Uses and Gratifications of Social Media in the Production of Political Information during the 2015 Egyptian Parliamentary Election

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the extent to which university students are actively seeking out political information on social media during the 2015 Egyptian parliamentary elections. Moreover, it explores the impact of social media usage in the production of political information and its influence on participants’ likelihood to vote. A random sample of 400 students at three public Egyptian universities qualified to vote in the 2015 parliamentary election were selected. The interesting result that emerged from this study was that students use social media for seeking information mainly in politics during the election more than pass time and entertainment purposes. Furthermore, the findings have shown that social media usage increased both the political information and participants’ likelihood to vote during the 2015 parliamentary election.

KEYWORDS

Egyptian Parliamentary Election, Online Political Communication, Participants’ Likelihood, Political Information, Social Media

INTRODUCTION

It is obvious, that the social media revolutionized today’s society especially in political scene. A huge and growing volume of literature has documented the extent to which new media facilitate political activities in both democratic societies and non-democratic or transitional societies (Zhang & Lin, 2014). The popularity and attractiveness of social media has encouraged many media and political communication scholars (e.g. Baumgartner et al. 2010; Bennett and Segerberg, 2012; Enjolras et al. 2013; Kirkpatrick, 2008; Nadler & Hong, 2012; Wenker, 2012; Raine; 2008; Valentine, 2011; Zhang & Lin, 2014) to explore the effects, uses, gratifications, attitudes, and engagement in social media. The role of social media in the Arab world has been much debated before and after the

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‘Arab Spring’. In addition, the Arab Spring was a major milestone for social media adoption in the Middle East. The Arab spring, highlighted the role that social media may play as facilitator not only of individual political participation (IPP), but also of collective activism. Social media became the preferred means in which youth currently engage in politics around the world (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012). In his study, Al-Jenaibi (2012) showed that social media such as Facebook and Twitter have provided new opportunities for information sharing, personal expression and, social networking, especially in regions like the Middle East, where these activities traditionally have been limited in the public sphere. For Example, in Egypt, social media plays a fundamental role in the formation and expression of opinion towards the progress of events relevant to the Arab Spring (El-Jazzar, 2013). Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) mentioned that there are several reasons that motivate users to adopt social media platforms such as interpersonal utility, pass time, information-seeking, convenience, and entertainment. Similarly, Kirkpatrick, (2008), pointed out that social media, such as Facebook, turn out to be effective channels for political institutions:

He added “Facebook is giving individuals in societies across the world more power relatives to social institutions and that may well lead to very disruptive changes. In some societies it may destabilize institutions many of us would rather stay the same. But it also holds the promise of posing challenges to long-standing repressive state institutions and practices. Facebook makes it easier for people to organize themselves.” (Kirkpatrick, 2008:8)

A number of considerable studies (Nadler & Hong, 2012; Kirkpatrick, 2008; Wenker, 2012) have predicted that social networking tools will bring about a fundamental transformation of how politicians, governments, and citizens will engage with one another. Boyd (2006) suggested that the internet has become a public sphere for debate, discussion, dissemination and even just hanging out. In their study, Kenski and Stroud (2006) explored the relationship between Internet access and online exposure to political information. The findings showed that Internet use was positively related with political efficacy. In the same line, other scholars (e.g., Johnson and Kaye, 2010; Li-Jo-Yun, 2013; and Tapscott and Williams, 2006) affirmed that internet become an international channel of idea sharing. Also, internet users are more interested in politics, and are more ready to vote than the general public. For example, when they search for political information on the internet, they are likely goal directed rather than entertainment oriented. Therefore, as Dimitrova and Bystrom, (2013) indicated that the speedy growth and popularity of social media across age groups has led to a steady growth in the number of studies looking at how such media influence voters. The Egyptian parliamentary elections in October 2015 were the third and last step of the roadmap approved by Egyptians citizens on July 3, 2013. And since, the Egyptian 2015 parliamentary election have witnessed significant debates on social media sites such as Facebook, and Twitter among young adult more particularly, university students, this study will look closely at the extent to which Egyptian universities students used social media networks such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter as tools for seeking political information during the 2015 Egyptian parliamentary election. Moreover, it also investigates the impact of social media usage in the production of political information and its impact on participants’ likelihood to vote during the 2015 Egyptian parliamentary election campaigns.

MEDIA USE AND POLITICAL INFORMATION

In the past few years, social media applications such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and MySpace have become global phenomena not only in Western countries but also in Arab countries. Many scholars
Market Orientation, Customer Relationship Management (CRM), Implementation Intensity, and CRM Performance: A Structural Model
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