

# MAPPING DIGITAL MEDIA: EGYPT



# Mapping Digital Media: Egypt

A REPORT BY THE OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS

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# Mapping Digital Media

The values that underpin good journalism, the need of citizens for reliable and abundant information, and the importance of such information for a healthy society and a robust democracy: these are perennial, and provide compass-bearings for anyone trying to make sense of current changes across the media landscape.

The standards in the profession are in the process of being set. Most of the effects on journalism imposed by new technology are shaped in the most developed societies, but these changes are equally influencing the media in less developed societies.

The **Mapping Digital Media** project, which examines the changes in-depth, aims to build bridges between researchers and policymakers, activists, academics and standard-setters across the world. It also builds policy capacity in countries where this is less developed, encouraging stakeholders to participate in and influence change. At the same time, this research creates a knowledge base, laying foundations for advocacy work, building capacity and enhancing debate.

The Media Program of the Open Society Foundations has seen how changes and continuity affect the media in different places, redefining the way they can operate sustainably while staying true to values of pluralism and diversity, transparency and accountability, editorial independence, freedom of expression and information, public service, and high professional standards.

The Mapping Digital Media project assesses, in the light of these values, the global opportunities and risks that are created for media by the following developments:

- the switch-over from analog broadcasting to digital broadcasting;
- growth of new media platforms as sources of news;
- convergence of traditional broadcasting with telecommunications.

Covering 60 countries, the project examines how these changes affect the core democratic service that any media system should provide—news about political, economic and social affairs.

The **Mapping Digital Media** reports are produced by local researchers and partner organizations in each country. Cumulatively, these reports will provide a much-needed resource on the democratic role of digital media.

In addition to the country reports, the Open Society Media Program has commissioned research papers on a range of topics related to digital media. These papers are published as the **MDM Reference Series**.

# Mapping Digital Media: Egypt<sup>1</sup>

## Executive Summary

Egypt has a young population, high rates of unemployment and inflation, and a long history of state control over the media. In this mix, the rise of digital media has been widely considered an engine of radical social and political change, not least in respect of the popular uprisings that led to the 25 January revolution in 2011. This report offers a detailed analysis of digitization that chronicles both what has and what has not changed in Egypt against a backdrop of unprecedented political and social instability, and the ongoing struggle for democracy.

Television has always been extremely popular in Egypt, and it remains the most powerful medium in terms of reach. While internet penetration is increasing rapidly, the rate of growth is constrained by high rates of illiteracy and inequalities across lines of income, gender, and demographics. But this does not detract from the significance of social media uptake, as this report will show.

There is evidence to suggest that the events of January 2011 were a cause—at least as much as an effect—of internet expansion. Use of social media platforms in particular has risen sharply in the post-revolution period. Most notably, the number of registered Facebook users more than doubled over just nine months between January and September 2011, from 4.1 million to 8.55 million.

The revolution also served to enhance the diversity of newspapers. The emergence of *Al Tahrir* as a major player has been attributed to its extensive coverage of the revolutionary aftermath. However, the reach of both newspapers and the internet is still some way off the critical mass audiences commanded by television, which remains untouched by the promise of digitization. Though some technical progress has been made towards switch-over, efforts to upgrade the network have been sporadic and disjointed, and there are doubts as to whether Egypt will meet its international commitment to switch off analog signals by 2015. On the consumer side, there is little incentive and no assistance to purchase set-top boxes (STBs), given the absence

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1. The author thanks Sara El-Khalili and Dalia Yousef for assistance with researching this report.

of any offer of new services from state broadcasters (which retain an exclusive monopoly over terrestrial television) or subsidy from the government.

In spite of the dominance of state broadcasting (on the terrestrial analog platform), satellite has been gaining ground as the result of a compromise by the former regime to open a limited space for commercial television on that platform. The reach of international news networks such as Al Jazeera has been extended by the spread of pirated access to satellite broadcasting. According to a 2008 report by the Arab Advisors Group, about three-quarters of pay-TV viewing at that date was via illegal means.<sup>2</sup>

Although commercial broadcasters have always been subject to significant state monitoring, interference, and censorship, the rise of political talk shows in the early 2000s served to diversify the news offer. Since the January 2011 revolution in particular, these shows are credited with building a bridge between old and new media, regularly featuring bloggers and social media activists as both sources and guests. This has helped to mitigate somewhat the effects of the digital divide that characterize internet penetration.

In spite of these divides, Egyptians have been quick to take up the opportunities for activism and citizenship offered by digital media technologies. When it emerged in 2004 that President Hosni Mubarak might transfer power directly to his son, this gave birth to the Kefaya (Enough) Egyptian Movement for Change, which gathered momentum on both social media and SMS platforms. Activist bloggers were also credited with giving a voice to striking workers on 6 April 2008, which led to the emergence of another pro-democracy force, known as the 6 April Youth Movement.

While such activism spawned an increasingly repressive response from authorities, there were notable examples of early campaign successes. In 2007, the award-winning blogger Wael Abbas posted a video documenting police brutality that resulted in the imprisonment of the two officers involved. It marked the first conviction for police brutality in an Egyptian court.

But reactionary responses to digital activism quickly became the norm and were manifested by the detention of several prominent bloggers connected with the 2008 strikes. Attempts to repress digital activism were coupled with more censorship and control of broadcasters during the run-up to scheduled elections in late 2010. The 18 days of unrest before the Mubarak regime was toppled in January–February 2011 were characterized by sweeping repressive measures, including the shutdown of the Al Jazeera network and of all internet and mobile communications on 28 January.

Although these measures failed spectacularly to save President Mubarak's regime, state censorship is an enduring problem in respect of both conventional and digital media. Key articles of the penal code established under the former regime remain in place, giving authorities broad powers to monitor communications and detain individuals. After the 25 January revolution, their force was intensified when the military began

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2. See <http://www.arabadvisors.com/Pressers/presser-200508.htm> (accessed 30 April 2013).



prosecuting civilians in military courts. Perhaps the most highlighted case was that of Maikel Nabil Sanad, a blogger sentenced to three years in prison in March 2011 following a posting that criticized the military.

Sanad was released in January 2012 after a long struggle on the part of civil society and human rights groups. This achievement demonstrated the capacity for civil society to curb the state's repression of digital activists—perhaps the most outstanding legacy of change since January 2011. But repression has resurfaced in other areas, too. While 16 new television channels started operating following the end of the Mubarak regime and the abolition of the Ministry of Information, the ministry was reinstated in July 2011 and the issuing of licenses for new satellite stations stopped completely in September. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) called reinstating the ministry “a substantial setback for media freedom in Egypt.” In an alarming post-revolution move, in September 2011 police forces raided the offices of Al Jazeera's Mubasher Mizr channel, confiscated transmission equipment, and arrested a technician. Although digital media have given voice to a wide range of political groups both before and after January 2011, they did not help to generate overall diversity in gender and ethnic representation. During the parliamentary elections in late 2011 and early 2012, women featured in less than 7 percent of the news coverage.

This reflects the often contradictory influences that digitization has had on journalism as a practice and a profession in Egypt. For instance, while the growth of online journalism has at times led to less fact-checking for the sake of being first to publish, the growing culture of citizen journalism has functioned as an effective watchdog, redressing inaccuracies and biases emanating from professional news organizations. One example was a published photograph in the leading government-run newspaper *Al-Ahram* of the former President Mubarak at the forefront of a group of world leaders during a 2010 visit to the White House. An Egyptian citizen journalist subsequently discovered the original photo, depicting U.S. President Obama at the forefront, and exposed the photo-shopping along with the offending newspaper.

On the other hand, the explosion of online activism and citizen journalism has created an environment that is tolerant of less than accurate news, particularly in the aftermath of January 2011, and professional journalists have sometimes been tempted to publish first and verify later.

Digitization has also done little to generate investigative journalism, although the surfacing of leaked documents online has enhanced efforts to expose corruption. The absence of a Freedom of Information Act and the reluctance among large news organizations to invest in long-form journalism continue to pose significant obstacles. It is perhaps because of this that newspapers have largely failed to provide the kind of analysis and in-depth coverage that might distinguish their offers from those of digital platforms. Efforts in this regard are starting to be noticed, however, despite a very difficult environment for obtaining information.

The legal framework governing broadcasting in Egypt does not help. Terrestrial broadcasting is allowed only by the government-financed and controlled broadcaster, the Egyptian Radio and Television Union. The so-called independent satellite channels, at least under President Mubarak, were permitted to operate only if their owners were on the regime's white list. There is an enduring consonance between the interests of commercial media owners and political elites. Consolidation and concentration within and among media markets since

his fall reflect the thirst for political influence among commercial media owners, who sometimes do not distinguish between business and editorial decisions.

Individuals are legally prohibited from owning more than a 10 percent stake in any newspaper, but the non-transparency of media ownership makes this impossible to measure and enforce. Indeed, the entire regulatory and policy framework for the media at large is opaque. There are no formal regulatory bodies for the media: to date, satellite broadcasters have been licensed by the General Authority for Investment (GAFI), which has no other oversight role. Licensing procedures have been cloaked in secrecy, with significant input from national security agencies, and decisions highly politicized. Although the regulation of telecommunications is nominally independent, it is chaired by the Minister for Communication and Information Technology.

It remains to be seen whether the new administration will reform this structure to introduce transparency, accountability, and independence in communications regulation, but the signs have not been very reassuring. Although the new constitution stipulates the establishment of an independent regulatory body for the media, there are no guarantees that the functions or membership of this body will promote an agenda for freedom of thought and expression.

Media freedom continues to be a central platform of the civic, pro-democracy movements, which despite splintering continue to expand, thanks largely to the viral spread of social media platforms. The question of how far digital media have spawned, mobilized, and sustained these movements remains critical to understanding the relationship between technology and social change. Prior to the 25 January 2011 revolution, Egypt's wired community may have been small, but it was active and effective. It was also able to exploit links between social and mainstream media and opportunities for mobilization to maximum effect.

This report suggests that new technologies of communication have had an enabling rather than a determining effect. They have acted as a catalyst to facilitate and accelerate social change already happening on the ground for years. Crucially, these technologies gave unprecedented opportunities for lateral communication and self-expression outside the regime's control. Moreover, the half a million Egyptians who clicked "I am attending the revolution" on Facebook gave each other the feeling that "I am not alone. If I go out on the streets on 25 January, I am not going to be with 200 people; I am going to be with thousands, or as it happened, with millions."

# Context

Egypt is one of the most populous countries in the Middle East, with 82.5 million inhabitants and 18.59 million households. In 2010, 43.3 percent of the population lived in urban areas, with the rate of urbanization projected to increase by 2.1 percent annually through 2015.<sup>3</sup>

Arabic is the official language, and the Egyptian dialect the most widely understood in the Arab world, due to Egyptian dramas (movie and series), which have always enjoyed widespread popularity. English is widely spoken by the educated classes, with French coming second.<sup>4</sup> It is worth mentioning that the adult literacy (15 years and above) rate in 2008 was 66.4 percent.<sup>5</sup> Egypt has a majority of Muslims (90 percent), who are mostly Sunni; Coptic Christians represent 9 percent, and other Christian communities 1 percent.

Between 2005 and 2012, Egypt's GDP increased noticeably from almost US\$90 billion to more than US\$ 256 billion, a growth of more than 161 percent, according to preliminary data from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). GDP per head also enjoyed a healthy increase during the period, jumping from US\$ 1,282 in 2005 to more than US\$ 3,100 in 2012. Unfortunately, the Egyptian people have derived few benefits from this large rise because of inflation: running at more than 4 percent in 2005, it spiked at a staggering 20 percent three years later, before declining to about 12 percent in 2011.

Large numbers of Egyptians are facing mounting economic challenges as the unemployment rate has risen. From 1993 until 2013, the unemployment rate averaged below 10.3 percent; the all-time high of 13.3 percent came in February 2013, and a record low of 8.1 percent in June 1999, according to the New York-based Trading Economics website.

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3. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), "The World Factbook," 2009, at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/eg.html> (accessed 26 December 2012) (hereafter, CIA, "The World Factbook," 2009).

4. CIA, "The World Factbook," 2009.

5. United Nations Development Program (UNDP), "2010 Egypt Human Development Report, Youth in Egypt: Building our Future," at <http://www.undp.org/Default.aspx?tabid=227> (accessed 26 December 2012) (hereafter, UNDP, "Youth in Egypt").

On 25 January 2011, the population took to the streets to protest in an unprecedented manner, and for 18 days demanded that the ruling regime, under President Hosni Mubarak, should step down. He was eventually overthrown on 11 February, and the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) took over. On 30 June 2012, Mohamed Morsi, who is affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, was sworn into power as president.

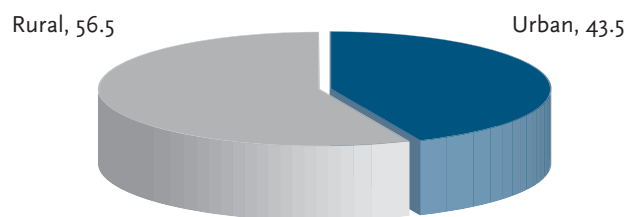
This report will generally deal with the media within three timeframes: under President Mubarak; during the 18 days of revolt; and under the SCAF and President Morsi.

# Social Indicators

Population: 82.5 million<sup>6</sup>

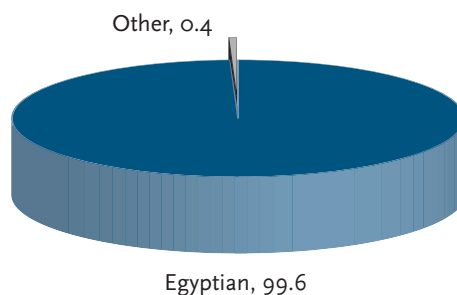
Number of households: 18.59 million<sup>7</sup>

*Figure 1.*  
Rural–urban breakdown (% of total population), 2011



Source: World Bank, “World DataBank: Development Indicators” (for 2011)<sup>8</sup>

*Figure 2.*  
Ethnic composition (% of total population), 2006

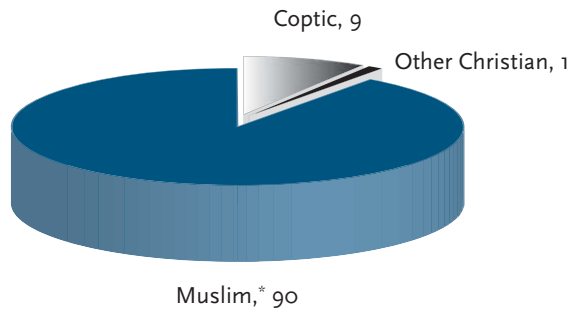


Source: Egypt Census 2006, cited in the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), “The World Factbook,” 2009<sup>9</sup>

6. World Bank, “World DataBank: Development Indicators” (for 2011), at <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/views/reports/tableview.aspx?isshead=true&ispopular=country&pid=16> (accessed 24 April 2013).  
7. UNDP, “Youth in Egypt.”  
8. See <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SPRUR.TOTL> (accessed 24 April 2013).  
9. See <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/eg.html> (accessed 20 April 2013).

Figure 3.

Religious composition (% of total population), 2013



*Note:* \* The adherents of Sunni Islam are usually estimated at over 90 percent of the Muslim population

*Source:* CIA, "The World Factbook," 2009 [subsequently updated]<sup>10</sup>

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10. See <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/eg.html> (accessed 26 December 2012).

# Economic Indicators

*Table 1.*  
Economic indicators

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012 <sup>o</sup>	2013 <sup>f</sup>	2014 <sup>f</sup>
GDP (current prices, US\$ billion)	89.79	107.37	130.34	162.43	188.60	218.46	235.58	256.7	264.7	268.8
GDP (current prices, US\$), per head	1,282	1,505	1,771	2,160	2,452	2,775	2,9300	3,112	3,146	3,131
Gross National Income (GNI), (current US\$), per head	4,480	4,890	5,310	5,710	5,910	6,020	6,120	n/a	n/a	n/a
Unemployment (% of total labor force)	11.4	10.9	9.2	8.6	9.3	9.1	12.0	12.3	13.5	14.2
Inflation (average annual rate, % against previous year)	4.6	7.2	8.5	20.1	9.9	10.7	11.7	7.2	12.3	10.9

*Notes:* o: outlook; f: forecast; n/a: not available

*Sources:* International Monetary Fund (IMF) (GDP, unemployment, and inflation figures); World Bank (GNI)

# 1. Media Consumption: The Digital Factor

## 1.1 Digital Take-up

### 1.1.1 Digital Equipment

Television has always been extremely popular in Egypt. The country has been known as a leader in media content and production in the Arab world. Cairo is widely called the “Hollywood of the Middle East.”<sup>11</sup> Within the past decade, a number of satellite channels have been launched, and today Egypt has the largest number of satellite channels and hours of broadcasting in the Arab world.<sup>12</sup>

Television is still the most powerful medium in terms of reach. Almost all households own a television set (94 percent in 2010), and some own more than one. Most Egyptians acquire their news through television. The *Arab Media Outlook 2009–2013* report describes Egypt as having a “high proportion of terrestrial [television] with good ground for Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT).”<sup>13</sup>

The percentage of radio set ownership has been going down, while the percentage of PC ownership has seen steady annual increases in recent years (27 percent in 2008, 31 percent in 2009, and 34 percent in 2010).

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11. D. Boyd, *Broadcasting in the Arab world: A survey of the electronic media in the Middle East*, Iowa State University Press, Ames, IA, 1999 (hereafter, Boyd, *Broadcasting in the Arab world*).
  12. IREX, “Egypt Media Sustainability Index,” 2009, at <http://www.irex.org/resource/egypt-media-sustainability-index-msi> (accessed 14 April 2013).
  13. Dubai Press Club and PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), *Arab Media Outlook 2009–2013: Inspiring Local Content* (hereafter, PwC, *Arab Media Outlook 2009–2013*), p. 44.



Table 2.

## Households owning equipment, 2005–2010

	2005		2006		2007		2008		2009		2010	
	No. of HH <sup>14</sup> ('000)	% of THH <sup>15</sup>	No. of HH ('000)	% of THH	No. of HH ('000)	% of THH	No. of HH ('000)	% of THH	No. of HH ('000)	% of THH	No. of HH ('000)	% of THH
TV set	14,240	92.8	14,519	94.6	17,132	96.5	17,295	96.4	17,662	96.7	17,485	94.0
Radio	13,012	84.8	13,269	86.5	15,661	88.2	14,245	79.4	14,100	77.2	12,736	68.5
PC	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	4,844	27.0	5,662	31.0	6,320	34.0

Note: n/a: not available

Source: International Telecommunication Union (ITU), 2011<sup>16</sup>

### 1.1.2 Platforms

The percentage of television households with terrestrial reception was 94 percent in 2010, according to the data. However, this does not reflect the actual viewership, which over the past two decades has been severely challenged by satellite reception.<sup>17</sup> Satellite reception grew from 32.5 percent in 2005 to almost 60 percent in 2009. Moreover, these figures do not take account of pirated connectivity, which has at times been estimated at 35 percent of total satellite reception.<sup>18</sup> Naturally, the penetration rates for terrestrial and satellite television overlap due to the presence of multiple platforms within individual households.

The scale of satellite piracy in Egypt is high, according to the International Intellectual Property Alliance (IIPA).<sup>19</sup> While nearly 25 percent of respondents to the report claimed to have pay-TV, official penetration is significantly lower, at just 4 percent.<sup>20</sup> A 2008 survey conducted by the Arab Advisors Group revealed widespread use of the illegal, yet quite entrepreneurial, practice of neighborhood operations reselling pay-TV signals to households. It shows how the low cost of such a practice has resulted in quite a high level of pay-TV service in urban areas, with 43.2 percent of households having pay-TV access. The report concluded that 75.5 percent of pay-TV viewers in Egypt use black-market connections for the service.

14. Total number of households owning the equipment.

15. Percentage of total number of households in the country.

16. World Bank, "World DataBank" and International Telecommunication Union (ITU), "World Telecommunication: ICT Development Report and Database," 2011, at [http://databank.worldbank.org/ddp/home.do?Step=2&tid=4&chActiveDimensionId=WDI\\_Series](http://databank.worldbank.org/ddp/home.do?Step=2&tid=4&chActiveDimensionId=WDI_Series) (accessed 24 April 2013) (hereafter, World Bank and ITU, "World Telecommunication").

17. R. Abdulla, "The changing Middle East media over the past 20 years: opportunities and challenges," in B. Korany (ed.), *The Changing Middle East*, American University in Cairo Press, Cairo, 2010 (hereafter, Abdulla, "The changing Middle East media").

18. PwC, *Arab Media Outlook 2009–2013*.

19. PwC, *Arab Media Outlook 2009–2013*.

20. PwC, *Arab Media Outlook 2009–2013*.

Although Internet Protocol television (IPTV) is hardly present in Egypt, it is considered to represent a potential technical solution to the problem of piracy.<sup>21</sup> Cable television represents a negligible proportion of television penetration, at only 0.2 percent in 2009, according to the most recent data.<sup>22</sup>

Table 3.

Platforms for the main TV reception and digital take-up, 2005–2010

	2005		2006		2007		2008		2009		2010	
	No. of HH <sup>23</sup> ('000)	% of TVHH <sup>24</sup>	No. of HH ('000)	% of TVHH	No. of HH ('000)	% of TVHH	No. of HH ('000)	% of TVHH	No. of HH ('000)	% of TVHH	No. of HH ('000)	% of TVHH
Terrestrial reception	14,240	92.8	14,519	94.6	17,132	96.5	17,295	96.4	17,671	96.7	17,485	94.0
– of which digital	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Cable reception	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	35	0.2	n/a	n/a
– of which digital	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Satellite reception	5,000	32.5	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	9,228	51.4	10,918	59.7	n/a	n/a
– of which digital	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
IPTV	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total	14,240	100.0	14,519	100.0	17,132	100.0	17,295	100.0	17,662	100.0	17,485	100.0
– of which digital	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

*Notes:* The figures in the percentage columns do not add up to 100 percent because of the coexistence of several forms of television take-up in many households; n/a: not available

*Source:* Calculations by MDM editors based on data from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), 2011;<sup>25</sup> Dubai Press Club and PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), *The Arab Media Outlook 2007–2011: Developing Organizations—Developing People, 2010*

The rates of internet use and mobile penetration have increased remarkably in the past decade, and particularly since the start of the 25 January revolution. The Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT) estimated there were 32.62 million internet users by 31 December 2012; this represents a penetration rate of about 38 percent, one-third of whom accessed the internet through mobile devices.<sup>26</sup>

Internet penetration has made a huge leap in terms of both the numbers of users and the quality of access. Broadband penetration rose from 0.1 percent in 2005 to 1.8 percent in 2010, and reached 2.9 percent in May 2013.<sup>27</sup> There was a notable increase in broadband penetration all over the Arab world, as the technology

21. Arab Advisors Group, “The Internet captures eyeballs away from TV viewing in Egypt,” 2009, at <http://www.arabadvisors.com/Pressers/presser-080909.htm> (accessed 26 November 2012) (hereafter, Arab Advisors Group, “The Internet captures eyeballs away from TV viewing in Egypt”).

22. Dubai Press Club and PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), *The Arab Media Outlook 2007–2011: Developing Organizations—Developing People, 2010* (hereafter, PwC, *Arab Media Outlook 2007–2011*).

23. Total number of households owning the equipment.

24. Percentage of total number of TV households (TVHH) in the country.

25. World Bank and ITU, “World Telecommunication.”

26. Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (MCIT), “Indicators,” at <http://www.mcit.gov.eg/Indicators/indicators.aspx> (accessed 11 March 2013) (hereafter, MCIT, “Indicators”).

27. MCIT, “ICT Indicators,” at <http://www.egyptictindicators.gov.eg> (accessed 1 August 2013).

became cheaper and more sophisticated and internet users grew more technology-savvy.<sup>28</sup> The *Arab Media Outlook 2009–2013* report predicts that the increase in broadband across the Arab world will be “driven largely by Egypt and Saudi Arabia, who together would make up 70 percent of total broadband subscriptions by 2013.”<sup>29</sup>

According to MCIT, in 2009 almost one-third of Egypt’s internet users were online daily, 38.7 percent weekly, and 26.75 percent sporadically.<sup>30</sup> Individuals aged from 16 to 54 years constituted around 59 percent of Egypt’s population and 94 percent of internet users. Individuals aged from 55 to 74 years constituted 8.15 percent of the population and 5.8 percent of internet users.

There is a direct correlation between households using computers and the internet on the one hand, and the income levels of their members on the other, according to MCIT figures. Only 3.3 percent of households with a monthly income of less than EGP 1,000 (US\$ 147 according to the exchange rate in March 2013) use computers, and only 0.4 percent of them use the internet. These figures increase to 51.8 percent and 20.3 percent, respectively, in households with an income of more than EGP 8,000 (US\$ 1,173) a month.<sup>31</sup>

In terms of the gender gap, males in Egypt are more likely to use the internet than females. The percentage breakdown of male and female internet usage in Egypt changed from 61 percent compared with 39 percent in January 2008 to 59 percent compared with 41 percent in January 2009.<sup>32</sup>

Compared with the digital divide in PC ownership and internet use, the ICT indicators show a massive increase in the numbers of mobile cellular subscribers across all categories. The penetration rate rose from 19.1 percent in 2005 to 72.1 percent in 2009, and then 90.4 percent in 2010. The latest figure, provided by MCIT on 31 December 2012, was 96.8 million mobile subscribers, representing a penetration rate of about 115 percent.<sup>33</sup>

Experts have noted since at least 2007 a pattern whereby mobile telephony rates rose while those for landlines declined.<sup>34</sup> An Arab Advisors Group report confirmed this pattern, as it reported a decline of 2.66 percentage points in fixed telephony landline coverage in 2010, with mobile telephony users on the rise.

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28. R. Abdulla, *The Internet in the Arab World: Egypt and Beyond*, Peter Lang, New York, 2007 (hereafter, Abdulla, *The Internet in the Arab World*).

29. PwC, *Arab Media Outlook 2009–2013*, p. 68.

30. MCIT, “The Future of the Internet Economy in Egypt: A Statistical Profile,” March 2009, at <http://www.egyptictindicators.gov.eg> (accessed 22 December 2012) (hereafter, MCIT, “The Future of the Internet Economy in Egypt”).

31. MCIT, “The Future of the Internet Economy in Egypt.”

32. MCIT, “The Future of the Internet Economy in Egypt.”

33. MCIT, “Indicators.”

34. Abdulla, *The Internet in the Arab World*.

Table 4.

Internet penetration rate (total internet subscriptions as % of the total population)  
and mobile penetration rate, 2005–2013

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	April 2013
Internet	11.7	12.6	14.8	16.6	20.0	27.2	35.72	39.41	40.14
– of which broadband	n/a	n/a	43.82	57.47	81.54	86.52	89.36	90.56	90.81
Mobile telephony <sup>35</sup>	18.0	23.0	38.0	51.0	67.0	87.6	102.76	116.94	113.11
– of which 3G	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	11.7	11.04	12.05

Note: n/a: not available

Sources: For 2005 to 2010: calculations by MDM editors based on data from the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), 2011, and MCIT, “ICT Indicators Report 2007–2011”;<sup>36</sup> for 2011: MCIT, “ICT Indicators Report 2007–2011” and “Information and Communications Technology Indicators Bulletin: December 2011”;<sup>37</sup> for 2012: “Information and Communications Technology Indicators Bulletin: December 2012”;<sup>38</sup> for 2013: MCIT, “Indicators”<sup>39</sup>

## 1.2 Media Preferences

### 1.2.1 Main Shifts in News Consumption

Although television has the widest reach and is the most powerful medium in Egypt, there has been an increasing growth in popularity of online media and social networking sites, particularly after the 25 January revolution. The *Arab Media Outlook 2009–2013* report indicates a strong preference for local, Arabic-language content that is based on the political and cultural context of the country.<sup>40</sup>

There were 19 newspaper titles in Egypt in 2009, up from 14 in 2003.<sup>41</sup> In April 2013, the Egypt State Information Service website listed 35 newspapers.<sup>42</sup> According to the *Arab Media Outlook 2009–2013* report, “Egypt, in particular, is home to a thriving newspaper industry, with some of the oldest newspapers in the world and, more recently, several new independent newspapers which have launched following the success of *Al Masry Al Youm*.”<sup>43</sup> Newspaper circulation has been steadily increasing over the past few years, albeit at

35. Total active Subscriber Identity Module (SIM) cards as percentage of population.

36. World Bank and ITU, “World Telecommunication,” and [http://www.mcit.gov.eg/Upcont/Documents/Publications\\_1382012000\\_Indicator%20E%202012-final2.pdf](http://www.mcit.gov.eg/Upcont/Documents/Publications_1382012000_Indicator%20E%202012-final2.pdf) (accessed 1 August 2013).

37. See [http://www.mcit.gov.eg/Upcont/Documents/Publications\\_1382012000\\_Indicator%20E%202012-final2.pdf](http://www.mcit.gov.eg/Upcont/Documents/Publications_1382012000_Indicator%20E%202012-final2.pdf) and [http://www.mcit.gov.eg/Upcont/Documents/Publications\\_282012000\\_Q4Eng.pdf](http://www.mcit.gov.eg/Upcont/Documents/Publications_282012000_Q4Eng.pdf) (accessed 1 August 2013).

38. See [http://www.egyptictindicators.gov.eg/en/Publications/PublicationsDoc/Publications\\_842013000\\_EN ICT\\_Indicators\\_Quarterly\\_Bulletin%20\\_Q4.pdf](http://www.egyptictindicators.gov.eg/en/Publications/PublicationsDoc/Publications_842013000_EN ICT_Indicators_Quarterly_Bulletin%20_Q4.pdf) (accessed 1 August 2013).

39. See <http://www.egyptictindicators.gov.eg/en/Publications/PublicationsDoc/Eng%20flyer-%20may2.pdf> (accessed 1 August 2013).

40. PwC, *Arab Media Outlook 2009–2013*.

41. PwC, *Arab Media Outlook 2009–2013*.

42. See the Egypt State Information Service website, at <http://www.sis.gov.eg/En/Default.aspx> (accessed 12 April 2013).

43. PwC, *Arab Media Outlook 2009–2013*, p. 30.

a much slower rate than that of internet penetration and usage. The circulation of daily newspapers is by far the largest in the Arab region, although the penetration rate in relation to the population is still low. In 2007, 3.627 million copies were circulated daily. That figure reached 4.177 million in 2010 and is expected to be 4.686 million in 2013.<sup>44</sup>

While audiences have resorted to online outlets, there is still an opportunity for growth in paper circulation, given the low penetration rate compared with the population figures. However, the popularity of online resources has been steadily rising, particularly after the 25 January revolution.

Generally speaking, the internet has had an impact on the entire Arab region's media and press industry. According to the *Arab Media Outlook 2009–2013* report:

The industry also faces increasing pressure from the internet, where consumers, both globally and in the Arab Region, are spending an increasing amount of time. With news being one of the most popular forms of content among the young demographic in the Arab Region, it is not surprising that consumption is moving online, with 40 percent of news readers accessing news via the internet in 2009.<sup>45</sup>

Another 17 percent reported getting news from blogs, 12 percent from emails, 9 percent from e-bulletin boards, and 7 percent from mobile phone alerts.<sup>46</sup>

A Nielsen Company report indicated that newspapers remain the dominant form of news consumption. Still, 33 percent of all Egyptians, mostly from the younger demographic group, read the news online. The study further revealed that while 2 percent only read news online in Egypt, 17 percent get more news online than from print media, 14 percent read news on the internet and in print equally, 26 percent get more news from print than from online, and 41 percent get their news only from print. Among those who do read news online, 25 percent do so five or more times a week, and 40 percent do so up to four times per week.<sup>47</sup>

With the high rate of illiteracy and high television penetration of 93 percent, television remains a major source of information and entertainment. Egyptians watch an average of 3.5 hours of television on weekdays and almost 4.5 hours on weekends, with high viewing percentages among both the youngest and oldest age groups.<sup>48</sup> Interestingly, the *Arab Media Outlook 2009–2013* report indicates that internet users spend nearly three hours a day online, which is comparable with the average time spent watching television. Internet usage is particularly high among the younger age ranges. However, television remains a more popular medium due to the low internet penetration rate and high illiteracy.<sup>49</sup>

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44. PwC, *Arab Media Outlook 2009–2013*.

45. PwC, *Arab Media Outlook 2009–2013*, p. 33.

46. PwC, *Arab Media Outlook 2009–2013*.

47. PwC, *Arab Media Outlook 2009–2013*.

48. PwC, *Arab Media Outlook 2009–2013*.

49. PwC, *Arab Media Outlook 2009–2013*.

## 1.2.2 Availability of a Diverse Range of News Platforms

The Arab Advisors Group's survey of internet users in September 2009 concluded that the internet has attracted an increasing number of consumers away from television. The peak time for browsing the internet for entertainment and personal purposes is after 9 p.m., which coincides with primetime television viewing. The survey also revealed that the internet was the primary source of daily and global news for 69.7 percent of respondents, of information for 97.6 percent, and for exploring job opportunities for 57.1 percent.<sup>50</sup>

The survey indicates that broadband internet in particular has become a major competitor for television among internet users. It has to be noted that many people have turned to the internet for political information and debates since the 25 January revolution.

The author of this report has argued in several articles and books that one of the main advantages of internet access is the availability of a whole new platform for diversity of news sources, information, and opinions.<sup>51</sup> Over the past decade, and particularly since the introduction of Web 2.0, which allowed for much more user interaction, the internet has provided an outlet for people not only to seek alternative sources and viewpoints to those available through government-controlled media, but also to express themselves and exchange opinions. The average internet user also managed through social media to interact with the traditional media, including by the provision of instant feedback and comments on newspaper articles, and communicating via Facebook and Twitter with some traditional media producers, at times requesting changes that take place immediately while the program is underway. This has empowered the average citizen in ways that were never deemed possible before.

## 1.3 News Providers

### 1.3.1 Leading Sources of News

Credible, regular, independent market research and statistical information are lacking, as are accurate audience measurement and ratings systems. Therefore the main source of information are consumer surveys, usually commissioned from market research firms by the broadcasters themselves or their advertising agents—hence their lack of credibility. Nevertheless, a few studies have tried to assess changes in the news landscape in Egypt over recent years. An attempt to assess the performance and popularity of media outlets, based on various sources, is outlined below.

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50. Arab Advisors Group, "The Internet captures eyeballs away from TV viewing in Egypt."

51. R. Abdulla, "Taking the E-train: The development of the check CAP Internet in Egypt," *Global Media and Communication*, 1(2) (2005), pp. 149–165 (hereafter, Abdulla, "Taking the E-train"); R. Abdulla, *The Internet in Egypt and the Arab World* (in Arabic), Afaq Publications, Cairo, 2005 (hereafter, Abdulla, *The Internet in Egypt and the Arab World*); Abdulla, *The Internet in the Arab World*; R. Abdulla, "Policing the Internet in the Arab World," Emirates Occasional Papers, The Emirates Center for Strategic Study and Research (ECSSR), 2009 (hereafter, Abdulla, "Policing the Internet in the Arab World"); Abdulla, "The changing Middle East media."

### 1.3.1.1 Print Media

The print media are quite vibrant and diverse. There are no independent sources for measuring or verifying circulation figures. The government-run *Al Abram* is the most powerful distributor and so is contracted to distribute many other newspapers. It is *Al Abram* that handles and publishes distribution figures, which raises questions about their reliability. However, a high-level source inside the independent newspaper *Al Masry Al Youm*, speaking in September 2011, claimed that *Al Abram* distributed 180,000–200,000 copies daily, and *Al Masry Al Youm* at least double that number.<sup>52</sup> The newly launched newspaper, *Al Tahrir*, headed by the veteran journalist Ibrahim Eissa, has become popular for its coverage of post-revolution Egypt. *Al Shorouk* is another independent newspaper that has proved popular, especially among more well-read Egyptians.

Indeed, even the Nielsen results from 2009<sup>53</sup> revealed that 37 percent of the respondents said they chose to read the daily newspaper that they have always read, while 63 percent said they read the newspaper because of its news coverage, and 32 percent because its opinion and analysis was closest to their own. It has to be said, however, that many people stopped buying government-owned newspapers during and after the 18 days that toppled President Mubarak. The influential state-owned *Al Gomhuriya's* circulation may be attributable to its extensive sports coverage, particularly of soccer, and because most government entities are automatically subscribed to it. According to Nielsen, Egyptians rated sports as the top read topic in the newspaper in 2009 (57 percent), followed by politics (49 percent), and current affairs (48 percent).<sup>54</sup>

### 1.3.1.2 Online

The top visited website in Egypt is Facebook, which in May 2013<sup>55</sup> recorded some 13.83 million users (see section 3.1.1).<sup>56</sup>

As will be discussed in more detail below, Facebook has become one of the top news sources in Egypt since the 25 January revolution broke out. Youm7.com is the website for *El Youm El Sabe'a*, a private newspaper, and Akhbarak.com is also a news portal, while Blogspot is a blogging portal. Search engines are also used to find the news of the day, and YouTube has become a main tool for following up on what is happening in the country.<sup>57</sup> The only non-news-bearing website on the list is Fatakat.com, a food and dieting portal dedicated to women.

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52. Interview with an executive at *Al Masry Al Youm* (confidentiality requested), Cairo, 17 March 2012.

53. PwC, *Arab Media Outlook 2009–2013*.

54. PwC, *Arab Media Outlook 2009–2013*.

55. Alexa.com, “Top Sites in Egypt,” at <http://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/eg> (accessed 1 May 2013).

56. Socialbakers, “Facebook Statistics by Country,” at <http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics> (accessed 1 May 2013) (hereafter, Socialbakers, “Facebook Statistics by Country”).

57. R. Abdulla, “The Revolution will be tweeted,” *Cairo Review of Global Affairs*, 1(3) (2011), at <http://www.aucegypt.edu/gapp/cairoreview/Pages/articleDetails.aspx?aid=89> (accessed 28 December 2012) (hereafter, Abdulla, “The Revolution will be tweeted”).

Further down the Alexa.com list, the private newspaper *El Watan* ranked 13th, Twitter 14th, the government-run newspaper *Al Ahram* 20th, and the private newspaper *Al Masry Al Youm*, 21st.<sup>58</sup>

It is interesting to compare these websites with the top visited news websites as ranked in the Nielsen 2009 survey published in the *Arab Media Outlook 2009–2013* report.<sup>59</sup> In that survey, two state newspapers (*Al Ahram* and *Al Akhbar*) featured prominently among the Top Five, as did a football news site (*Yalla Kora*).

The five top news websites in Egypt by visit in 2009 were, respectively: Masrawy (portal), Al Ahram, Al Jazeera, Yalla Kora (sports website), and Al Akhbar.

Social networking was the fourth most favorite activity for users in the Nielsen 2009 survey after getting information, chatting, and online games. Facebook (both in Arabic and English) was reported as the most visited social networking site, followed by Maktoob, Hi5, and Twitter. Arabic-language websites in general were favored by the majority of the respondents.<sup>60</sup>

### 1.3.1.3 Television

A survey by the Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies found that the top three news providers in 2005 were, respectively:<sup>61</sup> Egyptian TV (Channel 1), Egyptian TV (Channel 2), and Al Jazeera.

According to the same survey in 2007, the top three news providers were, respectively:<sup>62</sup> Al Jazeera, Egyptian TV (Channel 1), and Egyptian TV (Channel 2).

A 2010 survey by the Secretariat General of the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU), exploring the views of elite Egyptians on Arab and Egyptian news programs and services, ranked the top news providers as:<sup>63</sup> Al Jazeera, Al Arabia, Dream, Al Mehwar, and Nile News.

Like their two predecessors, the more recent surveys indicate the absence of ERTU news programs and services among Egyptians' favorite content providers, being replaced by evening talk shows presented on several private satellite channels.<sup>64</sup> The ERTU charter stipulates that it is the sole entity with the right to broadcast news bulletins, which is why private channels resort to political talk shows in order to get around this prohibition. No formal research has measured the popularity of these talk shows, but several seem to be

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58. Alexa.com, "Top Sites in Egypt," at <http://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/eg> (accessed 1 May 2013).

59. Alexa.com, "Top Sites in Egypt," at <http://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/eg> (accessed 1 May 2013).

60. PwC, *Arab Media Outlook 2009–2013*.

61. The results of the survey were analyzed by the vice-president of the center's Public Opinion Studies Program, Sobhi Essaila, in an article titled "Egyptian Public Opinion: The Role of TV Satellite Stations," 2009, at <http://mercury.ethz.ch/serviceengine/Files/ISN/94029/.../Chapter+12.pdf> (accessed 13 December 2012) (hereafter, Essaila, "Egyptian Public Opinion").

62. Essaila, "Egyptian Public Opinion."

63. "Arab News Satellites," 2010, at <http://www.rosaonline.net/Daily/News.asp?id=48283> (accessed 14 June 2013).

64. R. Abdulla, *Public Broadcasting Service: Egypt Country Report*, Panos Paris Institute and the Mediterranean Observatory of Communication (in press) (hereafter, Abdulla, *Egypt Country Report*).



highly popular with Egyptians, who follow them to get their daily dose of news.<sup>65</sup> These include “*Al Hayat Al Youm*” (Life Today) on Al Hayat TV; “*Baladna Bel Masri*” (Our Country in Egyptian) and “*Akher Kalam*” (The Last Word) on OnTV; “*Al Aashera Masaan*” (10 p.m.) on Dream II; “*Akher El Nahar*” (End of the Day) on Al Nahar TV; “*Al Soura Al Kamela*” (The Complete Picture) on OnTV Live; and “*Hona El Qahera*” (This is Cairo) on the satellite station Al Kahera Wal Nas. The popularity of these talk shows is aided by the dwindling popularity of Al Jazeera in Egypt, after it had achieved stardom during the first 18 days of the revolution. This decline is attributed in no small part to an alleged bias toward the Muslim Brotherhood and a tendency to ignore the human rights violations committed by them now that they are in power.<sup>66</sup>

#### 1.3.1.4 Radio

The UNDP’s “2010 Egypt Human Development Report” indicates that radio penetration in Egypt in 2005 stood at 94 percent.<sup>67</sup> Generally speaking, radio is still popular in rural areas and among drivers, particularly of taxis and minibuses. Historically, radio has been both popular and effective, and has been used consistently by the country’s rulers since the period of Gamal Abdel Nasser (1956–1970) to convey political messages. He paid special attention to radio broadcasting when it started in Egypt because he realized that he could spread his pan-Arab, socialist messages through this medium, investing heavily in broadcasting equipment as well as in personnel training. He started Sout El Arab (Voice of the Arabs), which became the most popular radio network all over the Arab world, and remains quite popular.<sup>68</sup>

In 2003, two private radio stations were launched: Nile FM 104.6 and Nogoom FM 100.6, which can only be received in the greater Cairo area. The two stations, which provide a wide range of entertainment and infotainment programs, were much welcomed by Cairenes, who longed for a proper music radio station. Both soon became popular among the elites and the young in Cairo. However, these stations do not offer any news content. In 2009, the government launched a hybrid ownership station, Radio Masr, a hip station with a heavy dose of Arabic music but also a good quantity of news and political talk shows.<sup>69</sup>

#### 1.3.2 Television News Programs

As discussed above, Egyptians rely on terrestrial and satellite television channels for much of their news, information, and entertainment. Mr Sobhi Essaila, vice-president of the Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, cited results from a 2005 survey which indicated that “72 percent of Egyptians depended on Egyptian (state) television as a primary source of political news [and that] television channels have the best shot at influencing the opinions of nearly 75 percent of Egyptians.”<sup>70</sup>

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65. Abdulla, *Egypt Country Report*.

66. *The Economist*, “Al Jazeera Must Do Better,” 12 January 2013, at <http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21569429-arabs-premier-television-network-bids-american-viewers-must-do-better> (accessed 14 April 2013).

67. UNDP, “Youth in Egypt.”

68. Abdulla, “Taking the E-train;” Abdulla, *The Internet in Egypt and the Arab World*; Abdulla, *The Internet in the Arab World*; Boyd, *Broadcasting in the Arab world*.

69. See <http://www.radiomasr.net> (accessed 1 April 2013).

70. Essaila, “Egyptian Public Opinion.”

Mr Essaila attributed this large share “to the fact that nearly a quarter of Egyptians lack access to satellite channels, as well as to the relative development of the news sector and Nile TV news station.” With the increasing access to satellite channels at home, the situation has been changing rapidly. “Despite relatively high ratings for state-owned networks, Egyptians increasingly prefer to get their news from the Qatari channel Al Jazeera. While the 2005 study found that only 16 percent of Egyptians and 22.5 percent of university students chose Al Jazeera as their top preference, this rate grew to 59 percent (of the general public) by 2007, according to a BBC and Reuters’ survey.”<sup>71</sup>

### 1.3.3 Impact of Digital Media on Good-quality News

Blogging became popular fairly quickly in Egypt, and early on the impact of some political bloggers on the media scene became apparent. As early as 2005, bloggers began to expose issues that were considered taboo in Egyptian news, forcing the mainstream media to discuss them. From issues such as sexual harassment, police brutality, coverage of small protests, and President Mubarak’s attempts to pass on governance of Egypt to his son, to new angles on more traditional government corruption, bloggers were there breaking news, providing pictures and videos and posting them on YouTube, and pushing the comfort zone of both the traditional media and society at large to discuss these issues in earnest.<sup>72</sup>

Since the start of the 25 January 2011 revolution, the credibility of Egyptian state television news has sunk even lower, leading more people to resort to social media and online news sources. During the 18 days that unseated President Mubarak, the performance of state media was at times described as “shameful” and from “another planet.”<sup>73</sup> On the eve of the Friday of Anger (28 January 2011), the day when Egypt lost most of its more than 800 martyrs (the term used by all Egyptians, including the government, for protesters who died in the revolution),<sup>74</sup> the news banner on Nile News television read, “The elephants in Africa are two types, and not one as previously believed.” On the Friday of Anger, Egyptian state television aired a peaceful image of the Nile while a war zone was being set up 100 m away. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, state television “provided uncritical coverage of the pronouncements of officials, focussed almost exclusively on the views of pro-government demonstrators and alleged a foreign conspiracy.”<sup>75</sup>

The *Washington Post* said that state-run television and newspapers initially dismissed the protests against President Mubarak as “non-events.” As the protests intensified, “state television reported on the First Lady’s

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71. Essaila, “Egyptian Public Opinion.”

72. Abdulla, “Policing the Internet in the Arab World.”

73. L. Fadel and E. Londoño, “Egypt’s state-run media starting to shift from pro-Mubarak coverage,” *Washington Post*, 9 February 2011, at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/02/09/AR2011020906234.html> (accessed 7 May 2012) (hereafter, Fadel and Londoño, “Egypt’s state-run media”).

74. According to *Wall Talk: Graffiti of the Egyptian Revolution*, Cairo: Zeitouna, 2012, p. 23, over 800 people were killed on 28 January 2011. The Final Report of the Fact Finding National Commission (in Arabic), 2013, states that at least 846 people died during the 18 days, most of them on 28 January; see [http://www.ffnc-eg.org/assets/ffnc-eg\\_final.pdf](http://www.ffnc-eg.org/assets/ffnc-eg_final.pdf) (accessed 1 August 2013), p. 8. The Arab Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI) states that at least 841 people died during the 18 days, including at least 551 on 28 January 2011; see ANHRI, “A Light on the Path for Freedom” (in Arabic), at <http://www.anhri.net/?p=52119> (accessed 1 August 2013).

75. M. Bradley and S. Said, “State TV’s Uncritical Coverage Draws Fire,” *Wall Street Journal*, 7 February 2011, at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703989504576128290567134066.html> (accessed 13 April 2013).

gardens, and call-in shows featured hysterical women and men entreating people to stop demonstrating.<sup>76</sup> Protestors all over Egypt started carrying banners denouncing the government-owned media and calling them “liars.” In the meantime, the primary sources of news for Egyptians became Al Jazeera and political talk shows on other satellite channels, as well as social media.

Indeed, one major development that came out of digital competition has been the introduction of talk shows into Egyptian television, which, particularly those presented on the private Egyptian satellite channels, have gained immense popularity over the past few years. In response, the state television commissioned a talk show in 2004 on Channel 2 terrestrial television and on the Egyptian satellite channel, Al Masriya. The program managed to attract some viewers, although its content remained mild compared with that of other channels. The credibility of the show was severely undermined when its popular presenter at the time, the journalist Mahmoud Saad, resigned on 26 January 2011, after he was prevented from going on air.<sup>77</sup> Some of the more popular talk shows on private Egyptian television now regularly feature bloggers and internet activists as guests. They act as an important link between the online world of social media and the traditional media world, by using bloggers and social media platforms as sources of information and bringing to the attention of the mainstream media topics previously explored and investigated only by social media activists.

## 1.4 Assessments

Social media have been gaining ground in Egypt since the introduction of blogging in 2004. But it was particularly during the 18 days that toppled Mubarak that social media in Egypt gained an unprecedented number of followers and credibility, thanks partly to their immediacy and interactivity, but also to the “shameful” performance of the traditional media.

As early as 2005, scholars argued that the internet, particularly Web 2.0, would open the way in the Arab world to more interaction and access to information, and inevitably force Arab governments to push their boundaries since they would no longer have a monopoly over information. It was argued at that time that the internet, including social networking, had opened a new public sphere for Egyptians and Arabs, and was likely to get them involved eventually in the social and political happenings in their countries in ways that were impossible beforehand.<sup>78</sup>

While there are no statistics to measure the precise effect of the internet and digital media on local broadcasting venues, it is very apparent that in recent years Egypt’s traditional media have had to take account of the fierce competition mounted by satellite channels and social media (see section 1.2.2).

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76. Fadel and Londoño, “Egypt’s state-run media.”

77. “Prominent media figure resigns from state TV talk show,” *Egypt Independent*, 27 January 2011, at <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/prominent-media-figure-resigns-state-tv-talk-show> (accessed 15 April 2013).

78. Abdulla, *The Internet in the Arab World*; Abdulla, “Policing the Internet in the Arab World.”

The impact of digital media has not only been about increasing numbers of media devices and outlets; there also has been a qualitative impact on the content and structure of Egyptian media. A prominent example of this can be seen by tracing the convergence between the mainstream media and digital platforms. The popular Egyptian talk shows have now learned to host bloggers and online activists, and to use them as a first-hand source of information. The activists have also developed contacts on these talk shows, discovering whom to approach in order to spread their news beyond the more limited realm of the internet.

## 2. Digital Media and Public or State-administered Broadcasters

### 2.1 Public Service and State Institutions

#### 2.1.1 Overview of Public Service Media; News and Current Affairs Output

The ERTU is the entity responsible for broadcasting in Egypt and the sole authority over all radio and television operations. It is supposed to be Egypt's public broadcaster, or the closest thing the country has to one. In practice, it functions more as a state broadcaster. The ERTU runs two national terrestrial channels, the main Egyptian satellite channel Al Masriya, and a set of local and specialized channels for news, sports, family, education, and entertainment, known as The Nile Specialized Channels.<sup>79</sup>

The ERTU charter,<sup>80</sup> which regulates its structure and operation, clearly spells out many of the rights and responsibilities of a public service broadcaster. These include “serving the people,” “disseminating culture,” serving “all sectors of society,” providing “educational, cultural, and humanitarian” content, providing content for “children, youth, women, workers and peasants,” “raising issues of public concern,” expressing diversity of opinions, and so forth. However, the charter also states that the ERTU “is committed to broadcasting whatever the Government officially asks the Union to broadcast,” which legally skews the union towards the government, and is a significant indicator of state control over the media. The lack of diversity in content and inhibitions on freedom of expression remain major problems.

Through its terrestrial channels and through Al Masriya, the ERTU reaches over 94 percent of the population. Al Masriya airs five news bulletins a day, which on average last about one hour each. All news bulletins are produced by the ERTU. Al Masriya also has a morning talk show, and a two-hour primetime evening talk show. The evening talk show was introduced to face off competition from the new private Egyptian satellite channels, which have been increasing their viewership, credibility, and following at the expense of the ERTU.

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79. Abdulla, *Egypt Country Report*.

80. Initiating charter of the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU), at <http://bit.ly/rr2pVm> (accessed 27 December 2012).

According to a new report on Egypt's public broadcasting service,<sup>81</sup> the programming and content on Al Masriya do not resemble that of a public broadcaster as they do not cover cultural, educational, and informative strands. There is also more mass entertainment on Al Masriya (about 40 percent) than is compatible with a public service mission. Furthermore, this is complemented by frequent football games and talk shows (about 27 percent of airtime).<sup>82</sup> Egypt lacks a broadcasting channel that is clearly designated as a public broadcaster.

The ERTU's government-controlled channels depend on the government for their funding, and they function according to government directives or guidelines regarding which content to provide or attitudes to take. The ERTU cannot be called free or independent. It primarily serves the interest of the regime or government, rather than the public interest.<sup>83</sup>

### 2.1.2 Digitization and Services

Little thought has yet been given to the process of digitizing television broadcasting. Interviews with ERTU board members<sup>84</sup> and an ex-ERTU chair of the board<sup>85</sup> indicated that no serious steps have yet been taken toward launching this process. A senior official at the ERTU's Sound Engineering Sector has suggested that the technical process started about three years ago, but it seems to be a haphazard effort by a few individual officials rather than a considered plan for conversion to digital.<sup>86</sup> Interestingly, the board members were not aware of the preparations underway in the Sound Engineering Sector.

One board member, Dr Hassan Mekkawi, the Dean of the Faculty of Mass Communication at Cairo University, said the process is "extremely chaotic" and there is virtually no planning in effect.<sup>87</sup> The Sound Engineering Sector official interviewed said that the "ERTU functions much like a bunch of isolated islands, [with] no coordination." He emphasized that while the technical side might be able to meet the ITU deadline of 2015, "there is a huge problem with content. There is nothing to entice the end-users to buy a set-top box (STB) to receive the digital signal, when they can get a complete satellite system for under EGP 150 (US\$25)." There is a danger, therefore, that the transition to digital terrestrial broadcasting will actually end up isolating the ERTU from its end users as they might opt not to buy the STB, and therefore not receive the ERTU signal any more.<sup>88</sup> As interviews with the board members indicated, there is currently no plan to deal with that danger and not even any ongoing discussions about digitization.

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81. Abdulla, *Egypt Country Report*.

82. Abdulla, *Egypt Country Report*.

83. Abdulla, *Egypt Country Report*; Abdulla, "The changing Middle East media".

84. Interviews with Dr Hussein Amin, Professor of Journalism and Mass Communication at the American University in Cairo and former ERTU board member, Cairo, 20 April 2011; Dr Hassan Mekkawi, Dean of the Faculty of Mass Communication at the American University in Cairo and ERTU board member, Cairo, 15 October 2012; and Louis Greiss, ERTU board member, Cairo, 22 July 2011.

85. Interview with Hassan Hamed, former ERTU chairman of the board, Cairo, 17 July 2011.

86. Interview with Mohamed Hanafi, Head of Broadcasting Projects, Sound Engineering Sector, Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU), Cairo, 4 October 2012.

87. Interview with Dr Hassan Mekkawi, Dean of the Faculty of Mass Communication at the American University in Cairo and ERTU board member, Cairo, 15 October 2012.

88. There are no statistics on the ownership of digital-enabled television sets in Egypt, but many Egyptians cannot afford one.

This concern was echoed by Mohamed Hanafi, the head of Broadcasting Projects at ERTU's Sound Engineering Sector. He agreed that the ERTU might, in technical terms, be able to meet the ITU deadline of 2015, but emphasized that it was making no effort to discuss the impact of digitization on the reach of the signal for end users, and warned that the low quality of content on ERTU channels might not entice end users to purchase an STB.<sup>89</sup> Interviews with ERTU board members indicated, as noted, that there are currently no discussions about how to deal with the process of digitization.<sup>90</sup>

The only established effects of digitization in Egypt have arisen due to the popularity of blogs and social media content. This has opened the way for news outlets other than the government-owned and controlled ones, so that the government has had to compete by providing slightly better content. The private channels, however, have made better use of social media to enhance their performance. ERTU channels are still hindered by years of traditional thinking and an established pattern of waiting for directives from those in power before deciding on content.

### **2.1.3 Government Support**

As the broadcast digitization process has not even started in Egypt, there has been no government support so far for the ERTU to switch to digital broadcasting.

### **2.1.4 Public Service Media and Digital Switch-over**

As the broadcast digitization process has not even started in Egypt, it is too early to assess the positive and negative impacts of digitization on the ERTU.

## **2.2 Public Service Provision**

### **2.2.1 Perception of Public Service Media**

All the prominent figures interviewed for this section of the report agreed upon certain principles that a public service broadcaster should uphold. A public service broadcaster should serve the needs of the people, the public, rather than the government or the state; and it should be financially independent from the state. Finally, the content provided should focus on information and development rather than on commercially based programs or entertainment. Hussein Amin, Professor of Journalism and Mass Communication at the American University in Cairo and ex-ERTU board member, said: "The nature of public service broadcasting is to broadcast programs that meet the needs of the public for those who cannot afford private media. It aims to inform, educate and entertain. It should provide information about the state and what is happening in the country."<sup>91</sup>

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89. Interview with Mohamed Hanafi, head of Broadcasting Projects, Sound Engineering Sector, ERTU, Cairo, 4 October 2012.

90. Interviews with Dr Hussein Amin, Professor of Journalism and Mass Communication at the American University in Cairo and former ERTU board member, Cairo, 20 April 2011; Dr Hassan Mekkawi, Dean of the Faculty of Mass Communication at the American University in Cairo and ERTU board member, Cairo, 15 October 2012; and Louis Greiss, ERTU board member, Cairo, 22 July 2011.

91. Interview with Dr Hussein Amin, Professor of Journalism and Mass Communication at the American University in Cairo and former ERTU board member, Cairo, 20 April 2011.

Louis Greiss, a veteran journalist and member of the ERTU board of trustees, said a public service broadcaster should “inform the public and enhance development,” which ERTU does not now do.<sup>92</sup> He said that the ERTU has intentionally concentrated on entertainment and sports more than anything else as a means of distracting the public from politics during President Mubarak’s time in office: “The public is not informed of what’s really happening [through Egyptian state television] but of what the Government wants to inform them about.” Mr Greiss added that most of those working at the ERTU were appointed through nepotism, rather than on the basis of their qualifications. A personal connection to the Minister of Information or to someone in his patronage was an important prerequisite to getting a job.

Yaser Alzayat,<sup>93</sup> a journalist with 23 years’ experience and deputy editor in chief of *Radio and Television Magazine*, said public service broadcasting should be independent from the state in terms of both ownership and financing. It should provide a balanced representation of society in terms of diversity. He believes that in light of state ownership and control, the ERTU only represents the government and only portrays messages from the regime.

Hassan Hamed,<sup>94</sup> a former CEO of the ERTU, said the main function of the public broadcaster in Egypt should be to provide content that is geared toward the development of the country in terms of providing educational and informative material, regardless of profit. He agreed that the ERTU is all that Egypt possesses, in terms of public broadcasting, but believes that it has lost its independence over the years, so now its loyalty is to the government or the state rather than to the people. The ERTU has been trying to act like a commercial broadcaster, although it is neither qualified for that role nor intended for it.<sup>95</sup> Its primary aim has been in recent years to provide content to attract advertisers, mainly entertainment and sensationalism, which is not what a public broadcaster should focus on.

Ghada Shahbender, a member of the board of the Egyptian Organization of Human Rights, said the concept of public broadcasting does not exist in Egypt. “We have state-owned media, but I do not consider them public broadcasting because they are controlled entirely by the state. Hypothetically, they are owned by the public, but they are controlled and used as propaganda devices by the state.”<sup>96</sup>

Hisham Kassem,<sup>97</sup> a veteran publisher and chairman and CEO of Algomhouria Algadida, said, “What we have on hand is a total disaster when it comes to public service broadcasting in Egypt.”<sup>98</sup> He explained that the problem lies in the business model and the “inefficient” manner of running things, particularly in terms

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92. Interview with Louis Greiss, ERTU board member, Cairo, 22 July 2011.

93. Interview with Yaser Alzayat, veteran journalist, Cairo, 23 June 2011.

94. Interview with Hassan Hamed, former ERTU chairman of the board, Cairo, 17 July 2011.

95. Interview with Hassan Hamed, former ERTU chairman of the board, Cairo, 17 July 2011.

96. Interview with Ghada Shahbender, board member of the Egyptian Organization of Human Rights, Cairo, 14 July 2011.

97. Interview with Hisham Kassem, chairman and CEO of Algomhouria Algadida, Cairo, 17 April 2011.

98. On Algomhouria Algadida, see Jared Malsin, “In Egypt, new newspapers and old problems,” *Columbia Journalism Review*, 18 July 2012, at [http://www.cjr.org/behind\\_the\\_news/in\\_egypt\\_new\\_newspapers\\_and\\_ol.php?page=all](http://www.cjr.org/behind_the_news/in_egypt_new_newspapers_and_ol.php?page=all) (accessed 25 May 2013).



of the excessive costs due to overstaffing. There were an estimated 46,000 people working at the ERTU in 2012, most of them not trained media personnel but rather employees in administrative jobs. “The public media in Egypt cost the state more than health, education, and transportation together,” said Mr Kassem.

Emad Mubarak,<sup>99</sup> of the Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression, said that the ERTU does not constitute public service broadcasting as it is fully owned and controlled by the government, and only serves to promote the agenda of the regime with no regards for the best interest of the public. In his own words, “Egyptian (state) television is not public, it is governmental.”

### **2.2.2 Public Service Provision in Commercial Media**

There are no specific obligations imposed on commercially funded, private media in Egypt to produce or disseminate public service content and there are no incentives offered for them to do so.

## **2.3 Assessments**

There are very few provisions for public service broadcasting in Egypt, and when they do exist, they are only on paper. While technically the ERTU might be able to make the transition to digital by 2015, no serious steps have been taken toward the digital switch-over of terrestrial television broadcasting in terms of coordinating how this service will reach the end consumer. There is actually a danger that such a transition might further alienate the ERTU if the end consumer does not opt to purchase the STB required to enable most television sets in Egypt to receive digital transmission. The only changes that have taken place, therefore, are as a result of the introduction of blogging and social media platforms, and these have mainly affected private, satellite Egyptian channels, rather than the public ERTU channels.

The private channels have started interacting with bloggers, featuring them on their talk shows, and relying on them and on social media in general as sources of information. A few channels have also started interacting with the public on social media through a Facebook page or a Twitter account. The channels with Twitter accounts have been quite efficient at interacting in real time with audiences, and have often featured a guest or a phone intervention as a result of immediate tweeted requests by the channel’s followers. This, in turn, increases the popularity and the credibility of the channel among its followers, and attracts more of them.

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99. Interview with Emad Mubarak, executive director of the Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression, Cairo, 19 July 2011.

## 3. Digital Media and Society

### 3.1 User-Generated Content (UGC)

#### 3.1.1 UGC Overview

According to Alexa.com,<sup>100</sup> the top 10 websites in Egypt in May 2013 were:

1. Facebook
2. Google.com.eg
3. YouTube
4. Google
5. Yahoo!
6. Blogspot
7. Youm7.com
8. Hao123<sup>101</sup>
9. Fatakat.com
10. Akhbarak.com

Of these, Facebook, YouTube, Blogspot, and Fatakat may qualify as user-generated content (UGC) websites. In addition, while Youm7.com (the website of the newspaper *El Youm El Sab'á*) does not allow users to add content such as news stories or blogs, it does allow user comments. All the above UGC websites are run by established organizations.

The top two UGC websites in Egypt (Facebook and YouTube) rank globally second and third, respectively. There is no information available regarding how much of the time spent on these websites is used to upload

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100. Alexa.com, "Top Sites in Egypt," at <http://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/EG> (accessed 1 May 2013).

101. The Firefox browser automatically opens to this website (a portal) in Egypt, which may be one reason why it features as one of the highest in the country in traffic.

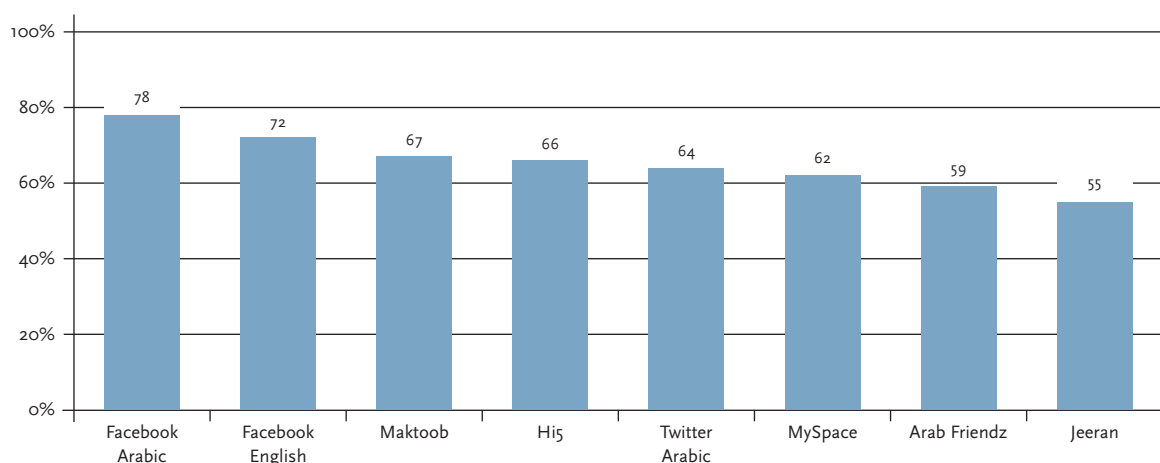
content rather than to read, view, or download information or videos. The *Arab Media Outlook 2009–2013* report indicates that almost one-third of their sample visits a UGC video site three times a week or more.<sup>102</sup>

### 3.1.2 Social Networks

According to Alexa.com, the most used social networks in Egypt are Facebook, Blogspot, and, to a lesser extent, Twitter. According to the *Arab Media Outlook 2009–2013* report, using data from a Nielsen 2009 survey, the social networking scene has changed dramatically since then worldwide, and Egypt is no exception.<sup>103</sup>

Since 2009, social networking sites such as Jeeran, Hi5, Arab Friendz, and MySpace appear to have dwindled in popularity. On the other hand, Facebook in particular has been very popular over the past few years. This popularity has taken on a whole new dimension after the 25 January events. Earlier in January 2011, Facebook users from Egypt numbered 4.2 million. By March 2011, this figure had risen to 5.7 million.

Figure 4.  
Popularity of social networks in Egypt (% of total users), 2009



Note: The Nielsen survey lists “Twitter Arabic” as the fifth most popular social networking site, although no such website exists. Twitter has introduced an Arabic interface, but it is not clear whether the Arabic usage of Twitter is what the report means by “Twitter Arabic.” Moreover, it would be difficult to measure this, as most users tweet in Arabic and English. The same comment applies to “Facebook Arabic.”

Source: PwC, *Arab Media Outlook 2009–2013*

By the beginning of September 2011, there were 8.55 million Facebook users in Egypt, which was almost 60 percent of the total Facebook users in the Middle East, then estimated at 15 million. By May 2013, the number of Egyptian Facebook users had risen to 13.83 million, ranking 17th in the world.<sup>104</sup> *Arab Media Outlook 2009–2013* indicated that 46 percent of their sample visited a social networking site two or more

102. PwC, *Arab Media Outlook 2009–2013*.

103. PwC, *Arab Media Outlook 2009–2013*.

104. Socialbakers, “Facebook Statistics by Country.”

times a week, 37 percent visited a social networking site four or more times a week, and 28 percent visited a social networking site daily, sometimes more than once a day.<sup>105</sup>

### 3.1.3 News in Social Media

There are no credible statistics on usage patterns of social networking sites. However, an earlier study that tackled internet use in general in Egypt indicated that by far the most important motive for using the internet was the search for information, followed by learning more about the outside world.<sup>106</sup>

With the introduction and popularity of blogs and social networking sites, Egyptian bloggers emerged as a leading authority in the Arab world on publishing political content and pioneering political activism through online means. Facebook and Twitter in particular have been very popular in Egypt, especially since the 25 January 2011 revolution. Many people joined Facebook looking for news about the revolution and subsequent political and social activism. The SCAF released official press statements on its Facebook page before anywhere else.

## 3.2 Digital Activism

### 3.2.1 Digital Platforms and Civil Society Activism

Blogging started in Egypt in 2004, and a few names soon emerged as star bloggers, who gained a large following across the Arab world. Blogging provided a space for self-expression that was unprecedented in Egypt and in the Arab world. Much of that space became dedicated to political analysis and carried sharp critiques of the Mubarak regime.<sup>107</sup> As early as 2008, the Information Decision Support Center (IDSC) issued a report indicating that over 15 percent of Egypt's blogs (160,000 at the time) had 10,000–50,000 visitors, and that more than 8.4 percent of blogs had over 50,000 visitors.<sup>108</sup> These numbers constitute a very high following for some bloggers, which is why they were a concern for the government.<sup>109</sup>

The 2008 IDSC report included a warning against blogs for being not subject to censorship.<sup>110</sup> The report stated: “Among the advantages and at the same time disadvantages of blogging is the lack of censorship, the lack of a mediator between the bloggers and the readers, and the fact that blogs are not subject to monitoring or control. This provokes certain *political* and ethical reservations about the content of blogs.”<sup>111</sup>

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105. PwC, *Arab Media Outlook 2009–2013*.

106. Abdulla, *The Internet in Egypt and the Arab World*; Abdulla, *The Internet in the Arab World*.

107. Abdulla, “Policing the Internet in the Arab World.”

108. Information and Decision Support Center (IDSC), “Egyptian Blogs: A new Social Cyberspace,” *Informatics Reports*, Cairo, 2008.

109. Abdulla, “Policing the Internet in the Arab World.”

110. Information and Decision Support Center (IDSC), “Egyptian Blogs: A new Social Cyberspace,” *Informatics Reports*, Cairo, 2008.

111. Information and Decision Support Center (IDSC), “Egyptian Blogs: A new Social Cyberspace,” *Informatics Reports*, Cairo, 2008, p. 4. Emphasis added.

Indeed, the effect of blogs and bloggers, especially political blogs and bloggers, has been felt several times in major ways during the past few years. That effect is particularly intensified once the story breaks out from the still limited reach of the internet into the traditional media, a link that now has been clearly established in Egypt. Traditional media and social media have reached a degree of symbiotic coexistence, whereby traditional journalists know whom to follow (or call) for first-hand news that breaks online, while bloggers and online activists have enough experience with and connections in the traditional media to enable them to publicize an idea or event beyond the realms of the internet.<sup>112</sup>

One early example is the Al Wa'y Al Masri (Misr Digital) blog, started in February 2005 by Wael Abbas, a pioneer in exposing many cases of police brutality in Egypt.<sup>113</sup> One incident that gained heavy exposure in the traditional media was the video Mr Abbas posted on his blog of a minibus driver, Imad al-Kabir, who was tortured and sodomized by police officers in 2006. The officers shot the video themselves and sent it to Mr al-Kabir's co-workers as a way of humiliating him and as a warning to others. Mr Abbas got a copy of the video, posted it on his blog, and it went viral. The buzz around the video was so significant that the traditional media could not ignore it. Soon afterwards, a case was filed in court against the police officers, resulting in the first conviction for police brutality in an Egyptian court and a three-year sentence for the two officers involved. It set a precedent for punishing police brutality crimes, which was highly appreciated and celebrated in Egyptian society.<sup>114</sup>

Mr Abbas received the prestigious Knight International Journalism Award of the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) in 2007. According to the website, Mr Abbas "raised the standards of media excellence" in his country.<sup>115</sup> This was the first time that a blogger, not a traditional journalist, had won this prestigious journalism award, a testament to the important work such bloggers are doing.<sup>116</sup>

### **Manal and Alaa's Bit Bucket**

One of the earliest attempts at online activism was started by the blogger Alaa Abdel Fattah, who— together with his wife, Manal Hassan—started the popular award-winning blog and aggregator Manal and Alaa's Bit Bucket.<sup>117</sup> Both bloggers fought the Mubarak regime online and offline, breaking cases of corruption and police brutality on their blogs. In 2005, Alaa wrote his testimony of police brutality against Egyptian protestors (himself included) and asked others to do the same. These accounts were all hosted or featured on his blog, making it increasingly popular. Since then, the blog has been known to host such accounts, together with updated selections of other Egyptian blogs.<sup>118</sup>

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112. Abdulla, "The Revolution will be tweeted."

113. Abdulla, "The Revolution will be tweeted."

114. Abdulla, "The Revolution will be tweeted."

115. "Egyptian Blogger, Burmese Reporter Named 2007 Knight International Journalism Award Winners," Knight Foundation, 24 August 2007, at <http://www.knightfoundation.org/press-room/press-release/egyptian-blogger-burmese-reporter-named-2007> (accessed 14 April 2013).

116. Abdulla, "Policing the Internet in the Arab World."

117. See <http://www.manalaa.net> (accessed 28 December 2012).

118. See <http://www.manalaa.net> (accessed 28 December 2012).

The efforts of bloggers and online activists continued through the years leading up to the 25 January revolution. In 2008, Esraa Abdel Fattah, a 30-year-old female blogger, created a page on Facebook calling for a public strike on 6 April 2008 in support of workers in Al Mahalla Al Kubra city who were planning a strike on that day. This was probably the first incident that showed Egyptian young people, including online activists, how much they could accomplish via Facebook. The news reached traditional television through another activist and journalist, Nawara Negm, who happened to be a guest on a popular evening talk show on a private satellite channel. Ms Negm casually broke the news at the end of her interview that this strike event was happening, and that the details were on Facebook. The Facebook event page attracted more than 70,000 members and caused much havoc in the country. Those involved in the organization of this event were joined by others and later formed the 6 April Youth Movement group, which played an important part in the early stages of the revolution and continues to do so today.<sup>119</sup>

Online activists' actions, in relation to the 25 January revolution, will be discussed in detail below. It is worth mentioning that such activism was not without a price. Many of Egypt's star bloggers were harassed by the Mubarak regime in many ways, from threatening phone calls to beatings, detentions, and sometimes torture.<sup>120</sup> Following the revolution, several online activists were subjected to military trial under the SCAF. They are still harassed under President Morsi through sporadic beatings, court cases, and sometimes detention.

### 3.2.2 The Importance of Digital Mobilizations

One of the earliest and most effective political movements that came out of Egypt in the online era was the Kefaya movement, formally known as the Egyptian Movement for Change. Established in 2004 by a grassroots coalition, the movement outspokenly said "*Kefaya*" (enough) to President Mubarak, and demanded guarantees that his son would not succeed him as president. The movement was important as it called out to young people and encouraged them to take to the streets in protest. Many of its members were bloggers, and eventually other street protestors started blogging about the demonstrations, thereby documenting them on the internet, and later also via video on YouTube. At the time, such protests were almost completely ignored by the traditional media, and so blogs provided an important voice.<sup>121</sup>

The introduction of YouTube in 2005 took blogging and the small protests of Kefaya to a different level. The chants of "Down with Hosni Mubarak" became available on video for the very first time in Egypt, and many watched on YouTube in excitement as a new form of opposition developed. This helped to turn more people into offline activists. Meanwhile, internet activists such as Wael Abbas, Alaa Abdel Fattah, Manal Hassan, Hossam El-Hamalawy, Malek Mostafa, and others uploaded hundreds of videos of police brutality, election-rigging, evidence of corruption at all levels, and different violations of human rights of all kinds.<sup>122</sup>

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119. Abdulla, "The Revolution will be tweeted;" Abdulla, "Policing the Internet in the Arab World."

120. Abdulla, "The Revolution will be tweeted;" Abdulla, "Policing the Internet in the Arab World."

121. Abdulla, "The Revolution will be tweeted."

122. Abdulla, "The Revolution will be tweeted."

The 13.83 million Facebook users in Egypt constitute about 64 percent of internet users in the country, a penetration rate comparable with the figure for the United States at 69 percent.<sup>123</sup> This makes it possible to assemble a good crowd via the social networking site. But again, a greater effect is achieved when an event is covered by the traditional media. One example given above was the mention on television about the Facebook page calling for a public strike in support of workers in Al Mahalla Al Kubra city, which went on to cause havoc. After 6 April 2008, the government detained Ms Fattah, who had created the page, for more than two weeks. During that time,<sup>124</sup> the “Facebook youths” became the target of a smear campaign in the government-owned media, which accused them of everything from being a “fifth column bent on destruction”<sup>125</sup> to being “a bunch of crazy, disoriented kids,” to being foreign-funded gang members whose sole aim was to destroy the reputation of Egypt.<sup>126</sup>

Several other bloggers were detained in association with the events of 6 April 2008 and the ensuing strikes.<sup>127</sup> One was Mohamed Refaat, who was accused of promoting a strike on 23 July that year via the internet: he was detained for over two months, and forced to sign a document that forbade him to blog or use his Facebook page. The 6 April bloggers went on to start a movement called Harket Shabab 6 April (6 April Youth Movement group, see also above), which aims at political, social, and economic reform in Egypt; the movement was, and continues to be, an active part of the 25 January revolution.<sup>128</sup>

One of the Facebook pages that played an important role leading up to and during the 25 January revolution was the “We Are All Khaled Said” page, named after a 26-year-old Egyptian blogger beaten to death by police informants outside an internet café in Alexandria in June 2010. The Facebook page started by asking its steadily increasing membership to stage silent standing protests, wearing black shirts. They started in Mr Said’s hometown of Alexandria, and soon the protests spread to several governorates in Egypt. The page did a very good job of organizing the events, taking its members’ input into consideration through regular and frequent voting on times and places of demonstrations. Eventually, it became by far the most popular page on Facebook among Egyptian users. (The page had over 3 million members on 27 April 2013.) It was the Khaled Said page that posted an “event” for a massive demonstration on 25 January 2011, Egypt’s Police Day, which turned into the 25 January revolution.<sup>129</sup>

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123. Socialbakers, “Egypt Facebook Statistics.”

124. Abdulla, “Policing the Internet in the Arab World.”

125. S. Carr, “Is It Time to Sign Out of Facebook?,” *Daily News Egypt*, 2 June 2008, at <http://www.dailystaregypt.com> (accessed 28 December 2012).

126. A. Hozayen, “When Facebook Turns into Deforming a Nation: The Egypt They Do Not Know” (in Arabic), *Al Abram*, 2 May 2008, at <http://www.ahram.org.eg/archive/Index.asp> (accessed 28 December 2012).

127. R. Philip, “Blogging The Strike: Activists Remain Behind Bars,” *Daily Star Egypt*, 4 May 2008.

128. Abdulla, “The Revolution will be tweeted.”

129. Abdulla, “The Revolution will be tweeted.”

## A Facebook revolution?

Perhaps the most striking example of using the internet for political activism was the organization of the events of the 25 January 2011 revolution in Egypt. The author of this report called it an “internet-based revolution,” as one of the most important tasks accomplished via the internet was the organization of demonstrations on the afternoon of 25 January.<sup>130</sup> The “We Are All Khaled Said” page on Facebook posted detailed times and places for marches and protests in every major square in every governorate of Egypt, as well as providing people with vital information on safety and emergency phone numbers.<sup>131</sup> In effect, it was the first revolution to be turned into an event on Facebook 10 days in advance. People were clicking “I’m attending the revolution.”<sup>132</sup>

It has been argued elsewhere that the Arab world has a lot to learn in terms of democracy from social networking sites such as Facebook. The popularity of such sites has created “a sense of commonality and belonging among their members analogous to feelings of patriotism and belonging to a nation.” The freedoms afforded by these websites have turned them into virtual nations, “places where members can roam freely without worrying about the restrictions their own countries and political systems might be imposing on them ... This idea of freedom of self-expression makes Facebook very attractive to youths, particularly in Egypt and the Arab world since there are very few alternatives in existence that might fulfill this need for these segments of the society.”<sup>133</sup>

The freedom of expression afforded to Facebook users has unconsciously taught particular groups of Egyptian young people to communicate “horizontally” with each other after years of being “talked at” by governments in a “vertical” fashion, which is the communication pattern experienced by most Arab people under their oppressive regimes.<sup>134</sup> This environment enabled certain groups of young people who were not politically inclined before 25 January to discuss matters of importance to their country once they felt a chance for real change. The more than 500,000 Egyptians who clicked “I am attending the revolution” on Facebook gave each other the feeling that “I am not alone. If I go out on the streets on 25 January, I am not going to be with 200 people. I am going to be with thousands, or as it happened, with millions.”<sup>135</sup>

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130. R. Abdulla, “The Invisible Republic of the Internet,” Personal Democracy Forum, June 2011, at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qDeOdEtmE70> (accessed 9 February 2013); Abdulla, “The Revolution will be tweeted.”

131. See <https://www.facebook.com/ElShaheed> (accessed 14 June 2013).

132. Abdulla, “The Revolution will be tweeted.”

133. R. Abdulla, “The Federal Democratic Republic of Facebook,” *Democracy*, 34 (April 2009).

134. R. Abdulla, “The Federal Democratic Republic of Facebook,” *Democracy*, 34 (April 2009).

135. R. Abdulla, “The Invisible Republic of the Internet,” Personal Democracy Forum, June 2011, at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qDeOdEtmE70> (accessed 9 February 2013).



### 3.3 Assessments

The most important effect that digitization has had on news consumption in Egypt and the Arab world is to open up a whole new world of alternative media through which users can obtain, as well as contribute to, content. With more than 33 percent of Egyptian internet users reading news online,<sup>136</sup> mostly young people, this significantly lowers the government's influence through its controlled news production on the regime's traditional media.

Bloggers capitalized on the benefits of internet interactivity and UGC abilities early on. In 2004, the bloggers Wael Abbas, Alaa Abdel Fattah, Manal Hassan, and others were already discussing sensitive political issues such as police brutality and election-rigging on their blogs, and enjoying a considerable following. Today, they and many others enjoy followings that surpass the circulation of any Egyptian daily newspaper. The credibility that these bloggers enjoy, particularly among the young generation, is quite admirable.

During the Mubarak period, bloggers and online activists played an important role by documenting protests and posting videos of them on YouTube whenever possible. This provided alternative media coverage for issues that were taboo in the traditional media. Occasionally, they managed to push a few stories into the mainstream media, which helped gain national attention to these issues. Online activists now have regular contacts in traditional media.

The revolution of 25 January 2011 may be the greatest example to date of the use of the internet for political activism. Indeed, it was so important that the government resorted to shutting down the whole internet for more than five days.

At this time of writing, two and a half years on, internet activists and many others who were not politically active before January 2011 have taken to the internet, particularly Facebook and Twitter, ready to assist with whatever the next stages of the revolution may require, from raising political awareness to planning social, economic, and development projects.

Currently, under President Morsi, social media remain an important tool for activists to present ideas, as well as to discuss pertinent issues and to organize. Debates on Twitter and Facebook take place almost every day on the different courses of action. Social media are also a wonderful way to gain initial support for an idea or initiative before taking it to the streets and pushing it through traditional media.

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136. Nielsen Company Report, cited in PwC, *Arab Media Outlook 2009–2013*.

## 4. Digital Media and Journalism

### 4.1 Impact on Journalists and Newsrooms

#### 4.1.1 Journalists

The introduction of the internet, particularly Web 2.0 and the ease of producing UGC, constituted a big bang in the media scene in the Arab world. Indeed, the journalists interviewed for this report emphasized that the main changes that have taken place in the nature of the work of journalists in Egypt over the past few years have mostly revolved around the use of social networking sites, blogs, and other online tools in research, cultivating sources, and disseminating and producing news.

In this sense, digitization has caused several changes in how news is both reported and produced, as noted by Rania Al Malky,<sup>137</sup> the editor in chief of the independent English-language newspaper, the *Daily News Egypt*. In print journalism, the digitization of layout has made it easier and faster to produce print as well as online newspapers. Online journalism provides newspapers with the advantage of speed, helping them reach a wide range of audiences first and allowing them to compete with television. “We do not wait for our readers to come to us on our website to see the stories. We go to them on their social networks, on Twitter (and) on Facebook,” she said. Ms Al Malky emphasized that the speed at which online news is produced helps keep the press abreast of the 24-hour television news production cycle: once a story is complete, it is posted online immediately and disseminated to readers. In this way, newspapers now act much like news agencies for most of the time.

Digitization has brought about many advantages as well as challenges for the press, as print newspapers are always racing against time. At one point, by the time the print issue was out, the news had already been on television or online. Ms Al Malky said that having an online forum for the daily newspaper takes care of this problem by allowing the website to be updated instantly once a story breaks. She added that the print issue should then give more analysis and depth in order to stand out.

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137. Interview with Rania Al Malky, editor in chief, *Daily News Egypt*, Cairo, 22 October 2011.

The publisher Hisham Kassem observed that print versions of all Arabic-language dailies offer their readers nothing new: newspapers in Egypt still publish yesterday's news as if it were news. Arabic-language newspapers, particularly government-owned ones, are mostly under old traditional leaderships, with many editors resisting the use of computers to edit stories, preferring to hold on to their pens and paper. This makes Egypt a little behind in adopting technology in the journalism business. Mr Kassem added that the older generation of editors feels threatened by digital technology.<sup>138</sup>

Yaser Alzayat asserted that many renowned Arabic-language newspaper editors in Egypt do not even know how to check their emails, and some even keep scoops off the online version to save them for the print version. Digitization has created a crisis for the Egyptian press, he believes, with many journalists still not aware that there is a crisis. To rescue the print newspaper, journalists must provide readers with something different from the online version. The job of the print version is no longer to provide news but to provide analysis and a fresh angle: "Newspapers have to look for an added value to provide their readers with. They have to answer the question, 'What do I write about tomorrow?'"<sup>139</sup>

Ahmed El Sawy, a journalist at the independent *Al Shorouk* newspaper, said digitization provided journalists with more tools facilitating their research. In terms of content, it created a form of "information liquidity," which he defined as an excess of news that is a direct result of the actual speed of news production. On the other hand, digitization has also created a form of what Mr El Sawy referred to as "desk journalism."<sup>140</sup> By this, he means that instead of doing more street reporting, journalists now interview people via mobile phones and emails. They also depend on finding sources online.

Another journalist, Sayed Mahmoud, agrees that digitization has changed how journalists report in Egypt.<sup>141</sup> "The journalists changed," said Mr Mahmoud, explaining that they started attending workshops to learn new tools and keep up with digital technology. Although he emphasized that old tools are gradually being replaced with modern ones, the newsroom where he works, the government-run *Al Abram Al Araby* magazine, only had two old desktop computers at the time of the interview.

In terms of diversity, Mr Mahmoud said the introduction of online journalism and social media networks forced the press to produce more diverse content to address its new readers.<sup>142</sup> Digitization has created competition in the Egyptian press. He cited the example of the newspaper *Al Tahrir*, launched after the 25 January revolution, which publishes posts from Twitter and Facebook on its front page. Mr Mahmoud added that newspaper layout also changed as a result of digitization, with more emphasis now placed on graphics and the art of newspaper design in general.

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138. Interview with Hisham Kassem, chairman and CEO of Algomhouria Algadida, Cairo, 20 October 2011.

139. Interview with Yaser Alzayat, veteran journalist, Cairo, 21 October 2011.

140. Interview with Ahmed El Sawy, journalist, *Al Shorouk* newspaper, Cairo, 23 October 2011.

141. Interview with Sayed Mahmoud, journalist, *Al Abram Al Araby*, Cairo, 24 October 2011.

142. Interview with Sayed Mahmoud, journalist, *Al Abram Al Araby*, Cairo, 24 October 2011.

#### 4.1.2 Ethics

Digitization has had both a positive and a negative impact on the ethical behavior of journalists. According to Mr Kassem, the positive side is that news exposure is much higher than for print, and news is posted as it breaks. On the other hand, it contributes to plagiarism because of the unlimited resources readily available. “It made it easier for journalists to cut and paste.”<sup>143</sup>

Ms Al Malky believes that “the beauty of digital media is that you can always verify and get to the bottom of it.”<sup>144</sup> She said digitization has made a journalist’s job easier and more difficult at the same time. “There are so many sources now to contend with, and it makes the job of the journalist a lot more difficult and a lot more important.” Journalists have to get as close to the core of the issue as possible. With citizen journalism acting as a watchdog over mainstream media, traditional journalists have become more careful. She cited the example of the altered photograph of the ousted president, Hosni Mubarak, that appeared in *Al Ahrām* in 2010.<sup>145</sup> The group photograph of world leaders at a summit in the United States showed Mr Mubarak leading the way, whereas the original photo had Obama in front. This was discovered by an Egyptian “netizen” who exposed *Al Ahrām* and circulated both versions of the photo online.

Ms Al Malky asserted that digitization made it easier to verify information. With readers becoming more interactive and watchful, mistakes and flaws are easier to uncover. The resulting increased public scrutiny has pushed media outlets to perform better. “Anything you write and say can be challenged by the whole of society online and offline,” Ms Al Malky said. She emphasized that this is especially so when journalists do not interview a sufficient number of sources or do not do enough research.

According to Mr El Sawy,<sup>146</sup> journalists and columnists calculate reactions before writing anything, as a result of online interactivity with the readers. He said readers often post comments and even links to prove a journalist or columnist wrong. Mr Alzayat added that even activists on social networking sites had started establishing a culture of fact-checking. When journalists or internet users post news, people ask for sources or verifications, Mr Alzayat said.<sup>147</sup>

However, the more fast-paced journalism becomes, the more prone to making mistakes journalists are. Lack of training, time pressure, press deadlines, and the 24-hour news cycle pose more challenges to journalism. Mr El Sawy said that many journalists take the easy way out and do not do enough reporting because they do not have time, adding that newspapers often find it easier to publish the story first and then correct it later if need be. Traditionally, there were many filters, edits, and proofing carried out before the story reached readers, but now with the ever greater need for speed, everything is done too quickly. He emphasized that there is an urgent need to change this culture of speed at the expense of accuracy.

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143. Interview with Hisham Kassem, chairman and CEO of Algomhouria Algadida, Cairo, 20 October 2011.

144. Interview with Rania Al Malky, editor in chief, *Daily News Egypt*, Cairo, 22 October 2011.

145. “Egyptian newspaper under fire over altered photo,” BBC News, 15 September 2010, at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-11313738> (assessed 28 December 2012).

146. Interview with Ahmed El Sawy, journalist, *Al Shorouk* newspaper, Cairo, 23 October 2011.

147. Interview with Yaser Alzayat, veteran journalist, Cairo, 21 October 2011.

Most news stories in the press are not complete, Mr Alzayat said. Egypt has adopted a night circulation system, which means that newspapers are available on the newsstands by 8 p.m. or 9 p.m. the night before. This has tightened deadlines even more. The very few newspapers that have their own printing houses (such as the government-run *Al Ahrām*) enjoy an extended 7 p.m. deadline; all others have to be ready by 4 p.m., Mr Alzayat said, adding that this makes it difficult to issue well-reported and comprehensive stories.

Digitization also created a problem with regards to authenticating information, explained Mr Mahmoud.<sup>148</sup> Journalists need online research training to evaluate the credibility of online sources. A famous case of a guest walking off the set of a live television talk show over allegedly inaccurate background information from Wikipedia is a clear example. The poet Abdul Rahman Yusuf objected to what was said about him in a live broadcast on “*Al Qahera Al Youm*” (Cairo Today), co-hosted by Amr Adeeb. The hosts strongly defended their show’s report while admitting that they had obtained the information on Mr Yusuf from Wikipedia.<sup>149</sup>

“They do not understand what a wiki is,” said Ms Al Malky, adding that they probably do not know that content on wikis is user-generated. She added that journalists may use Wikipedia to get a general idea about an issue or get links to an official website, but then they have to conduct their own research and fact-checking. Mr Alzayat agrees, saying that although digitization facilitates journalists’ work by creating more sources of information, it has become more challenging to verify it. Ms Al Malky also stressed that journalists have a “wealth of knowledge” available at their fingertips, and it is their responsibility to conduct many checks before they come up with their final versions. “At the end of the day, the printed word has a certain sanctity and credibility,” she said, adding that if journalists respect the ethical principles of journalism, digitization should make them more careful and resourceful.

The proliferation of social networking sites has had a positive and negative effect on the ethical behavior of journalists. Mr Alzayat and Mr El Sawy agree that social networking sites give journalists a sense of public opinion and a quick way to find out how people react to certain news.

On the other hand, Ms Al Malky noted that “digitization of media has made it much easier to spread false news.” While journalists may use social networks to give them leads, they need to verify the information. Many journalists believe that social networks have become a hub for cultivating rumors, especially after the 25 January revolution. Journalists need also to verify information circulated by activists on social networks: “Activists have a different agenda and have a different way of seeing things from journalists,” who should never take information online for granted, Ms Al Malky said. Otherwise, journalists can be used or abused by people commenting online or sending unverified information via email. Ms Al Malky said that if she cannot confirm it, she cannot use it. “We cannot be part of a rumor mill.”

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148. Interview with Sayed Mahmoud, journalist, *Al Ahrām Al Arabiy*, Cairo, 24 October 2011.

149. “On Video: Abdel Rahman Yousef Leaves the Set of Alqahira Alyoum; and Adib: ‘We’ll Send You Your Papers’” (in Arabic), *Al Ahrām*, 23 June 2011, at <http://gate.ahram.org/News/85893.aspx> (accessed 28 April 2013).

## 4.2 Investigative Journalism

### 4.2.1 Opportunities

Investigative journalism in Egypt is only present on a very small scale, but digitization is gradually helping to improve that situation. Social media, for example, have helped to foster an environment of investigative journalism. Mainstream media reports of police brutality cases were unheard of before user-generated videos online exposed such issues. “This is one instance where social media took the lead,” said Mr Kassem, emphasizing that such online videos opened spaces for the press. “The mainstream media had not entered this space before,” he added.<sup>150</sup>

The main pillars of investigative journalism are researching, sourcing, fact-finding, and fact-checking, which do not exist in most investigative reports by the Egyptian press, Ms Al Malky said.<sup>151</sup> She stated that big news organizations think they are doing investigative reporting even when their stories do not include a single source. In general, it is very rare to find investigative journalism in the press because such reporting is very complicated and time-consuming, and many journalists do not know how to conduct it. “It’s the role of the media in the digital age to go deeper, to probe more, and to see the less-privileged communities,” said Ms Al Malky, adding that investigative journalism is crucial because it has the power to change policy.

According to Mr El Sawy,<sup>152</sup> some newspapers carry very basic investigative stories, but news institutions consider it a liability to do so, due to the high cost involved in conducting investigative stories. He added that there is a generational gap in Egyptian newspapers between journalists who may be interested in conducting investigative stories and editors who do not appreciate investigative journalism. In addition, most centers that offer training in investigative journalism are not stationed in Egypt; journalists need to go abroad for it.

On the other hand, even amid this dearth of investigative reporting some smaller newspapers have won awards for investigative stories. Mr Alzayat, who plans to establish an investigative journalism training center in Egypt, noted that the *Al Badeel* online newspaper won an award for a story about a Sinai Bedouin clan without citizenship.<sup>153</sup> Also, some newspapers such as the independent daily *Al Masry Al Youm* carry out investigative journalism on a small scale. The government-run *Al Ahram* newspaper created an investigative journalism section after the revolution, according to Mr Mahmoud.<sup>154</sup> Mr Alzayat has also started leading a team of young investigative journalists to present one major story every Wednesday on the popular evening talk show “*Akher Kalam*” (The Last Word), presented by the popular Yosri Fouda.

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150. Interview with Hisham Kassem, chairman and CEO of Algomhouria Algadida, Cairo, 20 October 2011.

151. Interview with Rania Al Malky, editor in chief, *Daily News Egypt*, Cairo, 22 October 2011.

152. Interview with Ahmed El Sawy, journalist, *Al Shorouk* newspaper, Cairo, 23 October 2011.

153. Interview with Yaser Alzayat, veteran journalist, Cairo, 21 October 2011.

154. Interview with Sayed Mahmoud, journalist, *Al Ahram Al Araby*, Cairo, 24 October 2011.

Ehab El Zelaky, the managing editor of *Al Masry Al Youm*, is involved with training journalists on how to improve their investigative reporting with digital technologies. From using Excel sheets to record information systematically and over time, to using RSS feeds to gather information and encryption tools to protect it, Mr Zelaky said, digital media have opened paths to investigative journalists that were never available before.<sup>155</sup>

Mr Zelaky also trains journalists in advanced research and information-finding techniques, including using online sources and databases such as Lexus Nexus to track people and offshore companies. He says these techniques are particularly helpful in money laundering and corruption stories. He cited investigative reports by journalists at *Al Masry Al Youm*, for example, tracking the property of the Egyptian businessman Hussein Salem, who fled to Spain after the 25 January revolution, and who allegedly owes Egypt a fortune; and another on the alleged snipers who shot hundreds of protesters between 28 January and 3 February 2011.<sup>156</sup>

Some informal attempts at investigative journalism have also surfaced online, particularly after the 25 January revolution. For example, there are many allegedly classified state security documents on several Facebook pages, such as “Amn El Dawla Leaks” (State Security Leaks), and on the website 25leaks.com, both of which were created by activists after they stormed state security headquarters following the 25 January revolution. The credibility of these documents remains, however, problematic.

One major function of digital media is to help investigative journalists find more documents online. Mr Alzayat believes that digitization facilitates the work of investigative journalists by helping them find large sources of information online which were not available otherwise.

Ms Al Malky said digitization can help journalists in that they can do research online and dig up all the necessary background information before they talk to their sources. She also asserted that a major problem remains the absence of a Freedom of Information Act: public officials are under no obligation to provide reporters with documents. “Journalists find it extremely difficult to find information,” she said. Although digitization has made it easier to access documents, it could be “dangerous because the documents might not be creditable.”

#### 4.2.2 Threats

According to several of those interviewed, the main obstacle standing in the way of investigative journalism in Egypt is the absence of a Freedom of Information Act. If journalists uncover information and make it public, they may face charges of publishing illegal documents, said Mr Mahmoud.<sup>157</sup> Investigative journalists have only recently started resorting to digital media to carry out investigations, and so far, no major threats or dangers to the work of investigative journalists are known to have taken place because of digital media.

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155. Interview with Ehab Zelaky, managing editor, *Al Masry Al Youm* newspaper, Cairo, 5 November 2011.

156. A. Ragab and M. Marsafawy, “Ministry of Interior Used Snipers to Kill Protesters,” *Al Masry Al Youm*, 14 September 2011, at <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/node/495666> (accessed 29 December 2012).

157. Interview with Sayed Mahmoud, journalist, *Al Ahram Al Araby*, Cairo, 24 October 2011.

### 4.2.3 New Platforms

Bloggers have done much over the years to expose some major, sensitive issues, foremost among which is police and state security brutality. However, little of that can be classified as investigative journalism in the traditional sense. These efforts do not culminate in a complete “story.” Rather, they provide the very essence of investigative stories in terms of video or photographic evidence, ready to be developed into stories by professional journalists. “Very little investigative journalism is done on blogs. If it happens, it happens by chance,” Mr Kassem said.<sup>158</sup> Mr El Sawy agrees, saying that blogs do not offer investigative journalism.<sup>159</sup> If a video were published on a certain blog, the blog itself could be part of the story as a source. He added that journalists should double-check the facts and report only if they can validate the information. But Mr El Sawy emphasized that citizen journalism becomes essential in the absence of mainstream media coverage of various issues. For example, in the past seven years in Egypt, many bloggers have posted videos online purportedly showing torture at the hands of the police.

Some of the efforts of bloggers, although perhaps not constituting a complete work of investigative journalism, have managed to bring sensitive issues to the surface that would have otherwise passed completely unnoticed, by establishing links with the traditional media. The video posted by Wael Abbas in what became known as the Imad Al Kabir case culminated in the first ever court sentence in Egypt against police officers for a charge of police brutality.<sup>160</sup> The many other videos on the same issue that he posted made people realize the scope of the problem. Following the 25 January revolution, Hossam El Hamalawy, who blogs at Arabawy.org, had a whole section of his blog dedicated to the alleged scandals of state security agencies. Under the name “piggipedia,” El Hamalawy posted several accounts, including pictures, of state security officers that he has come across through years of activism, and some whose files and pictures he grabbed after storming the state security headquarters with other activists in March 2011.<sup>161</sup>

#### No to Military Trials for Civilians

A more recent effort is by a group called “No to Military Trials for Civilians,” which stands up for civilians’ rights to be prosecuted before a normal civic court rather than a military or state security court. On its websites NoMilTrials.com and TahrirDiaries.org, the group has put together background information, documented mostly through videos, on some of the more than 12,000 civilians tried militarily since the 25 January revolution. Initiated by the 25-year-old blogger Mona Seif, the group also produced public service announcements on the issue, including one in September 2011 featuring Egypt’s potential presidential candidates at the time, in an effort to bring more attention to the cause on the part of the traditional media and the general public.<sup>162</sup> Such cases would be ripe for a journalist to develop into a true investigative piece.

158. Interview with Hisham Kassem, chairman and CEO of Algomhouria Algadida, Cairo, 20 October 2011.

159. Interview with Ahmed El Sawy, journalist, *Al Shorouk* newspaper, Cairo, 23 October 2011.

160. Abdulla, “The Revolution will be tweeted.”

161. Abdulla, “The Revolution will be tweeted.”

162. R. Abdulla, “Arrest of Blogger Mobilizes Opposition to Egypt’s Military Rulers,” Index on Censorship, 2 November 2011, at <http://uncut.indexoncensorship.org/2011/11/ala-egypt-blogger-arrest> (accessed 29 December 2012).



## 4.2.4 Dissemination and Impact

Digitization has given investigative journalists more resources and more ways to disseminate information. “If your editor did not want you to publish a story, you could publish it online on your social networking site,” said Mr Kassem.<sup>163</sup> The same applies to stories that are censored by the government for whatever reason. There have been several examples over the past few years of stories that were not allowed to run in the traditional media but found their way to the website of the newspaper or media outlet or to the author’s blog, and which were then circulated and went viral on social media.<sup>164</sup>

However, there is a danger involved, a challenge to the mainstream media. Mr Kassem explained that if cyberspace begins to be flooded with news from individuals at the expense of weak mainstream media, this could lead to an “information meltdown.” He added that in Egypt the mainstream media currently follow social media, a trend that became evident in reporting from Tahrir Square and other venues. To overcome this problem, Mr Kassem said, professional standards in the mainstream media need to improve.<sup>165</sup>

## 4.3 Social and Cultural Diversity

### 4.3.1 Sensitive Issues

The most sensitive issues in terms of social and cultural diversity have to do with religious minorities, particularly Christians (about 10 percent of the total population)<sup>166</sup> and Bahá’í (less than 1 percent); Christian–Muslim tensions; and ethnic minorities (such as Bedouins, Nubians, and Berbers). Other issues include unequal geographical coverage, with Cairo getting far more coverage than any of Egypt’s 26 other governorates.

### 4.3.2 Coverage of Sensitive Issues

Generally speaking, diversity is lacking in the Egyptian media, and when issues of diversity are presented, they are skewed and naively stereotyped. Neither the charter of the ERTU nor its code of ethics specifies any standards for minority coverage in the media. There are no specific regulations on diversity in any document related to the media in Egypt.<sup>167</sup>

Three Media Diversity Institute reports have been released, examining the diversity in the media coverage of Egypt’s parliamentary and presidential elections in 2011 and 2012, after the 25 January revolution, as well

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163. Interview with Hisham Kassem, chairman and CEO of Algomhouria Algadida, Cairo, 20 October 2011.

164. See, e.g., <http://www.sa-leb.com/vb/thread166625.html>, <http://onefrommpl.elaphblog.com/posts.aspx?U=5997&A=78119> (accessed 29 December 2012); <http://www.elgomaa.com/article.php?id=70926> (accessed 29 December 2012).

165. Interview with Hisham Kassem, chairman and CEO of Algomhouria Algadida, Cairo, 20 October 2011.

166. CIA, “The World Factbook,” 2009.

167. Abdulla, *Egypt Country Report*.

as during the constitutional referendum of 2012.<sup>168</sup> The reports include a content analysis of the coverage of the elections in four major newspapers and several popular talk shows. The results reveal very low coverage for all groups of minorities and minority issues. For example, women were only featured in 6.8 percent of the coverage of the parliamentary elections, 6.5 percent in the coverage of the presidential elections, and 4.2 percent in the coverage of the constitutional referendum. Hardly any ethnic minorities were featured in the coverage. The only notable improvement was in terms of geographical diversity, where governorates other than Cairo and Alexandria started to appear frequently in the media.

Journalists agree that there is very little coverage of minorities and minority issues, and the coverage is somehow “negative,” often emphasizing existing stereotypes. Women are marginalized even though they are not numerically a minority. A typical *Al Ahram* story tackling religious discord will focus on unity and always downplay the conflict and background. In addition to negative portrayals of cultural, religious, and sexual groups, there are also regional distinctions and regional discrimination in the amount of coverage, which is focussed mostly on the Cairo elite. Ms Al Malky says: “When it comes to the daily struggles of people outside of Cairo and Alexandria, it is always [about] stories of conflict.” There needs to be regional diversification of coverage.<sup>169</sup>

Geographical diversity, or the lack thereof, was emphasized by Ghada Shabbender (see also section 2.2.1).<sup>170</sup> She discovered this at first hand in 2005 as a member of a committee monitoring the coverage of parliamentary elections. Ms Shabbender noted that coverage was restricted to the greater Cairo area, with almost no coverage provided for any other geographical vicinity. When she discussed that in her report, her remarks were excluded from the final document. As a result, she refused to sign the final document, which stated instead that fair and equal coverage was given to all political parties, and that coverage was even throughout all Egyptian governorates.

Ms Shabbender said the coverage was “slanted, unprofessional, inefficient, inadequate, and lame.” Indeed, a content analysis of news and talk shows in May 2010<sup>171</sup> showed a severe lack of political diversity, with content only focussing on the government or members of the then ruling National Democratic Party. However, the two recent Media Diversity Institute reports<sup>172</sup> noted an improvement in terms of geographical diversity in

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168. R. Abdulla, “Media Diversity During Egypt’s Parliamentary Elections (November–December 2011),” Media Diversity Institute, London, 2012, at [http://media-diversity.org/en/additional-files/documents/News%20Documents/MDI\\_Media\\_Monitoring\\_Report\\_1\\_EN.pdf](http://media-diversity.org/en/additional-files/documents/News%20Documents/MDI_Media_Monitoring_Report_1_EN.pdf) (accessed 29 December 2012) (hereafter, Abdulla, “Media Diversity During Egypt’s Parliamentary Elections (November–December 2011)”); R. Abdulla, “Media Diversity During Egypt’s Presidential Elections (May–June 2012),” Media Diversity Institute, London, 2012, at [http://media-diversity.org/en/additional-files/documents/b-studies-reports/MDI\\_Egypt\\_Media\\_Monitoring\\_Report\\_2.pdf](http://media-diversity.org/en/additional-files/documents/b-studies-reports/MDI_Egypt_Media_Monitoring_Report_2.pdf) (accessed 29 December 2012) (hereafter, Abdulla, “Media Diversity During Egypt’s Presidential Elections (May–June 2012)”; R. Abdulla, “Media Diversity During Egypt’s Constitutional Referendum (November–December 2012),” Media Diversity Institute, London, 2013, at <http://media-diversity.org/en/additional-files/documents/b-studies-reports/MDI%20Diversity%20Observatory%20Report%203.pdf> (accessed 29 April 2013).

169. Interviews with Rania Al Malky, editor in chief, *Daily News Egypt*, Cairo, 22 October 2011, and Yaser Alzayat, veteran journalist, Cairo, 21 October 2011.

170. Interview with Ghada Shabbender, board member of the Egyptian Organization of Human Rights, Cairo, 14 July 2011.

171. Abdulla, *Egypt Country Report*.

172. Abdulla, “Media Diversity During Egypt’s Presidential Elections (May–June 2012);” Abdulla, “Media Diversity During Egypt’s Parliamentary Elections (November–December 2011).”

election coverage since the 25 January revolution for the first time in Egypt, but this was the only aspect of diversity that showed some improvement. All other aspects remained fairly non-existent in the media coverage.

According to Mr Kassem,<sup>173</sup> the media in Egypt are becoming aware of social diversity, but it will be “a very long time” before the media can promote such issues in Egypt. “They first need to understand it,” he said, and to realize that it is imperative to have diversity in society, “and then the drive will appear.”

Mr Mahmoud<sup>174</sup> believes there should be laws that protect minorities from discrimination in the first place, and that this will only be achieved through building a democratic system in Egypt. He added that journalists also need to be trained on how to cover minorities effectively. Mr El Sawy<sup>175</sup> agrees, saying that the government does not reach out to minorities or promote diversity. As for the press, Mr El Sawy said, it is unfortunate that “there are only two schools in the coverage of minorities in the Egyptian press: sensationalism and bias.” The press does not put stories in context. Newspapers are more concerned about sensationalism, which sells more copies. When the press covers a marginalized community such as the Bedouins, the coverage is always one-sided, whether for or against, Mr El Sawy said. The press will either portray Bedouins as traitors or victims ostracized by the government: “It is very rare to find newspapers covering the real problems facing marginalized communities.” The news media need self-regulation and need to establish a culture of professionalism when dealing with such sensitive issues, an essential matter in a country where many small tribal communities live.

Media coverage of religious minorities also needs to be improved in both quantity and quality. Mr Alzayat noted that in 2009 a journalist reported rumors about Bahá'í in an Egyptian village who were engaging in illicit sexual behavior with family members.<sup>176</sup> The journalist then appeared on television and said that neighbors in that village would not tolerate their Bahá'í neighbors' behavior. The following day, residents of the village set fire to a number of Bahá'í houses.<sup>177</sup>

### 4.3.3 Space for Public Expression

The internet has provided a much needed public sphere for minorities in Egypt. In the absence of any fair coverage of minority issues or forums for them to express themselves and their problems, social media provide the alternative. While there are no scientific studies available to document this phenomenon, those interviewed for this report confirmed the important role of social media.

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173. Interview with Hisham Kassem, chairman and CEO of Algomhouria Algadida, Cairo, 20 October 2011.

174. Interview with Sayed Mahmoud, journalist, *Al Abram Al Araby*, Cairo, 24 October 2011.

175. Interview with Ahmed El Sawy, journalist, *Al Shorouk* newspaper, Cairo, 23 October 2011.

176. Interview with Yaser Alzayat, veteran journalist, Cairo, 21 October 2011.

177. “Egypt village mob torches Bahai homes,” AFP, 2 April 2009, at [http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5jldxNOCYVNNHf4nlRmsDu4xl\\_wvw](http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5jldxNOCYVNNHf4nlRmsDu4xl_wvw) (accessed 29 December 2012).

Mr Kassem<sup>178</sup> said there was not much discussion of Nubia, for example, until it surfaced on social media first, forcing the mainstream media to give it attention. Likewise, the issue of Coptic Christians calling for a right to divorce also started as an online movement. Ms Al Malky believes digitization has given minorities a space to express themselves and their grievances, and to voice their concerns and anger. “It has had a huge impact” on generating interest in their problems among sections of society beyond their own specific communities, she said.<sup>179</sup> Mr El Sawy also believes that digital media have enlarged the space for minorities and produced more diverse platforms.<sup>180</sup>

However, Mr Alzayat believes that digitization has only helped to give minorities a voice on the internet, but not much offline. He said that coverage of minorities was “frowned upon” under President Mubarak.<sup>181</sup> Mr Alzayat labeled the continuous trend of tarnishing and framing of minorities as “news laundering.” He explained that the news keeps circulating, perpetuating the same stereotypes until people believe they are true. Mr Mahmoud agrees that stereotypes and sensationalism often taint the press coverage of minorities. He added, however, that the appearance of independent media, satellite channels, and social media had helped to bring some issues regarding minorities to the surface.<sup>182</sup>

## 4.4 Political Diversity

### 4.4.1 Elections and Political Coverage

There is not much regulation of media coverage of elections and politics in general. The ERTU charter<sup>183</sup> has a few clichéd lines defining the “objectives” of the ERTU as, among other things: “giving the opportunity to express different viewpoints, including those of political parties”; and “committing to allocate radio and television broadcasting time for political parties on election days to explain their programs to the people, as well as allocating time on a regular basis to reflect the main focal points of public opinion.”<sup>184</sup>

As vague as these “objectives” are, there are no specific standards to help make them effective, and consequently, they are not paid much attention to in Egyptian media channels. The introduction of digital media has led neither to any changes in any of the regulations, nor to any new regulations on the standards of political diversity.

Generally speaking, though, the introduction of digital media, particularly social media, has given voice to many political entities that were otherwise ignored by the traditional media. From blogs to Facebook pages

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178. Interview with Hisham Kassem, chairman and CEO of Algomhouria Algadida, Cairo, 20 October 2011.

179. Interview with Rania Al Malky, editor in chief, *Daily News Egypt*, Cairo, 22 October 2011.

180. Interview with Ahmed El Sawy, journalist, *Al Shorouk* newspaper, Cairo, 23 October 2011.

181. Interview with Yaser Alzayat, veteran journalist, Cairo, 21 October 2011.

182. Interview with Sayed Mahmoud, journalist, *Al Abram Al Araby*, Cairo, 24 October 2011.

183. Initiating charter of the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU), at <http://bit.ly/rr2pVm> (accessed 27 December 2012).

184. Law no. 13 of 1979, Article 2.

to Twitter accounts to YouTube videos to online radio stations, many entities have managed to establish themselves and have a following, particularly among young people. (Several examples were given in section 3, including the April 6 Youth movement, which started as an event on Facebook.)

#### 4.4.2 Digital Political Communications

Following the 25 January revolution, the political scene in Egypt has become much more diverse, with more than 100 political parties and movements officially in existence. Journalists note that the Kefaya movement, which opposed the inherited succession of power in Egypt, was very active online and managed to attract many young followers through digital media.<sup>185</sup> As early as 2005, it had an active blog and publicized protests online and through text messages. Social media thus provided a voice for the politically voiceless, and an alternative way of exposing issues that were taboo in the traditional media at the time.

Mr Sayed Mahmoud said the extent to which online political movements affected the mainstream media was illustrated in the coverage of the 25 January revolution, which was heavily dependent on news from activists on social media websites. Groups of activists established news networks on social media websites that started with covering the revolution and continued afterwards. “If digitization hadn’t had an effect, the regime would not have shut down the internet during the 25 January revolution.” Even after internet connectivity was resumed, the regime used social media to launch an aggressive campaign against the revolution.<sup>186</sup> Political communication on social media websites is very diverse at the moment, often influencing the coverage of the mainstream media. Many groups continue to be active, and many presidential candidates are utilizing this tool to reach out to the masses online.

Digitization has become an integral part of the political scene. The transitional government’s interest in social media illustrates this.<sup>187</sup> The former prime minister, Essam Sharaf, created a page on Facebook and an account on Twitter, and the SCAF communicated with Egyptian citizens through an official Facebook page, which was where all its official military communiqués were released and picked up by traditional media. Many politicians started using social media as part of their election campaigns, and many political movements continue to use social media to communicate their ideas, campaign for a particular cause, or mobilize for demonstrations.<sup>188</sup>

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185. Interviews with Ahmed El Sawy, journalist, *Al Shorouk* newspaper, Cairo, 23 October 2011, and Rania Al Malky, editor in chief, *Daily News Egypt*, Cairo, 22 October 2011.

186. Interview with Mr Sayed Mahmoud, journalist, *Al Abram Al Araby*, Cairo, 24 October 2011.

187. Interview with Ahmed El Sawy, journalist, *Al Shorouk* newspaper, Cairo, 23 October 2011.

188. Interview with Ahmed El Sawy, journalist, *Al Shorouk* newspaper, Cairo, 23 October 2011.

## 4.5 Assessments

Digitization has affected the work of journalists and the quality and accuracy of their reporting. While it has made the work of journalists a lot easier, with a multiplicity of sources and background information at their fingertips, it has also created a challenge to credibility and accuracy. The speed needed in reporting, producing, and disseminating news and the plethora of sources available online and easily acquired with no guarantee of verifying information pose a risk to journalistic integrity. While professional, well-trained reporters are able to utilize the advantages of having so many online sources, some journalists are struggling to catch up with the digital necessities of this new era. The challenge for journalists is to maintain the highest possible ethical standards in a competitive 24-hour news cycle that requires speed and accuracy at the same time. The principle of getting the news right before getting it first—and properly attributing sources—needs to be emphasized in Egyptian journalism.

Digitization has also affected the coverage of elections as videos depicting election fraud in 2005 and 2010 first appeared on social media, with a few being picked up by traditional media. The real impact of digitization has not yet been seen, as Egypt prepared for what many were calling the first genuine elections in its modern history after the 25 January revolution, in the sense that everyone did not know the outcome in advance. The presidential election race started online with a poll created by the ruling military council on the potential presidential candidates. Facebook pages have proliferated in support of candidates, who have their own official pages on Facebook and their accounts on Twitter.

Digitization has helped minorities find a voice online. Many minority groups have their own websites and social media accounts, through which they discuss their problems and bring their issues to the attention of the mainstream media.

# 5. Digital Media and Technology

## 5.1 Broadcasting Spectrum

### 5.1.1 Spectrum Allocation Policy

The ERTU charter stipulates that the ERTU is the sole entity with the right to terrestrial broadcasting in Egypt, and the sole entity responsible for broadcasting in general.<sup>189</sup> In the early 2000s, the government decided to approve a few satellite channels for favored businessmen. So that the government could allow for private broadcasting without violating the ERTU charter, a free zone was established in 6th of October City. Therefore, the task of granting a license for private satellite television broadcasters in Egypt falls to the General Authority for Investment (GAFI), an authority that handles free zones but in reality has nothing to do with broadcasting or media. According to Mohamed Hanafi, the head of Broadcasting Projects at ERTU's Sound Engineering Sector, if and when a license is granted, the appropriate broadcasting spectrum is then assigned by NileSat, in coordination with the Sound Engineering Department of ERTU and the National Telecommunications Regulation Authority (NTRA).<sup>190</sup>

“Not just anybody has access to start a terrestrial radio or television network in Egypt because the law stipulates that only ERTU can do that,” said Dr Hussein Amin of the American University in Cairo, who is also a former member of the ERTU board of trustees. He stated that those who want to start a satellite channel have to apply at GAFI, and arrange with NileSat and the NTRA to be assigned a broadcasting spectrum. Dr Amin admitted that having to go to GAFI for a permit has been “problematic, and has created a lot of problems.” He said that “GAFI is irrelevant to the process ... They don't have a body to look into content, examine or analyze that content, or monitor and apply penalties if a broadcaster goes against their own [license] application terms.” Dr Amin gave the example of some fundamentalist religious channels that applied for a “cultural” channel, were granted permission, then ended up providing religious content, which he said was against the law.<sup>191</sup>

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189. Initiating charter of the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU), at <http://bit.ly/rr2pVm> (accessed 27 December 2012).

190. Interview with Mohamed Hanafi, Head of Broadcasting Projects, Sound Engineering Sector, ERTU, Cairo, 4 October 2012.

191. Interview with Dr Hussein Amin, Professor of Journalism and Mass Communication at the American University in Cairo and former ERTU board member, Cairo, 20 April 2011.

Dr Amin said that before the 25 January revolution, there was a draft law for the initiation of a national broadcast regulatory authority, which was to include among its duties the granting of broadcasting licenses. The model called for the integration of the Ministry of Information and the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology. No discussions of this proposal have taken place in the post-Mubarak period.<sup>192</sup>

Generally, the spectrum allocation is done in a non-transparent manner, and usually entities do not apply for a broadcast license if they are not sure they will receive one. Therefore, in such a climate, it is difficult to judge who is being disadvantaged in the spectrum allocation process.

### 5.1.2 Transparency

Dr Amin<sup>193</sup> said there were no criteria for being granted a license other than the logistical rules specified on the GAFI website. “On paper, it was very easy, but the problem was politics. There was a security barrier enforced through the State Security Forces and the Egyptian Intelligence,” which is why the criteria are not clear.

Hassan Hamed said:<sup>194</sup> “The only reason GAFI is in charge of licensing is that the Media Production City<sup>195</sup> is geographically a free zone.”

GAFI, in reality, has nothing to do with broadcasting, so they basically consult with the Minister of Information ... In the end, it was a matter of getting a security clearance from national security entities, namely the State Security and the Egyptian Intelligence. It is a political matter at the end of the day, which is why no one managed to get a license for a news channel.

Mr Kassem<sup>196</sup> said that in the past there was no transparency whatsoever in the process of granting a broadcast license. “When it came to broadcast, you got your license practically from Mubarak. Forget all the paperwork; for broadcast, you needed Mubarak to say ‘OK, give it to them.’ And when anybody went out of line, they shut them down. They shut (down) the signal.”

For example, in an alarming post-revolution move, in September 2011, police forces raided the offices of Al Jazeera’s Mubasher Misr channel,<sup>197</sup> confiscated transmission equipment, and arrested a technician. The

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192. Interview with Dr Hussein Amin, Professor of Journalism and Mass Communication at the American University in Cairo and former ERTU board member, Cairo, 20 April 2011.

193. Interview with Dr Hussein Amin, Professor of Journalism and Mass Communication at the American University in Cairo and former ERTU board member, Cairo, 20 April 2011.

194. Interview with Hassan Hamed, former ERTU chairman of the board, Cairo, 17 July 2011.

195. The Media Production City is located on the outskirts of Cairo in the 6th of October Area. It was designated as a free zone in 2000 by a decree from the prime minister. See <http://www.empc.com.eg> (accessed 29 December 2012).

196. Interview with Hisham Kassem, chairman and CEO of Algomhouria Algadida, Cairo, 17 April 2011.

197. I. Black, “Egypt shuts down al-Jazeera operations,” *Guardian*, 30 January 2011, at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jan/30/egypt-shuts-down-al-jazeera-operations> (accessed 29 December 2012) (hereafter, Black, “Egypt shuts down al-Jazeera operations”).



channel's manager said it was accused of broadcasting without an official license. He added that one lawyer complained to the channel for "sowing dissent" and "calling for demonstrations." A similar raid on the offices of 25TV Channel was also reported.

Also in September 2011, the Egyptian cabinet ordered a freeze on new satellite television permits.<sup>198</sup> The Minister of Information was quoted saying that legal action would be taken against channels that "undermine stability and security in this period." The decision came out of a meeting to discuss "media unruliness and its effects on citizens."

Indeed, the Egyptian Telecommunication Regulation Law (10/2003)<sup>199</sup> stipulates that the NTRA board shall include a representative from the Ministry of Defense and four representatives of the "National Security Entities." The Frequency Regulation Committee of NTRA also includes representation from these same entities. Article 51 of the law specifies that "the license shall be issued within a period not exceeding 90 days from the date of submission of all necessary documents with due consideration to the requirements of the Armed Forces and National Security Entities."

While it is understandable for the NTRA to consult the armed forces and state security entities on some matters connected with frequency distribution, the problem under President Mubarak was apparently that these entities only granted licenses to those who were approved by the regime or known to be pro-Mubarak. Otherwise, there are no clear criteria within NileSat, the ERTU, or the NTRA for frequency allocation or for obtaining a license.<sup>200</sup>

Mr Kassem believes this has not changed after Mubarak, as the SCAF still seems to be operating in the same way in terms of media policies.<sup>201</sup> While 16 new channels started operating right after 25 January 2011, and the Ministry of Information was abolished, these actions were soon reversed. The ministry was reinstated in July 2011 and the licensing of new satellite stations completely ceased in September 2011. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) called it "a substantial setback for media freedom in Egypt."<sup>202</sup>

Emad Mubarak said a broadcasting license should be granted just upon notification and providing the necessary paperwork and fees.<sup>203</sup> He added that the license should be based on appropriate professional standards, not security clearances and political considerations.

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198. S. El Deeb, "Egypt freezes new satellite TV station licenses," at <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2011/sep/8/egypt-freezes-new-satellite-tv-station-licenses> (accessed 29 December 2012) (hereafter, El Deeb, "Egypt freezes new satellite TV station licenses").

199. Egyptian Telecommunication Regulation Law (Law 10/2003), at [http://www.tra.gov.eg/uploads/law/law\\_en.pdf](http://www.tra.gov.eg/uploads/law/law_en.pdf) (accessed 29 December 2012).

200. The author of this report tried repeatedly to interview an NTRA representative with no success. Relevant questions were emailed to several officials, and despite promises of answers, none came. The only official who agreed to speak ended a two-hour interview by forbidding any use to be made of his comments, because "it was not an official NTRA statement." He promised to forward the questions to the appropriate "official" entities at NTRA, but no answers were received despite frequent follow-ups by phone and email.

201. Interview with Hisham Kassem, chairman and CEO of Algomhouria Algadida, Cairo, 17 April 2011.

202. Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), "Egypt's reinstatement of Information Ministry is a setback," 12 July 2011, at <http://cpj.org/2011/07/egypts-reinstatement-of-information-ministry-is-ma.php> (accessed 29 December 2012).

203. Interview with Emad Mubarak, executive director of the Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression, Cairo, 19 July 2011.

### 5.1.3 Competition for Spectrum

No information is available on the competitiveness of the spectrum award, but, generally speaking, the ERTU is the sole broadcaster in Egypt, and as discussed above, for a would-be private broadcaster, getting a license is a difficult process.

## 5.2 Digital Gatekeeping

### 5.2.1 Technical Standards

There is no discussion of the adoption of technical standards for platforms that carry news in Egypt. Very little, if anything, appears to have been done in preparation for the migration to digital platforms. The actual process of adopting technical standards for digital broadcasting has not been a topic of discussion.

### 5.2.2 Gatekeepers

As the process of switch-over to digital television has not started yet, there is no discussion about gatekeepers in the digital chain in Egypt.

### 5.2.3 Transmission Networks

The only arbitrator in terms of access to transmission has been the government, and the process has been haphazard and rather unclear. In October 2010, shortly before scheduled parliamentary elections, the government temporarily shut down 12 satellite channels and warned 20 others for “reasons ranging from insulting religion to broadcasting pornography.”<sup>204</sup> The exact citations were that the channels’ programming encouraged “incitement to religious hatred, unlicensed medical advice and obscenity.”<sup>205</sup> Although these channels were not news providers or politically inclined, some believed the move was timed to deliver a message to the politically active that they too could be shut down.<sup>206</sup>

Indeed, Egypt was downgraded from “Partly Free” to “Not Free” on the Freedom House 2011 Press Freedom Index, which covers the calendar year of 2010.<sup>207</sup> Among the reasons the report gave were: “The pre-election period saw satellite television outlets and text-message based news services banned; both are key outlets for disseminating independent views.” The report said: “Also in October, the National Telecommunication Regulatory Authority imposed several new rules aimed at restricting live coverage of election news, including rules effectively preventing live broadcasts by private production companies, which provide coverage to a range of international and domestic broadcasters.”

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204. “Egypt stops TV channels, Islamic trend seen a target,” Reuters, 20 October 2010, at <http://blogs.reuters.com/faithworld/2010/10/20/egypt-stops-tv-channels-islamic-trend-seen-a-target> (accessed 29 December 2012).

205. M. Bradley, “Egypt suspends licences for 12 satellite TV channels,” 21 October 2010, at <http://www.thenational.ae/news/worldwide/middle-east/egypt-suspends-licences-for-12-satellite-tv-channels> (accessed 29 December 2012) (hereafter, Bradley, “Egypt suspends licences”).

206. Bradley, “Egypt suspends licences.”

207. Freedom House, “Freedom of the Press: Egypt,” 2011, at <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2011/egypt> (accessed 29 December 2012).

The government struck again during the 18 days when President Mubarak was overthrown, including a total shutdown of Al Jazeera offices. According to an article in the *Guardian*, “The state-run Mena news agency reported that the information ministry had ordered ‘suspension of operations of Al-Jazeera, cancelling of its licenses and withdrawing accreditation to all its staff as of 30 January [2011].’”<sup>208</sup>

In September 2011, the government extended the emergency laws against entities accused of “spreading rumors.” A few days later, the authorities raided the offices of Al Jazeera Mubasher Mizr, which had started live broadcasts from Egypt after Mubarak’s fall. The channel was barred from broadcasting, ostensibly due to a missing permit. It was also announced in September 2011 that the SCAF and the cabinet had decided to suspend granting new permits to satellite channels, and to “prosecute satellite channels deemed threatening to the stability of the country.” The privately owned newspaper *Al Masry Al Youm* reported that Egyptian human rights organizations “condemned the decision, saying it is a regression to the oppressive policies of Mubarak’s regime.”<sup>209</sup>

Nevertheless, the 2012 Freedom House report (assessing events in 2011) returned Egypt to the “Partly Free” category, citing “the flourishing of new, independent media outlets, less self-censorship, and some loosening of centralized editorial control over state media after President Hosni Mubarak stepped down in February 2011 after nearly 30 years in power. However, by year’s end there were worrying indications that these gains were being reversed.”<sup>210</sup>

## 5.3 Telecommunications

### 5.3.1 Telecoms and News

Egypt’s telecoms market is vibrant, with penetration rates of 115 percent as of June 2013.<sup>211</sup> Text message-based news services have emerged over the past few years, enabling people to get headlines on their mobile phones via SMS.

On 11 October 2010, prior to the scheduled parliamentary elections, the NTRA imposed new regulations requiring news companies to obtain permits from the Ministry of Information and the Supreme Council of the Press before sending mass text messages. Freedom House said the license for these SMS aggregators could cost up to US\$ 88,000, and “restricts the ability of the public to obtain up-to-the-minute information.”<sup>212</sup> These regulations were considered an attempt to restrict information before the November 2011 parliamentary

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208. Black, “Egypt shuts down al-Jazeera operations.”

209. “Egyptian Authorities Crack Down on Satellite Channels,” *Al Masry Al Youm*, 11 September 2011, at <http://almasryalyoum.com/en/node/494616> (accessed 29 December 2012) (hereafter, “Egyptian Authorities Crack Down on Satellite Channels”).

210. Freedom House, “Freedom of the Press: Egypt,” 2012, at <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2012/egypt> (accessed 29 March 2013).

211. MCIT, “ICT Indicators,” at <http://www.egyptictindicators.gov.eg> (accessed 1 August 2013).

212. “Map of Press Freedom,” Freedom House, 2011, at <http://freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=251&year=2011> (accessed 29 December 2012) (hereafter, Freedom House, “Map of Press Freedom”).

elections, and were seen by many as a considerable obstacle to disseminating information and organizing via text messages. The ruling National Democratic Party was quickly granted a permit and other parties were told to apply. Only registered political parties had the right to apply to use mass text messages in the elections, which meant that organized groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood or the National Coalition for Change were not qualified.

### 5.3.2 Pressure of Telecoms on News Providers

The government is the organ that exerts pressure on both the telecoms operators and the news providers. Another extreme demonstration of government power was cutting off all access to mobile telephony and text messages on 28 January 2011, the day known as the Friday of Anger (as well as cutting access to the internet for five days from that day). Cutting telecoms cost the country US\$18 million a day, but also may have cost many lives, as protesters shot or critically injured were unable to reach medical help.

## 5.4 Assessments

The spectrum allocation process in Egypt is extremely politicized. There is no transparency whatsoever with regard to the process of granting a license to broadcast or to granting a specific frequency. The Frequency Regulation Committee of NTRA depends mainly on reports from the Ministry of Defense and other “National Security Entities.”<sup>213</sup> Otherwise, there are no clear criteria for frequency allocation or for obtaining a license from NileSat, the ERTU, or the NTRA.

Licenses for new satellite stations were completely stopped in September 2011<sup>214</sup> upon directives from the regime at the time. Media experts argue that these conditions should all be abolished, and that obtaining a license should be automatic upon informing authorities of the intent to broadcast and having fulfilled the necessary criteria, or at least should be regulated by an independent body. Frequency distribution should be guided by the actual needs of the society.

Since there is a lack of transparency regarding the policies of frequency assignment, there is unfortunately no information available on this. The author of this report tried to direct this question to the NTRA, but no one from the authority agreed to be interviewed on record.

Public interest seems to play a very minimal, if any, role in these policies, as illustrated by the fact that all such policies seem to be confidential, or at the very least not discussed in public. It is not clear what will happen to the digital dividend resulting from the process of digitization, although Mr Hanafi speculated that the main beneficiary will be the telecoms operators and mobile telephony companies, whose products are becoming increasingly popular, as indicated by a penetration rate of 111 percent in June 2012.<sup>215</sup>

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213. See <http://www.ntra.gov.eg> (accessed 29 December 2012).

214. El Deeb, “Egypt freezes new satellite TV station licenses.”

215. Interview with Mohamed Hanafi, head of Broadcasting Projects, Sound Engineering Sector, ERTU, Cairo, 4 October 2012.

## 6. Digital Business

### 6.1 Ownership

#### 6.1.1 Legal Developments in Media Ownership

There have not been any legal developments on news media ownership in Egypt over the past five years, although in September 2011 licenses for new satellite stations were completely stopped upon directives from the ruling regime at the time (the SCAF).<sup>216</sup>

According to the ERTU's initiating charter,<sup>217</sup> the ERTU is the sole entity that has the right to broadcast. Private television stations are only allowed on satellite, and have to be located in the free zone of the Media Production City.

As for radio, Rasha Allam, Adjunct Professor of Journalism and Mass Communication at the American University in Cairo, said that two private stations had been established in 2003, but it was not clear what the criteria were for issuing their licenses.<sup>218</sup>

Speaking about the private media, Mr Kassem said:<sup>219</sup> "What you have basically are media companies that are owned by individuals with editors who are willing to toe the line and do whatever the owners want."

Ibrahim Eissa told OnTV's "*Mal Masr*" (Egypt's Money) program on 20 August 2011 that private media ownership is managed mainly by businessmen who were favored by the Mubarak regime,<sup>220</sup> and that most privately owned television channels lack a board of directors. "It is more like a workshop run by one man," said Mr Eissa, adding that the key to media success is maintaining editorial independence from ownership. He asserted that "this is not the case with the Egyptian media."

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216. El Deeb, "Egypt freezes new satellite TV station licenses."

217. Initiating charter of the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU), at <http://bit.ly/rr2pVm> (accessed 27 December 2012).

218. Interview with Dr Rasha Allam, Adjunct Professor of Journalism and Mass Communication at the American University in Cairo, Cairo, 21 October 2011.

219. Interview with Hisham Kassem, chairman and CEO of Algomhouria Algadida, Cairo, 20 October 2011.

220. Interview with Ibrahim Eissa, editor in chief, *El Tabrir* newspaper, on "*Mal Masr*" (Egypt's Money) program, aired on OnTV channel, 20 August 2011.

## 6.1.2 New Entrants in the News Market

Before the 25 January revolution, entering the market for a private satellite channel was extremely difficult, and informally contingent upon state security approval. Only a few such channels managed to penetrate the market, all owned by major Egyptian businessmen, most of whom were closely tied to the old regime.

In 2008, Al Hayat channels joined these lucky few, and started airing a variety of news talk shows and entertainment programs. Al Hayat is owned by Al Sayed Al Badawi, a businessman who later became the chairman of the Al Wafd political party. Many accuse him of softening the influence of the party, which has been performing poorly in the political arena in recent years.

Also before the 25 January revolution, the advertising tycoon Tarek Nour launched *Al Kabera Wal Nas*, a purely entertainment-oriented channel that first operated (and sold advertisements) only during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, a time when television enjoys a very high viewership rate. The channel now operates all year round. Meanwhile, the businessman Naguib Sawiris launched OnTV, which has gained popularity during and since the revolution.<sup>221</sup>

After the 25 January revolution, the media market experienced a boom as many new channels hit the airwaves in anticipation of a new era of freedom of expression and access to information. From January to September 2011, 16 new satellite channels entered the broadcasting market. In September 2011, however, the Egyptian regime stopped issuing licenses to new channels.<sup>222</sup>

There is no transparency when it comes to information about ownership and the funding of private (or public) television. The information is not publicly available and is considered confidential in many cases.

Among the channels launched after 25 January 2011 was Tahrir Channel, which was launched during the 18 days of the first wave of the revolution and was considered by many to be the voice of the revolution. Tahrir's original owners included celebrity media figures such as Ibrahim Eissa and Mahmoud Saad. However, the ownership of the channel changed when it was acquired by the business tycoon Soliman Amer, who had major business ties to the old regime. Since then, pro-revolution media figures Ibrahim Eissa, Mahmoud Saad, Belal Fadl, and Hamdi Kandeel have all left the channel, and the talk show host Dina Abdel Rahman was prevented from airing her popular daily program.<sup>223</sup>

Another name that created controversy when it was launched after the fall of President Mubarak was the Capital Broadcasting Center (CBC) channel, owned by Mohammed Al-Amin, a businessman who had lived abroad for 30 years and is a business partner of Mansour Amer, a real-estate tycoon and chairman and

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221. Abdulla, "Media Diversity During Egypt's Parliamentary Elections (November–December 2011);" Abdulla, "Media Diversity During Egypt's Presidential Elections (May–June 2012)."

222. El Deeb, "Egypt freezes new satellite TV station licenses."

223. S. Abdel Rady, "Dina Abdel Rahman: They Prevented my Appearance on TV; Programming Manager: The Host is a Trouble Maker," 12 February 2012, at <http://www.almasyalyoum.com/node/651851> (accessed 29 December 2012).

CEO of the tourism giant Amer Group, who reputedly benefitted from close ties to President Mubarak. Mr Al-Amin first hired several anchors known to be supporters of the old regime to present CBC's primetime programs. According to the *New York Times*, the press conference to launch the channels by Mr Al-Amin and some of his talk show hosts was mostly spent defending their ties to the old regime.<sup>224</sup> CBC was shortly followed by CBC 2 and CBC Drama. More recently, the channel tried to shift more towards some pro-revolution figures, and hired talk show presenter Dina Abdel Rahman, as well as the now infamous satirist Bassem Youssef, known as Egypt's Jon Stewart (of "*The Daily Show*" fame).

Al Nahar satellite television channels were also set up after the revolution by the businessmen Alaa El-Kahky and Walid Mostafa. In September 2011, 85 percent of Al Nahar and Al Nahar Drama's shares were acquired by Mr Al-Amin; he seemed to be on a roll to acquire satellite stations, as he also bought 85 percent of the shares in the Modern channels, including Modern Sports, Modern Football (*Kora*), and Modern Freedom (*Horreya*). He was also reported to be in serious negotiations to acquire the four Panorama entertainment channels, which would mean that overall, in September Mr Al-Amin became the owner of more than 14 satellite channels.<sup>225</sup> Shortly after, the Egyptian regime stopped issuing licenses to any other new channels.<sup>226</sup>

Among the new channels following the 25 January revolution were 25TV, launched by Video Cairo Sat's chairman Mohamed Gohar, and Egypt 25, launched by the Muslim Brotherhood. The businessman Naguib Sawiris also launched OnTV Live.

### 6.1.3 Ownership Consolidation

So far, Mr Al-Amin provides the most striking case of media consolidation in Egypt. The operation is too young to determine its effects, but some fear that the channels may carry an anti-revolution message. During the February 2012 Ahli-Masri football match disaster in Port Said, for example, when 74 young fans were killed, most commentators blamed poor security for allowing crowds to enter the stadium with white weapons (non-firearms such as knives, blades, etc.), and police errors for misusing the gates. While revolutionary voices accused the regime of plotting to punish the ultras group of Ahli football fans for their revolutionary activism, voices on the Modern channels blamed the people of Port Said for "killing" Ahli fans.

Dr Allam said that the Egyptian market is exercising vertical integration in the broadcast sector to control program production and distribution. Given that terrestrial television is monopolized by the state, the few voices that are allowed to own satellite media channels provide little room for competition in the media market, leading to less pluralism. Dr Allam reminds us that "there are no ownership rules that regulate the level of concentration in the private market."<sup>227</sup>

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224. E. Mekay, "TV Stations Multiply as Egyptian Censorship Falls." *New York Times*, 13 July 2011, at [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/14/world/middleeast/14iht-M14B-EGYPT-MEDIA.html?\\_r=1&pagewanted=all](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/14/world/middleeast/14iht-M14B-EGYPT-MEDIA.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all) (accessed 29 December 2012).

225. "Mohamed Al Amin Acquires Al Nahar," 9 September 2011, at <http://www.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=489101> (accessed 29 December 2012).

226. El Deeb, "Egypt freezes new satellite TV station licenses."

227. Interview with Dr Rasha Allam, Adjunct Professor of Journalism and Mass Communication at the American University in Cairo, Cairo, 21 October 2011.

Although the introduction of private broadcasters allows greater freedom of expression, diversity of content has not met expectations. Dr Allam said that broadcasters replicate popular programs to attract viewers, thus reducing “product differentiation.”<sup>228</sup>

Ms Al Malky noted that there has been some cooperation between different media outlets over the past few years.<sup>229</sup> For example, reporters from some Arabic-language daily newspapers work with television networks on producing their talk shows or news magazines. Some also act as regular phone correspondents. This form of cooperation is said to be common when media entities undergo a merger, but it is usually not clear what the actual financial agreements are.<sup>230</sup> The problem is, again, that this also leads to the same content being broadcast on talk shows as is reported in newspapers. Indeed, the reports by the Media Diversity Institute indicate alarmingly low levels of diversity in media coverage of elections.<sup>231</sup>

There is no question that the concentration of ownership in the hands of one or a few major shareholders is a threat to editorial independence. The case of the independent daily *Al Dostour* is a clear illustration of how far owners can interfere in editorial policies. In October 2010, shortly after the newspaper was acquired by Al Sayed Al Badawi (the owner of Al Hayat television stations and chairman of the Al Wafd party), the editor in chief, Mr Eissa, was sacked for publishing an article written by Mohamed El-Baradei.<sup>232</sup> Mr Eissa was also asked to quit hosting his nightly television talk show on the privately owned satellite channel OnTV. The period before the 2010 parliamentary elections witnessed severe restrictions and a clear crackdown on independent media, which started with firing Mr Eissa and led many people to exercise self-censorship for fear of meeting the same fate.

During that time, a specialized monitoring committee was appointed by the ex-minister of information ahead of the elections. The committee was assigned to monitor media performance during the elections to make sure they adhered to the (unclear) guidelines set by the government. One popular talk show host, Mona El Shazly, was almost fired from her job at Dream Television after members of the National Democratic Party filed a complaint against her to the committee for having two journalists appear on her show (mildly) criticizing the former ruling party.<sup>233</sup>

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228. Interview with Dr Rasha Allam, Adjunct Professor of Journalism and Mass Communication at the American University in Cairo, Cairo, 21 October 2011.

229. Interview with Rania Al Malky, editor in chief, *Daily News Egypt*, Cairo, 22 October 2011.

230. *Al Masry Al Youm's* editor in chief, Magdy El Gallad, explained on Dream TV in August 2011 that this form of agreement was initiated to help journalists raise their incomes. Mr El Gallad said that journalists used to write for several newspapers under different names to improve their incomes, thus posing a clear conflict of interest. This agreement between a newspaper and a television talk show resolved this problem and provided journalists with an extra financial resource.

231. Abdulla, “Media Diversity During Egypt’s Parliamentary Elections (November–December 2011);” Abdulla, “Media Diversity During Egypt’s Presidential Elections (May–June 2012).”

232. “Ibrahim Eissa Fired from *Al Dostour* Editorship,” BBC News, 5 October 2010, at [http://www.bbc.co.uk/arabic/middleeast/2010/10/101004\\_egypt\\_aldistour.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/arabic/middleeast/2010/10/101004_egypt_aldistour.shtml) (accessed 29 December 2012).

233. “National Democratic Party Files Complaint Against Mona El Shazly,” *Masrawy*, 11 November 2010, at [http://www.alwatan.com.sa/Nation/News\\_Detail.aspx?ArticleID=28809](http://www.alwatan.com.sa/Nation/News_Detail.aspx?ArticleID=28809) (accessed 29 December 2012); “National Democratic Party Complaint Blows Away Mona El Shazly and Stops Talk Show,” *Al Arabiya*, 15 November 2010, at <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2010/11/15/126217.html> (accessed 29 December 2012).



Although the Egyptian media seemed to enjoy more freedom right after President Mubarak's fall, that rosy picture did not last for long. The television talk show host Dina Abdel Rahman was fired in July 2011 by Dream TV's owner, the businessman Ahmed Bahgat, after a live phone interview with a high-ranking army officer. A major general called the show in objection to an anti-SCAF opinion piece written by journalist Naglaa Bedeir, which Ms Abdel Rahman had reported on in her program.<sup>234</sup> The same Ms Abdel Rahman was prevented from doing her evening talk show on Tahrir television in February 2012 after the channel was acquired by the businessman Soliman Amer.<sup>235</sup>

Ms Al Malky said that although the owners of the *Daily News Egypt* do not directly interfere in content and the newspaper enjoys some editorial independence, there were "a few disagreements over content" during her term as editor.<sup>236</sup> She said most disagreements were about political views expressed in her editorial; the owners would argue it represents the newspaper's view, but Ms Al Malky argues that it is also her opinion. Their concern is justifiable "because the investors are businessmen whose businesses can clearly be affected." She said that when she gets a call from the owners, she usually gets a call from the censors as well. "They know where we cannot push too hard."

#### 6.1.4 Telecoms Business and the Media

No mergers or acquisitions have taken place between the media and telecoms sectors, although, for example, the business tycoon Naguib Sawiris owned MobiNil, the country's first mobile telephony company, until February 2012, when he sold a majority stake to France Telecom.<sup>237</sup> Mr Sawiris also owns OnTV and OnTV Live satellite television channels and is a major shareholder in *Al Masry Al Youm* newspaper. However, a merger between these entities has not happened.

#### 6.1.5 Transparency of Media Ownership

The absence of a Freedom of Information Act makes it very difficult to find out who owns what in the media. There are no legal or otherwise binding requirements on media organizations to disclose or report ownership information to any public entity or independent authority. The only way for the public to find out such information is when it is reported in the media or otherwise through word of mouth.

Media ownership in Egypt is certainly not transparent, said Mr Kassem.<sup>238</sup> "In print journalism, by law you are not allowed to own more than 10 percent. But every joint-stock company is owned by somebody with at least a controlling share but with shares registered under different names."

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234. S. Nour Eldin, "Dream Fires Dina Abdel Rahman after Reviewing an Article Criticizing Roweiny," *Al Masry Al Youm*, 24 July 2011, at <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/node/480069> (accessed 29 December 2012).

235. S. Abdel Rady, "Dina Abdel Rahman: They Prevented my Appearance on TV; Programming Manager: The Host is a Trouble Maker," 12 February 2012, at <http://www.almasryalyoum.com/node/651851> (accessed 29 December 2012).

236. Interview with Rania Al Malky, editor in chief, *Daily News Egypt*, Cairo, 22 October 2011.

237. M. Mawad and M. Campbell, "France Telecom Agrees to Buy Most of Sawiris's Mobinil Shares," Bloomberg News, 13 February 2012, at <http://www.businessweek.com/news/2012-02-13/france-telecom-agrees-to-buy-most-of-sawiris-s-mobinil-shares.html> (accessed 29 December 2012).

238. Interview with Hisham Kassem, chairman and CEO of Algomhouria Algadida, Cairo, 20 October 2011.

Ms Al Malky agreed: “People know by word of mouth where the funding of specific media outlets is coming from.” She said that people have the right to know who owns what for the sake of transparency, especially when “business and politics and media ... come in one place.”<sup>239</sup>

In an interview with *Al Abram* newspaper published on 20 August 2011, Tarek Nour, the advertising tycoon and owner of the satellite television channel *Al Kabera Wal Nas*, said that Egyptian businessmen seek private media ownership to protect themselves against attacks from other outlets,<sup>240</sup> and that new television channels were not established to seek profit. Mr Nour’s channel at first only aired during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, when viewership is at its peak. The channel now airs year-round, featuring drama, entertainment programs, a lot of advertising, and one of Egypt’s hottest political talk shows, hosted by Ibrahim Eissa. Mr Nour explained that most private satellite channels do not have a profit-seeking agenda. For the owners of these channels, their political agendas come first, and profit may come second or third.<sup>241</sup>

When newspapers launch campaigns for or against someone, people need to know who is behind this, Ms Al Malky said.<sup>242</sup> “Businessmen are now using the media as a tool for their own interests. Others use it to further their own ideas.” She added that under her editorship, when the *Daily News Egypt* ran a story on one of its investors, a disclaimer was published with the story.

## 6.2 Media Funding

### 6.2.1 Public and Private Funding

The state-owned media are funded through government subsidies and advertising, although exact figures and budgets remain confidential. There are no publicly available data on government spending on the media sector, nor on private spending and channel acquisition deals.

Dr Allam pointed out that “a government subsidy is considered a threat to editorial independence,” since the government then interferes in program content by imposing certain political opinions on the media it directly funds.<sup>243</sup> Indeed, the ERTU charter includes an article stipulating that the ERTU is obliged to broadcast any news provided by the government.<sup>244</sup>

Mr Kassem believes that the media in Egypt should be financed through joint-stock companies so as to overcome political and business influence. Mr Kassem is optimistic about the future of the media in Egypt

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239. Interview with Rania Al Malky, editor in chief, *Daily News Egypt*, Cairo, 22 October 2011.

240. “Tarek Nour: The New Channels are a Defense Weapon for Their Owners” (Al Qanawat Al Jadeeda Selah Defaa Le’as’habeha), *Al Abram*, 20 August 2011 (hereafter, “Tarek Nour: The New Channels”).

241. “Tarek Nour: The New Channels.”

242. Interview with Rania Al Malky, editor in chief, *Daily News Egypt*, Cairo, 22 October 2011.

243. Interview with Dr Rasha Allam, Adjunct Professor of Journalism and Mass Communication at the American University in Cairo, Cairo, 21 October 2011.

244. R. Abdulla, *Egypt Country Report*.

and believes there will be a lot of competition in the media market in the coming years. He added that there will be “more real joint-stock companies and fewer oligarchical companies.”<sup>245</sup>

Ms Al Malky agrees that the best form of media ownership is the joint-stock corporation, with the entity’s reporters and personnel owning shares, and with a ceiling of 10 percent on individual investments. “People need to start thinking about new models that guarantee independence from big money and government,” Ms Al Malky said.<sup>246</sup>

### 6.2.2 Other Sources of Funding

The only example of hybrid public-private funding in Egypt is found in the radio sector. While Nile FM and Nogoum FM are privately owned, they have an agreement with the government to pay a percentage of the profits to the ERTU in addition to their license fees. The stations are still not allowed to offer any news content. The licenses for both stations expired in April 2012, and heated negotiations continued for a while before the licenses were renewed.<sup>247</sup> Rumor had it that the ERTU refused to renew the licenses before the stations increased the ERTU’s share of the profits. A deal was finally reached, and the licenses were renewed in return for an undisclosed percentage of the profits going to the ERTU.

In 2009, the government launched a more viable hybrid ownership model, Radio Masr, which has proved to be fairly popular. Because the government has a majority ownership of the station, it is allowed to offer a good dose of news and political talk shows. However, editorial independence remains a major problem.

## 6.3 Media Business Models

Digitization and the economic crisis have not seemed to prompt any changes to existing media business models. Specific information on budgets and cost expenditure is treated as highly confidential. Such information therefore is not available.

## 6.4 Assessments

Television digitization is still an afterthought. The government does not seem to have taken any serious steps in preparation for the process. As such, digitization has not directly affected existing media monopolies, although online digital media helped political movements to influence the agenda of the mainstream media by sometimes acting as sources and sometimes as alternatives. Since the 25 January revolution, the media market has begun to change dramatically, as more individuals are investing in satellite channels to compete

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245. Interview with Hisham Kassem, chairman and CEO of Algomhouria Algadida, Cairo, 20 October 2011.

246. Interview with Rania Al Malky, editor in chief, *Daily News Egypt*, Cairo, 22 October 2011.

247. “Nogoum FM Faces Closure over Maspriro’s Conditions. Save Nogoum FM,” at <http://bit.ly/Wykewh> (accessed 29 December 2012).

with the existing media giants. The main problem facing the media in the midst of all this political change is editorial independence. Most channels are still owned either by the state or by individual businessmen and politicians who promote certain ideologies. Transparency of ownership is minimal. There are many free-to-air channels with religious or political content whose owners are not known to the public.

Digitization (in terms of online media) has not changed the impact of ownership on the performance and independence of the media. The media may have opened up because of digitization but ownership patterns have not changed. The influence of the government or of individuals over content remains immense.

# 7. Policies, Laws, and Regulators

## 7.1 Policies and Laws

### 7.1.1 Digital Switch-over of Terrestrial Transmission

#### 7.1.1.1 Access and Affordability

No clear plans for the digital switch-over of terrestrial transmission are in place, and therefore no provisions have been established to govern or guarantee access by citizens in an affordable manner. This was precisely the problem emphasized by Mr Hanafi (see above), who believes that the ERTU will be technically ready for digital switch-over by the ITU's deadline of 2015, but that no one knows how the end user will have access to the signal.<sup>248</sup>

#### 7.1.1.2 Subsidies for Equipment

There is currently no scheme that provides for the payment of subsidies to those who cannot afford STBs or digital television sets. Interviews with ERTU board members indicated that there is no plan to deal with that process and discussions have not started on the whole issue of digitization.<sup>249</sup>

#### 7.1.1.3 Legal Provisions on Public Interest

There is no legal framework that takes into consideration the digital switch-over in any way. The existing legal frameworks do not include any definitions of public interest or any guarantees that the public interest is served.

#### 7.1.1.4 Public Consultation

There have not been any public discussions or consultations regarding the transition to digital terrestrial broadcasting. Citizens and civil society groups have not been consulted or involved in decision-making with respect to any policies or provisions that have to do with this process.

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248. Interview with Mohamed Hanafi, head of Broadcasting Projects, Sound Engineering Sector, Egyptian Radio and Television Union, Cairo, 4 October 2012.

249. Interview with Mohamed Hanafi, head of Broadcasting Projects, Sound Engineering Sector, Egyptian Radio and Television Union, Cairo, 4 October 2012.

## 7.1.2 The Internet

### 7.1.2.1 Regulation of News on the Internet

There is no regulation of internet content in Egypt. There was one attempt to control news dissemination through SMS mobile phone messages in October 2010, when the NTRA required news companies to obtain permits from the Ministry of Information and the Supreme Council of the Press for sending mass text messages. However, there is no evidence that this provision was ever implemented for news services.

Ms Al Malky said that although *Daily News Egypt's* website is not regulated, there is always some sort of self-regulation exercised by the newspaper.<sup>250</sup> She said that even when the paper sometimes “received remarks” from one entity or another, it was always regarding the print issue, not the online one. She added that stories that they received remarks about in the print issues were still posted online.

Mr Zelaky confirmed that no regulation is exercised on the portal of *Al Masry Al Youm* newspaper.<sup>251</sup> He said that the provision to require permission for sending news via SMS never applied to *Al Masry Al Youm* because the newspaper was already providing this service, and the understanding was that it would only apply to new service providers. However, he did not believe the provision ever went into effect. “It was more of a ministerial decision than anything else, and it died with Mubarak’s fall and the change of government,” Mr Zelaky said.

### 7.1.2.2 Legal Liability for Internet Content

Since there are no laws regulating the internet in Egypt, there are no clear guidelines on who bears liability for content published on the internet. However, articles of the Emergency Law, which was in effect from 1981 until the end of May 2012, and of the Penal Code give authorities broad powers to monitor communications and detain individuals. Courts have ruled in certain cases that such provisions apply to online content. So far, most cases have assigned responsibility to the author/poster of the content, and almost all cases involved political anti-Mubarak or anti-regime content. The first was in February 2007, when Abd al-Karim Nabil Suleiman, who was known by his blogging name Karim Amer, was given a four-year prison sentence for a blog post he wrote, which the court found to be “inciting hatred of Islam” and “insulting the president.”<sup>252</sup>

Other political activists who suffered the wrath of the regime as a result of their online writings included Esraa Abdel Fattah, for creating a Facebook group calling upon people to strike on 6 April 6 2008 in solidarity with the workers of Al Mahalla Al Kubra. She was accused of “inciting unrest,” and detained for two weeks before the charges were dropped.<sup>253</sup>

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250. Interview with Rania Al Malky, editor in chief, *Daily News Egypt*, Cairo, 22 October 2011.

251. Interview with Ehab Zelaky, managing editor, *Al Masry Al Youm*, Cairo, 5 November 2011.

252. Abdulla, “Policing the Internet in the Arab World.”

253. Abdulla, “Policing the Internet in the Arab World.”

Such provisions remained in effect after the 25 January revolution, and were aggravated when the military started prosecuting Egyptian civilians in military courts. Perhaps the most highlighted case was that of Maikel Nabil Sanad, who wrote a blog titled “The military and the people were never one hand,” and as a result was prosecuted by the military in March 2011 and given a three-year sentence. He was later released in January 2012 after a long struggle on his behalf by civic society and human rights groups, including the “No to Military Trials for Civilians” group.<sup>254</sup>

In August 2011, online activist Asmaa Mahfouz also faced a military trial for a tweet she wrote, which the military deemed offensive and inciting to violence. She was accused of “insulting military rulers and calling for armed action.” She was released on an EGP 20,000 (US\$ 3,350) bail; the charges were later dropped.

Such incidents do affect the performance of the traditional media. They provide a rationale for statements such as Ms Al Malky’s, who said that although her newspaper’s website was not subjected to direct censorship practices, the newspaper practiced self-censorship. The regime has always made it a point to intimidate and make examples of journalists and bloggers on traditional and digital media, so that others think twice before reporting or posting content that may be deemed offensive to those in power or against the policies of the regime.<sup>255</sup>

## 7.2 Regulators

### 7.2.1 Changes in Content Regulation

No changes have occurred in the structure of media content regulators in Egypt over the past five years. Since plans for digitization are basically non-existent, there are no planned changes to the regulatory framework as a result of digitization at this point.

As for the existing regulatory structure, as already discussed, the ERTU is the sole entity that has the right to terrestrial broadcasting in Egypt, and the sole entity responsible for broadcasting in general. The ERTU charter gives it massive rights without establishing any responsibilities or criteria for assessment or accountability to the public.<sup>256</sup> In recent years, and to circumvent the ERTU charter and allow for private satellite broadcasting, a free zone was established to allow broadcasters to operate from a “geographically independent” area that would not fall under the jurisdiction of the ERTU charter. Granting licenses for television broadcasters in Egypt therefore is the responsibility of the GAFI, an authority that handles free zones but has nothing to do with broadcasting.

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254. R. Abdulla, “Egypt: On Maikel Nabil, first blogger to be jailed since January 25,” *Global Voices Advocacy*, 7 September 2011, at <http://advocacy.globalvoicesonline.org/2011/09/07/egypt-on-maikel-nabil-first-blogger-to-be-jailed-since-january-25> (accessed 29 December 2012); “Jailed Egyptian blogger on hunger strike,” Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), New York, 31 August 2011, at <http://cpj.org/2011/08/jailed-egyptian-blogger-on-hunger-strike.php> (accessed 29 December 2012).

255. R. Abdulla, “Policing the Internet in the Arab World.”

256. R. Abdulla, *Egypt Country Report*.

As established through expert opinions in section 5 of this report, the process of obtaining a satellite broadcasting license under Mubarak depended merely on passing state security checks, and showing enough good faith for the regime to trust the channel would be owned by loyal allies. If approved, a frequency would then be assigned, another process with no clear criteria. So far, no changes have occurred in this system, although voices in civil society have started to ask for an independent regulatory body to handle licensing and content regulation.

### **7.2.2 Regulatory Independence**

There are no independent regulatory bodies for the media. The whole structure of media regulation falls back on the Ministry of Information and the MCIT. The NTRA is chaired by the Minister of Communications and Information Technology.

The problem of such a lack of independence came to the forefront during the initial days of the 25 January revolution, when the government cut mobile phone communications for a day, and shut off all internet communication and SMS mobile text services for five days. While the problem was so rampant, no clear entity was held accountable, and no provisions were put in place to guarantee it would not happen again.

### **7.2.3 Digital Licensing**

There are no mechanisms in place to ensure that a license application will be considered according to any objective criteria. As mentioned above and as documented by several interviews in this report, during Mubarak's presidency an applicant was usually a business personality with close ties to the regime and trusted by those in power. If the applicant passed all state security checks, a license was granted. So far, no new provisions have been established to replace this system.

### **7.2.4 Role of Self-regulatory Mechanisms**

There are no independent self-regulatory bodies. The Higher Press Council, which only handles print newspapers, is headed by the speaker of the Shura Council (lower house of Parliament), who has traditionally been a member of the ruling National Democratic Party. Although independent on paper, the body has always been loyal to the government. The Journalists Association has tried over the years to play an active role, but that remained largely dependent on the political affiliations of its board and the chair of the board, who usually were members of the ruling party. In essence, the Association does not have any real regulatory powers.

## **7.3 Government Interference**

### **7.3.1 The Market**

As illustrated in the above sections, interference in the media market in Egypt on the part of the government has mostly been direct rather than indirect.



### 7.3.2 The Regulator

There are no independent regulatory bodies for the media in Egypt.

### 7.3.3 Other Forms of Interference

Over the years, the government has maintained full control of who gets to have a say on television, although attempts to exert that same control over the internet have proven extremely difficult and rather unsuccessful. For television, control started with the application process to obtain a license, which is fully explained in this report, and which—according to the experts interviewed—guaranteed that only those trusted by the regime would end up with the required license.

The next level of control had to do with maintaining clear boundaries and intimidating anyone who dared to cross them. Sometimes sporadic and sometimes targeted threats—or straight closures of television channels—ensured that broadcasters got the message. For example, in October 2010, before the parliamentary elections, the government temporarily shut down 12 satellite channels and warned 20 others for different reasons that ranged from “insulting religion” to “spreading rumors” or even “broadcasting pornography.”<sup>257</sup> Some analysts believe the move was timed to deliver a message to any potential politically active broadcasters that they too could be shut down.<sup>258</sup>

Perhaps most notoriously, during the 18 days that toppled President Mubarak, the government shut down Al Jazeera’s offices in Egypt.<sup>259</sup> Later, in September 2011, the government extended the use of the emergency laws to cover entities accused of “spreading rumors.” A few days later, the authorities raided the offices of Al Jazeera’s Mubasher Misr channel, detaining one engineer and confiscating some equipment.<sup>260</sup> Also in September 2011, the SCAF and the cabinet decided to suspend the granting of new permits to satellite channels, and to “prosecute satellite channels deemed threatening to the stability of the country.”<sup>261</sup>

In May 2011, the military prosecutor called in Reem Magued, the OnTV talk show host, as well as the blogger Hossam El Hamalawy, after Mr Hamalawy made some comments on Ms Magued’s show that were deemed to be against the military. No charges were brought, though, and the military prosecutor later said they were called in for a “friendly chat.”<sup>262</sup>

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257. “Egypt stops TV channels, Islamic trend seen a target,” Reuters, 20 October 2010, at <http://blogs.reuters.com/faithworld/2010/10/20/egypt-stops-tv-channels-islamic-trend-seen-a-target> (accessed 29 December 2012).

258. Bradley, “Egypt suspends licences.”

259. Black, “Egypt shuts down al-Jazeera operations.”

260. “Egyptian Authorities Crack Down on Satellite Channels.”

261. El Deeb, “Egypt freezes new satellite TV station licenses.”

262. “Reem Magued Outside Military Prosecutor’s Office: There Was No Formal Investigation,” Masrawy, 31 May 2011, at [http://www.masrawy.com/News/Egypt/Politics/2011/may/31/reem\\_investigate.aspx](http://www.masrawy.com/News/Egypt/Politics/2011/may/31/reem_investigate.aspx) (accessed 29 December 2012).

## 7.4 Assessments

No plans have been made in preparation for digitization of television signals, and no regulations are in place with regards to the internet. The system currently in place for granting broadcast licenses is deeply flawed, and depends on the regime's prior knowledge and trust of the applicant as well as a full report from state security agents that guarantees the applicant is not a threat to the regime or the government. There is no transparency regarding license granting or spectrum assignment, and no real guarantees for freedom of expression or free dissemination of news.

The nature and degree of interference by state authorities in Egypt has not changed as a result of any preparations for digitization, since no such preparations are in place. Any minor changes have been due to the political situation in the country at the time.

No genuine efforts were made to include the public in a real debate about the regulation of the media. No policies or legal provisions related to digitization are in place.

# 8. Conclusions

## 8.1 Media Today

There is no evidence that Egypt has plans for the transition to digital television broadcasting. Even if the technical transition is possible, the process is very haphazard and has not been given any serious thought by the ERTU or by society in general. However, the popularity of the internet in recent years has contributed considerably to the diversity and pluralism of voices in the country, and has helped traditional news media become more independent and secure more freedom.

The literature and the interviews in this report suggest that the internet has made a difference in terms of paving the road for more freedom of expression in the media and in the political climate in general. Political communication and the interactive nature of the internet, particularly social media, have helped spread a sense of horizontal communication that was not possible before. These resources have empowered people and traditional media sources to become bolder in their criticisms of the government and the regime. Traditional media have learned that if they do not allow for more plurality of voices, and if they do not carry an accurate picture of everyday events, people will find an alternative on the internet. They have also learned that when the government cracks down on their right to free expression, they can still publish content online.

Political bloggers have made major use of the internet to spread their views and to gain a following. Groups that have evolved and thrived on Facebook, such as the April 6 group, later grew into major political movements. The development and lower cost of mobile technology mean that everyone can be a citizen journalist, as portrayed very well by the pictures from Tahrir Square and other revolutionary locations all over Egypt.

The authorities keep trying to curtail media independence and freedom through an array of tactics, from making it very difficult to obtain a broadcasting license, to shutting down television channels, to detaining and harassing bloggers, activists, and media personnel.

## 8.2 Media Tomorrow

Since the 25 January revolution began, internet use has increased significantly. Egyptian Facebook users have almost tripled, and Twitter users have multiplied exponentially. It has become commonplace to see people protesting in Egypt while at the same time recording or taking pictures using their mobile phones. These changes are permanent and irreversible. If anything, internet use is going to continue to increase dramatically over the next few years.

As for television, plans for digitization have to be introduced in the coming few years because of the 2015 deadline to convert (even if the date is postponed slightly). If Egypt technically makes the deadline, it is way behind in planning how digital terrestrial broadcasting will reach and serve the public, and steps toward that process have to be started in the very near future.

One of the main challenges and areas of development over the next few years will be the process of regulation of all types of media. Egypt is undergoing major changes politically, and the situation may be ripe, with the help of civil society, to introduce regulation and independent regulatory bodies that aim not at censorship but at guaranteeing freedoms and diversity of opinions.

# List of Abbreviations, Figures, Tables, and Companies

## Acronyms and Abbreviations

CBC	Capital Broadcasting Center
CPJ	Committee to Protect Journalists
ERTU	Egyptian Radio and Television Union
GAFI	General Authority for Investment
ICFJ	International Center for Journalists
IDSC	Information Decision Support Center
IIPA	International Intellectual Property Alliance
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPTV	Internet Protocol television
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
MCIT	Ministry of Communications and Information Technology
NTRA	National Telecommunications Regulation Authority
SCAF	Supreme Council of the Armed Forces
STB	Set-top box

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## Companies

Al Hayat  
Al Jazeera  
France Telecom  
Mobinil  
Nile FM  
NileSat  
Nogoum FM  
OnTV  
Video Cairo Sat

## Mapping Digital Media: Country Reports (published in English)

1. Romania
2. Thailand
3. Mexico
4. Morocco
5. United Kingdom
6. Sweden
7. Russia
8. Lithuania
9. Italy
10. Germany
11. United States
12. Latvia
13. Serbia
14. Netherlands
15. Albania
16. Hungary
17. Moldova
18. Japan
19. Argentina
20. South Africa
21. Turkey
22. Lebanon
23. Macedonia
24. Bosnia and Herzegovina
25. Poland
26. Montenegro
27. Georgia
28. Nigeria
29. Colombia
30. Croatia
31. Slovenia
32. China
33. Peru
34. Chile
35. Spain
36. Kenya
37. Bulgaria
38. India
39. France
40. Estonia
41. Kazakhstan
42. Malaysia
43. Pakistan
44. Slovakia
45. Czech Republic

**Mapping Digital Media** is a project of the **Open Society Media Program** and the **Open Society Information Program**.

## Open Society Media Program

The Media Program works globally to support independent and professional media as crucial players for informing citizens and allowing for their democratic participation in debate. The program provides operational and developmental support to independent media outlets and networks around the world, proposes engaging media policies, and engages in efforts towards improving media laws and creating an enabling legal environment for good, brave and enterprising journalism to flourish. In order to promote transparency and accountability, and tackle issues of organized crime and corruption the Program also fosters quality investigative journalism.

## Open Society Information Program

The Open Society Information Program works to increase public access to knowledge, facilitate civil society communication, and protect civil liberties and the freedom to communicate in the digital environment. The Program pays particular attention to the information needs of disadvantaged groups and people in less developed parts of the world. The Program also uses new tools and techniques to empower civil society groups in their various international, national, and local efforts to promote open society.

## Open Society Foundations

The Open Society Foundations work to build vibrant and tolerant democracies whose governments are accountable to their citizens. Working with local communities in more than 100 countries, the Open Society Foundations support justice and human rights, freedom of expression, and access to public health and education.

For more information:

Open Society Media Program

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