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Egyptian women bloggers: perceptions of empowerment in the online public sphere

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EGYPTIAN WOMEN BLOGGERS: PERCEPTIONS OF EMPOWERMENT IN

THE ONLINE PUBLIC SPHERE

A Thesis Submitted to

Journalism and Mass Communication Department

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the degree of Master of Arts

by Valentina Cattane 800-09-0752

(under the supervision of Dr. Sheila Peuchaud)*

month/year

The American University in Cairo

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Egyptian women bloggers: perceptions of empowerment in the online public sphere.

Thesis Chair: Sheila Peuchaud.

The current study aimed at investigating Egyptian women's motivations and experiences with blogging as a tool of empowerment. A combined purposive and snowball sample of Egyptian women bloggers was drawn and data, obtained from an online survey, were analyzed using descriptive statistics and non parametric statistics through IBM SPSS Statistics v.19.

Statistics revealed a correlation between the motives of Egyptian women bloggers - considered as a form of dis-empowerment - and the gratifications – as a form of empowerment – they get out of blogging. Highly significant correlations were found between the personal motives and the personal gratifications of bloggers, with a relation between the personal and social empowerment, as the two most important elements on the economic and political ones characterizing the empowerment process of Egyptian women bloggers.

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STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROBLEM

Women in developing countries face more obstacles in accessing the Internet and technology in general. In addition, in many countries of the Middle East, women suffer of gender inequalities, being prevented from holding specific positions, from actively participating in public life and from voting in a few countries such as Saudi Arabia. When implemented laws do not officially restrict women's rights, tradition, culture and lack of resources can represent an obstacle to women's empowerment. Great attention was given to the role of social media – to Twitter and Facebook most of all - following the revolutions that led to political unrest in some countries of the Middle East and North Africa in 2010-2011 and that in most cases have been facilitated by the use of social media in the organizational phase.

However, in the academic research there is a gap of studies related to blogging and particularly to female blogging in the Arab world and specifically in the Arab Republic of Egypt. During the 2011 unrests, the Internet and social media have proved to be a useful tool to optimize organization, especially in repressive regimes because more difficult to monitor and restrain. As social medium, blogging should receive attention as a possible tool with empowerment potentials for women as a marginalized group.

This exploratory study takes into consideration Kabeer's definition of empowerment, which relates it to the initial person's dis-empowerment (2011). When those who were prevented from the ability to make a choice acquire such ability, they are empowered (Kabeer, 2011). In order to have power, the access to alternatives and the

possibility of choosing otherwise are crucial. Consequently, the importance is given to the equality in the access to choices rather than to the choices themselves (Kabeer, 2011) and to the process of acquiring such empowerment rather than on the outcomes. This is the reason why the study only investigates the Egyptian women bloggers' perceptions and perspective on their blogging activity without focusing on their readers' feedback or the impact a blog written by an Egyptian woman can have on society and her public.

In conclusion, this study investigates uses and gratifications of Egyptian female bloggers, and it tries to present the bloggers' view on blogging as tool of empowerment and as alternative public sphere online.

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The study aims to research on Egyptian women's motivations and experiences with blogging as a tool that can contribute to the process of empowerment. Therefore, the descriptive study tries to observe the uses of this tool made by Egyptian female bloggers, their motivation and gratifications applying the uses and gratifications theory. Due to the scarcity of studies tightly focused on blogging, and in specific on female blogging, the present literature review analyzes the history and development of the Internet in the Arab world and in Egypt, and it provides a background and contextualization of blogging in the Arab world and Egypt specifically. In addition, it connects to each other the concepts of gender equality and empowerment, the Internet – and blogging specifically - as an alternative public sphere online, feminism and cyberfeminism.

Internet in the Arab world – Background

The development of the Internet in the Arab world

The Internet started in the early 1960s to facilitate communication and transmission of information through a private network inside the U.S. army (Abdulla, 2007). The term was introduced later, in 1974, as abbreviation of internetworking, which was used as a synonymous (Furlong, 2012). In 1982, the Internet protocol suite (TCP/IP) was completed, introducing the concept of a worldwide network of fully interconnected TCP/IP networks (Furlong, 2012). Only in the 1990s, though, the new tool started to

become increasingly influential and a truly global medium. According to data updated in March 2011 by the Internet World Stats (2012), the world Internet users reached 2 billion.

In 1993, the Internet became accessible in the Arab countries and in 1995 in Africa. Initiatives, such as USAID funded project, have aimed at developing full Internet connectivity for the African continent and reduce the digital divide (Furlong, 2012). As Abdulla stated (2007), the majority of Arab countries are trying to make efforts to increase the Internet. The Internet users in the Middle East went from the about 3 million registered in 2000 to about 72 million in 2011, and a population penetration of 31.7%, compared to a world average of 30.2%.

Even though Saudi Arabia and Iran allowed public access to the Internet only in the late 1990s, previously restricting its use exclusively to academic and governmental institutions (Hosaka, 1997), there have been efforts to increase connectivity even in these countries (Wheeler, 2004). Currently, the Internet usage in Saudi Arabia has reached 11,400,000 users, with a population penetration of 43.6%; Iran has a population penetration of the Internet of 46.9%, and the UAE has now the highest percentage of population connectivity in the Arab world (69%), followed by Qatar (66.5%) (Internet World Stats, 2011). On the opposite side, Iraq merely scores 2.8% of population penetration, the lowest among the Middle Eastern countries, less than Yemen, which reaches 9.7% and Syria with 19.8% Internet penetration.

In Libya, which is an African country with only 5.9% Internet penetration (Internet World Stats, 2011), in Iraq and Syria no Internet services have been available for a long time mainly because of security concerns (Hosaka, 1997). In fact, the

introduction of the Internet services represented a new challenge for leaderships in the Middle East. Earlier, the diffusion of satellite TV receivers had spread fear among Middle Eastern governments because it could facilitate the flow of alternative and more objective information among citizens. With the Internet, the variety of sources accessible to users became even bigger and easier to access. Finally, the Internet proved to be more difficult to monitor and restrain than satellite receivers. Therefore, some conservative countries in the ME, such as those above mentioned, have presented the new media as tools used by western countries, specifically Israel and America, to control and jeopardize the security of the Middle East. Joshua Landis, a professor of Syrian History and Politics at Oklahoma University and founder of the leading English-language blog on Syria, Syrian Comment, confirmed that "the Syrian security services viewed the Internet before 2000 as Zionist plot to filtrate the state" (Loewenstein, 2008, p. 96).

In the Africa Internet Usage Statistics (Internet World Stats, 2011), Egypt, which counts about 20 million Internet users and a population penetration of 24.5%, is among the top African Internet countries. In the majority of Middle Eastern countries, the Internet as well as public telecommunication services is provided by government-led companies. Exceptional cases are Israel, Egypt and Jordan that also have private Internet service providers (Abdulla, 2007). The highest growth rates in the Arab world for the past few years were in Egypt, Algeria, Libya, Syria, Tunisia and Morocco.

According to the 2011 International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Report, Africa was the region with the lowest Information and Communication Technology (ICT) development Index (IDI) values in 2010. The ITU measures the information society developments worldwide through the IDI and the ICT Price basket (IPB). The IDI in

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specific is related to the progress made in regard to ICT infrastructure, use and skills while the affordability of ICT services is measured by IPB. In fact, as the report states, the infrastructures can have an impact only when people use them effectively.

Some factors need to be taken into account in order to explain the results of the ITU report. First, in the Middle East, more than one person usually shares Internet accounts. In the Arab world up to three people share the same account, with the exception of Egypt where up to eight people use the same Internet account, making it difficult to have reliable statistics (Abdulla, 2007). The low IDI values are mainly due to the so-called digital divide, which refers to the difference in Internet accessibility and knowledge acquisition between countries and between different population segments inside the same country (International Telecommunication Union, 2011). As the report underlined, the role of education, income, gender, age and location play a key-role in increasing Internet use. The higher the level of education is, the higher the Internet usage is. Low income and level of education are both involved in the gender divide and the consequent women lower access to ICTs. As a consequence, the report suggested that the possibility to equally access ICT is considered a way to overcome gender inequalities in areas such as jobs, education or equal wages (Internet World Stats, 2011). In fact, in countries where women are less involved in public life, the Internet can help them reach the same goals from private spaces like one's home. For instance, the digital economy represents a good opportunity for developing countries through the E-commerce. Finally, the differences in income levels of the countries of the Arab states are reflected in IDI values and ranking.

Fixed-broadband penetration levels also remain relatively low in the region, at

2.5%. This is due to the relatively limited access to fixed infrastructures in favor of mobile technology and leveraged mobile-broadband services. The high percentage of mobile-phone usage is encouraged by the high portion of youth populating the Middle East and developing countries in general. This is a significant factor, which contributes to the diffusion of social network in the region. The ITU report underlines the importance of these new tools to drive the rise of the Internet and reduce the digital divide in developing countries.

The development of the Internet in Egypt

The Internet in Egypt started in 1993 with 2,000 users (Kamel & Hussein, 2002). The Government allowed free access thanks to the collaboration of the Information and Decision Support Center (IDSC) with the Regional Information Technology and Software Engineering Center (RITSEC), in the attempt to boost the new technology as a development tool and to raise the rate of Internet users especially within small and medium sized enterprises.

According to Kamel and Hussein (2002), in 1994 the service was divided in three major sub-domains: academic, science and government. The academic service was available free of charge for schools and universities, with the domain name '.eun,' abbreviation for 'Egyptian Universities Network.' The '.sci' denominated the science domain, and it was provided by the Egyptian National Scientific and Technical Information Network (ENSTINET). Finally, the '.gov.eg' served different governmental agencies (Abdulla, 2005).

According to ITU 2001 (International Telecommunication Union, 2001), in 1994 only one Internet service provider had international connection through a server in the United States. In that year, Egypt hosted a UN international conference, and the government had to improve the quality of the Internet service, establishing a link with France. Once the official commitment ended, the government decided to keep the service available to offer further free connectivity to non-governmental organizations and private business. From this point, the Internet became a priority for the government and the public sector.

In 1996, the government decided to privatize the Internet service and "user numbers increased to 20,000" (Abdulla, 2005, p. 154). In 2000, in Egypt the Internet users were 400,000, with 60 Internet service providers all across the country (Kamel & Hussein, 2002). Only one year later, the number of users rose to more than 600,000, even though official statistics are usually partial in the Arab region considering that many users are not paid subscribers and therefore hardly traceable (Mostafa, 2006).

In 2002, the Egyptian government launched the "affordable PC initiative," through the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology. The project supported the sale and diffusion of computers by discounted prices and extended payments up to three years at a reduced interest (Mostafa, 2006). "The free Internet Initiative" was part of the plan. The government allowed the availability of Internet services by the payment of call charges to Telecom Egypt without the need to pay subscription fees to the ISPs. According to Mostafa (2006), this strategy had a significant impact on the Internet usage in Egypt, and the promotion of similar initiatives contributed to the diffusion of the Internet in the country.

Despite the positive growth of the Internet, the new technology is still limited to small segments of the population in Egypt. Official statistics show that the number of Internet users in Egypt as of 2010 was 12%, while a report published by Arab Advisors Group (2010) reveals that only 8% of the Egyptian population is connected. 94.5% of them reported having an ADSL connection at home, even though 24.0% share with neighbors. Finally, 89.2% of the Internet users are males and 10.8% females, showing evidence of a considerable gender divide among Internet users.

Some of the reasons for the gap between the two sexes could be associated with the differences between them in term of literacy rate, culture impact and social habits. In addition, as underlined by the same report (Arab Advisors Group, 2010), women rarely access the Internet from public spaces in Egypt; only 16.8% use it from public hotspots in comparison to 30.2% of males.

According to Mintz, "Internet users [in Egypt] can be divided into three categories: 20 per cent in the academic community; 5 per cent in the government and public sector; and 75 per cent in the business community" (as cited in Kamel & Hussein, 2002, p. 148). The Internet, therefore, has a great influence on business and on the socio-economic situation of the country. In Egypt, several companies allow customers to order and pay online as well as by cash on delivery. However, the main form of e-commerce in Egypt is currently focused on business-to-business relations more than on business-to-costumer. Companies therefore use the Internet as a promotion or marketing tool rather than as an online sales tool, which leads experts to consider business-to-customer in Egypt as still in the pre-mature stage.

In conclusion, the use of the Internet in the Arab world and in Egypt is constantly growing, with a remarkable influence on the business sector, and the initiatives promoted by the government significantly enhanced the Internet services.

Blogging as a tool of empowerment

Weblogs: Meaning and background

A blog is a "frequently modified webpage containing dated entries listed in reverse chronological sequence" (Tremayne, 2007, p. 3). The definition stresses the importance of the structure on the content. In fact, blogs are not only personal journals presenting the blogger's life but also platforms where the writer can focus on different subjects, from politics to religion, from music to travel and so forth. A blog's entry is called 'post,' and the person who blogs (the verb 'blog' indicates the action of writing and publishing a post) is called a 'blogger.'

Blogging started in December 1997, when the word weblog was introduced by Jorn Barger to indicate a website with "logs" of interesting links (Blood, 2000). When later in 1999 easy-to-use-blogging platforms, such as Pitas and Blogger, made the process of writing a blog easier, "the bandwagon jumping began" (Blood, 2000, p. 1), with an increasing number of people who started to publish their own weblog. Before that time, only people who knew how to code HTML could in fact create the weblog, which originally was a link-driven site and a mixture of links, commentary, and personal thoughts.

Blogs have become influential especially after the terroristic attacks upon the United States occurred on September 11, 2001 (Conhaim, 2002; Tremayne, 2007), when the mainstream media could not compete with the reporting of the men-on-the-street. From that time, blogs have represented not only a way to have alternative and timely information but also a way "to ignite the traditional media's interest in a topic" (Tremayne, 2007, p. 5). Mass media have been increasingly compelled to consider bloggers as important sources and to deepen stories often missed by them.

The word blog is frequently used in articles, and blogging is usually considered an alternative form of journalism (Tremayne, 2007). The definition is often used as synonymous of 'citizen' or 'personalized' journalism with a positive connotation. Both of them are characterized by the coexistence of "several dichotomies," such as the citizen and the media professional or public and private (Bailey, Cammaerts & Carpentier, 2008). The combination of these elements makes blogging an alternative source of news for the reader. The credibility of the blogger is based, as for any other 'traditional' journalist, on what he/she publishes. As Bailey (et al., 2008) pointed out, ordinary people can be valuable sources and accomplish the same results as experts. However, citizen journalism can't replace traditional forms of journalism but it can only complement them (Bailey et al., 2008).

Lovink (as cited in Wallsten, 2008) provided a general theory of blogging by focusing on the phenomenon of blogging itself rather than on the relationship between citizen journalism and mainstream media. In contrast with Bailey (et al., 2008), Lovink didn't consider blogging as progressive nor as a new form of journalism, but rather a

platform that diminishes the message's value and that causes the "death of mainstream media institutions" due to its nihilistic aspects (Wallsten, 2008, p. 151).

Blood (2000), author of the Rebecca's pocket weblog, wrote the history of blogging, and considered the shift from weblogs with a mix of links to "short-form journals" occurred in 1999 a turning point in the expansion of the blogging phenomenon. The journal format defined the website as personal platform and online diary and, at the same time, as alternative form of journalism, where the blogger could publish news articles or opinion pieces. By writing her own blog, Blood discovered "two side effects" of blogging, the discovery of her interests and the acquisition of higher self-confidence. Valuing one's personal point of view worthy of consideration is directly linked to the personal and psychological empowerment potentials of blogging, which this study is trying to investigate. As Blood (2000) explained, writing one's opinion in a public platform requires the author to meditate on it in order to provide arguments supporting it. This process makes the blogger consider her/his opinion unique and it develops critical thinking.

Blogging in the Arab world and in Egypt

The present chapter looks into the development of blogging in the Arab world in general and in Egypt specifically. Blogging is a recent phenomenon and so is the academic research published on it, which lacks in significant studies on blogging in the Arab world and specifically in the Arab Republic of Egypt.

Bloggers in the Arab world have been inspired by the blogs written by Iraqi during the Iraqi war in 2003. For the first time, the posts published by citizen journalists

presented a perspective often absent in the mainstream media. At this stage, the posts were only written in English (Radsch, 2008).

Only one report has so far tried to map the Arab blogosphere on "a base network of approximately 35,000 active Arabic language blogs, and several thousands Arabic blogs with mixed use of Arabic, English and French" (Etling, Kelly, Faris & Palfrey, 2009, p. 3). The study was published in 2009 by the Internet & Democracy Project, a research initiative at the Berkman center for Internet & Society at Harvard University, and it mapped the blogosphere with the 6,000 most connected blogs. The findings of the report identify Egypt as the largest cluster on the Arab blogosphere, followed by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Female and male bloggers in the Arab world are usually young people under 35-year-old, and the female Arab bloggers population in particular is made by younger bloggers among 18-28-year-old (Etling, et al. 2009).

By analyzing different cases of repression against bloggers in the Middle East, Lynch (2007) identified three main categories of bloggers, which are activists, bridges, and public sphere bloggers. Activists are mainly involved in political movements and they use blogs to coordinate their political action; bridge-bloggers are those who write in English and rarely in French, building bridges to Western audiences. Finally, public sphere bloggers are those deeply engaged in arguments about domestic politics, but not in organized activism. Lynch (2007) predicted that the Arab political blogosphere would evolve in all the three modes he defined. In addition, blogs would increase in political significance, and their ability to frame stories and to funnel information into the public sphere would grow as well. However, the author preferred being cautious about the effects of blogging because he didn't believe political blogging would lead to political

change in the Middle East (Lynch, 2007).

Isherwood (2008) considered Lynch's analysis of the blogosphere convenient because it provided "a useful dictionary" about a recent phenomenon, which hasn't had a complete categorization yet. However, the author evaluated the description of the groups confusing due to their vagueness including activities that can overlap, since a blogger can be activist and public-sphere blogger at the same time, and excluding other bloggers who could be better considered under the category citizen journalism. The collaborative or citizen journalism is a form of journalism in which a person without professional training can use the tools of modern technology in order to write and comment on others' blogs. In citizen journalism, the citizen is at the same time the sender and the receiver.

The role of blogger in society still does not have a clear definition. As Ahmed Al Omran, Saudi Arabia's most prominent English-language blogger, pointed out, the majority of bloggers consider themselves as watchdogs on governments to hold it responsible to its citizens (as cited in Lakhani, 2011). Therefore, most of them decide to simply write their blogs or being activists but rarely to be directly involved in the political arena. In fact, when Slim Amamou, a Tunisian blogger jailed during the protests that led to the 2010-2011 revolution, accepted the charge of minister for youth and sport in the post-revolution government, he caused the discontent of his fellow-bloggers (Lakhani, 2011).

In the Arab world, poetry, literature and human rights are recurrent topics in both female and male bloggers. If the majority of male bloggers enter the blogosphere to express their political views and write of issues related to local politics or social issues,

according to the study, women blog more on "personal religious thoughts, women's issues (rights, status, hijab), single and family life" (Etling et al., 2009, p. 37).

The main topics investigated by female bloggers in the Arab world correspond to those preferred by female bloggers in other countries. Chen (2011) investigated the gratifications women get out of blogging in different countries in the world, analyzing mainly personal blogs because women are more likely to blog about private issues. In Spring 2010, Chen surveyed 312 women bloggers through a random sample drawn from 4 public women's blog directories. He aimed to measure the psychological needs on a 1 (strongly disagree) – 5 (strongly agree) scale. As a result, the study suggested that women blog to satisfy needs or deficits in themselves. The needs are mainly for self-disclosure, affiliation and achievements.

Ulrich (2009) analyzed the history of transition of ideas and information in the Middle East through the invention of the paper and cassettes, comparing them to the importance that blogging could have. The author believed that the new media allowed a greater participation and involvement of users. In fact, contrary to paper, cyberspace and online communication enable people to reduce distances in space and time. In addition, the anonymity gives the chance to overcome societal barriers and express one's identity without fearing of being identified (Ulrich, 2009).

The same opinion is expressed by Dayem, who underlined the importance of blogging in the Arab world as a "medium for social and political commentary" (2009, p. 1). Blogging has an even more important role in the Middle East than in western countries, because it really represents an alternative voice to mainstream and state-

controlled media. Dayem compared blogging to the impact that the emergence of satellite television had on communication. Both showed to be effective in facilitating communication across borders and eluding government repression (Dayem, 2009). Especially in countries where the mainstream media are controlled and freedom of expression limited, social media and blogging represent freer platforms to talk about topics that can't appear on traditional media.

As a consequence, the blogosphere is the most effective in reproducing the public sphere communications (Etling et al., 2009). Tools such as Facebook and Twitter might have a more immediate impact in mobilizing people with a straightforward communication system and shorter posts. However, blogs have great influence in shaping the new public sphere because they have a more persistent structure, constantly updated hyperlinks and a better chance to express and elaborate one's opinions (Etling et al., 2009). The findings of the report supported the empowerment potentials of the Internet, in particular the hypothesis that the Internet can empower users politically and help the Arab countries to move toward democracy. In addition, blogging is seen as a tool that provides especially minority groups with an infrastructure for expressing their opinion (Etling et al., 2009).

Lynch (2007), on the contrary, had a less optimistic opinion regarding blogging and its potential in the Arab world. He believed that blogging would not bring political change in the Middle East. In fact, only a tiny minority in the area uses blogs with a small audience and a strong repression by regimes in those cases such as Egypt and Bahrain, where bloggers have been politically influential. Nonetheless, Lynch stated that the phenomenon is constantly growing, and blogs can represent an incubator of new ideas,

even though they can't reach a mass audience.

Mohamed (2010) argued that the Egyptian blogosphere and Arab blogging in general differs from the West. The study suggested that the new media offer platforms where users can express their views and experience democratic participation online (Mohamed, 2010). In addition, the author pointed out that many marginalized groups have benefited from using the Internet, such as women, who used it mainly to express themselves and break down the rules of a conservative society. Topics like sexual harassment were put on the public agenda thanks to blogging. The study concluded that a new public sphere has been made accessible thanks to the emerging media in Egypt (Mohamed, 2010). However, the Internet use is still far from providing a solid democratic foundation for the public sphere because it's still censored in many countries and not accessible to all the social classes.

Eltahawy (2007) recorded the main events that were covered only by bloggers in the Arab world, such as the sexual assault of women in Cairo downtown in October 2006, giving credit to them as trustworthy and alternative sources to mainstream media. She stated that, even if with a tiny audience, bloggers can indeed affect the public and change the media agenda.

The common problem of the countries of the Arab blogosphere is the absence of a tradition of engaging in democratic exchange of ideas, which has strong repercussion on the freedom of bloggers (Lakhani, 2011). For instance, Iran is extremely harsh concerning online repression in the Middle East (Dayem, 2009). As a recent article on the status of blogging in the Arab world during 2011 pointed out, there is a total absence of

freedom of expression in Iran, which regularly represses, arrests and harasses bloggers. Egypt, Syria and Bahrain are among the worst countries in repressing the freedom of expression (York, 2012). In addition, many other countries, from Egypt to Saudi Arabia and from Tunisia to Syria, do not have freedom of speech. All Arab countries, in fact, enforce laws to restrict online expression and blogging through press and penal code regulations, emergency laws and emergency web-specific laws and decrees (York, 2012).

Blogging in Egypt

According to the report on the status of the Arab blogosphere, Egypt is peculiar among the Arab countries because it is the largest cluster and it has the highest proportion of female bloggers. This specific section of bloggers is also the one that opts for anonymity, compared to the majority of bloggers who usually blog using their real name (Etling et al., 2009). However, the report didn't provide an explanation of the anonymity of female bloggers.

The Egyptian blogosphere took its first steps in 2003. Significant events have marked the history of blogging and led to an increase of blogs. The events are included in the three main stages of development of the blogosphere defined by Radsch (2008). The first experimentation phase between 2003 and 2005; the activist phase, during which bloggers started to become activists and vice versa, between 2005 and 2006; finally, the third phase so-called of diversification and fragmentation from 2006 to the present.

During the first phase, Egypt counted only 3 millions users, a number that

increased to 5 million in 2005, clearly showing that the potential represented by the Internet were appealing to the Egyptian population. In 2003, Ahmad (Radsch, 2008) created the Arabic Wikipedia entry "blog," and the creation of blogs in Arabic became more common. In December 2004, the Kifaya ("Enough!") movement, a diverse political coalition that - at that time - opposed former President Hosni Mubarak and a possible candidature of his son at the presidency, was born. The movement organized many protests using social media and blogging to spread awareness and organize strikes against the regime.

After the large use of the Internet and social media introduced by the Kifaya movement (Isherwood, 2008), most of the political bloggers who are influential nowadays started writing their online journal. As Radsch (2008) pointed out, Egypt counted a few bloggers and only 40 blogs in 2005. The most read blogs, such as the Arabist, Sandmonkey, and Nermeena were directed to their circle of friends and to a Western and English speaking audience. From the 40 blogs registered before 2005 in Egypt, the number increased to about 400 by 2005. From this moment, the number of blogs constantly increased.

Significant events for the development of the Egyptian blogosphere occurred in 2005, during the second phase delineated by Radsch (2008). First, President Mubarak announced a referendum on a constitution amendment to allow multi candidate elections. The citizens had the chance to express their opinion, and this encouraged a profitable interaction between Kifaya, activists and bloggers, which lasted through 2006 (Radsch, 2008). Second, the weekly newspaper Al-Dostour introduced a page with selected content from different blogs. Even though the initiative did not have great success and it

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was suspended after a short time, it helped increase the traffic for the blogs and encouraged readers to also become blog creator launching their own sites (El Zelaky, 2007). Finally, on the night of December 30th 2005, the Egyptian security forces raided a group of Sudanese refugees that was striking demanding solutions for their unstable status. During the bloody raid of protesters, only bloggers covered the attack. This was indeed the first important scoop made by bloggers (El Zelaky, 2007).

The turning point for Egyptian blogs - and for female blogging specifically - is considered 2006. Two tragic events occurred in Cairo and reached the public only through blogs, remaining almost ignored by mainstream media, which were eventually compelled to revise their news agenda (Radsch, 2008; Isherwood, 2008; Otterman, 2007; El Zelaky, 2007; Al Malky, 2007). In October 2006, a mass sexual assault against random groups of women occurred in downtown Cairo during the celebration of the end of the holy moth of Ramadan, the Eid el-Fitr feast. That day, Wael Abbas, a known Egyptian blogger, was nearby the area where the aggression was taking place. He headed to the square with a group of other bloggers and shot videos that could later be the only evidence of the violence. At first, the mainstream media ignored the item, and the authorities denied the incident (El Zelaky, 2007). However, when the videos spread through the Internet and independent newspapers started to talk about it, the state-owned newspapers responded with a campaign to discredit bloggers (El Zelaky, 2007) that had negative results.

The second event occurred in November 2006, when the ongoing anti-torture campaign started, following the diffusion by Wael Abbas of a video on an aggression perpetrated by two policemen against a minibus driver in January 2006 (Isherwood,

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2008). The two policemen were tried and found guilty. This was the first time policemen were tried and held accountable using an amateur video as evidence.

At this stage, bloggers could build credentials through their activity, setting the mainstream news agenda. Many bloggers became activists and some of them were hired as journalist in new independent newspapers thanks to the credentials acquired through their blogs. According to Radsch (2008), the activist phase was a crucial one in the development of Egyptian bloggers. In fact, they've had access "to the resources of international media and human rights organizations and transnational activist networks on a level incomparable to any other blogosphere except perhaps China's" (Radsch, 2008, p. 11).

From 2006, the blogging phenomenon started to take a different direction from the political Kifaya movement that first supported its birth; while the "Enough!" movement lost its momentum, blogging kept growing (Radsch, 2008).

The opinions on the effects of blogging are diverse. The blogger, journalist and activist Nora Younis considers "blogging empowering" (Al Malky, 2007) because it empowered activists against the regime. However, some analysts, such as Naila Hamdy, prefer not to overestimate the impact that blogs can have. Hamdy sees the low percentage of computer literacy and the small segment of blog's followers as main barrier to an effective tool (Al Malky, 2007). Bloggers and activists agree on the advantages gained from new technologies and tools like blogging and social media in specific, which made the organization of their movements and the diffusion of their opinion easier (Faris, 2008). As the blogger Malek Mostafa explained, "blogging is not only a channel for

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communication [...] but also an inherently plural phenomenon that at once allows for community and individuality to develop" (as cited in Al Malky, 2007, p. 5). In the end, Al Malky (2007) concluded the analysis stating that activist blogging can only have an impact on a small scale.

As the events mentioned above illustrated, blogging has indeed become an important and challenging phenomenon for the mainstream media in Egypt. However, as El Zelaky (2007) stressed, the absence of laws protecting and regulating online journalism and the frequent crack down on bloggers by the regime are among the main problems blogging is currently facing. In fact, the Egyptian regime has so far tried to limit the diffusion of social media and blogging through the arrests of bloggers, journalists and human rights activists rather than shutting down newspapers or websites (Isherwood, 2008). Other subtle ways used by regimes to discourage bloggers include the implementation of laws and regulations that make it more difficult for bloggers to afford the higher prices of the subscription. In addition, the intimidation of Internet users passes through the license for the Internet cafes and laws requiring the Internet companies to demand detailed users information (OpenNet Initiative, 2009). In 2009, Egypt was listed among "the ten worst countries to be a blogger" by the Committee to Protect Journalists (OpenNet Initiative, 2009), estimating the number of blogs in July 2008 to 160,000. Bloggers are often arrested for short periods as a form of intimidation. The arrest of Abdel Kareem Nabil Sulieman was the most prominent case due to the attention it received from human rights organization and foreign governments. Kareem is a former student at Al-Azhar University, faculty of law. Even though his blog didn't have many followers, he attracted noteworthy attention by posting insults against religious figures,

including prophet Mohamed, and the Egyptian former president, Hosny Mubarak. (Isherwood, 2008). He was the first blogger to be sentenced to 4 years (three years for insulting Islam and inciting sedition and one year for insulting the Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak) for the content of his writing. Arrested in 2006, he was released on November 17, 2010. As Isherwood commented, "taken as a whole, the Egyptian government's approach towards the Internet appears 'schizophrenic' in the way that it promotes widespread access for commercial reasons but crack down sporadically and unevenly on online dissent" (Isherwood, 2008, p. 12).

Empowerment, public sphere online & feminism

This study looks into Egyptian women's motivations and experiences with blogging as a tool that can contribute to the process of empowerment. It connects topics such as gender equality and empowerment, the Internet – and blogging specifically - as an alternative public sphere online, feminism and cyberfeminism. This section tries to define these elements and relate them to each other.

Gender equality and empowerment is the third of the Millennium development goals[1] and a key contemporary concern around gender and communications, according to the World Summit of the Information Society[2] (ITU). In the 1960s, the concept of empowerment was first related to that of development with attention to top-down approaches (Parpart, Rai & Staudt, 2002) that could lead to social transformation. However, women have not been considered in the development programs before the 1970s (Kinnear, 2011). Eventually in the 1980s, the attention shifted to development with a gender perspective (Kinnear, 2011). Empowerment was thus considered as a process thanks to which both genders could gain power through participation in decision-making such as elections and decisions at a personal and collective level. From the 1980s, addressing empowerment/development programs with a gender perspective, looking at women as minority, became condition *sine qua non* (Kinnear, 2011).

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[1] The member states of the United Nations and international organizations agreed on the achievement of 8 international goals by 2015. Among the 8 goals, there are the eradication of extreme poverty and the promotion of gender equality. The goals and the deadline chose to achieve them aim to raise awareness among countries and to encourage social and economic development.

[2] The International Telecommunication Union (ITU), which is a specialized organization of the UN responsible for information and communication technologies, organized the World Summit of the Information Society (WSIS). The Summit was a two-session conference to debate on the foundations of an information society for all. The first phase took place in Geneva in 2003 and the second in Tunis in 2005. 2005.

Parpart (et al., 2002) stated that the first conception of empowerment as development has later on shifted to that of improving productivity within the status quo, eliminating the important aspect of social change. As a consequence, the scholars asked for a new approach that combines a local and global perspective, having cyberspace as new place without national boundaries to promote empowerment (Parpart et al., 2002).

Batliwala defined empowerment as "the process of challenging existing power relations, and of gaining greater control over the sources of power" (Batliwala, 1994 in Sen, Germain, Chen, p. 130). This approach is possible only through transformative political action (Papart et al. 2004). The result of the empowerment process is therefore essential for Batliwala (1994) to measure and define it. On the contrary, Kabeer (2011) related empowerment to the initial person's dis-empowerment. When those who were prevented from the ability to make a choice acquire such ability, they are empowered (Kabeer, 2011). In order to have power, the access to alternatives and the possibility of choosing otherwise are crucial. If a woman accepts to take part in a development program because she doesn't have any other choice (for financial constraints for instance), this can't be considered empowerment, according to Kabeer's definition (2011). Power is not considered as domination but rather as 'power with' and 'power to' (Kabeer, 2011). The importance is given to the equality in the access to choices rather than to the choices themselves (Kabeer, 2011). The empowerment comes therefore through voluntary participation as well as non-participation, as long as the woman has alternatives.

Rowlands stated that "empowerment is thus more than participation in decision-

making; it must also include the processes that lead people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to make decisions" (Rowlands, 1997, p. 14). For both genders the possibility and ability to make a choice is in fact the key element in order to be empowered, at a personal level as well as relational and collective (Rowlands, 1997; Kabeer, 2011). Empowerment is hard to be defined and measured because it's not an outcome or an end but a process, which can especially mobilize marginalized groups such as women (Rowlands, 1997). In conclusion, Rowlands believed that the core of empowerment is "the increase of self-confidence and self-esteem and the feeling to have the right to be respected" (Rowlands, 1997, p. 129-30). He focused on the personal level of development rather than on the economic, political and social aspects of empowerment.

Strandberg (2001, p. 4) defined empowerment as "all those processes that make women take ownership of their own lives, and that these processes can take place on individual, group and societal level." The process of empowerment might be found through the development of ICT skills (Sreberny, 2005), therefore in the online world, which is at a global level. The achievements reached at a global level can have a significant impact at the local level because women can develop spaces where they can talk among themselves (Sreberny, 2005). This process might give a sense of power to women, making them more self-confident and aware that they have a significant role in society. As a result, they might develop stronger personalities and consider integrating their online participation with the one in the public space offline.

Burkey (2006) believed the process of development starts within the person, and it is human/personal, economic, political and social development. All the four aspects of development need to be represented in order to have empowerment, which is "a process

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evolving gradually overtime and involving the use of physical, financial and human resources" (Burkey, 2006, p. 35).

In conclusion, the concept of empowerment doesn't have one single definition. It embraces psychological and personal aspects, which strengthen 'power within' the person, and economic and political factors that give 'power with' and 'power to' (Parpart et al., 2002). All these factors should be considered in order to have empowerment. The voluntary participation and the ability to make a choice take place through collective and individual actions at local, national and global level (Parpart et al., 2002). According to the definition, globalization is considered a tool of empowerment because it provides a means that can encourage self-confidence and self-esteem (personal empowerment) and promotes economic, political and social development (Parpart et al., 2002).

Public sphere in Habermas' conception is a place where "the sphere of private people come together as a public" to collectively "engage in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor" (Habermas, 1989/1994, p. 27). In the scholar's theory, basic factors to have a public sphere are the equal access to all citizens from different backgrounds, public opinion formation, rational critical debate and diversity of opinion. Public space is also considered a metaphor indicating a place where citizens, who are distant in space and time, can take decision sharing equal rights as members of a group (Parkinson in Geenens & Tinnevelt, 2009). According to both definitions, there is a similarity between the online public space and the offline public sphere defined by Habermas. The Internet offers platforms that are theoretically accessible to all computer literates from different backgrounds, and it can foster critical debate with diversity of

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opinions. However, access, moderation of interactions, and male dominance are considered limitations to a public sphere online (Cammaert, 2005).

Blogging is a social medium online that creates interaction and provides people with a free platform to express their opinions. According to Abdulla (2012), social media are intrinsically democratic because they establish a horizontal communication where the participants share the same opportunity of joining the conversation. "There is a sense of social equality and justice in social media," Abdulla (2012) stated. The individual has his/her own space in social media and he/she is in the center of the interaction process. Therefore, the Internet and social media provide users with a platform where they are equal, free to interact and express their opinion. This would fulfill two of the factors Habermas mentioned to have a public sphere, equal access to all citizens and diversity of opinions.

Raoof (2011), human rights defender and editor of the "Egyptian blog for human rights," considered cyberspace almost the only free space in Egypt where groups and individuals can express their opinion and practice their right to assembly and exchange ideas with people with common interests (Raoof, 2011). Since Egyptians started to use blogs in 2004, Raoof claimed, offline media were empowered and many taboos were broken (Raoof, 2011). Especially during Egypt's revolution, online spaces seem to be the only place where people could share what was happening. He explained that interaction between online and offline communities is complementary. When citizens can't practice their rights in the offline space, they have the chance to do it online, creating an alternative and virtual public space (Raoof, 2011).

Even though many scholars agree with Raoof (2011) and Abdulla (2012) that Habermas' factors to have public space can also be found online thanks to social media, others disagree. According to Dahlberg (2007), public sphere can't exist online because the critical debate factor is absent and users usually engage in discussions online with others who share similar ideas and interests, thus reducing debates. Iosifidis (2011) considered the empowerment and democratizing potentials of the Internet overestimated. The inclusiveness factor necessary to have a public sphere is not guaranteed on the Internet. Therefore, social media don't represent an alternative public sphere, according to the author. Finally, Papacharissi (2002) considered cyberspace as the combination of private and public space. He recognized that the Internet allows a greater participation than traditional media. However, this doesn't necessarily mean that it also involves diversity and debate among different opinions or rational critical debate, other essential factors in order to have an online public sphere.

Even though the Internet cannot be considered "a panacea for women's problems," it can contribute to economic, social and political empowerment of women, and give them significant opportunities, also for those living in poor and rural areas (Hafkin & Taggart, 2001). Mohamed (2010), who examined the potentiality of online journalism and blogging as an alternative Arabic public sphere, found that many marginalized groups have benefited from using the Internet. In fact, the Internet can create a global village where intimacy can be facilitated even without physical presence (Parpart et al., 2002). As part of the services offered by the Internet, blogging can be an empowerment tool and an alternative to public sphere for both genders. However, this study aims to focus on women as minority group that has less access to the public sphere

offline. Therefore, the concepts of blogging, empowerment and public sphere are also linked to feminism.

Beasley (1999) tried to clarify the complexity of the Western feminist theory, stating that there can't be a unique definition of feminism because it develops in different ways if in liberal, radical and Marxist/socialist views. Liberal feminism views women discriminated in the modern society and calls for equal rights for both genders (Rosser, 2005). In contrast, radical feminism rejects individualism and positivism, and it sees the social shaping of technology highly based on a masculinist conception that excludes women at all levels (Rosser, 2005). Finally, radical feminism considers women's discrimination as the most widespread oppression and that "scientific institutions, practice and knowledge are particularly male-dominated" (Rosser, 2005, p. 10).

Disregarding the definition of the diverse forms of feminism, struggles to obtain more "humane and just societies" in relation to women's issues take place all over the world (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). Therefore, feminists usually refuse the reduction of feminism to a set of ideas existing in the absence of a movement. On the contrary, feminism is more complicated and it involves diverse characteristics such as considering women as the subject rather than the object of the analysis. The basic element of feminism is the recognition of women's marginalization, its effort to overcome it, and the male-dominated perception of technology and social life.

Feminism in the Arab world was born with nationalism, a movement that started as a reaction to western colonization. Therefore, the movements of nationalism, feminism and colonialism are interconnected, differing from feminism in western countries and

making it difficult to clearly define it. According to El Saadawi, Egyptian feminist, the gender inequalities afflicting Arab women can only be reduced by addressing the root causes of the problems (El Saadawi, 1980). El Saadawi believes that "real emancipation can only mean freedom from all forms of exploitation whether economic, political, sexual or cultural. Economic emancipation alone is not sufficient […]"(El Saadawi, 1980, p. 6). She considers the liberation of women from all different kinds of exploitation – economic, social, moral, and cultural – an achievement for both genders (El Saadawi, 1980) and the society as a whole.

Since the research focuses on blogging, cyberfeminism is the term that represents the feminist approach online. The term cyberfeminism was introduced in 1991. It indicates a "woman-centered perspective that advocates women's use of new information and communication technologies of empowerment" (Rosser, 2005, p. 17). According to Rosser, cyberfeminism combines different feminist views in order to show the complex interactions among information technologies, women and feminism (Rosser, 2005).

Hawthorne (1999) defined cyberfeminism as a philosophy which acknowledges, firstly, that there are differences in power between women and men, in the digital discourse in specific; and secondly, that cyberfeminists aim at changing that situation (Hawthorne, 1999). The Internet offers a great opportunity to feminists to work in ways they never considered possible, creating groups where they can discuss about gender issues and reach a larger audience.

According to Gajjala, "what all cyberfeminists share is the belief that women should take control of and appropriate the use of cyber-technologies in an attempt to

empower themselves" (1999, p. 617). Gajjala believes that the empowerment would be possible by giving women who live in the de-empowered south, which is not efficiently connected to the rest of the world, the chance to become computer literates and connect to the north of the world. New technologies, which enable users to create contents and share opinions, can be powerful tools nowadays and increase the potentials for women (Gajjala, 1999). Activists working online had recognized the potential of the Internet as a force for social change and a tool of empowerment for women because it creates women's venues, resources and networks for organizing (Sutton & Pollock, 2000). Chen (2012), who surveyed 312 women bloggers, found out a significant relationship between need for self-disclosure and seeing blogging as a way to express their opinion, even if this is not considered the main reason why women blog. In fact, other secondary reasons compel women to blog, related to basic needs that are most deficient in them (Chen, 2012).

Female Internet users are usually not representative of the population as a whole in developing countries, but they rather belong to a small-educated elite (Hafkin & Taggart, 2001). According to Otterman (2007), the 30 percent of all Internet users is made by Egyptian women, while according to a survey published in 2010 by Arab Advisor Group's Egypt, the female Internet users reach only 10.8% in Egypt. Statistics on women bloggers in Egypt are not even available so far.

All over the world women suffer of discrimination. However, "it is in the MENA countries where the gap between the rights of men and those of women is the most visible and significant and where resistance to women's equality has been most challenging" (Nazir, 2006, p. 2). Women do not enjoy the same citizenship and nationality rights as

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men do in MENA countries[3] (Nazir, 2006). They are not allowed to hold specific positions, they are often silenced in the mainstream media (Nazir, 2006), and they are a marginalized group in the technology field and in society. As a consequence, the Arab world remains excluded from all the opportunities possible for networking, economic development and investment, placing women in the Arab world "in the deepest recess of the digital age" (Wheeler, 2004, p. 138).

As part of a study into the psychological empowerment potentials of Web 2.0 for marginalized groups of the society, Stavrositu & Sundar (2008) surveyed a sample of 340 female bloggers, obtained from two public web directories listing blogs written by women. It found out that writing a blog psychologically empower women. In the process of blogging, the person becomes in fact both sender and source of information; in this way, the blogger boosts her competence, and she develops her personality and ideas. Thanks to blogging, women can have a platform where they can both express their opinion and connect to others. As a consequence, psychological empowerment is not a direct outcome of blogging but an immediate indirect one, giving the chance to develop sense of community and agency (Stavrositu & Sundar, 2008).

Otterman (2007) pointed out that, according to Egypt's National council of women, positive steps have been made due to female blogging, which can help improve gender equality. For instance, blogging allows discussions among people of different social classes and opinions about topics that are usually taboo, such as sexual harassment and homosexuality. As a consequence, the author stated that the blogosphere is one of the

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[3] Even though King Abdulla has recently announced that women will be allowed to vote starting the 2015 local elections, so far women cannot vote in Saudi Arabia, and in the rest of the Arab countries women are extremely underrepresented in institutions.

few public spaces with chances of equal representation.

According to Wilson (2005, p. 51), feminist women discuss important issues in the comments section of each other blogs. The interaction is the main factor that "makes the blogosphere unique" because it gives women the chance to interact with other points of view, to express, formulate and supports their opinion. Female bloggers confirmed that blogging gave them confidence. Receiving feedback from the readers and establishing an interaction helped them in formulating their ideas and improving self-confidence. In this way, blogging becomes a powerful tool for women.

Studies focusing on differences in writing styles and content between blogs written by male and female bloggers – which is not the main focus of this study - confirmed the empowerment potential of blogging. In fact, many of these studies pointed out that female blogs are defined by a more personal writing than men (Chen, 2012; Koppel, Schler, Argamon & Pennebaker, 2006; Nowson & Oberlander, 2006; Li, 2005; Singh, 2001). This finding might indicate the tendency of women to build an online public space where they can express themselves freely. As a minority group in the IT field, women don't have equal access to the offline public space as men do, and therefore they find an alternative. They don't only want to express themselves but also exchange opinions with other users. In this way, women challenge themselves and they might find personal empowerment though blogging.

In conclusion, blogging is a social medium that allows users to share their opinions on a free platform. This might create an online public sphere, which can empower users and minority groups - such as women in the IT field - specifically.

Women's empowerment process might develop online and affect the participation of women in the public sphere offline as well.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Uses and Gratifications Theory – Overview

The study aims to add knowledge of the female blogosphere through the feedback of female bloggers in Egypt and investigate the use of blogging by Egyptian female bloggers, their reasons for choosing the blog format as a tool for self-expression in different areas, such as personal, political and social, and the gratifications they get from using it. The object of the study is related to the concept of media users as active subjects, who can be users and receivers at the same time and choose specific media to respond to their needs. In this perspective, the uses and gratifications (U&G) approach resulted to be the best one. In fact, bloggers can here be considered as communicator and users at the same time due to the interaction that social media such as blogging allow in contrast to traditional media. In this chapter, the development and the core elements of the U&G theory will try to justify such choice.

The Payne Fund studies - on the effect of movies on children's behavior - are at the origin of the uses and gratifications theory (U&G) in the early 1920s. At this time, people were considered passive receivers, immediately and directly influenced by any media content with powerful effect on them (Ruggiero, 2000). The U&G theory was developed as an alternative to the powerful effect theories of mass media, but it was not yet a part of the mass media research at that time. According to Rubin (2009), the U&G theory began in the 1940s, when scholars directed their interest in understanding the reasons why audiences were attracted to certain media behaviors, such as reading

newspapers and listening to the radio, or to certain kinds of music in soap operas and radio (Katz & Blumler, 1973; Ruggiero, 2000). The theory was developed in order to examine the gratifications that the audience gets from the media contents and that satisfy their psychological and social needs (Ruggiero, 2000).

The U&G approach has a psychological communication perspective and it is based on five assumptions. First, the audience member is an active receiver. Second, the receiver's social communication behavior is affected by psychological and social factors. Third, the U&G bases part of its conceptualization on the psychological process according to which people's purposes of media usage justify their choices of specific media contents. Fourth, the audience selects media contents to satisfy specific needs. Fifth, this attempt – according to the U&G theory - is related to the relationship between media and interpersonal communication (Rubin, 1993; Rosengren, Wenner & Palmgreen 1985).

Hence, the U&G approach draws attention to individual choice, shifting the attention from "what media do with people" to "what people do with media" (Katz & Blumler, 1974), and it focuses on the expectations of the receivers towards the media, and the reasons why receivers use or don't use specific media. Finally, the researchers using the U&G theory believe they can also explain communication processes by understanding people's expectations, motives and needs.

With the development of new media, U&G theory has evolved new perspectives. In the use of new media, the audience is active and interactive in selecting its ways of receiving information. This new approach is suitable with the U&G approach, which puts

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into high consideration personal factors in the media selection process (Bouwman & Van De Wijngaert, 2002; Ko, Cho & Roberts, 2005). According to Ruggiero (2000; Rubin & Bantz in Salvaggio & Bryant, 1989), U&G approach is very effective in understanding needs and motivations for using the Internet. Kaye (1998) stated that the application of U&G theory to the new technologies has received limited attention. Therefore, he looked into the uses and motives for choosing the World Wide Web and its impact on traditional media from the audience's perspective. He surveyed 207 students at a Midwestern university and identified six main motivations to use it (Kaye, 1998), such as entertainment, social interaction, pass time, information and web site preference.

As Flaherty (1998) observes, new media differ from traditional ones, especially for their interactive dimension, which makes Internet communication very similar to the face-to-face dimension. The researcher investigated the computer-mediated communication as alternative to the face-to-face one by analyzing the motives of a sample of 312 Internet users. In conclusion, the U&G approach is the most appropriate to analyze new media, because it suits both mediated and interpersonal communication, according to the author (Flaherty, 1998).

Later on, the same topic was investigated by Pornsakulvanich, who stated that computer mediated communication "can lead to equal or even more socially desirable interactions than face-to-face interaction" (Pornsakulvanich et al., 2008, p. 2293), and that the U&G is the best approach to look into individual's motives for using an interactive tool like the Internet. Singer (as cited in Ruggiero, 2000) considers the Internet as a medium with the capability of empowering the individual on two different levels, the seeking information level and the generation of content level. The emerging

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technologies showed the importance and effectiveness of the U&G approach especially the Internet, according to the author (Singer as cited in Ruggiero, 2000).

In conclusion, the study investigates the Egyptian female blogosphere and women's empowerment through blogging. This new medium is defined by interactivity and direct involvement of users. Since the U&G approach focuses its attention on the motives and uses of the users, shifting the attention to what people do with media (Blumler & Katz 1974), the U&G theory is the most suitable theory to investigate the female Egyptian blogosphere.

Criticism to Uses and Gratification Theory

Despite the significant developments, some scholars have criticized the U&G theory. The critics consider U&G relying mostly on self-reports and being naive and uncritical about the possible dysfunction for society of specific types of audiences' gratifications. Finally, it gives little attention to the content media, focusing more on self-report that are biased because limited to a person's memory (Katz, 1987).

In addition, the contemporary criticism of the U&G states that the theory relies too much on self-selection and on expectations "produced from individual predispositions, social interaction, and environmental factors" and therefore not consistent (Ruggiero, 2000). Finally, it assumes that the audience targeted has an active media behavior (Ruggiero, 2000).

Feminist theory approach – Qualitative versus Quantitative methods

This study investigates Egyptian women's motivations and gratifications with blogging. It applies the U&G approach to analyze the needs and motives of female Egyptian bloggers, and the feminist theory to choose the best method to gather and analyze the data. This section will explain the dispute between qualitative and quantitative methods in feminist studies, supporting the choice of the present study to apply a quantitative method.

The concern about the effectiveness of quantitative methods for feminist studies has started during the second wave of feminism (Scott, 2010). In fact, feminist scholars usually consider qualitative methods as the most suitable approach for studies on gender inequalities (Scott, 2010; McDowell, 1992). Since the 1970s, the choice of the methodological approach has been based according to the 'malestream' conception, which considers "qualitative methods aligned with a feminist perspectives, while quantitative as defensive of the (masculinist) status quo" (Oakley, 1998, p. 707). As a consequence, the quantitative approach has been neglected to gender studies for a long time.

Scott argued that this belief is based on "a narrow definition of feminism and a somewhat misleading portrayal of quantitative research" (Scott, 2010, p. 223). The author re-assessed the quantitative methodology considering its approaches essential and affective in analyzing the practices of exclusion and selection, which cause and define

gender inequalities (Scott, 2010). Therefore, he considered quantitative method relevant to gender studies, even if he didn't believe there is "a best method" for researching on gender inequalities. Scott stated that the combination of qualitative and quantitative could support different levels of research, with more accurate results. Finally, in contrast to the general belief, the quantitative approach doesn't reduce women's experiences to numbers, but rather it wideners the opportunities of feminist social science studies.

Oakley (1998) considered the apparent contrast of the two methodological approaches a historical and social construction. The new feminist research should rather consider quantitative and qualitative methodology as complementary in describing the social world and gender inequalities (Oakley, 1998). The same consideration can be applied to the value of the survey research, which some feminist researchers considers scientific and functional to their purposes, even though some others don't believe quantitative methods and survey research can be scientific and rigorous (Reinharz, 1992).

Jayaratne (1983) stated that more rigorous quantitative research should be done in order to counter the previous quantitative sexist research and eventually adapt some erroneous procedures to feminist values. In addition, studies aiming to compare elements or underline differences and/or similarities between male and females or among women require a quantified research and statistics, which allow generalization. In this way, small sections of the population can be analyzed through survey research and statistical techniques, and problems that apparently occur to a few people can be investigated and generalized on a bigger scale (Reinharz, 1992).

In conclusion, the study refers to the feminist theory approach, which recognizes

women's marginalization and tries to overcome it by promoting solutions, tools and policy that can help women share the same rights as men. Cyberfeminism is a feminist approach online, which refers to different feminist theories because it still hasn't developed a separate one. Even though the feminist theory has originally considered quantitative methods representative of a "malestream" conception, feminist researchers currently support the use of quantitative method and survey research for feminist social science. They consider quantitative method especially convenient to investigate the new tools in a changing world that are significantly affecting the status of women in society.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The literature review shows that women blog to express themselves and share their opinion on different subjects, considering blogging as an alternative public sphere. It presents blogging as empowerment tool for women especially in countries where there is lack of freedom of expression like in Egypt and women have fewer chances to express their opinion in public spaces. However, since the literature review on blogging in general and on female blogging in specific is scarce, the study will try to investigate further on the needs and motives of Egyptian female bloggers and on blogging as empowering tool for women in Egypt through a quantitative method.

The study tries to address the following three research questions:

1. **What are the motivations of Egyptian women bloggers?**

2. **What gratifications do Egyptian women bloggers get from blogging?**

3. **Is there a correlation between the motivations (as a form of dis-empowerment) and the gratifications (as a form of empowerment) Egyptian women bloggers get out of blogging? Do Egyptian women bloggers perceive blogging as an empowering act?**

CHAPTER 4: METHOD

Sampling Criteria and Strategy

The study addresses a population of Egyptian women bloggers who blog in English, Arabic and French (rarely) on any topic. Only women bloggers of Egyptian and mixed Egyptian nationality were included in the study. Looking for Egyptian women bloggers was not an easy task. In fact, no blog search engines listing female bloggers in Egypt or comprehensive directory of Egyptian blogs are currently available. The directory www.egybloggers.com, titled "the Egyptian blog ring," is currently shut down (Shoukry, 2008), while www.omraneya.net aggregator is still under construction in addition to being a non-user friendly website or useful in the specific research of women bloggers (Shoukry, 2008).

The researcher, therefore, combined purposive and snowball sampling techniques. A list of 120 women bloggers – who mostly blog in Arabic – was obtained from Shoukry (2008), the only study published on Egyptian women bloggers so far. This group of bloggers was invited to participate to the study through e-mails, social media (Facebook and Twitter), and by posting a message on their blogs. Collective blogs were used to form the second pool. Egyptian bloggers involved in Kolena Laila ("We are all Laila" - www.kolenalaila.com) took part in the study. Kolena Laila is a blogging initiative started by a group of women in 2006 to blog yearly about topics related to Egyptian women. Eman Abdelrahman, blogger and co-founder of the website, forwarded the survey to the rest of the group. 'Women bloggers' (http://blog-on.net/about), a group of Arab bloggers that opened a community blog in 2012, was invited to participate through their website

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and Twitter account. Finally, Egypt's section of Global Voices Online was reached through the Lingua coordinator, Mohamed ElGohary. The contacts remained anonymous and inaccessible to the researcher who was included in the mass e-mail sent to the group of bloggers. In addition, the researcher invited key-members of the blogosphere community in Egypt to spread the link to the survey among the Egyptian blogosphere. Finally, the blogroll, with the list of blogs suggested by the blogger – was also used in order to find other Egyptian women bloggers and contact them. Men bloggers were asked to support the study by forwarding the link to the online survey with the tools they preferred, either e-mails or social media. In distributing the survey, social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, were used. The online survey was posted on the main Facebook groups of Egyptian and Arab bloggers as well as the main Arab and international organization dealing with women's rights and human rights. However, the most effective tool was Twitter because it helped diffuse the survey reaching a high number of women bloggers (considering the low number of the entire population of women bloggers) in a short time.

Questionnaire design

The twenty-question-survey was designed to describe women's motivations and experiences with blogging and the blogger's use of the blog format as part of the empowerment process that the literature review has pointed out. Questions 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 are filter questions and demographic questions. The respondent was asked to answer all of them in order to proceed with the questionnaire. No male bloggers or women of other nationalities were allowed to complete the survey.

Questions from 6 to 11 investigated the bloggers' uses and frequency in using the blog-format (on a 5-point scale ranging from "very often" to "never"). Question 12 was related to the concept of blogosphere as alternative public space online. The respondent was asked to identify the space – either online or offline – she felt more comfortable talking about a list of topics. The topics were chosen considering the psychological/personal aspects and the social and political factors defining the empowerment process. Question 13 and 14 looked into the gratifications bloggers get from blogging. The options were equally distributed between personal and social/political empowerment. The scales used in the survey are likert, interval level. Questions from 15 to 17 are related to the empowerment potentials of blogging as alternative public sphere. Related to the same topic are the open-ended questions 18 and 19. Bloggers were asked to explain the meaning of empowerment and whether they felt empowered by blogging or not according to their definition of empowerment. The open-ended questions were included in order to give the blogger the chance to define a quite difficult concept such as empowerment and compare it to the definition made by the literature review. The open-ended question 20 allowed respondents to express their comments on the study and anything related to it.

The questionnaire was developed taking three different dissertations on blogging published at the American University in Cairo as a model in designing some of the questions. Shoukri (2008) was taken as a model for questions 8, 11, 13, 14. Meshreky (2009) supported the design of questions 14 and 15; and finally El-Hefnawi (2008) was also considered for question 14.

The survey was created using the online survey service SurveyMonkey. It was anonymous and no IP addresses were recorded or stored.

Response rate

Eighty-two (n = 82) respondents took the survey. Among them, 72 bloggers (n = 72) filled out the survey and 54 (n = 54) fully completed the survey. In Shoukry (2008), which is the only study previously published on Egyptian women bloggers, 66 female bloggers out of 120 contacted by the blogger responded to the survey.

Procedures

The IRB approval was requested and obtained in order to survey the bloggers. The questionnaire was constructing using the online survey service Surveymonkey, and the link to the online and anonymous survey was sent to the bloggers with the procedures explained in the survey strategy section. The survey remained opened for one week, from the 19th to the 26th of March. Three e-mails with a reminder message were sent to the bloggers and a daily reminder was sent through the social media Twitter and Facebook.

Data collection and analysis

The research is descriptive and therefore the data are analyzed quantitatively. Descriptive analyses were generated on SurveyMonkey in the form of tables and charts. In addition, inferential statistics calculated mean scores and standard deviation of gratifications and needs/motives; the Spearman's correlation between the three indexes of need and gratification factors respectively and, finally, the reliability coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha) of the data gathered from the 72 respondents using SPSS.

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In order to calculate the Spearman's correlation between gratifications and needs of bloggers, items investigating gratifications and needs were grouped into three indexes respectively, representing the personal/psychological, social and political sphere. The items were grouped in each of the indexes considering the concept of empowerment taken into consideration in this study. Empowerment embraces psychological and personal aspects, which strengthen 'power within' the person, and economic and political factors that give 'power with' and 'power to' (Parpart et al., 2002). Four motives included in question 14 were removed from the three indexes because not directly related to the three main areas of empowerment considered. The excluded items were "To improve my writing skills," "Because I don't feel represented by the mainstream media," "Because readers' feedback help me understand myself better," and "Because anonymity allows me express my opinion freely."

I BLOG:

Personal/Psychological Needs
    To express my opinion
    To gain more self-confidence
    To develop my critical thinking
Social Needs
    To connect to other people
    To pass free time
    To influence other people
    To update family
    Readers' feedback helps me understand other people's opinions
Political Needs
    To advocate women's rights
    To advocate human rights
    As alternative to civic life
    Because I can't express my opinion freely in public spaces

---

Among the gratification items listed in question 13, one item was excluded from the three indexes (personal, social and political gratifications), that is to say "Has improved my writing style," because not directly related to none of the indexes.

BLOGGING:

Personal/Psychological Gratifications
    Allows me to express myself regarding personal issues
    Has helped me strengthen my arguments
    Has made me a more open minded person
    Has made me feel more confident
    Has improved my critical thinking

Social Gratifications
    Has allowed me to engage with both women & men online
    Has made me aware of other people's opinion
    Has encourage me to be more social offline
    Has expanded my circle of friends

Political Gratifications
    Allows me to express myself regarding social & political issues
    Has increased my involvement in politics
    Has increased my civic engagement

In the open-ended questions, the respondent was asked to express her opinion on the meaning of "empowerment" and whether she considers blogging empowering for her or not and eventually the reasons. In the literature review empowerment didn't have a specific and unique definition. On the contrary, the term is quite complex due to its intercorrelation with personal, political, social and economic sphere. That being so, the respondent was asked not only to say if she felt empowered by blogging on a 1 (strongly disagree) – 5 (strongly agree) scale, but also what the word meant to her and to which extent she felt or she didn't feel empowered.

Kabeer's definition of empowerment was taken into consideration to measure empowerment in this study. She related empowerment to the initial person's dis-empowerment. When those who were prevented from the ability to make a choice acquire such ability, they are empowered (Kabeer, 2011). In order to have power, the access to alternatives and the possibility of choosing otherwise are crucial. This definition strictly correlates the needs and motives to use a specific tool - blogging in this specific study - as a form of dis-empowerment and the gratifications a woman can get out of it, as a form of empowerment.

Overall, the literature review indicated empowerment as both a process and an outcome, which embraces psychological and personal as well as social, political and economic factors. In any empowerment process one factor can be predominant on the others. However, according to Parpart (et al., 2002) all these factors should be considered in order to have empowerment.

Limitations

The survey instrument was only in English, even though Arabic written blogs were included in the sample. As a consequence, respondents could have made mistakes due to the language divide. However, a moderate majority of bloggers reported blogging in English rather than Arabic. This shows that Egyptian women bloggers are a well-educated minority and, therefore, not representative of the entire population, due to the significant digital divide that makes the Internet still limited to small segments of the population, as explained in the literature review.

The sample was a combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques, and therefore the results can't be generalized. In fact, the researcher couldn't construct the study on a random sample due to the unavailability of a blog search engine to draw the sample from. The same limitation was pointed out in Shoukry (2008).

In addition, the study was based on the uses and gratifications theory. Self-report, bloggers' perceptions and memories could lead to biased or partial results.

Time constraints limited the possibility of combining a qualitative study with the quantitative as well as of conducting a pre-test. In addition, interviews with bloggers resulted to be of difficult realization not only for time constraints but also for the scarce availability of bloggers who prefer to express their opinions anonymously and online. However, the researcher did conduct previous interviews with Egyptian female bloggers for a previous research study and magazine articles and therefore considered that while constructing the survey.

Operational definitions

Blog: A blog is a "frequently modified webpage containing dated entries listed in reverse chronological sequence" (Tremayne, 2007, p. 3). In the present study, blogging only includes blogs and not Twitter, which is considered a form of micro-blogging.

Blogging: The act of writing a blog

Blog post: A data entry posted on the webpage

Blogger: The person who blogs. The verb 'blog' indicates the action of writing and publishing a post on a weblog page

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Gender: Nominal variable

Age: Ordinal variable

Education: Ordinal variable

Motivations/Uses (for blogging): The reasons why receivers use or don't use specific media (Katz & Blumler, 1974). Motivations are assessed on a 5-point-likert scale.

Gratifications: Satisfactions obtained by users thought the use of a specific medium. Gratifications are assessed on a 5-point-likert scale.

Empowerment: Kabeer related empowerment to the initial person's dis-empowerment. When those who were prevented from the ability to make a choice acquire such ability, they are empowered (Kabeer, 2011)

"All those processes that make women take ownership of their own lives, and that these processes can take place on individual, group and societal level" (Strandberg, 2001).

"The increase of self-confidence and self-esteem" (Rowlands, 1997, p. 130)

In this study the aspects of personal/psychological and social/political empowerment are privileged while the economic empowerment is not included because not strictly related to the aim of the study.

Public sphere: is a place where "the sphere of private people come together as a public" to collectively "engage in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor" (Habermas, 1989/1994, p. 27).

The study takes into consideration Habermas' definition of public sphere according to which essential factors in order to have public sphere are equal access to all citizens, public opinion formation, rational critical debate and diversity of opinions. These aspects are related to the personal and social/political empowerment with a predominance of the political aspect on the others.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS

Eighty-two respondents began the survey. However, the results were filtered to eliminate males and non-Egyptians. The partial answers of the respondents were considered significant and, therefore, not filtered due to the already small number of the sample and to the importance of their answers. As a result, 72 Egyptian women bloggers filled the survey out and are included in the analysis. Fifty-four ($n = 54$) out of 72 fully completed the survey. The final sample here analyzed includes, therefore, 72 ($N = 72$) bloggers, 100% females. The 88.9% ($n = 64$) of the bloggers lives in Egypt, while the 11.1% ($n = 8$) lives out of Egypt. Sixty-four ($n = 64$) bloggers have fully Egyptian nationality and 8 ($n = 8$) "Egyptian and other nationality."

Based on the sample of 72 respondents, the majority of bloggers are from 21 to 25-year-old (31.9%, $n = 23$), followed by those ranging from 26 to 30-year-old (27.8%, $n = 20$). Bloggers from 18 to 20-year-old were 13.9% ($n = 10$), 18.1% ($n = 13$) from 31 to 40-year-old and 6.9% ($n = 5$) over 40 years old.

Table 1.1

Demographic information of the 72 respondents

Answer options:	N	Response Percent	Response Count
Under 18 years old	72	1.4%	1
18-20 years old	72	13.9%	10
21-25 years old	72	31.9%	23
26-30 years old	72	27.8%	20
31-40 years old	72	18.1%	13
Over 40 years old	72	6.9%	5

The majority of bloggers surveyed possesses a Bachelor degree (63.9% *n* = 46) and a Master/PhD degree (26.4% *n* = 19). They write their blog in English (81.8% *n* = 51), while the rest chooses Arabic (74.2%, *n* = 49) and French, a small minority of 3% (*n* = 2). Out of 66 respondents, 30.3% (*n* = 20) have been blogging for more than 4 years, while the 22.7% (*n* = 15) from 1 to 2 years.

Table 1.2

Blog frequencies
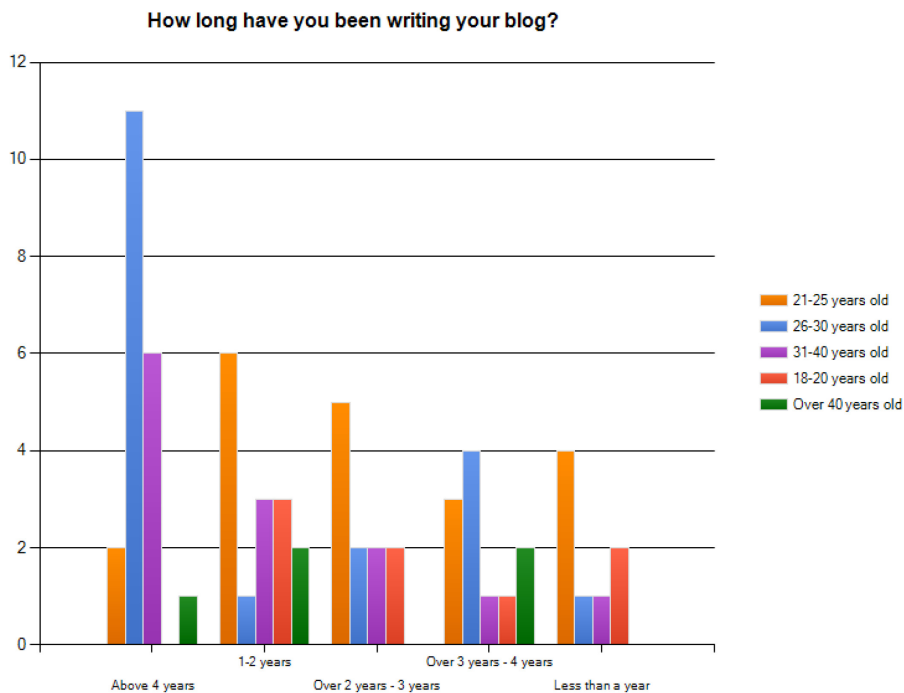
Most of the bloggers post new entries "less than one time a week" (*n* = 42) or "from 1 to 2 times a week" (*n* = 20). Only 3% (*n* = 2) of women, who are from 21 to 25 years old, blog "3-5 times a week" and another 3% from 26 to 30 years old blog "more

than 5 times a week." The chart below shows the post frequency in relation to the variable age.

Table 1.3

Post frequencies

How often do you post new entries on your blog?
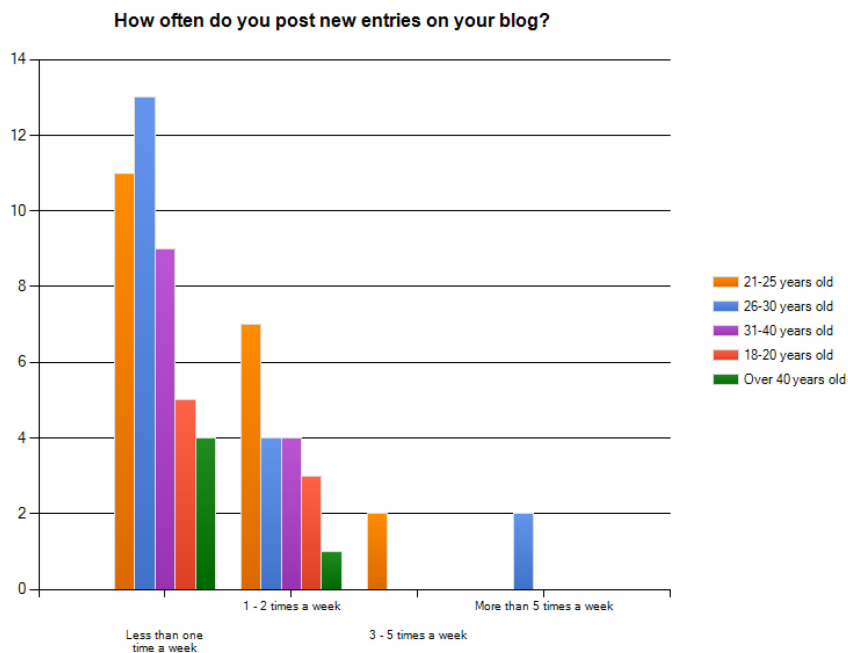
The majority of bloggers considered their blog personal (69.7%) and social (50%). In addition, 30.3% of women write political blogs and 31.8% of the respondents define their blog literary. The "other" option mentioned by bloggers included: "a mix of all of them," which can be considered a mistake since the respondent was allowed to pick multiple choices; "religious, my life/my reflection and journey, family blog," which can be included in the "personal option." Other answers included "entertainment, technology & social media, architectural heritage, religious issues/travel writing, lifestyle, technology, humanitarian."

A significant majority of bloggers (89.4% *n* = 59) addresses their blog to both genders, while the rest doesn't have a specific target audience. Finally, none of the 66 respondents blog exclusively for a female or male audience.

Out of 61 respondents, the most frequent topics are personal experiences (60.7%, *n* = 37) and political issues (27.9%, *n* = 17). Respondents write "sometimes" about women's issues (34.4%, *n* = 21), religious views (34.4%, *n* = 21) and human rights (29.5%, *n* = 18). A significant number of respondents "never" writes about sexuality (36.1%, *n* = 22).

Table 1.4

Frequencies of the topics chosen by bloggers
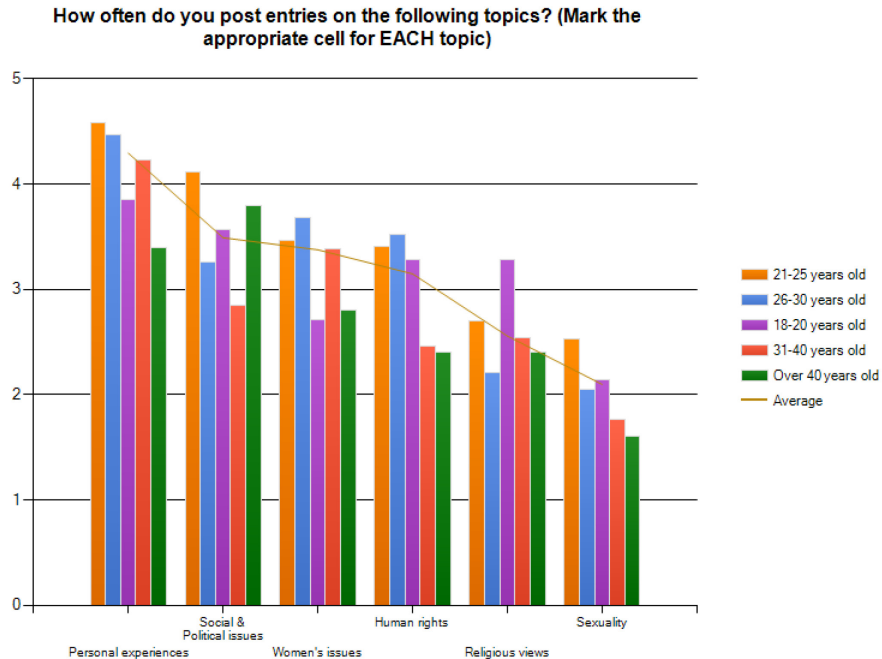
Overall, the most recurrent topics are personal experiences, social and political issues, women's issues, human rights, religious views and sexuality. The table 1.4 shows the frequencies of the topics chosen by the bloggers in relation to the age ranges. The choice of topics throughout the different age ranges showed to be quite homogenous.

Sixty-one out of 72 bloggers expressed their opinion about feeling comfortable talking about specific topics. A large majority doesn't perceive any difference in talking online and offline about women's issues (82%, $n = 50$), human rights (78.7%, $n = 48$), social & political issues (78.7%, $n = 48$), religious views (50.8%, $n = 31$) or personal experiences (62.3%, $n = 38$). However, 34.4% ($n = 21$) of Egyptian female bloggers prefer talking about sexuality offline rather than online reflecting the results of the frequency of the topics chosen by bloggers.

Sixty out of 72 bloggers responded to the gratifications they get out of blogging. The items included could be divided in three indexes representing personal/psycological, social and political gratifications, as explained in the method. The most recurrent gratifications for 60 women bloggers are linked to the expression of personal (61.7%, $n = 37$) and social and political issues (55%, $n = 33$). The 48.3% of the respondents were made more aware of other people's opinions as well as improved their writing style. The other more recurrent gratifications were linked to the personal and psychological empowerment, such as blogging "has helped me strengthen my argument" (36.7%, $n = 22$), "has made me a more open-minded person" (43.3%, $n = 26$), "has made me feel more confident" (36.7%, $n = 22$) and "has improved my critical thinking" (38.3%, $n = 23$).

Motivations for blogging were investigated in question 14. The items, as for the gratifications, were grouped into three indexes representing personal and psycological needs/motives, social and political needs. The first set of variables, "I blog to express my opionion," was the main reason for bloggers to write their blog according to the 99.3% (n = 57) of women who strongly agreed or agreed with the statement. 43.1% (n = 25) of the respondents were neutral about "gaining more self-confidence" as motivation to write a blog. However, 39.7% (n = 23) "strongly agree" and "agree" with the statement. "To develop my critical thinking" scored 52.1% (n = 36).

The second index of items included social motives. The variable "because readers' feedback help me understand other people's opinion" is one of the main motives, with a total of 74.1% (n = 43), considering SA and A. "To connect to other people" is also a significant reason for women to start blogging (67.3%, n = 39 summing "strongly agree" and "agree"). "To pass free time" was equally chosen as a motive to blog but also as a neutral statement by the same number of bloggers. "To influence other people" is a motive to blog for the 67.3% (n = 39, summing SA and A). Finally, "To update family" wasn't one of the reason for bloggers to regularly publish their posts (56.9% SD and D).

Political needs included "to advocate women's rights," a statement with which the 55.1% (n = 32) of the respondents strongly agree or agree. The same percentage got the item "I blog to advocate human rights." In addition, "I blog because I can't participate in civic life" is not a motive for choosing blogging for 58.6% (n = 34) of the respondents. Finally, 48.3% (n = 28) strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement "I blog because I can't express my opinion freely in public spaces."

Other items, which were not included in the three indexes of variables, were "to improve my writing skills," which is considered a reason for the 62.1% of the bloggers (considering both SA and A). The 44.8% of the respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed with the item "because anonimity allows me to express my opinion freely," while the 22.4% was neutral to the statement. Finally, "because I don't feel represented by the mainstream media" is a reason to opt for blogging for the 53.5% of the Egyptian women bloggers.

In question 15, bloggers strongly agreed and agreed with the statement "I feel freer to express myself on blogs than offline" (49.2%, $n = 28$). However, 35.1% ($n = 20$) were also neutral to the assertion.

In question 16 a significant majority agreed that blogging is an alternative public space for women (71.9%, $n = 41$). Finally, 82.5% ($n = 47$) thought that blogging is empowering for them (considering SA and A).

In the open-ended questions, the respondent was asked to express her opinion on the meaning of "empowerment" and whether she considers blogging empowering for her, on a 1 (strongly disagree) – 5 (strongly agree) scale, or not and eventually the reasons.

Thirty-six ($n = 36$) out of 72 respondents expressed their definition of empowerment and 37 ($n = 37$) explained whether they consider blogging empowering or not in the open-ended questions. The majority of answers underlined the personal/psychological and social aspects of empowerment, omitting the political and

economic factors that were included in the empowerment definition by the literature review. In addition, according to the Egyptian bloggers, there is a connection between social and personal factors of empowerment. The freedom of expression, self confidence, power, inspiration and awareness obtained in the private sphere can – according to the respondents – be reflected in the offline social life and the interaction with other people.

The most used terms, which can be related to the personal and psychological sphere, were: "confidence, assurance, feeling I can express my thoughts and myself, capability of trying, freedom, knowing of your inner strength, encouragement, believing I have capabilities, thinking and feeling, inspiration, passion, independence and respect, self-confidence, being me."

The answers related to the social aspects of empowerment were: "Socialize and re-share opinions;" "knowing your inner strength and have it come out," which established a connection between the personal and social empowerment. When a woman is personally empowered, she feels she can have more chances to transfer the confidence and self-expression into the social sphere and into action in the offline life. The connection between personal and social factors of empowerment is also underlined in the following answers:

> "Empowerment means feeling better about yourself, confident, learning new things, exploring new areas and ideas, sure about your choices, having the strength and courage to represent your true self as you see it (being your self), Influence."

> "Self confidence that there are people who care to read what I write"

"It means a greater deal of self reliance, self confidence, and awareness about oneself, others and the socio-economic and political environment that one lives in. It's the ability to achieve one's goals and to engage positively with society. Being able to voice one's point of view regarding all social and political issues without restrictions or taboo issues. It also means having a greater awareness of different perspectives and being able to engage in constructive and enriching dialogues with others no matter how much their points of view may differ from your. It means the ability to do many things"

Two respondents (*n*= 2) gave a negative connotation to the word empowerment. For one blogger the term means "nothing," while another one stated, "I hate the word. It is very popular when it comes what is called 'women empowerment.' It gives you the feeling the women are helpless creatures who escape to the safe heaven of 'blogosphere.' Generally empowerment gives the feeling of inferiority. I never use it."

In the second open-ended question, 29 out of 37 stated that blogging is empowering to them. The most recurrent reason is that blogging helps communicating one's thoughts to the world without being judged and/or regulating the comments. One blogger commented, "I can freely say what I feel, which is something I cannot do in public, without being asked why or without being afraid of the feedback! I can freely control who comments, follow or read me." Bloggers consider writing - in general, online

and offline - empowering, and blogging a tool that helps them be active, multifunctional and interactive with other people.

"Yes. Throughout the five years of blogging, I could understand myself as well as other better. This knowledge allowed me to think more critically and to identify that I have a voice. Voice is power."

"It allows me to express myself more freely, seeing what I write on my blog gives me more courage to say it out loud."

"Yes, it changed my character, my career and it molded my future to a better best. It helped me moving on, it was my best friend when I didn't have anyone to talk to. It became my window to change my part of the world."

"Yes. Because through blogging I have been able to assess the effect my words have on people. I feel like I was able to change lives, even if in a small way, through my words."

One answer underlined the necessity of assessing the empowerment process in the long run: "I only started blogging a year ago, I can't really link the two yet." Other bloggers were not sure about the empowering potentials of blogging, even though they recognized some empowering factors of the tool. "I

believe that it made no difference, but the ability to blog anonymously enabled me to say things I wouldn't normally say to people who know me, not because I'm not empowered but because those around me might not be open minded enough to accept me as a friend or acquaintance." And another blogger said, "Actually, in a previous period it was."

Finally, four bloggers ($n= 4$) clearly defined blogging as not empowering to them. However, in the explanation they mentioned some of the reasons why blogging could psychologically empower a person. "No. It's only a way to express opinion, it has nothing to do with empowering." "Not really, it's just a place I voice my opinions." A more severe comment of one of the bloggers was, "I see false relationship that you're trying to make between female's empowerment and blogging. This has nothing to do with being a female. Blogging allowed everybody to express themselves freely regardless of their sex." Finally, another blogger said, "No, because I believe I am already utilizing my potential."

Non-parametric statistics

In addition to the descriptive analysis, the mean and the standard deviation of gratifications and needs/motives were calculated. The Spearman's correlation was calculated between the three indexes of need items and the three indexes of gratification items in order to test if there is a correlation between the needs – as dis-empowering factors - that lead women to start blogging and the gratifications – as empowering factors - they get out of it. Finally, the reliability coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha) of all the data was also calculated to measure the reliability. All analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics v. 19.

According to the mean scores of the needs, which were measured on a 1 (strongly disagree) – 5 (strongly agree) scale, "expressing one's opinion" came as the first reason Egyptian women bloggers blog for (M = 4.64, S = .520). "I blog because I want to influence other people" has the same mean score (M = 3.88) as "to connect to other people," but a lower standard deviation (SD = .900 and 1.027 respectively). Being prevented from participating to civic life came last with a mean score M = 2.33 and SD = 1.049 and "because I can update my family and relatives who live faraway" (M = 2.38, SD = 1.282).

Table 1.5

Descriptive Statistics of the blogger's motives

I BLOG:	*n*	*M*	SD
To express my opinion	58	4.64	.520
To connect to other people	58	3.88	1.027
Because I want to influence other people	58	3.88	.900
Because readers' feedback helps me understand other people's opinions	58	3.86	1.131
To improve my writing skills	58	3.71	1.155
To develop my critical thinking	58	3.64	1.087
To advocate women's rights	58	3.57	1.141
To advocate human rights	58	3.57	1.141
Because I don't feel represented by the mainstream media	58	3.57	1.171
Because readers' feedback helps me understand myself better	58	3.45	1.111
To gain more self confidence	58	3.34	1.117
To pass free time	58	2.97	1.284
Because anonymity allows me express my opinions freely	58	2.91	1.466
Because I can't express my opinion freely in public spaces (offline)	58	2.69	1.188
Because I can update my family and relatives who live faraway	58	2.38	1.282
Because I can't participate in civic life	58	2.33	1.049

Note. A 5-point scale was used: *strongly disagree* (1), *disagree* (2), *neutral* (3), *agree* (4), and *strongly agree* (5). The question was: "Please indicate your opinion on EACH of the statements below related to the reason why you blog."

The needs were grouped in three indexes, social, personal & psychological and political, each of them with related items. The mean scores and standard deviation was also calculated for the three indexes of needs. Personal and psychological motivations are the most frequent (M = 3.8736, SD = .65137), according to Egyptian women bloggers. Social motives and the need to interact and socialize comes after (M = 3.3931, SD = .68974) and political needs as the last reason to blog (M = 3.0388, SD = .75916).

Table 1.6

Mean scores and standard deviation of the three indexes of the bloggers' motives

I BLOG:	*N*	*M*	SD
Personal/Psychological Needs	58	3.8736	.65137
To express my opinion			
To gain more self-confidence			
To develop my critical thinking			
Social Needs	58	3.3931	.68974
To connect to other people			
To pass free time			
To influence other people			
To update family			
Readers' feedback helps me understand other people's opinions			
Political Needs	58	3.0388	.75916
To advocate women's rights			
To advocate human rights			
As alternative to civic life			
Because I can't express my opinion freely in public spaces			

Note. A 5-point scale was used: *strongly disagree* (1), *disagree* (2), *neutral* (3), *agree* (4), and *strongly agree* (5). The question was: "Please indicate your opinion on EACH of the statements below related to the reason why you blog."

The mean scores and standard deviation of the gratifications were also calculated. According to the results, one of the main gratifications the respondents has is "expressing myself regarding social & political issues" (M = 4.48; SD = .624), followed by "blogging allows me to express myself regarding personal issues" (M = 4.47, SD = .791). Blogging doesn't encourage women in being more social offline according to bloggers' perceptions (M = 3.12, SD = 1.059), or increasing civic engagement (M = 3.37, SD = 974).

Table 1.7

Descriptive statistics of the bloggers' gratifications

BLOGGING:	*N*	*M*	SD
Allows me to express myself regarding social & political issues	**60**	**4.48**	**.624**
Allows me to express myself regarding personal issues	60	4.47	.791
Has made me more aware of other People's opinions	60	4.25	.816
Has improved my writing style	60	4.23	.890
Allows me to engage with both women and men online	60	4.08	.829
Has improved my critical thinking	60	4.08	.889
Has helped me strengthen my arguments	60	4.02	.892
Made me a more open-minded person	60	4.02	1.049
Makes me feel more self confident	60	4.02	.948
Has expanded my circle of friends	60	3.93	1.071
Has increased my involvement in politics	60	3.75	1.129
Has increased my civic engagement	60	3.37	.974
Has encouraged me to be more social offline	60	3.12	1.059

Note. A 5-point scale was used: *strongly disagree* (1), *disagree* (2), *neutral* (3), *agree* (4), and *strongly agree* (5). The question was: "Please indicate your opinion on EACH of the statements below related to blogging."

Also the gratifications were grouped in three indexes of variables, and the mean scores and standard deviation were calculated. According to the results, women bloggers obtain personal gratifications from blogging (M = 4.1200, SD = .62186). Political gratifications come after (M = 3.8667, SD = .67565) and social gratifications last (M = 3.8458, SD = .67349).

Table 1.8

Mean scores and standard deviation of the three indexes of the bloggers' gratifications

BLOGGING:	*N*	*M*	SD
Personal/Psychological Gratifications	60	**4.1200**	**.62186**
Allows me to express myself regarding personal issues			
Has helped me strengthen my arguments			
Has made me a more open minded person			
Has made me feel more confident			
Has improved my critical thinking			
Social Gratifications	60	**3.8458**	**.67349**
Has allowed me to engage with both women & men online			
Has made me aware of other people's opinion			
Has encouraged me to be more social offline			
Has expanded my circle of friends			
Political Gratifications	60	**3.8667**	**.67565**
Allows me to express myself regarding social & political issues			
Has increased my involvement in politics			
Has increased my civic engagement			

Note. A 5-point scale was used: strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), neutral (3), agree (4), and strongly agree (5). The question was: "Please indicate your opinion on EACH of the statements below related to blogging."

The needs and gratifications were divided in three indexes of variables in order to correlate them and establish if there was a correlation between the dis-empowerment of women and their empowerment thanks to blogging and in which sphere specifically. In order to do that, the Spearman's correlation was calculated between the indexes of need and gratification items.

Table 1.9

Spearman's correlation between the indexes of needs and the indexes of gratifications

Spearman's rho of **Gratifications**	**Personal**	**Political**	**Social**
Personal/ Psychological Needs			
Correlation Coefficient	**.581****	.262*	.320*
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.047	.014
N	58	58	58
Social Needs			
Correlation Coefficient	.281*	.253	**.454****
Sign. (2-tailed)	.032	.055	.000
N	58	58	58
Political Needs			
Correlation Coefficient	.300*	**.351****	.281*
Sign. (2-tailed)	.022	.007	.033
N	58	58	58

Note. **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Correlations were proved to be highly significant at the 0.01 level of significance and significant at the 0.05 level. Overall, all the three factors resulted highly correlated, and the most salient correlation was the one between personal gratifications and personal need factors ($r = .581$, $p < 0.01$). Among the single variables of each index, there was a highly significant correlation ($r = .678$, $p < 0.01$) between the personal need "I blog to gain more self confidence" and one of the personal gratifications "blogging makes me feel more confident." A highly significant correlation ($r = .578$, $p < 0.01$) was also found between the need "I blog to develop my critical thinking" and the personal gratification

"blogging has improved my critical thinking". The same personal need ("I blog to develop my critical thinking") had a highly significant correlation ($r = .376, p < 0.05$) with one of the social gratifications, "blogging has encouraged me to be more social offline."

Highly significant correlation ($r = .464, p < 0.01$) was found between the social need "I blog to connect to other people" and the social gratification "blogging has encouraged me to be more social offline." The social need "I blog because readers' feedback helps me understand other people's opinions" highly correlated ($r = .389, p < 0.05$) with one of the social gratifications "blogging allows me to engage with both women and men online."

In conclusion, the Cronbach's Alpha of all the data of the 72 respondents was calculated, establishing a reliability of 79.2%.

Table 2.1

Cronbach's Alpha

	N	%	Cronbach's Alpha	N of items
Cases				
Valid	**57**	79.2	.867	48
Excluded[a]	15	20.8		
Total	72	100.0		

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Based on the results, Egyptian women bloggers are young, familiar with technology and a well-educated minority that chooses English as main language to blog, followed by Arabic. Therefore, Egyptian women bloggers can't be considered representative of the all population, as Hafkin and Taggart (2001) pointed out in relation to women using technology in developing countries. Egyptian women bloggers are quite familiar with the blog format, and the most frequent topics, ranging from personal experiences to social and political issues, women's issues, human rights and religious views, suggest that the respondents don't choose the blog format to pass free time, but because they have a specific reason and aim.

In line with Etling (et al., 2009), the results of this study show that Egyptian women write mostly personal blogs rather than social or political ones. In fact, the most recurrent topics reflect the definition of blog type given by the respondents. Personal experiences are, in fact, the most recurrent topic, followed by political issues. Women write less frequently about women's issues, religious views and human rights.

Dayem (2009) pointed out that social media can represent a freer platform to talk about topics that can't appear on traditional media especially in countries that suffer of lack of freedom of speech. Even though sexuality is one of these taboos, this study observed that Egyptian women bloggers are more likely not to talk about it online. This might suggest that Egyptian women bloggers do not perceive blogging as an alternative public sphere that can help users overcome taboos. The respondents confirmed that by

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stating they don't feel comfortable to talk about sexuality online, limiting this topic to the offline conversation. This contradict not only Dayem (2009) but also Mohamed (2010), who stated that women use the Internet mainly to express themselves and break down the rules of a conservative society. And finally, Otterman (2007), who said blogging supports discussions about topics that are usually taboos. If sexuality is considered a taboo, talking about it online could help women increase self-confidence as significant part of the empowerment process in the online public sphere.

Blogging is the continuation of an offline discussion. It helps women feeling more comfortable, expressing their opinion and making them more self-confident, but it doesn't constitute an alternative to public spaces. This is confirmed by the bloggers' neutrality toward the choice of discussing different topics offline and online. However, when women are asked to directly state whether blogging is an alternative public sphere, the majority shows to believe so. This could be linked to a misleading interpretation of public space. The expression of one's opinion and the self-confidence supported by the practice of blogging represent the personal/psychological gratifications, which result in personal empowerment.

Ulrich (2009) believed anonymity gives the chance to overcome societal barriers and express one's identity without fear. Also Etling (et al., 2009) stated that female bloggers are those opting for anonymity more than men. However, this study showed that anonymity doesn't help women expressing themselves freer because it's not an option frequently adopted by bloggers.

From the open-ended questions and from questions 15 to 17, Egyptian women bloggers strongly expressed the absence of disparities or inequalities between genders in the Egyptian public sphere that might lead them to blog. However, they recognize the blogosphere as alternative public space and empowering tool. Based on the non-parametric statistics, Egyptian female bloggers start blogging mainly for personal needs of self-expression. The personal needs are interestingly connected with the social ones. Therefore, the online public sphere is not only used to have a platform to express oneself but also to connect to other people, developing the social aspect of empowerment as well. The perceptions of the term "empowerment" Egyptian women presented included structural statements reflecting the difficulty to explain the concept with a straightforward definition.

The highly significant correlation between the need "I blog to develop my critical thinking" and the social gratifications, "blogging has encouraged me to be more social offline," could support the results of the descriptive statistics and the open-ended questions, which underlined a relation between the personal and social empowerment. In fact, according to the Egyptian women bloggers included in the sample, there is a connection between the empowerment they personally get out of blogging and the empowerment they can apply to the social sphere.

Recommendations

Future studies should analyze the perception of the term empowerment among Egyptian women and how its overuse made it perceive in a negative way especially in regarding to gender studies. The same suggestion can be made for the term public space

online, which is perceived as a segregated platform for women who can't participate in the offline/real public space rather than a complementary public space online with positive meaning.

Since the study is based on self-report, content analysis could help avoiding errors and integrating the results of quantitative study. However, anonymity and the frequent fear to even meet the researcher could represent an obstacle to it.

Conclusion

This study focused on a small section of the Egyptian female population, which can be considered as a marginalized group since women don't share the same rights as the male part of the population and they have less access to the public space. The results gave a glimpse of how a social medium like blogging could represent a new tool supporting women's empowerment as well as a possible tool used by the feminist movement to improve women's life. Through blogs, users can express their opinion on any topic and with more space than in other social media like Facebook or Twitter. In addition, this study is important because it challenges the common idea that Egyptian blogs are mostly political.

Egyptian women bloggers use the blog format mainly to express their opinion on personal experiences. Even if Dayem (2009, p. 1) said that blogging is a "medium for social and political commentary," this study suggested a different use of the tool based on the gender. Women use the blog format to respond to different needs than men do, getting mainly personal empowerment out of it. This interesting result should be further investigated in order to put the concept of public sphere in relation to gender.

Public sphere in Habermas' conception is a place where citizens gather to discuss and collectively deliberate using their reason publicly to participate in political life (Habermas, 1989/1994). In the scholar's theory, therefore, public sphere has a political meaning more than personal. The political aspect of the public space might influence the women bloggers' perceptions. In fact, the public sphere online is not seen as an alternative to the real one, but as a platform to express personal needs while the offline public space is linked more to the political empowerment. The online public sphere, apparently, can fit more the women's needs than the real one. And the personal empowerment is seen as extremely significant in the development of economic and political empowerment as well. However, the Internet has some limitation in the representation of an alternative public sphere, such as "access, moderation of interactions, and male dominance" (Cammaert & Audenhove as cited in Al-Saggaf, 2006, p. 314).

Basic factors to have a public sphere are the equal access to all citizens from different backgrounds, public opinion formation, rational critical debate and diversity of opinion. Therefore, the online public sphere can't be compared to the real public sphere due to the digital divide that can't allow equal access to citizens from different backgrounds. The public sphere remains, therefore, essential. However, the potentiality of the online public space needs to be considered as support to the gender empowerment.

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triumphs-for-bloggers.

Appendix A: Survey

Dear Blogger,

My name is Valentina Cattane. I'm a graduate student in the Journalism and Mass Communication department at the American University in Cairo (AUC). I am conducting a research study on Egyptian women and blogging as part of my Master of Arts' thesis. The purpose of this study is to learn about Egyptian women's motivations and experiences with blogging.

The survey consists of 21 questions regarding your blogging experience and it will take about 10 minutes of your time. The information you provide is solely for the purpose of research and it will remain anonymous.

If you have any question about the research, your rights or you are interested in the results and findings of the research you can contact me at this email address: valecattane@aucegypt.edu
Thank you for your time.

1. ***Gender**

   Female
   Male

2. ***Nationality**

   Egyptian
   Egyptian AND Other
   Other

3. ***Where do you currently live?**

   Egypt
   Out of Egypt

4. ***Age**

   Under 18 years old
   18-20 years old
   21-25 years old
   26-30 years old
   31-40 years old
   Above 40 years old

5. ***Education**

   High school
   Bachelor degree
   Master/PhD degree
   Other   _____

6. ***You blog in**

   English
   Arabic
   French
   Other   _____

7. ***How long have you been writing your blog?**

   Less than a year
   1 - 2 years
   Over 2 years – 3 years
   Over 3 years – 4 years
   Above 4 years

8. ***How often do you post new entries on your blog?**

   Less than one time a week
   1 – 2 times a week
   3 – 5 times a week
   More than 5 times a week

9. ***How would you identify your blog?**

   Personal
   Social
   Political
   Literary
   Others (please specify _____)

10. ***Your target audience is**

   Females only
   Males only
   Both
   N/A

11. *How often do you post entries on the following topics? (Mark the appropriate cell for EACH topic)

Frequency	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Women's issues					
Human rights					
Social & Political issues					
Sexuality					
Religious views					
Personal experiences					

12. *Where do you feel MORE COMFORTABLE talking about the following topics (Mark the appropriate cell for EACH topic)

Topics	Offline	Blogs	Both	Neither
Women's issues				
Human rights				
Social & Political Issues				
Sexuality				
Religious views				
Personal experiences				

13. *Please indicate your opinion on each of the statements below related to blogging

Blogging:	5 (SA)	4 (A)	3 (N)	2 (D)	1 (SD)
Allows me to express myself regarding personal issues					
Allows me to express myself regarding social & political issues					
Allows me to engage with both women and men					

online					
Has made me more aware of other people's opinions					
Has helped me strengthen my arguments					
Made me a more open-minded person					
Makes me feel more confident					
Has expanded my circle of friends					
Has encouraged me to be more social offline					
Has increased my civic engagement					
Has increased my involvement in politics					
Has improved my writing style					
Has promoted my critical thinking					

14. ***Please indicate your opinion on EACH of the statements below related to the reason why you blog**

I blog:	5 (SA)	4 (A)	3 (N)	2 (D)	1 (SD)
To express my opinion					
To gain more self confidence					
To connect to other people					
To improve my writing skills					
To develop my critical thinking					
To pass free time					
To advocate women's rights					
To advocate human rights					
Because anonymity allows me express my opinion freely					
Because readers' feedback help me understand myself better					
Because readers' feedback help me understand myself better					
Because readers' feedback help me understand other's opinion					
Because I can update my family and relatives who live faraway					
Because I don't feel represented by the mainstream media					
Because I can't express my opinion freely in public spaces (offline)					
Because I can't participate in civic life					
Because I want to influence other people					

Indicate your level of agreement/disagreement with the following statements:

15. *I feel FREER to express myself on BLOGS than offline

Strongly agree
Agree
Neutral
Disagree
Strongly disagree

16. *Blogging is an alternative public space for women"

Strongly agree
Agree
Neutral
Disagree
Strongly disagree

17. *"Blogging empowers me"

Strongly agree
Agree
Neutral
Disagree
Strongly disagree

18. What does EMPOWERMENT mean to you?

19. Do you believe that blogging is empowering for you? Why or why not?

20. If you have any comment (about anything related to the study), please share it here

Appendix B: Answers to the open-ended questions

What does empowerment mean to you?

Confidence, assurance.

To be in control! Expressing my thoughts freely. Feel I can plan my life and implement my plans.

The free space that the society leaves for you in order to get things done perfectly

Well, I'm not sure from what angle I should consider a definition for the word. But, I guess for me, it means more freedom & capability to try new, defying, constructive & unusual experiences without having to explain my point of you or getting permissions for it. Then later on, I can prove to others that what I have experienced was the right thing and I wouldn't have done it any other way.

I am empowered when I stand up for myself or when I am inspired into for taking a stance for something I truly believe in. Empowerment is knowing of your inner strength, that which you rarely ever expressed and having it come out of you when it's needed

Means a lifestyle that is more free without being criticized and put down by others all the time

Enables and encourages me to express more ideas, first on the virtual space then later offline

Believing that one has the capability to make a change

Socialize and re share opinions

Write what I feel and think without any limits

Gives me a certain authority and power

Expressing myself without being pigeonholed

Empowerment means giving people the support to be what they truly are

Capable, knowledgeable,

Inspiration & passion is the empowerment I am seeking

Independence and respect

Self confidence that there are people who care to read what I write

Empowerment means that I have the right to do and say whatever I want and have the power to do so and defend myself.

The freedom to make my own choices without being exposed to significant societal pressure

It means to have enough room and freedom to express and develop my abilities and myself.

Empowerment is utilization of unused potential

Attaining moral power to strive for my rights.

It's when I let people know they're not alone, it's when I give them a piece of my mind, a story of my background or anything they can relate to. It's making them inspired and wanting to find their optimum powers and potentials.

Being me

Means freedom of expression and support this cause not suppress it

Confidence, the ability to talk my mind when I need to.

It means I can express myself better and be able to make people see my point of view

Self confidence

It means a greater deal of self-reliance, self-confidence, and awareness about oneself, others and the socio-economic and political environment that one lives in. The ability to achieve ones goals and to engage positively with society. Being able to voice one's point of view regarding all social and political issues without having restrictions or taboo issues. It also means having a greater awareness of different perspectives and being able to engage in constructive and enriching dialogues with others no matter how much their points of view may differ from your. It means the ability to do many things

Being able to take control of your life, express yourself freely and not be afraid of the consequences.

Being able to make the choices I want when I want to make them then act on those choices

Being aware of one's power and influence. Being aware that one does count and

can change the surroundings.

Empowerment: means feeling better about yourself, confident, Learn new things, explore new areas and ideas, sure about your choices, having the strength and courage to represent your true self as you see it (being your self), Influence.

Feeling and identifying the power within myself to speak my mind and act upon my convictions.

Negative perception of "empowerment"

I hate the word. It is very popular when it comes to what is called "women empowerment." It gives you the feeling that women are helpless creatures who escape to the safe heaven of "blogosphere." Generally, empowerment gives the feeling of inferiority. I never use it.

Nothing

Do you believe that blogging is empowering for you? Why or why not?

Yes I do, because I feel that through blogging I am capable of communicating my thoughts to the world.

Yes, it helps me to express my inner thoughts without any limitations

I can freely say what I feel, which is something I cannot do in public without being asked the reason or without being afraid of the feedback. I can freely control who to comment, to follow me or read me. I create my own little word and I feel safe this way

Yes, very much. I like to be active and multi-functional. Blogging makes me feel that way, because whenever I blog about anything (specially personal experiences) I feel I made an impact on others and not just on myself. Especially when I get feedback from readers and when I'm asked questions from people who want to know more.

Writing always empowers me.

Yes, I get to say what I feel when I want to without fearing strong opposition or judgment

Yes. Once you get used to speaking up in blogs, it's only a matter of time before you start speaking up publicly and voicing your opinions, which may disagree with the surrounding majority in real life.

Yes, to know how others think

Yes it is. As I said above, I can write about everything and anything and my limit is not even the sky

Yes, because I express my thoughts to people and argue for my cause and my opinion matters

Yes, it allows me to express myself more freely, seeing what I write on my blog gives me more courage to say it out loud

Yes, it gives me more self-confidence and better communication ability.

Yes, because I receive comments and even from people I don't know. I'm improving in expressing myself, and obviously some people like it

Yes. In a way it's a safe space to test thoughts and society's response to them.

To a great extent, blogging is empowering because it gives me a room to express myself freely.

Yes. A free land to express all my passionate issues and gain confidence and affect people all at the same time.

Yes, it changed my character, my career and it molded my future to a better one. It helped me moving on, it was my best friend when I didn't have anyone to talk to. It became my window to change my part of the world.

Yes, because can say my opinion freely

Yes for sure because I am not allowed to discuss my opinions in public whether religious or political. So I blog under my real name for public to express my opinion freely

Yes, it's a place where I can express anything that comes to mind.

Yes, cause it helps me to express myself and make people to see who I am

Yes. It allows me to organize my thoughts and have stronger arguments.

I started blogging when I was over 40 years old so I believe I was already empowered to a large extent. However, it allowed me to express myself more creatively which I hadn't

had the confidence to do so before, to link up with others and learn from them more and to accept their criticisms and points of view to what I write, to understand others more from their personal reflections and opinions and to be aware more of the concerns of the younger generation of middle class Egyptian (especially females).

Yes but I perhaps live in a circle where I can express myself pretty freely. Blogging allows me to express myself outside of that circle without getting up on a podium or getting on TV.

Yes. Throughout the five years of blogging, I could understand myself as well as other better. This knowledge allowed me to think more critically and to identify that I have a voice. Voice is power.

Yes to a big extend. I discovered new talents in me, I appreciated my skills more. I learn about new initiatives and movements and participated in them, which made me more knowledgeable and aware. Better self-expression and better thinking and paradigm shifting.

Yes. Because through blogging I have been able to assess the effect my words have on people. I feel like I was able to change lives, even if in a small way, through my words.

Negative/Skeptical answers

No, because I believe I am already utilizing my potential

Not really, it is just a place I voice my opinions

I believe that it made no difference, but the ability to blog anonymously enabled me to say things I wouldn't normally say to people who know me, not because I'm not empowered but because those around me might not be open minded enough to accept me as a friend or acquaintance.

In a way because while blogging I think and many things come to mind. I research and that is another form of empowerment to gain more knowledge

Actually in a previous period it was (incomplete answer)

I see false relationship that you're trying to make between females empowerment and blogging. This has nothing to do with being a female. Blogging allowed everybody to express themselves freely regardless of their sex.

I only started blogging a year ago can't really link the two yet.

No, it's only a way to express opinion. It has nothing to do with empowering

A bit. It has given me space to express myself easily and freely, without being judged.

If you have any comment (about anything related to the study), please share it here

You might need to ask about using a pseudonym, whether or not it's more liberating and empowering for a woman to use a pseudonym versus revealing ones real identity.

I think it's an interesting study. There aren't many Egyptian women who blog yet. I encourage them to do so, it will help them grow. Personally, blogging gave me self-confidence more than I would've ever imagined a couple of years ago. It helps you being heard in so many levels. It even helps you get your dream job! Because big companies are attracted by people who are active online. I'm glad I am part of this study.

It is a wonderful attempt to shed light on the life of women in the Middle east fighting for their voice

Yea. There is NO difference whatsoever between female bloggers and male bloggers in terms of blogging styles or purposes. Differences are usually individual regardless of sex.

Good luck (7 respondents)

Share your results (3 respondents)

I'm not sure what exactly are you aiming for but I started a community. It's not a blog per se to help women, not in a feminism way but in a humanly way.
It's still small but it's working as magic, hopefully.