledge and concepts, developing the required values, attitudes and dispositions, and promoting the required skills, abilities and behaviors; all of which intended to convert citizens from the state of potential citizenship to actual citizenship (Kassem, 2008, p. 88).

He also argues that civic education is concerned with (Ibid., p. 81-89):

- ❖ Nurturing the basic principles and concepts of liberal democracy,
- ❖ Promoting conscious, active, responsible, moral citizenship on the basis of rights and responsibilities,
- ❖ Developing social and moral responsibility, community involvement, and volunteering,
- ❖ Enhancing the understanding of the different roles of citizens in democracies,
- ❖ Enhancing the understanding of the political system, its different institutions, and its democratic manifestations, and
- ❖ Encouraging multi-culturalism and contribution to world civilization as a world citizen.

AIMS

The overall aim of civic education is to enhance, perpetuate and deepen democracy and activate participatory, active, responsible citizenship by means of creating citizens who are capable of assuming this mission. It is supposed to raise the citizens needed for a democratic society. As education for citizenship, the aims of civic education are best stated in terms the traits of the desired democratic citizen. In this regard, the 2003 Civic Mission of Schools report calls for schools that prepare students who are: competent and responsible citizens, informed and thoughtful, participate in their communities, act politically, and have moral and civic virtues (Jamieson, 2013, p. 70). In the same vein, Doğanay (2012) stresses that this education should help young people acquire and learn to use the

knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that will help them to be active and democratic citizens throughout their lives (p. 29-30).

In short, civic education is concerned with preparing citizens who are knowledgeable about democratic principles and concepts, political institutions and government system, and country's history and identity, believe in political and civic participation, understand and adopt the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, and have the skills that are necessary for making use of this knowledge and assuming this role.

COMPONENTS

When answering the question about the essential components of a good civic education, Branson and Quigley (1998) specify them as civic knowledge, civic skills, and civic dispositions. Civic knowledge is concerned with the content or what citizens ought to know. The knowledge component is embodied in the form of five significant and enduring questions: (1) what are civic life, politics, and government? (2) what are the foundations of the democratic political system? (3) how does the government established by the Constitution embody the purposes, values, and principles of democracy? (4) what is the relationship of one's nation to other nations and to world affairs? (5) what are the roles of citizens in our democratic society?

As for civic skills, Branson and Quigley (1998) bracket them in intellectual and participatory skills. Intellectual skills include critical thinking about political issues, the ability to identify emotional language and symbols, the ability to describe functions and processes such as legislative checks and balances, the competence in explaining and analyzing, and decision-making through evaluating, taking, and defending positions. Participatory skills include interacting, monitoring, and influencing (p. 8-9). The same authors identify civic dispositions as: becoming an independent member of society, assuming the personal, political, and economic responsibilities of a citizen, respecting individual worth and human dignity, participating in civic affairs in a thoughtful and effective manner, and promoting the healthy functioning of constitutional democracy (p. 12). The following table includes a more detailed and sophisticated view of the components of civic education.

Table (1) Components of Civic Education

Knowledge	Values, Attitudes and Dispositions	Skills
<p>Political Knowledge Political and legal system Basic concept, principles and institutions of democracy Concept of democratic citizenship Citizens rights and responsibilities including human rights Political decision making on local, national and international level Current political issues</p> <p>Social Knowledge Social relations Social rights The function and work of voluntary groups and civil society Social differences (welfare, social security, health etc.)</p> <p>Cultural Knowledge History and cultural heritage of one's country Different cultures in the local, regional, national, and global context</p> <p>Economic Knowledge Economic rights Economic principles and consequences of economic development Key financial matters and associated economic literacy</p> <p>Forms of Participation Knowledge Knowledge of the forms of political, social, cultural, economic participation to the life.</p>	<p>Values Acceptance of the rule of law Respect for human dignity Respect for human rights Believing in democracy Believing in social justice, equality and equal treatment of citizens Rejection of prejudice, racism and all kind of discrimination Respect for tolerance and toward differences Respect for reasoning Valuing the freedom Valuing the fairness</p> <p>Attitudes Commitment to truth Open mindedness Commitment to peace and constructive solutions to problems Feeling confident to engage politically Trusting in democratic principles, institutions and procedures as well as importance of civil action Feeling responsible for own decisions and actions Commitment to the value of mutual understanding, cooperation, trust and solidarity Sense of belonging</p> <p>Depositions The intention to participate in the political community The intention to be active in the community The intention to participate in civil society</p>	<p>Thinking skills Critical thinking Critical examination of information Distinguishing statements of facts from an opinion Reaching a balanced judgment, decision or point of view based on critical examination of information and reasoning Defending reached position Problem solving Decision making Creative thinking Inquiry skills Communication skills Using media in an active way</p> <p>Participation skills Monitoring and influencing policies and decisions including participating in peaceful protesting Resolving conflicts in a peaceful way Participating in voluntary-civil organizations as a member or contribution Building cooperation and coalitions Displaying democratic leadership Living in a multicultural environment Handling all kind of differences including gender, social, cultural, racial, and religious</p>

Table data are taken from: Doğanay, 2012, p. 23-34

Such immense aims cannot be met, and such huge content cannot be delivered in formal instruction only. Since civic education is primarily concerned with building student's character, inculcating democratic culture, promoting political and civic participation, co-curricular activities constitute an original part of teaching civic education. Application of civic knowledge, values and skills require opportunities for real-life practices. Of great importance to civic education success is school climate and governance.

FACEBOOK: POTENTIAL AS A NATION-WIDE CIVIC EDUCATION CLASSROOM

Definition and Expansion

As one of the technologies of web 2.0, the Facebook is a social network that enables people to communicate with friends and exchange information. It was developed in February 2004 by the Harvard student Mark Zuckerberg as means of communication between students. Within one year, it expanded to schools around Boston and began to accept membership of all students and graduates from all schools in the United States. Initially individuals could only become member using e-mail address of the relevant high schools and some large companies. In September 2006, the Facebook was opened to all

e-mail addresses (Tiryakioglu & Erzurum, 2011, p. 141).

The Facebook can be defined as a unique online service, platform, or space where social communication and/or social relations can be established and individuals intensely share information (Ibid., p. 135). The Facebook allows users to create profiles, updating them with personal information such as home address, mobile phone number, interests, religious views, and even data like relationship status. The Facebook users can also designate other users as friends, send private messages, join groups, post and/or tag pictures and leave comments on these pictures, as well as on either a group's or an individual's wall (Petrović et al., 2012, p. 356).

The Facebook has expanded exponentially: from 500 million users in February 2011, to 1.1 billions by May 2013 (Tiryakioglu & Erzurum, 2011, p. 135), to over 1.5 billion active Facebook users by August 2013, with a 23% increase from March 2012 (<http://zephoria.com/social-media/top-15-valuable-TheFacebook-statistics/>). This makes Facebook the largest social network with the biggest audience compared to similar media.

In Egypt, Internet users grew from only 450,000 in 2000 (0.7 % of total population), to 5,100,000 in 2006 (7.0 % of total population), to 10,532,400 in 2008 (12.9 % of total population), to 12,568,900 in 2009 (15.9 % of total population), to 29,809,724 in 2013 (35.6 % of total population) (<http://www.Internetworldstats.com/af/eg.htm>).

Growth in the number of Facebook users has been much more impressive in Egypt. They increased from

11,387,300 in July 21, 2012, to 16 million users by July 21, 2013, adding 4,612,700 users (41%) in one year. This total represents 48.11% of Egypt Internet Users and 18.84% of Egypt Population. With 16 million users, Egypt now ranked the 17th worldwide and 1st in the Arab region in terms of audience size (eMarketing Egypt Online Competitive Intelligence Report, 2013, p. 6). Table (2) presents a closer look at Facebook users in Egypt.

Table (2) Facebook users in Egypt

	Total in millions	%	User's age (%)						
			Under 30	Under 18	19-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	Over 40
Male	12	62	74	26	30	18	11	6	9
Female	4	38	82	30	35	16	9	4	6
Total	16	100	75	28	32	17	10	5	8

Table data are taken from: eMarketing Egypt Online Competitive Intelligence Report, 2013.

Table (2) shows that:

- ❖ The Facebook in Egypt is a young age community, dominated by those who are younger than 30 years of age (12 millions, that's 75% of total Facebook users),
- ❖ Young people aged 18 years old represent the largest single year group on the Facebook (1.1 million users, that's 6% of total Facebook users).
- ❖ Facebook use declines with age. Users older than 40 years of age are greater in number than 30-34 and 35-39 year olds only because they constitute a wide age group.
- ❖ Facebook users' gender distribution is almost similar to that of the total Internet distribution in Egypt. But Male/female comparison reveals further that female Facebook users are of much younger ages, with female users younger than 30 years of age representing 82% of total female users, opposed to 75% for males.
- ❖ It can be deduced that in a generation, most Egyptians of all ages will have Facebook accounts or newer versions of social media, when children aged 18 surpass the age of forty.

Facebook in Formal Teaching

Social media provide the educational characteristics educators have long been advocating: interaction, collaboration, active participation, information and resource sharing, and critical thinking. They also meet students' demand for more autonomy, connectivity, interaction and socio-experiential learning opportunities in their learning contexts (Petrović, et al., 2012, p. 357).

The Facebook uses in education-related aspects were, therefore, studied heavily. Research in this area found that:

- ❖ Most college instructors have Facebook accounts and think that the Facebook can provide important contributions to social interactions among students as well as to

communications between instructors and students (Tiryakioğlu & Erzurum, 2011).

- ❖ The Facebook use was significantly negatively predictive of engagement scale score and positively predictive of time spent in co-curricular activities (Junco, 2011).
- ❖ The Facebook was also found to be used by students in recounting and reflecting on the university experience, exchanging practical information, exchanging academic information, displays of supplication and/or disengagement, and 'banter' (Selwyn, 2009).
- ❖ The Facebook use was situated within the 'identity politics' of being a student, as a space of 'role conflict' (Selwyn, 2009).
- ❖ The Facebook is an instructional tool that advances civic-engagement ideals and global-learning goals (Usher II, 2012).
- ❖ Civic educators can use virtual or online world to promote civic engagement and participation in the real offline world (Kahne, Ullman & Middaugh, 2011, 2012).

The Facebook Wall as Civic Learning Multimedia Board

The above research and much more is concerned with making use of the Facebook as a tool in intended teaching, but as far as the author knows, the role of the Facebook in the unintended non-formal civic learning has not yet been explored, and research examining the civic learning effect of the Facebook is rare, if existed. Following is a review of the characteristics and capabilities that promote the influence of the Facebook use on civic learning, or its role as a civic learning multimedia board, opposed to traditional classroom white or black boards.

The Internet and its offspring social media, arguably the single most important communication breakthrough in the latter half of the last century, has revolutionized the way people communicate, access information and even how they respond to and

comment on social and political issues. They enabled media, perhaps for the first time, to evade government control. With overcoming government control always come democracy and a deep change in culture and world view (Kassem, 2010; Leeson, 2008; Tufekci & Wilson, 2012; Safranek, 2012). How do social media achieve this shift in culture, citizenship and political participation, that's civic learning?

Digital media or new "citizen" media create public spheres within which citizens debate for public good. They create alternative public spheres, disseminate information and provide a platform for debate, can also contribute to the internal democratization of the media landscape itself, form political culture and collective identities, and enhance networking, organizing and mobilizing for collective action (Michaelsen, 2011, p. 16-19). These same effects that made the social media play a crucial role in helping "Arab Spring" protesters in overthrowing despotic regimes should make it effective in civic learning.

What made Facebook the most popular and largest social network site is that it merges virtually all previous forms of media. On the Facebook wall, children and young people can watch TV channels, post news videos, read press articles, post them, share their own created videos and articles, get others' postings, and most importantly debate over public issues and events. Through social media, people can demonstrate socially responsible actions and ways to participate and express themselves in a networked society. Web 2.0 social tools, therefore, increase the competence of individuals and communities to act as influential participants in the information society (Alam & McLoughlin, 2010, p. 14).

The Facebook also provides its users with a space for disseminating information, discussing ideas and events, and developing skills that are necessary for citizenship and civic engagement. Kahne, Lee & Feezell (2012) Kahne, Ullman & Middaugh (2011) identify the following links between the Internet – mainly the Facebook- and young people's civic learning:

- ❖ It is through the Internet that young people get much of their political information.
- ❖ It is through the Internet that young people receive campaign information.
- ❖ It is through the Internet that young people often hear and voice perspectives.
- ❖ It is through the Internet that young people have opportunities to learn participatory skills and norms.
- ❖ It is through the Internet that young people are increasingly engaged in informal online communities that define themselves around shared interests and that often center around expressive activities.

- ❖ It is through the Internet engagement that young people has the potential to strengthen their participation in civic and political life.
- ❖ Most importantly, it is through the Internet that young people are exposed to divergent views, that in turn promotes reflection, helps them reach a better understanding of complex issues, develop a deeper appreciation of others' views, enhance their knowledge of actual public opinions, their tolerance, and their sense of the legitimacy of democratic outcomes.

All these desired effects of the Facebook are greatly magnified when we know that in today's informatics era students are heavily immersed in Web 2.0 technologies which play an increasingly important role in their social life as well as their academic life (Petrović et al., 2012, p. 355-56). In today's media-saturated world, students spend a large part of their time in front of, interacting with, and even creating digital images and words. The media children consume and interact with may have the potential to greatly influence their beliefs and behaviors. From childhood, digital media and technology are integrated in the daily life of digital natives.

With children and young people being immersed in new media, both democracy and citizenship turned digital. Digital citizenship is characterized with participatory culture which emerges as the culture absorbs and responds to the explosion of new media technologies that make it possible for average consumers to create and circulate media content in powerful new ways, and as people move away from a world in which some produce and many consume media toward one in which everyone has a more active stake in the culture that is produced (Jenkins et al., 2009, p. 8, 13).

In addition to the above effects of social media on civic learning and civic participation, they are cheap and efficient means of communication and most importantly don't need advanced computer skills (Safranek, 2012). These traits are revolutionary in their effects, as they can have an equating or leveling effect on literate/illiterate, highly educated/poorly educated, academically/vocationally oriented, urban/rural, and metropolitan/remote people. People on the two ends of these dichotomies are supposed to benefit alike from social media.

In Egypt, Facebook content is highly politicized. It is perhaps due to the revolutionary state and the transition phase we are experiencing that politics and civics dominate Facebook content. It can even be argued that the recent increases of Facebook users in Egypt were for political reasons. That's the decision to have a Facebook account is synonymous to having voice in the current issues and events, particularly

after the recurring discourse about the role of the Facebook in the "Facebook revolution"

The following table may shed light on the potential contribution of the Facebook to civic learning in Egypt.

Table (3) Fans of Facebook pages according to age and gender

Facebook pages	category	Fans numbers	Male (%)	Female (%)	User's age (%)					
					Under 18	19-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	Over 40
Educate yourself	Social	7.487.910	54	46	18	40	20	11	5	6
Amr Khaled	Celebrity Religious	7.030.975	58	42	18	39	19	12	6	6
Amr Diab	Celebrity Musician	5.824.291	62	38	26	43	17	7	3	4
Ahmed Helmy	Celebrity Actor	4.205.119	61	39	30	44	14	7	2	3
Vodafone Egypt	Business	3.823.198	63	37	27	38	17	9	4	5
We Are All Khaled Said	Political Cause	3.231.532	63	37	20	39	19	10	5	7
Al Ahly	Sports	2.711.570	73	27	28	39	16	8	4	5
Youm7	News & Media	2.578.665	70	30	15	33	20	14	7	11

Table data are taken from: eMarketing Egypt Online Competitive Intelligence Report, 2013.

Table (3) shows that male and female fans are roughly distributed in all Facebook pages according to the percent of each in Facebook users (62:38). It is clear that Egyptian female users are more culture oriented (Educate Yourself page), while male users are more sports followers (Al Ahly sports team). In terms of age groups, a political cause page (We Are All Khaled Said²) ranks sixth in total number of fans, taking 20% of children younger the age of 18, and 39% of young people 19-24 years old. The independent newspaper (Youm7 or the Seventh Day), which fans need for following current events and political articles, ranks eighth, with 15% and 33% of the two age groups respectively. Even celebrity people may be followed for their political positions, like the actor Ahmed Helmy who participated in most waves of the 25th January revolution.

METHOD

Qualitative research methods such as surveys are often used with this sample age, but they would not uncover the ethos of the youth using the Facebook. Answers to questionnaire close-ended items would not yield the information needed for the study of civic learning that the author argues that it is embedded in culture. The author, therefore, decided that qualitative research methods are the most appropriate ones for gaining deep insights into students' experiences of Facebook use as a means for civic learning. Morgan (1998) argues that "qualitative methods also excel at interpretation, giving an understanding of why things are the way they are and how they got to be that way" (p. 12).

Of all the qualitative methods available, the author chose the focus group method, since its

characteristics seem to yield the information the author required. This method combines the advantages of interviews and surveys, particularly when guided by predetermined set of topics or a

focus group guide (appendix I). This method allows for group dynamics and gives voice to group members. It yields more in-depth information on perceptions, insights, attitudes, experiences, or beliefs of participants. It provides insights into how people think and provide a deeper understanding of the phenomena being studied (Morgan, 1998).

PARTICIPANTS

Two secondary schools, one general and one technical commercial, in Qtour district, affiliated to Gharbiyah governorate, were chosen. Gharbiyah is one of the Delta governorates, about 80 km north of Cairo and about 120 km southeast of Alexandria. Although rural life characteristics have quite disappeared and urbanization pervaded, this governorate is yet considered a rural one. In Egypt, general secondary education is the intellectual academic education that qualifies students for colleges of science and humanities. It is not a terminal phase, i.e. is does not grant a diploma and students must join any higher education institution to get a certificate. On the contrary, technical secondary education prepares students for vocations, is terminal, gives diploma, and only allows students to limited higher education options. For these differences, it is expected that general secondary students are more in contact with, and equipped for, using social media than technical secondary students. They are also expected to perform higher levels of civic learning than technical secondary students.

Two focus groups of about 12 students each were chosen in each school, one male and one female. Males and females were separated for helping girls

(2) Khaled Said is the young man whose death at the hands of Alexandria police is said to have inflamed the 25th January 2011 revolution.

overcome shyness and allow them to express their experiences. Thus the focus groups were as follows:

- 1) Secondary school male group: 12 in number and 90 minutes in duration.
- 2) Secondary school female group: 13 in number and 95 minutes in duration.
- 3) Commercial school male group: 12 in number and 85 minutes in duration.
- 4) Commercial school female group: 14 in number and 110 minutes in duration.

At the end of the groups, there were close to 150 pages of transcripts recorded from seven hours of focus groups sessions, whose analysis gave the following results.

RESULTS

Familiarity always blinds people to the things they always do and use. Thus children may use the Facebook in civic learning without being aware of that. So the author began the interviews with the level of civic learning, and after verifying students' levels, he moved to their use of the Facebook in general, then its use in civic learning. This order of discussion lets students confess the role of the Facebook in civic learning, as manifested in the following extract:

The researcher: "If you do not read newspapers, books or the like, where did you get that learning from?"

A student: "You are right. The Facebook and satellite TV channels are main sources of knowing about politics and following current issues" (general secondary male group).

But in the following presentation of the study results, the author begins with the Facebook use, then proceeds to the level of civic learning.

The Facebook use

According to the data provided by the students:

- ❖ 88% of general secondary school male students, 65% of general secondary school female students, 74% of commercial school male students, and 57% of commercial school female students have Facebook accounts. This male/female percent is close to those mentioned in the eMarketing Egypt Online Competitive Intelligence Report.
- ❖ Most students have Internet access at home; very few get access through public sites.
- ❖ Most students have Facebook accounts for a year or less, few for two years. Some of them are of the more than 4 million Facebook users added during the last year.
- ❖ Most students log into their Facebook accounts on a daily basis, for an hour in average.

- ❖ Most students have more than 200 friends in their Facebook pages, and are members of in other pages or groups.
- ❖ Most students share and like others' postings and express their ideas via the Facebook.
- ❖ Because of the high-stake nature of general secondary education, parents try to limit their children's access to the Internet and the Facebook as time-wasting activities, and urge them to dedicate all their time to studying.
- ❖ 15% of students log in to the Facebook via mobile phones.

It should be noted that not having a Facebook account was due to demographic and logistic reasons. All students who do not have Facebook accounts know of this technological application, admitting that it is fashionable to have Facebook accounts, and said they hoped to have one. In Egypt, people have Internet access through terrestrial telephone lines. This was a cause of the lower number of Internet users. But routers came to allow one telephone line to offer Internet access to several users with trivial cost. Students who do not have Facebook accounts attributed this to the lack of telephone lines or adjacent routers.

Facebook use is gaining momentum. Few students have got Facebook accounts for two years, several for about a year, and many for several months. The discourse of the "Facebook revolution" prevalent in TV channels was mainly responsible for the spread of Facebook use. It is true that the Facebook was used by Tahrir Square protesters to organize their demonstrations, circulate news, and mobilize people, but the widespread use of the Facebook only followed the revolution and gains new users daily. It seems that Egyptian youth discovered the Facebook as means for political expression, which in turn politicizes the Facebook. So the author was keen to know the reasons that drove students to have a Facebook account in the first place. In addition to following fashion, students said that they had Facebook in the first place to know what is taking place and take part in the revolution.

"To know what's going on" (commercial secondary school male group).

"To know this that the Facebook initiated [the revolution] and be part of what is going on" (general secondary school female group).

Civic Knowledge

Within a society in a state of "continuous revolution", it is not surprising to find political awareness heightening. People in such a case consume political debate more than anything else. Students have the political knowledge that is necessary for democratic citizenship. They are aware of the basic concepts of democracy and its principles and institutions, and citizens' rights and responsibilities including human

rights. For most students, democracy means free elections. Yet, they are aware of the separation of the three branches of the state, and the jobs of each branch.

Most students have a meaning of democracy centered on human rights. For them democracy means "not being subject to inhuman practices by police."

Students expressed utopian views of democracy: "Democracy means providing decent life for all people, no unemployment, no torture in police stations, and no political corruption" (commercial secondary school female group).

"Democracy means that all people are equal in front of law, whatever their position or wealth is" (general secondary female group).

Contrary to the author's previous study, all students know the principle of rule of law. They asserted that most of Egypt's problems during the Mubarak regime resulted from the violation of this principle. As a result, they emphasized that democracy means the rule of law.

Students acknowledge that citizenship requires participation that they mainly bracket in the political domain. Civil society and voluntary work are not widespread in Egypt. Despite the role played by civil society organizations, mainly human right ones, in making the revolution, they were subject to a continuous defaming campaign launched by pro-state media. Thus the meaning of civil society was not clear among students. Students are also aware of the importance volunteering for solving the many problems that face local communities, such as removing waste.

"It is good of course for citizens to work together to solve common problems. But this culture has yet been established. Will I volunteer alone?" (general secondary male group).

However, volunteering for political or social causes is not strongly held in their perspectives. Yet some students spoke of campaigns launched via the Facebook for political issues.

"We nowadays campaign in support of the presidential candidate [...] on the Facebook" (commercial school female group).

Mainly as a result of the political debate dominating public discourse in Egypt, all students know the function of the constitution and recognize its importance:

"Constitution is the contract between the governor and the governed" (general secondary school female group).

Students are even aware of the interest conflict that is shaping the prospect of democratic transition in Egypt. They know that strong power groups are struggling for their interests in the new regime.

"All of them [the military, the police, the judiciary, old regime and political Islam groups] are struggling for their interests, not those of ordinary people" (general secondary female group).

Students follow current political issues and events. Only very few of them don't know about the 50-committee for amending the constitution. They are aware of the controversial issues in drafting the constitution, mainly the identity of the state, whether civil or theocratic. They know the steps of the "future map" announced for the 30th June 2013 "revolution". All students know up to 5 candidates of the last presidential election, and have expectations for candidates of the coming one.

The study is not concerned with political ideology or party bias of students. Yet students volunteered to express their political ideology. Reflecting the wider society and culture, when a student in the general secondary school group expressed his support for the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood party, disorder prevailed as other students tried to silence him, expressing their support of liberal parties. Students' trial to silence the different opinions and use of loud voice reflect the wider society and culture at the moment. This event is revealing, as political and ideological affiliation is the climax of political awareness, whatever the party or the ideological orientation the person supports.

Overall, females are a bit more aware of democracy and citizenship than males. Both possess the knowledge base required for democratic citizenship. This result is consistent with the previous study by the author (Kassem, 2008).

Contrary to what was expected, commercial school students are not less cognizant of civic knowledge than general school students. The latter are more capable of expressing themselves than the former because of the nature of their intellectual academic education. But both possess the knowledge base required for democratic citizenship. This parity or lack of difference can be attributed to new media that entered all households, mainly social media and satellite TV channels. It can, therefore, be claimed that social media blur the distinction between different kinds of education pertaining to civic and political learning. So if civic education in general has a "compensation effect" for less educated and less

socially integrated people (Finkel & Smith, 2011), civic learning through the Facebook use intensifies this effect.

The Facebook also helps in enriching the cultural knowledge pertaining to citizenship and democracy. Coinciding with the continuous protests, and driven by ideological activists, the Facebook witnesses heavy postings related to historical figures such as Jamal Abd-A-Nasser and Anwar A-Saddat. When asked about such figures, students revealed sufficient knowledge about them and their roles in the history of modern Egypt. Some students attribute this kind of knowledge to the Facebook.

"Facebook provides much information about such important events as October 6, 1973 war. Believe me it is the first anniversary for me to be proud of that great victory and the heroes that achieved it" (commercial school male group).

"Nasser was independent in his decisions, not dependant like those who followed him" (commercial school female group).

"Egypt was even better in the monarchical period than it was in the later republican period" (secondary school female group).

Overall, Students' level in civic knowledge is much greater than the level the author documented in a previous study (Kassem, 2008). This higher level of civic knowledge can be attributed to the state of revolution itself, as political debate is found everywhere in Egypt. It can also be attributed to social media that strongly contribute to the circulation of civic knowledge, as manifested in students' responses. Students who have Facebook accounts for longer periods and log in their accounts more frequently have more civic knowledge than students who don't have accounts or enter their Facebook page less frequently. But causation might go in both directions. In addition to having more knowledge because of using the Facebook, it can be argued that political and civic engagement leads the person to have a Facebook account in the first place and to log in frequently. The 41% increase (4,612,700) in Facebook users from July 2012 to July 2013 confirms this interpretation. However, overall the Internet and Facebook use is known to increase political and civic knowledge (Kahne, Ullman & Middaugh, 2011).

Civic Values, Attitudes and Dispositions

In the absolute, students believe in democracy. But perhaps because of the high frequency of demonstrations, strikes, sit-ins and road blocking, some said that freedom is not good for the Egyptian people:

"Freedom is harmful for this [Egyptian] people. Even people having marital problems go in demonstrations and block roads" (commercial secondary school male group).

Students also believe in the rule of law as the main principle of democratic states. But as mentioned above, they doubt that the judiciary is fair or independent of state intervention.

"In political cases, judges may follow the general orientation of the state. When a specific group holds authority, its opposition is cruelly treated by courts. See how courts dealt with opposition before and after the 30th of June 2013" (general secondary school female group).

In theory, students respect human dignity and human rights of all people, and say they reject prejudice, racism and all kinds of discrimination. But in practice, they are prejudiced against others' political points of view, and deprive political opponents of human rights and dignity. While they say that they believe in human dignity of all people, some of them especially ideologically and politically biased ones, accept oppressing proponents of opposing political or ideological orientations.

"They want to destroy Egypt and must therefore be severely punished" (commercial secondary school male group).

Thus, it can be claimed that tolerance is absent from the value repertoire of Egyptian secondary school students. This may be a reflection of the severe polarization that prevailed the Egyptian society after the revolution.

Students believe that TV channels have been playing an important role in the political events in Egypt. But in the same time, they denounce TV channels expressing the opposing ideological orientations. Despite saying that they believe in the right of all people to express their opinions, when discussing specific political events and issues, they deny political opponents the right to free speech and expression:

"These are not peaceful demonstrations. They want to destroy the state" (general secondary school male group).

"Biased TV channels conspired against the president [Mohamad Morci]" (the same group).

It can, therefore, be claimed that there is a contradiction between the values students express in theory and the values revealed by their actions and opinions. In theory, they are they are tolerant liberal democratic persons. But when talking about their

political opponents, their tolerance, liberalism and democracy vanish away and give way to prejudice and refusal of difference. This is a reflection of the political polarized culture dominant in Egypt after the 25th January 2011 revolution.

Although students believe in democracy and want it to be established in political practice and feel confident to engage politically, they don't trust that democracy can be established in Egypt. They feel that power and interest groups would void democracy of its value. They provided several reasons for this distrust, including illiteracy, poverty and protectors of the traditional regime.

"What is the use of democracy with a people half of which is illiterate and the other half is poor" (general secondary school male group).

Like older generations and the public discourse in a period characterized with severe political and ideological polarization, students' commitment to truth is weak. As sons and daughters of a polarized society, they mention the facts that support their arguments and dismiss those refuting them. Students are aware that state-controlled media are subject to government directions and that independent media have agendas that make them adopt only one side of the political debate. In spite of this critical view of media bias, students are not objective in dealing with public affairs. This trend reveals that students have critical thinking, but lack open-mindedness and acceptance of the other.

While students expressed their trust in democratic principles and institutions, some said that they do not trust politicians. And while they said that they are politically engaged, they expressed their mistrust in political participation. They admitted that certain social conditions will hinder the proper functioning of democracy.

"In front of each vote given on conscious basis, several will be given for benefit. You know sugar and oil provisions are still influential" (commercial secondary school male group).

Finally, students have a strong sense of belonging. Recent events and the western opposition to the 30th of June 2013 developments may have heightened the sense of belonging because of the threat posed on the Egyptian state as most people felt, including secondary school students. The Facebook played a major role in raising the sense of belonging as manifested in the civic knowledge section, through exposing such important historical events and characters as the 1973 war, Nasser and Saddat.

Overall, no differences between male and female students were observed in civic values, attitudes and

dispositions. Contrary to what was expected, no differences were observed in the adoption of these values between general secondary school students whose education is intellectually- and academically-oriented and commercial school students whose education is technically- and vocationally-oriented. This may be an example of the difference-blurring effect of new media, especially the Facebook.

Students' level in civic values, attitudes and dispositions is better than their level in the previous study of the author (Kassem, 2008). This can be attributed to the revolutionary state we are experiencing in Egypt and the widespread use of social media. Contradictions in the values student possess will be resolved with time and exposure to different viewpoints, in which social media will play a great role.

Civic Skills

Students possess the thinking skills required for democratic citizenship. They think critically in political issues and democracy and its institutions:

"What is the use of the good constitution and institutions when people are illiterate and poor" (commercial secondary school male group).

"I don't think that any human can resist the attraction of authority when it calls for him" [alluding to possibility that a prominent military leader will join presidential elections and will win] (general secondary school female group).

Students distinguish statements of facts from opinions. But as previously mentioned, they tend to ignore the facts that contradict their opinions. It is, therefore, difficult for them to reach balanced judgments, decisions or points of view based on critical examination of information and reasoning, mainly in the field of politics that is characterized with severe polarization:

"It seems as if we are two peoples happened to live in the same country" (general secondary school male group).

Perhaps because of the above mentioned values and attitudes and the severe political and ideological polarization, students excel in defending their opinions and supporting their arguments. But in the same time, they tend to ignore the refuting arguments. Students possess problem solving, critical thinking and decision making skills. They always volunteer by coining creative problems to political and economic problems of the society.

As for participation skills, students use the Internet and the Facebook in monitoring political decisions and events. They try to influence them through

expression, campaigning and developing a public opinion supporting their viewpoints. Many students participated in the 30th June 2013 events, and some are participating in the counter events that are still taking place nowadays.

"I participated in protests in Tanta [the capital of Gharbiyah governorate] to overthrow the last regime" (general secondary school male group).
"My father and I participate in all protests against the coup ed'etat" (the same group).

Most students support certain political orientations and parties, some supported and worked for certain candidates in the last presidential elections and took part in their election campaigns, some intended to be active in the expected parliamentary and presidential elections, mainly through the Facebook. An evidence of the role social media play in political debate and civic learning is that a candidate in the previous presidential elections (Hamdeen Sabahy) came in the third rank with little less than five million votes, despite the fact that his campaign was financially and organizationally trivial compared to other candidates. Commentators attributed this candidate's popularity to the Facebook, as young people implemented vast and sincere campaigns for him on the Facebook which soon forced their way to streets and public opinion. This enabled a weakly funded candidate to get a number of votes close to that obtained by the candidate supported by the military and the state institutions (Ahmed Shafik) and the one supported by the political Islam groups (Mohamad Morci).

"We succeeded in collecting five million votes for him. And we were about to enable him to enter the second phase of the election but for forgery" (general secondary school male group).

"I took part in the presidential campaign of the candidate [...] in the previous elections" (general secondary school female group).

Students said that they use the Facebook in political debate and campaigning.

"The Facebook came to be a discovery for political participation" (general secondary school male group).

Overall, no differences were noticed in civic skills between male and female students. Yet females use the Facebook for political mobilization more than males. For this reason it was said that the above presidential candidate got that great number of votes because of the support he received from young women of the Facebook community. There were also no differences between general and commercial school students.

Students' level in civic skills is better than their level in the previous study of the author (Kassem, 2008). This can be attributed to the revolutionary state we are experiencing and the widespread use of social media. This is congruent with Valenzuela, Park, and Kee's (2009, cited in Junco, 2011) result that intensity of Facebook use was related to civic participation, life satisfaction, and social trust.

DISCUSSION

After the failure of the Egyptian general secondary school, and all intended and unintended educational institutions, in achieving the required civic education outcomes, documented eight years ago in a study by the author (Kassem, 2008), secondary school students (general and technical) came to master civic education outcomes. They now possess the civic knowledge, values and skills required for active democratic citizenship. It should be noted that at the value and attitude level, students hold certain contradictions, such as denying political and ideological opponents the rights to free speech and expression. But this is hoped to be a temporary result of the transition state itself, the excessive ideological polarization and the increasing politicization of the Egyptian society, including children and young people.

What did make the difference between Egyptian secondary students in 2013 and 2005 (note that including vocational secondary school students in 2013 was expected to lower students' civic outcomes overall)? In addition to the revolutionary state that politicizes all people, the study stresses that social media, mainly the Facebook, was the protagonist in this success story, as students themselves said and their civic learning revealed. Through the Facebook, children and young people learn information, principles and concepts of democracy and citizenship; develop the values, attitudes and dispositions needed for democratic citizenship; and learn and practice the skills required for such citizenship.

Egyptian children and young people are not just civic learners or passive recipients of what other Facebook users present, but are also civic teachers and active users of the technology. They use the Facebook to its utmost potential: consume others' content and create their own content for others to consume, and are media makers as well as media recipients. They use it to learn, debate, follow current events, advance their political positions, mobilize for action and move from online virtual world to offline real world. Thus, they can be argued to practice digital citizenship in the meaning of being full active citizens on digital media.

Egyptian children and young people are highly politicized and highly politicizing the social media. They moved civic and political life online. As Kahne,

Ullman & Middaugh (2011, p. 23) argues, virtual world proved to be good for the "real" world in the Egyptian case.

The Facebook use in Egypt also accomplished a goal that the education system has long aspired for, that's equating the cultural and political outcomes of academic and technical education. Traditionally, academic education (represented in general secondary school) was expected to produce citizens who are more culturally and politically literate than technical education (represented in this study in commercial secondary education). Yet, the current study proved that technical education students are almost equal to academic education students in civic learning.

Females' share in the Internet and Facebook use is still less than males' (38% v. 62%). Yet, they are much younger age than males. In terms of civic learning, girls are at the same level of boys, if not better. This result is consistent with a recent statistical report that finds that female's contributions to the Facebook are more culture-centered, opposed to males' contributions which are sports-centered.

Urban and metropolitan children and young people cannot be better learned in civic education than those participating in the study, being from a rural governorate and a small town. With this last statement, the equating effect of social media on civic learning, political culture and culture in general, goes a step further. Now social media are blurring the boundaries between academic and technical education, and between urban and rural culture. It even blurs the boundaries between alphabetically literate and illiterate people in this regard³. After the pre-social-media Internet and TV channels have brought these pairs close to each other, social media is promising to remove all differences among them. Civic learning outcomes and political culture traits will converge more and more with the penetration of social media into people's lives.

The Facebook is also capable of alleviating the polarization of other non-Internet media and remedying the value contradictions of Egypt's "digital generation" mentioned in the results of the study. As a platform for all viewpoints, ideologies and positions, the Facebook can alleviate polarization, and enhance tolerance to opposing positions and to difference itself.

Promise becomes greater, when we take into account that the Facebook in Egypt is a young age community, with young people aged 18 representing the largest single year group on it. This means that the Facebook use is gaining ever-increasing land

among children and young people, and that a generation later the full influence of the existent and would-be social media will change the landscape of culture and political participation all together.

We are just in the beginning of gradual- yet radical-change in citizens' culture and participation. The Facebook in Arabic was introduced in 2009 only.

At last, civic education in Egypt escaped the defects of the education system and the lack of the political will that were always raised as the fundamental reasons for its weakness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Is it sensible to give recommendations regarding a sphere that is so personal and personalizable and uncontrollable as the the Facebook? Why not?

- ❖ Others developed several social media services mainly to intensify and organize citizen online political participation and collaboration (Näkki et al., 2011, p. 3).
- ❖ Others recommended and took the reverse direction: using formal civic education to enhance media literacy as a basic requirement for digital citizenship (e.g. Kahne, Lee & Feezell, 2012; Alam & Mcloughlin, 2010), or using media education as a means for preparing students for competent use of digital media (Kahne, Ullman & Middaugh, 2011; Oxstrand, 2009; Buckingham et al., 2004; Kellner & Jeff, 2007).
- ❖ Formal education institutions can take part by hosting groups for their children's Facebook pages that create and share civic content and promote their Facebook participation.
- ❖ Formal education and culture institutions can take part by intentionally creating and sharing civic content.

FURTHER RESEARCH

In light of the study results, the following research is recommended:

- ❖ Analyzing secondary school students' facebook walls in terms of civic content.
- ❖ Comparing the civic learning of children and young people who use the Facebook and those do not use it (before there is no one left that is not using it).
- ❖ Examining the level of media education in schools and its effects on civic learning via social media.
- ❖ Examining students' political behavior on the Facebook during election campaigns and important political events and crises such as the 30th June protests.

(3) Does not it astonish that the author first had a facebook account after knowing about it from a 16-year-old fairly illiterate acquaintance?

APPENDIX I

Focus Group Guide

The Following topics and questions guided the focus group interviews:

- 1) Level of civic learning: knowledge, values and skills: this part of the interviews was guided by the civic education components listed in table (1)
- 2) Personal data regarding Facebook use: Do you have a Facebook account? For how long? How often you log in you Facebook account? How many friends are there in your page? Are you member of any Facebook groups or pages? Does Facebook postings help you acquire the needed civic learning? Do you always express your political opinion on Facebook? Do you usually share others' postings? Did you use the Facebook recently to search for political information? Did you use the Facebook recently to campaign for political action? Does the Facebook help you in following current political issues?

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