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Islam Zaabal



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TURKEY- ISTANBUL

Bahçelievler, Yenibosna Mh 29 Ekim Cad. No: 7 A2 Blok 3. Plaza D: 64
Tel/Fax: +90 212 227 2262 E-Mail: info@eis-eg.org

Revolution and Social Media: Restoration of Role

Islam Zaabal

Nowadays, information technology has acquired great significance, comprising all aspects of popular social life, especially in the media and communication areas. In fact, digital communication has played a big role in changing the political and social reality domestically, regionally, and internationally.

In Egypt, social networking sites had played a significant role in shaping political and revolutionary awareness to large sectors of the Egyptian people before and even after the January 25th. Revolution. Many political movements - such as “Six April Movement”, “We Are All Khalid Saeed”, the “National Assembly for Change”, as well as the “Muslim Brotherhood Youth” pages - have used the social networking sites to promote their ideas and acquire more supporters, after creating official pages on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

The social media was used for mobilization of protesters and calling for changing the regime and led to the outbreak of the January 25th. Revolution and overthrowing the regime, which shows the significance of social media in the process of political change and revolutionary action.

The stages experienced by the media environment in Egypt before and after the Jan. revolution:

Development of the role of media in Egypt before and after the revolution can be divided into three stages:

1. The stage of marginal opposition (before the January revolution under the rule of ousted President Mubarak), where there was a limited margin of freedom for

- some of the televised and print media: However, some observers say it was only a kind of cosmetics to beautify the regime's image in front of the West.
2. The stage of media chaos (from the early days after Mubarak had stepped down until the July 2013 coup d'état): This stage is viewed by some as the best time for freedom of expression. However, others believe that it should have been rationalized because it created a state of chaos and polarization in the Egyptian society. This state of confusion was exploited by the "deep state" with all its components, including the army, police, judiciary and sovereign bodies. During that period, reliance on social media for expression declined because satellite channels and newspapers became an alternative means for expression. Unfortunately, the media was exploited as an arena for incitement, intimidation and abuse instead of being a factor in building, rationalizing and achieving the objectives of the revolution.
 3. The stage of silencing all voices by force, which came after the military coup in 2013 and was considered the cruelest and most difficult periods in the history of the Egyptian media. Therefore, Egyptians once more returned to reliance on the social media as an alternative media. This situation was also exploited by Egyptian security and intelligence services, in formation of the so-called "electronic committees".

Social networking sites and restoration of role

Social networking sites had played an active role as a means for calling for protests before the January Revolution. They were also used as a tool for maneuvering with the Egyptian security forces. For example, activists sometimes called for "mock protests"

in fake timing and places as a tactic to exhaust the security forces and as a means to protect their grassroots from arrest.

The Egyptian regime under Abdel Fattah al-Sisi deals with the activists of social networking sites in a more brutal way than ever before, for fear of instigating a popular uprising similar to the January 25 revolution, which shows clearly how the repressive regime in Egypt is aware of the significance of social media and their role in creating a revolutionary situation. Accordingly, Sisi enacted laws to watch and even ban personal social media accounts in flagrant violation of human rights.

The question now is: Have the social media lost their effectiveness? The answer is no. A report by Technowireless, an Egyptian company specializing in the marketing of electronic and mobile networks, has revealed that there is a significant increase in the use of internet in Egypt, especially after 25 January 2011, where the internet in general, and Facebook and Twitter social networking sites in particular, played an active role in the outbreak of the Egyptian popular uprising that lasted 18 days and prompted Mubarak to step down on 11 February 2011. The report said that the number of internet users in Egypt before January 25 was 21.2 million, but that number reached 23.1 million after that. The number of Facebook users before Jan. 25 was 4.2 million, but rose by 23.8 percent after the revolution, reaching about 5.2 million, according to the report. Twitter users also increased from 26,800 before the revolution to 44,200 after that, the report said.

It is also clear that the number of users of WhatsApp, Telegram, as well as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube are increasing significantly and use of these applications has become more effective as well. The social networking sites have become the main link

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between technology and politics, being almost the only way to express opinions after closing all means of expression to revolutionaries under the current system.

Just as revolutionaries were able to confront the security services before the January revolution by using social media in mobilization, assembly and maneuvering, they would be able to innovate new ways for responding to the repressive practices of the Sisi regime. The state of fear that the Sisi regime has been creating in the Egyptian society through murder, torture and detention will not prevent those who believe in the January 25 revolution from creating more innovative ways to revive their peaceful revolutionary action.

