



Joint Research Paper

Technology role in combating violence against women



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This paper is part of a joint effort between the New Women Foundation and Motoon, in an attempt to monitor and analyze the role of technology, specifically blogs and social networking platforms, in empowering young people of both sexes in combating violence against women

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Introduction:

Truth belongs to everybody

Media studies introduced many theories concerned with marketing and media promotion, some of which referred to the revolutionary leap that social networks and blogs took regarding the dissemination of ideas and opinions, but blogs and social networks experience made a huge progress not only on marketing field or promotion, but more importantly, In enabling freedom of expression and mobilization on social change causes in the first place.

Where violence against women has received an uneven share of attention from number of blogs and social media campaigns, which has contributed significantly to the creation of public opinion, and exposing the silence on social issues. The most important contribution of blogs and social platforms is breaking the monopoly on truth and limiting it to specific sources.

Publication of any narration or fact is no longer controlled by the state alone, a new space was created, large and wide space that enables citizens of both sexes to share facts and opinions about public concerns.

Perhaps the term “citizen journalism” is the best description for digital communication and media, where the participation of citizens of both sexes, especially young ones, is revealing fact and missing points of views of the official narrative, and more importantly, free, uncensored, and unrestricted speech space was created.

These weren't the only benefits, but also came as an effective attempt to reduce the space given to businessmen-owned media with all its economic, social and political bias. We can not ignore the content of many blogs and social communication campaigns that dealt with issues of marginalized men and women. except for young people citizens and social networks neither official nor private media participated in the community conversation or shedding light on torture, labour rights, and movement, strikes, and protest.

**The political,
economic and social
context in which
blogs and social
networks were born**

It is important to draw attention to the contribution of blogging and social networks, not only in opening new windows for expression but in reading its contribution in the political, economic and social contexts which witnessed its flourishing. We can't really understand the rise of blogging movement without observing the political loosening at that time. The blogosphere

was refulgent in political expression during the five years before the revolution –from 2005 to 2010– which was the peak of activism and Kifaya movement in the political sphere. We can also reflect on the birth of the April 6 movement, which began as a blogging wave interested in labour cause, and considered Mahala Strike as the movement’s main locomotive. Their manifestation was in the call for that strike, which is difficult to measure the extent of people’s response to it, it has achieved a tangible presence and spread of advocacy and response in the labour movement in a provincial city away from the Capital that has the biggest share in the political movement.

Blogs:

The backyard of women’s seizing their right for free expression

Then there were not only young male bloggers but also female bloggers interested in public affairs and specifically political issues, that was a leap in gaining women’s right to express on public issues, a radical start in pushing on women’s issues in political arena. Attention to discrimination against women started to transfer to their fellow young male bloggers and the vigilant digital concerned-in-change community. Perhaps “Nawara Negm” blog “Tahyees¹ Popular Front” and its posts is one of the most important milestones in observing the writing of women and girls about public affairs.

It is also important to note that the bloggers’ movement, which emerged in the five years leading to 2010, has been remarkably lacking in equal attention to social rights in general and women rights in particular. The main theme that dominated bloggers’ writings of both sexes was politics, both the national and regional. Opposition to hereditary rule or extending Mubarak term, in addition to the Palestinian cause and the Second Intifada which was the hot topic of blogs posts. Hezbollah’s resistance was a subject of many blogs. Even dealing with worker” issues came in a political context that called for change. On the other hand, writing about education, health and other social rights was lacking, despite being at the center of political issues concerning the public and being a fertile ground for inciting the demands of change, instead of that the fight against hereditary rule, term

1 Egyptian slang word means acting or speaking in an irrational or meaningless way, resulting from tiredness, out of consciousness or kidding.

extensions, and Arab policies were the main demand from the blogosphere of both sexes before 2011.

We Are All Laila:
*start blogging about the
experience of women's issues*

We Are All Laila was the first spark in blogging about women by young female bloggers followed by posts from young male bloggers. Laila's blogging campaign evolved into a vital and attractive blogging subject for both sexes, not only from Egypt, also Arab bloggers joined it as well.

According to one of the "I Don't Know" blog posts, the blogging campaign "We Are All Laila" was a way to send a message from the female bloggers, "we exist," as an attempt to draw the attention of the blogosphere to the fact that there are opportunities and realities of gender equality in blogosphere. We Are All Laila came to reveal this, to push young bloggers to consider it, endorse it, and participate in providing an opportunity for expression on unspoken issues about women.

Perhaps the last campaign of "We Are All Laila" was in 2010 –the year that marked the end of the blogging activity and its success also– in 2011, streets were occupied by citizens, away from the virtual reality, the movement emerged from opposing regime to actively demanding change, but the latest posts of "We Are All Laila" in 2010 took a different aspect from just blogging, it was an invitation to a questionnaire to write on and observe the reality of the relationship between men and women, which is a direct and vital step to start talking about patriarchy, masculinity, stereotyping, and imbalance between the sexes. It was also an attempt to take the conversation outside the virtual world, and an attempt to involve those outside the blogging community and vice versa.

**Metro Cinema
incident:**
*The first dealing with sexual
violence on blogs*

The incident of "mass sexual amok" which happened to belly dancer Dina at the opening of her Eid film in 2006, "Aalya El Tarb Bl Talta" was the early beginning of blogging about sexual abuse and violence, and was addressed by many blogs, perhaps Misr Digital "Wael Abbas's blog" was the one that started it, driven by the massive harassment that occurred in Down Town after Dina danced at the film opening at Metro Cinema, which was followed by an attack on her, where she faced mass sexual assault attempt.

There were many blogs that have referred to this with the term “Mass Sexual Amok”.

Many bloggers monitored what happened in Down Town streets, calling it “Down Town’s quake”, which gave a green light to start turning the sexual violence, specifically harassment, from unspoken into being monitored, media spotted, and conversational subject, and witnessed the birth young bloggers who are fully aware that these violations exist and must be addressed, “What happened exactly in Down Town in Cairo, a huge quake in the middle of street almost lead to dramatic events.”

Mabadali:

"Amr Ezzat" Blog and Heba Najib case

It should also be noted that “Mabadali” blog edited by blogger Amr Ezzat had a remarkable role in adopting “Heba Naguib” –the owner of the blog “Hiba Slopes” – case. Hiba is an Egyptian girl from a living-in-Saudi-Arabia family, who was detained and imprisoned by her family when she asked them to let her come to Egypt (hoping to be able to live with some freedom and opportunity to work and learn), and “Mabadali” had a remarkable role in advocating her case.

The case of Heba Naguib is one of the most representative cases of Egyptian girls reality in conservative or precisian families. According to the story, Hiba was subjected to various forms of violence and coercion. Her arrival to Egypt came after high official bodies intervened, but in reality, it started with a blog post from a concerned blogger, she was able to arrive to Cairo safe because of a lobby group led by bloggers in the first place.

Egyptian female bloggers:

Three examples of blogging on violence against women

Wa7damasrya blog: shedding light on violence against women in the public sphere (Harassment and Black Wednesday).

Wa7damasrya “Egyptian girl” blog is interested in public affairs in many ways, and an example of Egyptian girls blogging experience, who are busy expressing their views on political events, before and after the revolution. The blog also shed light on many of the social obstacles facing girls. A recent publication of the harassment in Mawlid and crowded areas in August 2014 was

titled “Harassment Tribune”. She also had an excellent post on “Salafis’ Women Mania” in 2013, highlighting the Salafis’ handling of women’s status in the elections and the way it was expressed. She also adopted the publication and advocacy of Arab campaigns to empower women in the region, especially regarding personal status issues and amending the family laws in the Arab countries, with a special post “Call for dignity and equality of Arab women”, she also had an important post on Black Wednesday memorial, titled “Where is Egyptian girl right” in which she said that she never wrote as an Egyptian girl and that Black Wednesday events pushed her to think about what female activists face specifically the inferiority of society and police to their bodies.

Al-Haramlik Blog: Blogging about Taboos

El-Haramlak is a uniquely feminist blog. Together with Heya blog they highly adopted women’s issues from a revolutionary feminist perspective. It began in 2005 with the beginning of the blogging movement in general, but it is strange that this blog took a different direction from other blogs public attitude, that it was mainly focused on political issues.

It addressed many of taboos, and perhaps the choice of its name “El-haramlek²” came to reflect women’s marginalized position and violations of their rights. In 2005, Al-Haramlik wrote about 16 posts on issues related to sexual violence and stereotyping in a different and varied subjects, such as FGM in “And here said Laila” post, stereotypes in “He praised him and said” post, menstruation in “small tragedy” post, and other hundreds of posts from 2005 to 2010. Its last post was titled “intellectual renaissance” and talked about the need to change the stereotypes about girls, and the importance of raising a revolution against stereotypical look that supports discrimination practice, and allow violence against women, all of which were discussed from a feminist perspective. Many of her writings have also linked violence and discrimination in the personal domain to violence in public domain, particularly in the political domain.

2 A sacred inviolable place for female members of the family in old eastern houses.

Bahia: The most popular blog about women in public and personal domain

Bahia's blog is one of the blogs dedicated to shedding light on women's issues. Despite shutting it down since 2011, it remains an unforgettable one, even the famous writer Muhammad Hassanein Heikal wrote about its great posts and their importance. Bahia blog is similar to Al-Haramlik blog, although in a different style. It dealt with women's issues, violence and discrimination in the most smart and socially acceptable manner, although it was characterized by openness compared to Al-Haramlik. It discussed women's reality, especially domestic violence, and personal status issues.



Social platforms, addressing women's issues and revolution

Many bloggers after the 2011 revolution, and the mass movement success, imagined that blogging mission is over and achieved its goal. The message was spread, masses were mobilized, and the movement accomplished its tasks. They saw that blogging goal was changing reality and to move outside virtual reality, this may explain blogging activity suspension except for a few bloggers of both sexes. This suspension may be due to new digital platforms domination such as Facebook, Twitter, and other social platforms.

“We are all Khaled Said” page

No one can ignore the Facebook page “We are all Khaled Said”, and how it successfully managed to mobilize masses to protest and demonstrate in January 2011, the page's effect reflects the huge transition from blogs to social platforms, specifically Facebook.

The page called for protesting after a young man, Khalid Saeed, was tortured to death. Ministry of the Interior Affairs brutality and its adopting for torture and murder was one of the main reasons for the explosion of public anger and the huge response to the call for massive protest. Despite the success of the page in its call and mobilizing its followers for many reasons including: torture, contamination of drinking water, poor education services, poverty, parliamentary elections results forgery, it never mentioned the low status of women, whether economically, socially or politically, and maintained a tone of voice that didn't target women in any way, ignoring the need for mobilizing both sexes based on citizenship.

“Tweet Nadwa” From real world to social networks and not vice versa

Social networks became a battleground for revolutionaries of both sexes, and advocacy and mobilization exceeded the limits of the page, everyone realized that he could participate in the mobilization and conveying the revolution and change message with diverse contents. Personal and public pages advocating revolution and mass mobilization increased tremendously, the frequency of video publishing, transmitting events and live broadcasting increased, digital networks were transferred to struggle arenas, not the other way around. The experience of “Tweet Nadwa” for example which was held several times in Squares, but despite the young momentum, unity around the revolution, and truly embracing its demands, Tweet Nadwa gatherings didn’t address gender equality issues in any of their discussions, despite the fact that absolute justice and equality was the main theme of the revolution.

Although many progressive young people of both sexes participated in coordinating it. However, “Tweet Nadwa” didn’t expose, for example, individual or groups harassment incidents, and didn’t hold any events to speak up about these incidents even after the increase in mass harassment incidents, or about the need to participate in intervention and protection groups during demonstrations and other events.

Social platforms role in exposing sexual violence, documenting its testimonies, and expanding interventions

To a large degree, Facebook and Twitter were considered the revealers for some of the sexual assault incidents by those who documented their testimony about harassment and mass sexual abuse both in Tahrir Square and on its surrounding streets. It's important to point out that the first mass sexual assault incident was against a foreign female journalist after Mubarak's stepping down announcement, at that time, the news was published unnoticeably on social networks until it was officially published on the sites of CBC or CNN. In my opinion, as a researcher, recognition of such reality is met with a great deal of denial, both from the revolutionaries and from society. The reactions weren't free from political use, whether by proponent or opponent of revolution, after that, speaking about the mass sexual assault of the journalist faded, despite the enormity of what she witnessed. Later, a remarkable number of survivor women and girls managed to write their testimonies about the incidents of mass sexual assault in Tahrir Square, and the social networks turned into a spotlight that reveals unspoken cases, and the audacity of publishing such incidents increased, perhaps Yasmine El-Barmawi testimony, which was published with her initials only on the journalist Mohammed Khair profile was the starting point to recognize the danger and acknowledge what is happening, and motivate other survivors to talk about it, and to slightly go beyond the denial state even if the sense of helplessness continued in front of these incidents.

Civil society organizations, especially feminist organizations, weren't far from Tahrir Square or social networks. Al-Nadim Center, New Woman Foundation, and Nazra for feminist studies worked on documenting more testimonies which were published on social platforms and tweets they published a collection of more than 30 cases of mass sexual assaults mainly published on social platforms.



Slapping Shahnda Maklad photo, assaulting Ola Shahba and attacks on Heliopolis Presidential Palace sit-in

The movement continued during Muslim Brotherhood rule, and the sit-in went viral on social platforms, forms of violence against women involved in political work varied, perhaps the photo of slapping Shahnda Maklad which went viral on social platforms was one of the most shockingly memorable incidents that draw attention of those who keep an eye on physical violence against women, and led to call up to take a stand in front of the Muslim Brotherhood attacks, Ola Shahba assault incident, testimonies about the attack, and Ola's own testimony in Yousri Fouda TV program about surviving mass harassment, and beating came as an affirmation of women mass assault, especially in power transition periods during the revolution, wither under SCAF or the Muslim Brotherhood rule.

Videos and photos transmit the mass assault incident in the inauguration ceremony

Although the current political leadership had a wide popular support at the beginning, this didn't prevent sexual assault of one of the celebrating woman in Tahrir Square or protect her. Police intervened this time, live videos of attempts to rescue and protect the victim, and the police heroism, were transmitted mainly through social platforms and played a great part in these crimes acknowledgment, awareness, acceptance about possible interventions, and most importantly, putting pressure on the political leadership to intervene.

Digital campaigns and hashtags for several forms of violence

Several digital campaigns were launched to raise awareness about the importance and necessity of facing violence against women. Sexual harassment in streets, and transportation had a large share of calls for blogging and hashtags.

It is interesting to note that the call for acknowledging violence went beyond the widely noticed forms of violence like harassment but also spotted relatives harassment, domestic violence, harassment in workplace, and girls beating. Hashtags increased and continued in exposing and revealing various forms of violence against women like:

Why Harassment Has Spread hashtag, First Time Being Harassed hashtag,

also hashtags for specific survivors cases like I'm Somaya hashtag, and recently the #MeToo global hashtag which exposed a large

number of global public figures involvement in harassment incidents.

Today, as we ask everyone to stand against violence, there is a huge wave of online campaigns calling to end violence. We can't also ignore the many pages interested mainly in exposing the harasser, or publishing a file contains public figures involved in harassment and violence against women, all of which indicate that confronting violence is no longer the subject of women's rights defenders alone, but a larger community with several levels of perception when it comes to forms of violence and the best possible interventions. This community is growing and taking a wide space on social platforms to express its efforts to acknowledge and oppose violence.

Currently, there are more than digital campaigns for initiatives or organizations to acknowledge and stop violence, such as the Inside Home campaign, a campaign to criminalize domestic violence, a campaign to stop the young girls' marriage, and awareness campaigns that fill public and personal pages opposing violence against women.



Recommendations


1. In the end, it may be important to clearly reveal the positive and compelling role of technology in empowering genders, especially women, to express themselves in terms of stopping violence. However, there are many challenges to reach safe technology not only from sexual harassment but also from tracking and penetration by national security.
2. Spreading cheap technology, enabling girls to use it, and supporting the right of free expression.
3. Importance of documenting experiences of girls writing and blogging on social platforms.
4. Providing different and sustainable pieces of training on digital expression, publishing, and digital security.
5. Overcoming slang, local and foreign language obstacles, facilitating translation needs and incorporating them into blogging.
6. Tracking and collecting hashtags and providing analytical readings, enriching confront violence against women writings, and expanding communication areas.



Motoon is a social enterprise invested in nurturing a free, enabled, connected and gender conscious tech community that empowers and supports social development and well being.

We provide a range of IT services, including consultancy, web development, training, localization, and hosted applications, for individuals, NGOs, SMEs and corporates.

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