



Egyptian Women Online: A Significant Imprint

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Analysis of the Evolution of Women's Online Discourse 2011 – 2020

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Introduction

In Egypt, some might think that debates on sex, female circumcision, women's economic and social freedoms, abortion, sexual freedom, and violence against women only appeared after the Internet. It is a misconception, of course, but that is what the Internet has done in a nutshell. It gave people a voice and a shared space. It acted as a magnifying glass reflecting all opinions, at least the majority of opinions, until algorithms stepped in to control how much space each voice occupies online.

But the internet did not only empower women and raise minorities' issues in the public domain; it also facilitated hate speech, incitement, misogyny, blackmail and cyber-bullying against women, especially with the existence of mechanisms for concealment, disguise and the use of pseudonyms.

The Internet didn't turn out to be the utopia or the perfect world where an ideal virtual reality could be created making the world a small village as some people imagined. What the internet did was reflect our real life on virtual reality. We had not become a small village, on the contrary, we became conflicting islands sheltering from each other and trying to form alliances and partnerships to enable their voices to dominate cyberspace! It gave each user the freedom to be and say whatever s/he wanted. Yet, matters have evolved in recent years after attempts to restrict the Internet and impose certain policies on social media platforms and the World Wide Web in every geographical area! the possibility of challenging these obstacles is still available, likewise all the tools of inflicting damage are still available. In 2017, on the celebration of the 31st anniversary of the emergence of the Internet, Tim Burns, one of the pioneers of the creation of the Internet, said, "The Web is not working for women and girls"¹, due to the increasing waves of hate speech and incitement to violence against women on the Internet.

In Egypt, as elsewhere in the world, the Internet was a gateway to a potentially different reality with unlimited opportunities and development. Yet, like anywhere else, women had to make a double effort to be able to access it, use it, benefit from it, and create mechanisms that enable them to deal with cyber violence against women. Furthermore, women had to deal with many hindrances including the cost of the Internet, the lack of social acceptance of young women using the Internet. This is particularly true the farther away you move from the capital, where some young women are deprived from accessing it under the pretext of protecting them. Such hindrances significantly impacted the representation of women on the Internet. Statistics indicate that women's representation does not exceed 32% of the population, which is the highest percentage in the Middle East². In early 2022, the number of women, or those who identify themselves as women, using Facebook in Egypt, did not exceed 36.4% of the population, 34.7% for YouTube, 38.2% for Instagram, 28.3% for LinkedIn, and 12.8% for website Twitter, while their percentage exceeds males in a single application, which is Snapchat, to reach 67.1%³.

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/global/2020/mar/12/internet-not-working-women-girls-tim-berners-lee>

² <https://www.intel.com/content/dam/www/public/us/en/documents/pdf/women-and-the-web.pdf>

³ <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-egypt>

One in five women in Egypt believes that the Internet is not suitable for her, even if it seems useful and beneficial for, it might not be acceptable or approved by the family¹. A study conducted by the Intel Corporation on a number of Internet female users in Egypt, shows that women's chances of benefiting from the Internet double if they were using the internet for more than five years. However, the number of female Internet users for more than five years did not exceed 6% of the sample². Social barriers in Egypt play a major role in how women access and use the Internet to serve their interests. However, not all women face the same obstacles in using the Internet, some might suffer from difficulty in accessing the Internet in their place of residence, or the financial inability to afford the cost of Internet subscription, or from technical illiteracy, and the lack of social acceptance. In addition to technical illiteracy, there is the language barrier hindering the interaction of users with the Internet, especially since the Arabic content on the Internet does not exceed 1% of the Internet content³!

This Study

This study highlights the changes of feminist discourses on the Internet and tracks the differences of these discourses, and to what extent did the internet based initiatives change in their content and scope. The study also seeks to answer several questions; the impact of the Internet on empowering women economically, socially and politically; how did the society in general, and men in particular, reacted virtually and reality, to women's use of the internet; and the role played by authorities in such empowerment /disempowerment of women and its impact on their social and economic freedoms.

Why ten years?

The timeline for this study starts from 2011 to the end of 2020, reviewing briefly how women have used the Internet during these years, starting from the early victorious moments of the January 25th revolution and transcending the imposed limits, up to 2020 and the endorsement of multiple laws restricting freedom of expression on the Internet, and the Public Prosecution's supervision on social media and its female users " to preserve values of the Egyptian family".

The study tracks a number of initiatives launched and adopted by women during 2011- 2020. The nature of the initiatives launched in the early years of the Egyptian revolution, however, were completely different from initiatives in the following years with regards to shape, content and discourse. In contrast to the political defeat, the feminist discourse got stronger after years of stumbling. Those ten years witnessed many public debates, discussions, harassment and targeting. However, by 2020, the feminist discourse became much stronger, entitled and engaged in a wide number of social and economic issues compared to the early years of the revolution when it was exclusively political.

¹ <https://www.intel.com/content/dam/www/public/us/en/documents/pdf/women-and-the-web.pdf>

² <https://www.intel.com/content/dam/www/public/us/en/documents/pdf/women-and-the-web.pdf>

³ <https://www.nasr.app/2022/06/arabic-technical-content-online.html>

Research methodology

The study encompasses initiatives launched and adopted by women throughout the ten years. The researcher relied on content analysis of social media (Twitter - Facebook - Instagram), websites and press interviews with founders of these initiatives. In addition, the researcher analyzed the discourse of feminist communities, and the reactions of society, authorities, civil society organizations towards those initiatives).

Definitions

The studied initiatives: are the initiatives launched or adopted by women and existed on the Internet. It is not feminist initiatives in general, or initiatives addressing women's issues on the Internet.

Women: All those who call themselves women, or identify themselves as women, or women identified as women by birth.

The Internet in the period from 2011 to 2020

The Ministry of communications' report, "Measuring Digital Transformation" 2015, illustrates the gender gap in using the internet by males and females 2010-2015. It shows that the percentage of female internet users declined from 45.2% in 2010¹ to 41.3% in 2011. Despite an increase to 46% in 2012, the ratio decreased again to 43.5% in 2013.

In the following lines we monitor how women used the internet as a tool for resistance and empowerment, to gain more rights and opportunities and as a tool for education and advocacy and to open new horizons and opportunities in the labor markets.

2011

The use of the internet was a critical tool in challenging traditional censorship and gaining new spaces in 2011. The same year witnessed the first successful attempt of the Egyptian regime to totally shut down the internet on January 28th as a way of containing the waves of anger and demonstrations that exploded nationwide and to downsize the digital impact in escalating such demonstrations. However, in that year the number of women users of the internet decreased considerably by 4.1% than the previous year 2010.

Due to the nature of that year, most of the feminist initiatives, directly impacted by the internet, essentially engaged with the heated events in Tahrir Square and most of the Egyptian governorates. The most prominent events monitored and documented by the feminist movements, or where women used the internet as an empowering tool to advance their rights, were linked to the assaults on women in the streets during the political events in Egypt.

Internet exposing Sexual assaults

Although sexual harassment was not a new phenomenon, but it reached a peak in February 2011 and following months. People began to speak about it after "Lara Logan", CBS correspondent, appeared in a TV program, revealing how she was assaulted on the night of Mubarak's stepping down². This was followed by a series of sexual assaults of women by demonstrators, passers-byers, or security forces.

In this context we will focus on three examples where women used technology to place their issues on the public opinion's agenda and to create pressure to recognize the harm they suffered.

¹ https://mcit.gov.eg/Upcont/Documents/Publications_1272015000_Measuring_the_Digital_Society_in_Egypt_12_.pdf

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bO12X1nhzzk>

Samira Ibrahim

On the 9th of March 2011, the army troops raided the sit-ins in Tahrir Square at the time. They arrested a number of women and men activists. During that encounter, the arrested young women were assaulted. One of them, Samira Ibrahim, later revealed that she had been exposed to a virginity test by a physician in the military prison.

In cooperation with some digital initiatives and activists, Samira was able to document what she was exposed to¹, and filed a lawsuit before the military judiciary against those violations. The supportive digital campaign created pressure that led the military court to investigate Samira's complaint. The head of the Military Judicial Authority issued a decree banning any media publicity with regards to her case; However, a page was launched on social media², #supportsamira, challenged the ban.

HarassMap³

Harass Map, a voluntary initiative that was established in Egypt by the end of 2010, with the goal of ending societal tolerance to sexual harassment. The Harassment Map Initiative (HMI), began by setting up a hotline to receive reports of sexual harassment against women in Egypt and an interactive map on their website. The Map was continuously updated showing sexual harassment reports received through the hotline from different regions. This allowed them to classify regions according to the intensity of risks to women, and organize action plans to limit the spread of the phenomenon in those regions.

In June 2011, the HMI called for a Tweeting and Blogging Day on the sexual assaults Egyptian women are exposed to, to raise awareness of this phenomenon. Many women of all ages were encouraged, for the first time, to narrate what they face in the Egyptian streets on a daily basis.

SuperMama

A website established by Yasmin El Mehiry and Zeinab Samir⁴. It was launched on the 10th of June 2011, to be the first Arabic digital platform addressing motherhood pre, post and during pregnancy. Its objective was to provide mothers with a tool to deal with motherhood changes, hardships and challenges

The two founders received many awards and training that enabled them to sustain the project's continuity and develop it to become a platform for all mothers-to-be. Unlike many websites or specialized platform addressing maternity and Motherhood experiences, "Super Mama", collaborated with specialists and physicians in different fields to review the content published on the website⁵.

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c29CAXR141s>

² <https://www.facebook.com/SolidaritySamira/photos>

³ <https://www.harassmap.org/ar>

⁴ <https://www.supermama.me>

⁵ <https://thenextweb.com/news/supermama-an-egyptian-startup-benefiting-from-an-international-ecosystem>

The website, established and managed by a team of women, had dedicated some sections to highlight the role of fathers and husbands during pregnancy, childbearing and child care; trying to address the concept of fatherhood from a man's perspective¹. Within the first month of launching the website, the number of subscribers exceeded 2000 members, and the average visitor rate reached 20 thousand visitors.

The women's uprising in the Arab world (intifadat al maraa)

In October 2011, the "women's uprising in the Arab world"², a feminist page, was launched on Facebook under the slogan "Together for women enjoying freedom, independence and security in the Arab World". The facebook page, with more than 11379 users, declared that it is "a free secular space" for constructive dialogue on women's freedoms and independence in the Arab world, and emphasized its adherence to the International declaration of Human Rights.

The online initiative was co-founded by four women from Egypt (Sally Zohni), Lebanon (Yalda Younes, Diala Haider), and Palestine (Farah Barkawi), and relied entirely on voluntary work. Its solidarity work highlighted the commonalities of Arab women's sufferings, struggles and challenges. Its diversified work (sharing news, launching and supporting campaigns and initiatives) reflected both political and human rights dimensions based on supporting women against patriarchal systems whether in the family, authority or religious clergy. The initiative called for changing laws that exclude and marginalize women, and for the participation of women in the constitutional making processes in the Arab Spring countries.

The initiative gained wide fame in October 2012, after launching the campaign "I support Women's Uprising in the Arab World Because...". The campaign included photos of women and men participants with banners showing the reason for their support. Some of the women participants' photos outraged many Facebook users, who organized violent and hate speech campaigns with aggressive and negative comments on the initiative's page. Facebook administration deleted the photo of a young woman participant following complaints reporting it as an "offensive content". Furthermore, the accounts of some of the page administrators were suspended.

Following the attack on its Facebook page, the initiative launched a counter campaign³ to put



The logo of women's uprising in the Arab world, an Arabian girl, her black hair is the map of the Arab world

¹ <https://www.egyptindependent.com/supermama-unprecedented-online-start-arab-mothers/>

² <https://www.facebook.com/intifadat.almar2a/>

³ https://www.facebook.com/events/304290906351114/?post_id=305083029605235&view=permalink

pressure on Facebook administration to undo the controversial post's removal, and to unblock the page's moderators. That campaign received wide solidarity from various human rights and feminist organizations and initiatives, in addition to individuals of different nationalities and sects, and the participation of a number of influencers and artists. Eventually, the widespread campaign and massive solidarity received compelled the Facebook administration to undo the deletion of the controversial post and restore the page moderator's authority.

Since 2011, the "women's uprising in the Arab world" initiative has organized many solidarity campaigns with women in many Arab countries, e.g. Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Lebanon, Morocco, etc. That support gave it momentum, expansion and a diverse audience at the regional level. For example, in 2013, following a number of horrific incidents of violence and sexual harassment and even rape endured by Egyptian women; the initiative called, through its digital accounts, for a wide solidarity campaign with Egyptian women against assaults they face in public places. The campaign was able to mobilize broad solidarity with Egyptian women from different countries of the world. The popularity it gained, contributed to shedding more light on the level of sexual violence faced by women in the Egyptian street.

The initiative also organized awareness campaigns on legal violence against women in Arab countries, and campaigns to support Saudi women in their right to drive cars, and to support women's political rights in Lebanon. In all these campaigns, the slogan was "Our issues are many, and our struggle is one".



تصميمات حملة "هل تعلمين" – انتفاضة المرأة في العالم العربي

Sett el Banat (Finest of girls)

During November and December 2011, many clashes erupted between the revolutionaries and the security forces. Most news and stories circulated on the "Mohammed Mahmoud clashes" exposed the security forces' violence against the demonstrators. Yet, these narratives avoided incidents of sexual assault and rape that women demonstrators were subjected to during those events. Justifications included, "not to distort the Square's image", or "fear might deter women

from participating in demonstrations and events". However, several women published, on their social media accounts, testimonies of what they were exposed to while participating in the demonstrations. They were faced with violent attacks and criticism, from both opponents and supporters. The former regime supporters smugly gloated on such attacks.

By December 2011, the assaults became more violent and brutal. Women's rights and anti-harassment groups organized a series of interventions to protect women, including digital campaigns to expose sexual assaults of women. The most prominent was "Sett el Banat" (Finest of girls), a young woman, who was stripped, dragged and beaten by a number of soldiers during the "Council of Ministers' events. and Such assaults were documented through photography and videotaping that were published on the internet. They were republished through many digital campaigns, e.g. "A'skr Kathebone" (Army Liars) and many other pages on social media.

At that time, many feminist activists and feminist rights groups organized digital campaigns to denounce, expose and publicize these sexual assaults targeting women demonstrators, attempting to intimidate and bully them from participating in the demonstrations. Many pages on social media called for women's marches to denounce what happened, particularly following beating and stripping during the "Council's" events.

2012

According to the Ministry of Communications report, the percentage of women and girls using the Internet in 2012 increased by 5.3%, compared to 2011.

Initiatives against sexual harassment

In 2012, digital campaigns and digital organizing focused mainly on confronting sexual harassment both online and in public places, particularly after a number of women's organizations and initiatives began to shed light on this phenomenon in 2011.

"Daughters of Egypt are red line"¹, an online initiative, was launched in June 2012 to protect the rights, freedoms and dignity of Egyptian women, enable women's reporting on sexual violence crimes and provide psychological and emotional support to victims/survivors. This initiative used social media pages as a tool for organizing and meeting supporters, providing direct awareness campaigns and training volunteers to enable them to provide protection against harassment in public places

In August 2012, another initiative, "Anti-Harassment Movement"², was launched through a page on social media, Facebook and Twitter. Its objectives were awareness raising against harassment, launching digital campaigns regarding violence against women, networking volunteers and organizers of protection teams. The training included tools for awareness raising and collective action to address and combat violence against women in public spaces. In addition, they trained "protection teams" on how to function on the streets during events.

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/banatmasrkhata7mar>

² <https://www.facebook.com/AntiHarassmentMovement>

The Anti-Harassment page has been diligently publishing stories of survivors of sexual violence, as well as posting content that encourages women to report abuse.

In October 2012, the campaign produced a video to encourage citizens to participate in a demonstration on 4 October to assert women's rights in the constitution and combat harassment.

Girls' Revolution

A feminist group, established through social media accounts to outreach to the largest possible segment of women and girls¹. The group, founded by Ghadeer Ahmed on January 26, 2012, seeks to stop discrimination against women and defend women and girls' right to their bodies.

This digital initiative aimed to use technology and the Internet as a means for change and to outreach for women and girls in governorates and villages through raising public debate on feminist and controversial issues that concern women.

Over the past years, the "Girls' Revolution" initiative had incited a lot of heated debates because of the many controversial issues it raised and the strong, unconventional and courageous views that are not usually raised on social media. A position that led to systematic violent digital campaigns against the group's founder, targeting her Twitter account.

The "Girls' Revolution" group addressed violence against women in both the public and private spheres, including sexual harassment in public spaces, domestic violence and female circumcision. It also initiated several discussions on controversial issues, e.g. the veil, women's control over their bodies, and women's independence vis-a-vis their families. This stance caused a harsh attack on the page's editors in most of the comments raised on these topics.

The initiative helped create a space for digital organizing and pressure, and was the first digital space after 2011 that engaged, supported and raised awareness of girls and women from outside Cairo.

"Girls' Revolution" editors resorted to unconventional methods in addressing debated feminist issues e.g. using satirical "memes" designs, or resorting to digital shaming and naming of a number of men violating women to enhance the accountability process. The initiative, through its Facebook page and Twitter account, tackled many thorny issues such as the right to abortion, marital rape, and the hymen, in addition to discriminatory laws against women.

Campaigns of the "Girls' Revolution" campaigns included:

- virginity tests in Egyptian homes **#من_الجسد_وإليه** (from the body and back to the body),
- Marital rape: **#حقها_اختيارها** (her right her choice),
- the right to abortion,
- in addition to shaming campaigns of rapists, e.g. **#متحرش_الميكروباص** (the microbus rapist).

¹ <https://twitter.com/EgyGirlsRev>

Operation Anti-Sexual Harassment OpAntiSH

In 2012, a year after Mohamed Mahmoud (the street between Ministry of Interior and Tahrir Square) events, clashes were renewed and included violent assaults and mass rape of young women in the square, which was shocking for feminists and human rights groups. A heated debate erupted on whether to announce what happened to women during these events or cover it up “not to defame the Tahrir demonstrators”. However, Yasmine Al-Barmawi, a survivor who was subjected to violent sexual assault in Tahrir Square, came out revealing her brutal experience through social media pages. Her testimony was then recorded in written and video format¹.

In the wake of those events, “OPANTISH” or “Op Against Sexual Harassment/Assault”. A group of volunteers and many associations and initiatives worked jointly on rapid interventions to stop mass sexual harassment and assault during demonstrations and sit-ins.

OPANTISH used social media², Facebook and Twitter³, to provide timely information about dangerous hotspots in which sexual assault incidents occur during gatherings and events, needed assistance to those requesting medical, legal or financial support to rescue victims and provide temporary safe shelters.

The initiative achieved credibility and wide reputation because of its members’ dedicated efforts to provide the necessary protection for women participating in the events. It used different digital platforms to raise awareness with regards to sexual harassment and systemic and organized assaults on women demonstrators. Phone numbers of OPANTISH were published on social media before events for reporting sexual harassment hotspots or call for help

By the end of 2013, OPANTISH announced, through its accounts and website, it will suspend its intervention groups activities during demonstrations and events due to increased pressures on its members that mounted to arresting some of them. However, the initiative maintained its virtual presence through social media, especially its Facebook page. It continued to support efforts to eliminate harassment in solidarity with the struggle of women to reduce sexual violence in the Egyptian street.

OPANTISH used Twitter to organize volunteers, providing hotline numbers to help stop assaults, and collect financial support to purchase medical needs for survivors of sexual violence.

2013

In 2013, the percentage of women Internet users decreased, 43.5% compared to 46% in 2012. According to the Ministry of Communications’ report, the percentages of women Internet users in that year, were 42%, 15.9% and 27.3% in the Delta, Cairo and Upper Egypt governorates successively.

This percentage shows an increase in the number of Internet users in the Delta and Upper Egypt

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VZmdhwd3axw>

² <https://www.facebook.com/opantish>

³ <https://twitter.com/OpAntiSH>

compared to Cairo and Alexandria, reflecting a state of decentralization away from the major capitals in the use of the Internet and explaining the increased number of digital initiatives launched from the Delta and Upper Egypt governorates. This might be explained by the limited opportunities for women in those governorates to participate freely in public events and occasions taking place on the ground. It also reflects the transformation of the Internet into a means to compensate for the lack of physical and actual participation in the streets and public places. On the other hand, the percentage of women Internet users was comparatively low (6%) in the Suez and Sinai governorates due to the continuous interruption of the Internet in North Sinai, in addition to the conservative nature of the two governorates, which may impose restrictions on how women use the Internet.

Confessions of a Married Woman

The “Confessions of a Married Woman” initiative is a women-only closed group. It is almost the first of its kind in Arabic on social media in Egypt. Despite the name, it is not exclusive to married women; single and divorced women can join it.

After getting married Zainab Al-Ashry began to discover all the silenced issues about marriage. When she realized that she was not the only one suffering from these problems, she created a Facebook page with a group of friends, so that women can exchange psychological, and sometimes even financial support. They adopted a policy of anonymity when publishing confessions or problems, so that participants can discuss their problems freely, without embarrassment or fear.

The “Confessions of a Married Woman” group was the first digital space enabling Egyptian women to address sexual and marital problems freely without fear of being judged. This revealed many shocking facts with regards to marital relations and problems. The group began as a space for married women to share confessions about the marriage institution, however, by time and with the increasing membership it turned into a safe space for women to freely share their worries and concerns regardless of their age or social status. Sex related domestic violence and financial problems or confessions represent the overwhelming majority of what was published and debated on the group¹, which currently has a membership of over 188.6 thousands women.

To sustain the group’s cohesion and to keep that safe space for women to be able to speak freely, the group adopted some rules within their publishing policy. They banned discussions related to religion and politics, in addition to prohibiting any comments entailing abuse or bullying of any member.

The popularity of the group and the nature of the information circulated, even being anonymous, provoked some men who accused the group of inciting women against their husbands or families and pushing them to rebel against what they were accustomed to².

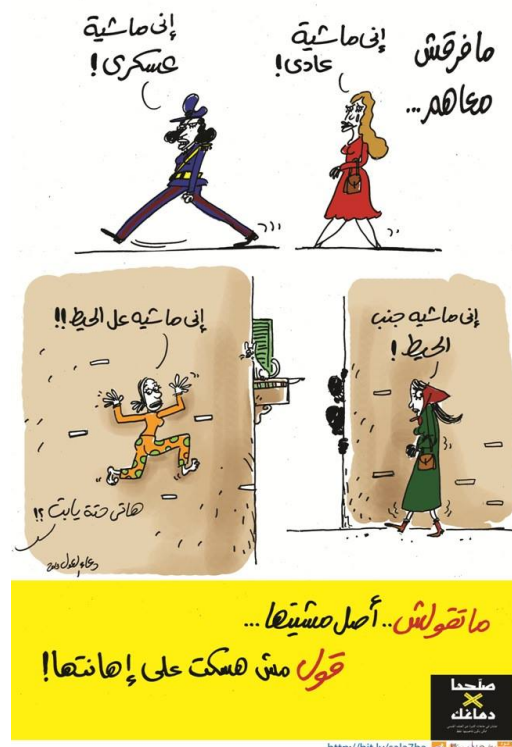
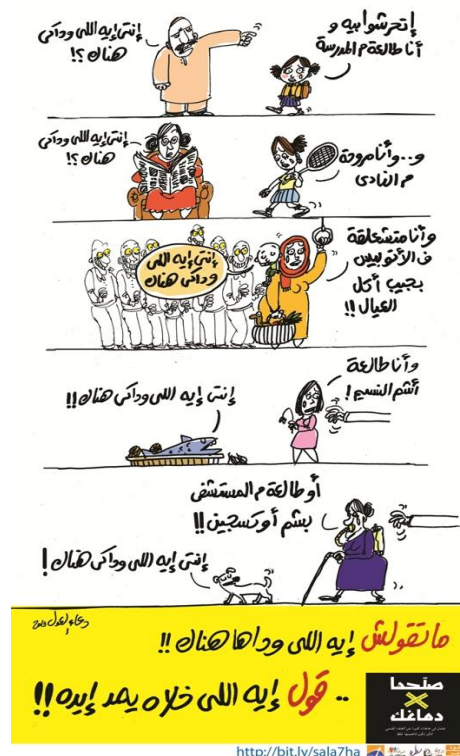
¹ <https://dailyfeed.dailynewsegypt.com/2016/08/01/scary-confessions-married-women/>

² <https://merip.org/2017/05/virtual-space-and-collective-action-in-egypt/>

Correct it in Your Mind

In November 2013, with the anniversary of the assaults on women, a number of human rights and feminist organizations launched a digital campaign targeting men titled “correct it in your mind”¹. The campaign aimed to challenge negative stereotypes and misconceptions associated with sexual violence against women in Egypt. It used several tools, most notably widespread dissemination of satirical cartoons through social media, and the hashtag [#صلحهاخدماغك](#) (correct it in your mind) to reach out to its target audience. In addition, it used social media to call for a number of live events such as seminars, storytelling sessions, and awareness campaigns in 10 governorates. Many organizations, such as the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, Harass Map, and Nazra for Feminist Studies, OPANTSH, Girls’ Revolution, Woman uprising in the Arab world and other initiatives concerned with confronting harassment and sexual violence against women participated in the campaign. The campaign received great media coverage on a number of digital media platforms.

Compared to previous campaigns, the “correct it in your mind” campaign was different and new. Instead of the usual approach targeting women and community, that campaign addressed its messages to men for the first time. Its discourse was clear-cut, direct and simple, using various daily life situations in an attempt to change and modify behavior to confront violence against women in the public domain.



Examples of Cartoons used during the “correct it in your mind” campaign.

The campaign also worked hard to raise awareness of the ambiguities and shortcomings of the Egyptian laws on violence against women and the prejudiced texts defining the types of sexual

¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_cOn6t9uL3w

violence against women, resulting ultimately to pathetic judicial verdicts for these crimes¹.



Designs from the “correct it in your mind” campaign

2014

These incidents gained wide attention because of the intensity of violent scenes shared through social media. These included a video of a woman covered in blood after being totally striped and assaulted in Tahrir Square. In addition, the nature of the event during which these attacks took place in the complete absence of any presence or security protection contributed to the attention to these incidents.

Subsequently, the new President visited a victim of sexual assault in the hospital where she was receiving treatment. Following the visit, the local media highlighted the President’s directives to his Minister of Interior to confront the phenomenon of sexual harassment against women. A month later, the criminal Court issued life sentences to 7 defendants in those incidents and 20 years’ imprisonment for another two².

STOP

In August 2014, photographer Eman Helal launched, “Stop”, a project on Egyptian women and sexual harassment in the Egyptian street after 2011, through video clips from the Egyptian street, and illustrated stories of a group of women presenting their personal experiences, in addi-

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fZviFXgxAoE>

² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-28329064>

tion to digitally recorded incidents of harassment.

At that time, despite the high frequency of violence against women in the Egyptian street, several Egyptian newspapers refused to participate in the project, and after one of the international newspapers agreed to publish these stories digitally on one of its platforms, Iman published it on her own platform¹.

2015

2015 was not the internet's happy year. It witnessed, for the first time since 2011, the beginning of blocking of many Internet news websites, and the arrest of many social media users because of publishing written or visual controversial materials. In August 2015, the Anti-Terrorism Law was promulgated containing many articles on internet crimes limiting publishing on social media. In 2015 Egypt ranked 100/167 on the ICT Development Index (IDI), compared to 98 in 2010, and down 11 points from the previous year (should add source, "Measuring information society", 2015. International Telecommunication Union.

In August 2015, two dancers were arrested for posting video clips of their dances on social media, after some lawyers filed several complaints against them on charges of inciting the spread of immorality and debauchery and violating the values of the Egyptian family. The restrictions on social media raising the risk of legal liability because of the content, led many initiatives to suspend their activities both on social media and on the ground especially after the cybercrime law. Yet, this didn't stop the emergence of women's initiatives on social media.

Femi Hub

A digital initiative that was established on Facebook by a closed group for young women only. It started as a support group to young women coming to Cairo, for the first time, from other governorates to find work, study and get independence from their families. The initiative worked on



Bread, House, Freedom (femi-Hub banner)

¹ <http://emanhelal.22slides.com/just-stop-egypt>

networking with many initiatives and activists to support these young women, and was keen on warning newly independent young women against risks of deception and exploitation. It worked on sharing job opportunities and training grants with group members and providing a database of safe workplaces for young women in Cairo.

Two years after its establishment, the initiative redefined itself as an umbrella group to provide a safe and supportive community for independent young women without any geographical bias. This included exchanging information and experiences related to housing, providing psychological support, capacity building, and creating a network of institutions that provide psychological, economic and legal support to young women.

Femi-Hub took care of the economic aspect impacting the independence of young women, through several solidarity initiatives to build its members' capacity to achieve their financial independence!

In addition, the closed group created an open social page¹, where it published some experiences of its members and the hardships and challenges they faced in their quest for independence. It also collated a manual for newly independent or still seeking independence that addressed major questions and problems they might face, e.g. legal measures in case they are subjected to domestic violence due to their decision to get independent, or if they want to travel alone or get a passport.

2016

The percentage of female internet users was 31% of females, compared to 37% male users². The section on Egypt in the World Wide Web foundation report³ on digital rights, stated that only 45% of Egyptian women can access the internet, compared to 87% of men. Women using the internet to search for important information related to digital rights comprised 7%, and only 1% of women were able to access digital financial services.

The foundation highlighted the absence of any public policy for raising awareness on sexual and reproductive health. There were some initiatives by civil society organizations, yet on a very limited scope. The report emphasized the widespread of online sexual harassment against women. As a shortcoming of limited police and judicial skills to deal with reported sexual harassment, women resorted to self-censorship on their digital practices.

The Freedom House report on internet freedom⁴, highlighted the lack of internet freedoms, block of voice communication services, and censorship on social media. In January 2016, Poet Fatima Naoot was charged with defamation of religion and was sentenced to 3-year imprisonment, because of her post in 2014 criticizing the "sheep slaughtering" tradition on Eid al-Adha.

In May 2016, the Egyptian police arrested a transgender woman. Accused of prostitution, by

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/Femi-Hub-780813025375003/>

² https://www3.weforum.org/docs/GGGR16/WEF_Global_Gender_Gap_Report_2016.pdf

³ http://webfoundation.org/docs/2016/09/WF_GR_Egypt.pdf

⁴ https://freedomhouse.org/country/egypt/freedom-net/2016#footnote26_9u0ipaq

tracking her account on social media.

Wiki Gender

Wiki Gender¹ initiative, is a digital platform based on individual voluntary contribution to research and writing on women's issues in Arabic language. It was launched in 2016, by the Goethe institute and Adef Foundation. Adef provided the technical input and the institute provided financial support.

Wiki-gender worked on enhancing cumulative feminist knowledge production through archiving of written texts and audiovisual content, and translations of research papers related to feminist issues building on participatory efforts.

The initiative organized interventions to introduce women and men concerned with gender and feminism to the digital initiative and provide the necessary training to use the platform and add or edit content. It also followed and documented initiatives and groups interested in gender and feminist issues, in addition to encouraging and stimulating interaction of other platforms with Wiki-gender.

The initiative established a participatory group on facebook to facilitate communication between its editors and those interested in feminist and gender issues, and to share with them the project's developments. It also established a public page² to publicize its content and interventions in addition to two accounts on Twitter and Instagram.

Prominent among the founders of Wiki-gender are: Farah Barqawi, Aya Hisham, Ola Abou Shalashel, Khlood Beidaq, Habiba Montasir, and others. They were keen on establishing a kind of collective digital dictionary to share and spread knowledge in Arabic freely, and to open discussions on critical and timely gender and feminist issues.

2017

According to Freedom house report on the freedom of internet in Egypt³, Egypt's ranking declined to 32 compared with 37 in 2016 (Scores are based on a scale of 0 (least free) to 100 (most free). Its classification continued to be "not free". In 2017, 100 websites were blocked, rounding the blocked websites to 434 websites by October 2017. Some of the Arab law makers and parliamentarians proposed imposing restrictions on setting accounts on social media and monthly fees to be paid to the state treasury. The internet subscription prices increased, negatively impacting the number of users.

In April, Mona El Brince, a university professor, posted on her Facebook personal account a video of herself dancing. She was stormed by mocking attacks, and the university administration referred her to an investigation committee, which decided, after 14 months, to fire her.

¹ https://genderiyya.xyz/wiki/الرئيسية_المقدمة

² <https://www.facebook.com/WikiGenderAr>

³ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/egypt/freedom-net/2017>

In July, all personal accounts of activist Ola Shahba were hacked. Earlier, she received a message from Vodafone, Internet services company, that her phone SIM had been disabled. The company gave her replacement SIM to another person, without her knowledge which is against the law. After that, all personal digital accounts and email were disabled and canceled, eventually cutting her from any communication with the virtual world for several days before she managed to regain her digital identity again. Shahba accused Vodafone of complicity and assistance in hacking her digital accounts.

And in September, the feminist and human rights activist, Sarah Hegazi, was arrested after publishing her photo raising the rainbow flag in a concert of the Lebanese band Mashrou' Leila¹.

Also, in the same month the social media accounts of activist Esra Abdel Fafath were hacked. A Facebook page with the name of "Be Positive" (كن إيجابي), leaked some of her personal photos without the veil, her emails and phone calls over the internet, amongst accusations of treason and smearing her private life.

First time I was harassed, my age was...

A campaign that was launched by a group of feminists in response to the increasing daily sexual harassment incidents, particularly to children. The campaign #أول_محاولة_تحرش_كان_عمري (first time I was harassed, my age was...), was an innovative response to the claims that harassment is a new phenomenon in Egypt or that only specific groups of women face harassment.

Hundreds reacted to the hashtag via social media. Many news websites discussed the campaign. Young men also shared their posts on the sexual harassment they were exposed to in their childhood. The hashtag was so popular that it extended to other Arabic speaking countries, and included posts by women from Libya, Sudan, Jordan, Tunisia, Lebanon telling stories of their first harassment experiences. Some influencers and celebrities shared their posts too, e.g. the TV broadcaster Yasmin El Khatib and Enas EzzDin, an Arab Idol star.

The hashtag was attacked through a group of accounts, mostly men, raising doubts regarding the realism or credibility of the posted stories. Others were claiming that getting distant from religion is the reason behind sexual harassment.

Yousef's Right

On May 18th 2017, Yousef, a 13 years old boy, suddenly dropped unconscious among his friends in the street. After taking him to the Hospital, his mother discovered that he has a bullet in his cerebellum. Yousef stayed in a coma for 12 days before he died on the 29th of May. Police investigations revealed that Yousef was hit by a bullet from a gun firing in a wedding, yet, they were unable to arrest the accused because of their families' influence. From the moment of her son's death, Marwa Qinawy launched the hashtag #حق_يوسف calling for arresting the perpetrators and bringing them to justice.

¹ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/10/06/egypt-mass-arrests-amid-lgbt-media-blackout>

For over two years, Marwa Kenawy continued her campaign, which evolved from individually demonstrating in front of the Council of Ministers, to media meetings, and public letters to the Ministry of Interior and the Prime Minister. In parallel, Marwa launched a campaign (#No_to_firearms in celebrations), to stop the recurrence of such incidents. In May 2018, a year after Youssef's death, the defendants were sentenced in absentia to seven years in prison on charges of manslaughter and possession of weapons without a license.

Marwa continued her campaign for arresting the accused despite the threat letters she received from their families. Exhausting all pressure means, Marwa began an open hunger strike until the perpetrators were extradited. There was no official response except for an urgent briefing request submitted by parliamentarian Anisa Hassouna to the Minister of Interior on the subject matter and a letter sent by parliamentarian Muhammad Fouad to the same Minister. Marwa continued her hunger strike, and received popular and public support on social media pages. After 45 days of hunger strike, Marwa Kenawy ended her strike after she was notified that the main defendants had surrendered themselves to the prosecution.

On another vein, Marwa started a social initiative through her hashtag #لا_لضرب_النار_في_المناسبات (no to firearms in celebrations) to stop this deadly habit. She printed "Yousef's Notebooks", carrying Yousef's photo with the caption "your biography is longer than your age", and distributed it in schools with awareness raising workshops on that harmful habit.



Yousef Notebooks' design

Molester Physician MF

This was the first collective public naming and shaming of the physician Michael Fahmy who was later convicted of sexually assaulting 6 underage girls after luring them.

The campaign began publicly in October 2017, when a number of social media users began circulating a post warning from Michael Fahmy. However, the campaign developed into the "#Molester M.F." to avoid legal liability after he began filing insults and slanders' complaints against anyone linking his name to those accusations on social media.

Despite the sensitivities of publicly addressing any thorny Christian issues through social media, that did not stop the solidarity and blogging campaign on his crimes. Four years later, Michael Fahmy was convicted in 2021 and sentenced to life imprisonment.

Me Too

In October 15th 2017, following the exposure of numerous sexual-abuse allegations against film producer Harvey Weinstein, the American actress, Alyssa Milano posted a tweet on sexual harassment in Hollywood and called upon all women to retweet under the hashtag # Metoo#. Her call, together with other actresses, had a wide response and many women began to tweet incidents of sexual harassment they have been exposed to.

Egypt was not an exception. Many Egyptian women began to shed lights narrating horrific details of sexual harassment against them, using the same hashtag in English and Arabic. The campaign contributed to the beginning of a real debate on social media on sexual harassment, its causes and motivations, and how to respond to it beyond the traditional approaches that usually blame women for “provoking” harassment.

These heated debates raised serious questions on the sexual harassment phenomenon: what is the difference between courting and harassment? What is consensual sex? When does it turn to harassment or rape? Questions that were daring and were never discussed outside the traditional cultural and religious frameworks. The campaign also prompted other campaigns, encouraging many victims of sexual harassment to publish their testimonies through closed or open digital media, whether anonymously or openly.

Harassing servant

It can be said that the hashtag #مُتَحَرِّش_خَادِم is one of the consequences or inspirations of the Me Too campaign, which opened the door to discuss harassment in religious institutions or by religious men, a subject people usually avoided discussing.

Nardine Nagay was harassed in her childhood by one of the church servants¹. After meeting another young woman who was harassed by the same servant, Nadine initiated the hashtag in October 2017. She designed a form asking girls to respond to specific questions on harassment in Christian religious houses. She received 96 responses from young women stating that they were harassed by Christian clergymen. Posts on sexual harassment by Michael Fahmy were also shared within the hashtag.

In 2018, Sally Zachary used the same hashtag to expose the sexual harassment by an Egyptian priest in the Coptic Church in Florida. Sally explained that this priest was promoted and transferred to Egypt despite the incidents and reports of sexual harassment against him. In 2019 the priest behavior was investigated and finally in 2020 he was removed from office, thanks to the continued pressure of the campaign exposing the details of his sexual harassment. and the church's reluctance to punish him.

The hashtag #مُتَحَرِّش_خَادِم (harassing servant) is still vivid where posts of new harassment incidents within the church are shared on it.

¹ <https://almanassa.com/ar/story/14735>

2018

The total number of internet users in 2018 was 49.5% of total population.. Female users constituted 41.3% compared to 52.4% male users¹. Female users represented 37% of total Facebook users², and 40% of Instagram active users.

In 2018, the number of blocked websites increased to 500 websites. The parliament suggested three draft laws on regulation of social media platforms, website monitoring and criminalization of publishing fake news. Eventually in August 2018, the parliament promulgated "Law on Electronic Crimes", providing a legal framework for blocking of websites "that represent threat to national security". Visitors of blocked websites might receive one-year imprisonment. Designers and managers of such websites might face a maximum of two years' imprisonment. Internet providers were obliged to retrieve users' history and avail it to security authorities when requested.

This year the parliament also approved 3 draft laws on Media regulation, including digital media, and demanded news websites to get practice licenses in Egypt. It also considered blogs and personal accounts a form of media that can be accused of publishing fake news, and its owners would be liable to fines, imprisonment or canceling their accounts on social media³.

In May 2018, Amal Fathi posted a video on her Facebook personal account about the harassment she was exposed to by some security personnel in the bank and a taxi driver in the same day, and how the government fails to protect women in public spaces. The video went viral on different platforms and websites and she was arrested a few days later. She spent 161 days in detention and was let out on 10.000 LE bail. Two days later she was convicted of abusing social media and was sentenced to two years' imprisonment and 20000 LE fine. She filed an appeal, and on January 12, 2022 the court of appeal supported her imprisonment for one year because she insulted state institutions through social Media.

Two months after arresting Amal Fathi for blaming the government and state institutions for failing to provide safe streets for women, Mona El Mazbuh, a Lebanese tourist who was sexually harassed in the Egyptian streets, broadcasted a live video on Facebook narrating her experience with sexual harassment the moment she arrived to Egypt, in addition to theft and lack of public services. She was arrested and was sentenced to 8 years' imprisonment for spreading false news over social media and spreading immorality. She was deported from Egypt, after the court decreased the sentence to one suspended year.

Diala Adel El Siwi's Right

In January 2018, Samah Abdel Aziz, revealed on her personal page, that the father of her daughter Diala refuses to admit that she is his daughter. Through blogging and campaigns on social media, Samah managed to highlight her daughter's case, many interacted with her posts, and she re-

¹ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/733570/egypt-internet-penetration-countries-gender/>

² <https://www.slideshare.net/DataReportal/digital-2018-egypt-january-2018>

³ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/egypt/freedom-net/2018>

ceived support and encouragement from many feminist and human rights organizations in Egypt.

The Story began with an Aurfy marriage contract between Samah and Adel El Siwi, who refused to acknowledge the baby at birth, thus Samah was unable to register her. She resorted to Family court (first degree) and the case was dismissed. Samah was exposed to threats and blackmail, partly because of the fame and wide social relations of El Siwi, and partly because society rejects and blames women resorting to Aurfy marriages. After launching the hashtag, Samah and Diala received a lot of support through solidarity campaigns on social media. The New Woman Foundation provided the legal support to the daughters right to parentage which was approved in a final court judgment after applying for a DNA test.

The Sex Talk

A closed group on Facebook that was established in January 2018¹. The group defines itself as a closed group concerned with discussing all issues related to sexuality in Arabic (original or translated texts). The group provided a progressive definition of sexual relations that includes consensual sex regardless of gender. The main goal of the group, as defined by its founders, is education and entertainment. It is open only for women and those identifying as females. The founder, Fatima Ibrahim, is a feminist researcher and activist, thought of the initiative because of the absence of any groups or initiatives that deals with sex scientifically and is relevant to women's sexual needs and rights beyond traditions, customs and religions².

The group kept its closed policy, restricting its membership to women or anyone who defines herself as a female. As membership grew to exceed some hundreds, the group became reluctant in accepting new membership for the sake of securing members privacy. To avail the information and discussions on sex subjects in Arabic, a public page with the same name was created on Facebook³, in addition to an account on Instagram⁴.

The group and Facebook page discussed many thorny issues related to sex, sexually transmitted diseases, self-examination for protection from breast cancer, contraceptives, correcting misinformation on the hymen, menstruation, female genital mutilation and its medical harms, in addition to sexual identity, and how to protect children from sexual assaults and provide them with appropriate sexual education.

Because of its daring and outspoken content, the public account and other accounts of the group on social media were subjected to many critiques and attacks, in addition to digital attacks that led to the closure of the page at one time. The big challenge for the group and its public accounts is the Facebook policy related to social standards, that lead to closing the group's accounts several times in addition to deletion of the contents as being classified as pornography.⁵ revise for footnotes

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/151806665620267>

² <https://whatwomenwant-mag.com/the-sex-talk-بالعربي-your-guide-to-sexual-health/>

³ <https://www.facebook.com/TheSextalk3arabi>

⁴ https://www.instagram.com/the_sextalk/?hl=en

⁵ <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/2021-12-21/online-collective-brings-sex-education-to-women-in-the-arab-world>

Yossry Fouda

In September, 2018, Dalia Alfaghal posted a statement that impacted heavily on the Media scene. She wrote on her Facebook account a testimony of being sexually harassed by the famous broadcaster Yousry Fouda, who was working in Deutsche Welle news (DW) in Germany. Initially she mentioned his full name in her testimony, then deleted the name to avoid legal liability. Between skeptical, opposing, supporting or gloating voices, the journalist issued a statement denying all accusations and indicating that he will fight the war imposed on him, and that he will keep all options open.

Dalia's testimony had wide repercussions, particularly that other women began to publish their own harassment stories by the same person. One of the journalists working in DW published that he harassed and raped her when he was her boss. Faced with a statement from within, DW opened an internal investigation, to receive more incidents of sexual harassment against the same person, in addition to revealing old complaints that were neglected.

The campaign continued for some weeks, then DV announced publicly the suspension of the "Fifth Power" program and that the broadcaster is no longer working in DV as his contract ended. According to some analyses, DW paid a huge sum to the journalist to end his contract, in addition to compensations to the women who filed complaints against him with a condition to stop public discussion on the issue. The Journalist who accused him of sexual harassment, filed an official complaint, a matter that is being investigated by the German authorities. Yousry Fouda left Germany and moved to London.

Her Honor Setting the Bar

The initiative identifies itself as a human rights initiative to fight discrimination against women in the judiciary. The initiative seeks to uphold the rule of law and justice, and the independence of the judiciary authority through emphasizing what is stated in the constitution on empowering women to practice as judges and to stop gender bias against appointing women in leading judiciary posts.

Omnia Gadallah, founded the initiative in 2014, when she and other female graduates of law and Sharia schools were denied the opportunity to apply to the State Council posts that were open for their male colleagues of the same patch. Omnia filed a court case before the state council, but didn't win the case. Once again in 2017 Omnia filed another case, and managed to have the case referred to the constitutional court. However, the constitutional court had not addressed the case yet. In 2018¹, a digital campaign was launched under the hashtag #Her Honor Setting the Bar.

The initiative builds on Constitutional texts that acknowledge women's rights to be appointed in all judiciary posts and that competency should be the only standard for appointment. In addition, it also highlights Egypt's international commitments, particularly the Convention against all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/المنصة-حقها-Her-Honor-Setting-The-Bar-277991102857130/>

The initiative launched some awareness campaigns on the importance of women assuming leading judiciary positions and the unconstitutionality of denying them to hold such posts. The initiative used the hashtag #HerHonorSettingTheBar **المنصة_حقها** in both languages (Arabic and English and sometimes French)

One of the important results of the campaign's impact on public opinion was the issuing of a Presidential Directive to the Ministry of Justice in January 2021 regarding women's work in public prosecution and State Counsel. Despite lacking firm and concrete points to enact constitutional articles and using general phrases e.g. "as soon as possible" without indicating a specific timeframe, the directive was seen as a step forward.

Besides being active on the campaign, Omnia is continuing judicial appeals to attain her right to be appointed in the State Council despite losing the case many times. Since its establishment, the initiative has supported many law schools' graduates to pursue the legal and judicial courses to get their legitimate right to sit on the bar.

Eventually, by the end of January 2021, the State Council issued the usual job announcement, stating for the first time, that both male and females can apply to the job, which was an initial victory for a persistent movement to empower women to occupy leading posts in the judiciary. It is also an important victory for the **المنصة_حقها**. Although Omnia was deprived from her right to apply for the job, yet she persistently and courageously paved the way for hundreds of women to attain their right

إعلان رقم ١ لسنة ٢٠٢٢

يعلن مجلس الدولة
عن قبول طلبات التعيين في وظيفة
مندوب مساعد

من خريجي وخريجات كليات الحقوق والشريعة والقانون
والشريعة دفعة ٢٠٢١
ويشترط فيمن يتقدم للتعيين في هذه الوظيفة
بالإضافة إلى الشروط العامة المنصوص عليها
قانوناً ما يلي:

- (١) التقدم للذكور والإناث.
- (٢) ألا يقل التقدير التراكمي عن جيد.
- (٣) ألا يزيد عمر المتقدم على (٣٠) عاماً في تاريخ آخر موعد للتسجيل الإلكتروني.
- (٤) توفر الأهلية والصلاحية والكفاءة المطلوبة لشغل تلك الوظيفة القضائية طبقاً لما تقرره اللجنة المختصة بمجلس الدولة.
- (٥) أن يجتاز المقابلة والاختبارات التي يحددها مجلس الدولة.
- (٦) أن تثبت لياقته الطبية على وفق التحاليل والفحوص من الجهات المختصة التي يحددها مجلس الدولة.
- (٧) شُحِبَ الملفات من مقر مجلس الدولة (٢) شارع عصام الدالي - الدقي - الجيزة - بعد تقديم المستندات التالية:
- صورة ضوئية من بطاقة الرقم القومي مع الاطلاع على الأصل.
- صورة ضوئية من المؤهل الدراسي.
- ما يفيد سداد مبلغ (٥٠٠) جنيه على الكود المؤسسي رقم ١٠١٠٠٨٠٠١ مجلس الدولة في جميع البنوك المصرية ومكاتب البريد.
- (٨) شُحِبَ الملفات خلال المدة من يوم الأربعاء الموافق ٢٠٢٢/٢/٢، حتى نهاية عمل يوم الأربعاء الموافق ٢٠٢٢/٢/٩.
- (٩) تُقدَّم الملفات في مقر مجلس الدولة خلال المدة من يوم السبت الموافق ٢٠٢٢/٢/١٩، حتى نهاية عمل يوم الخميس الموافق ٢٠٢٢/٣/٣.
- (١٠) يُراعى عند سحب الملفات وتقديمها المواعيد المحددة لكل جامعة والمنشورة على صفحة وحدة التوثيق الإلكتروني لمجالس الدولة على الفيس بوك <https://www.facebook.com/CouncilDU>
- (١١) تُقدَّم الملفات مستوفاة أصول المستندات والأوراق المطلوبة.
- (١٢) لن يُلتفت إلى الطلبات السابقة على هذا الإعلان، أو التي ترد بعد الموعد، أو غير المستوفاة الشروط.

مع تمنياتنا بالتوفيق للجميع

State Council job announcement indicating that both male and female graduates of law and Sharia schools can apply

Another unhappy year for the internet in Egypt witnessing the enforcement of the new legislations allowing state authorities to block any websites that “threaten national security”. These legislation also compel service providers to retrieve users’ data and submit them to the security authorities upon request. Furthermore, these legislations provide for the authorities to delete accounts on social media platforms, and subject its owners to a fine and imprisonment if they are accused of publishing false news¹. 2019 also witnessed the arrest of Malak Al-Kashef, a transgender woman, because of what she published on her personal account on social media platforms².

The approval of the law regulating media led to remarkable reduction of the number of news websites due to the continuous threat of closing, unless they paid 50.000 LE to get a license from the Supreme Media Council. This includes social media accounts with more than 5000 followers.

In 2019, the internet users were 49% of the total population, i.e. less by 1% than 2018³, and only 40% of the population were using social media. Female users of Facebook represented 36% compared to 64% male users. The percentage is higher when it comes to using Instagram showing 42% female users, compared to 58% male users. On Twitter, female users comprised only 21% compared to 79% males, and on LinkedIn women represented 29% compared to 71% males. However, percentages are almost reversed when it comes to the Snapchat application, where women users comprised 73% compared to men 24%.

Amr Warda

In July 2019, during the African Cup Championship, the Mexican model Giovanna Valdatti posted a video showing messages from Amro Warda, a player of the Egyptian National team participating in the championship, accusing him of stocking and sexually harassing her. Giovanna’s posts were a kind of support and validation to what Merhan Keller, An Egyptian woman of American origins had posted a few days earlier. Merihan published some messages showing the player’s harassment.

The messages provoked a wave of anger and criticism of the player’s behavior on social media. The Egyptian Football Union issued a decision to dismiss the player from the Egyptian team. The decision was approved by the African Football Union. However, Wada’s colleagues criticized the decision, Including Mo Salah, Sherief Ekrany and Baher Mohamady. The latter raised Warda’s T-shirt (no. 22) after he scored in Congo’s net as a sign of support.

After the Egypt/Congo match; Warda posted a video on social media apologizing for what he did and promising that it will not happen again. The Egyptian Union revoked his decision and Warda joined the Egyptian team in the final Match where he lost.

¹ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/egypt/freedom-net/2019>

² <https://afteegypt.org/en/research-en/monitoring-reports-en/2019/05/06/17457-afteegypt.html>

³ <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2019-egypt>

It is worth noting that Warda washed out his public apology saying that he wrote it under pressure from close circles to get back to play. His sexual harassment incidents with wives of his colleagues in European clubs did not stop and is still happening.

2020

In 2020, the internet users represented 54% of the total populations¹, i.e. 5% higher than the previous year. Female users represented 36.8% compared to 63.2% male users on Facebook, while on Instagram female users were 43.4%, compared to 56.6% male users. The percentage of female users on Twitter increased to 33.5% compared to 66.5% males, while the percentage of female users of LinkedIn decreased from 29% in 2019 to 26.8% in 2020.

In March 2020, a woman from Damietta was arrested for spreading false news on Covid-19 in Egypt after sharing a video on facebook about the spread of Covid 19 in her governorate.

One Hand

An initiative that began on Facebook². The founder, Malak Saeed, stated that she decided to create the page and abandon working as a lawyer³, after the death of Nada, an Egyptian child because of Female genital Mutilation, popularly known as female circumcision (female genital circumcision FGC). The platform seeks to provide a safe space for women to tell their stories on the violence they have been exposed to. Testimonies were sent using an anonymous form, and were posted under the hashtag #alltypesofviolenceagainstwomen#. Most of the testimonies were posted on a public page⁴ linked to the "One hand" Facebook page. Any person could post anything on the public page that might not be consistent with the group's goal, so there were multiple posts on real estate, religious prayers, advertisements, common questions, etc. However, the public page was committed to publish subjects of concern to women and those raising awareness on sexual violence.

The publicity of the "One hand" initiative was positively enhanced, when the famous broadcaster Isaad Younis posted a video⁵ through the initiative encouraging women to speak up about harassment and domestic violence.

Marital Rape

Tamim Younis is a singer and director of a controversial song "so you wouldn't say no". It created a heated debate as it was enticing against the principle of consensual agreement in relationships, especially in a country where most women suffer from sexual harassment and where marital rape is not criminalized. Nada Adel, Tamim Younis' ex-wife, posted a video on Instagram stating

¹ <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-egypt>

² <https://www.facebook.com/unitingwomenandgirls/>

³ <https://honna.elwatannews.com/news/details/2065722/من-العنف-الناجيات-لدعم-الناجيات-من-العنف>

⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2797069010416208>

⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=610473456538496>

that she was raped by her ex-husband and that it took her a year to be able to disclose what happened, and calling for criminalization of marital rape.

Nada's video created a wave of support and empathy with her, opening the debate on marital rape; with those demanding its criminalization and those who rejecting the term as imposed on "our Culture".

Menna Abel Aziz

Menna was famous among social media users for the many videos showing her singing and dancing. In May 2020, she shocked her followers when she appeared on another account shaved with a swollen beaten face and calling¹ for help after her account had been stolen. She stated that she was raped, tortured and tortured by a group of young men and women

The video provoked a heated campaign on social media #Menna Abdel Aziz's right#. Two days later, Menna and all whom she mentioned in the video were arrested. The prosecution initially charged Menna with "Incitement to spread immorality and debauchery", the others were charged with committing rape, torture, assault and theft. Later, the prosecution dropped charges against Menna and she was placed in a care home for minors. The remaining defendants were sentenced to two years in prison and a fine.

Healthy Meals Initiative for home isolated Corona patients

At the beginning of the Covid 19 crisis, instead of falling into the panic that affected the majority in the society; an Egyptian Journalist Basma Mustafa chose to employ such perplexed feelings to help the isolated patients, particularly with spreading news that some shops refused to deliver water and food to those isolated in their homes. Basma's initiative sought to provide for the patients' needs of healthy food and deliver it to their homes² through groups of volunteers. It depended on filling forms by volunteers and accordingly divided different tasks (collecting food ingredients, cooking, delivering meals, etc). Other forms were filled by the patients themselves (number of sick people in the families, where they stay, information about new cases, etc.)

The initiative was very popular and attracted many volunteers, more than 35000 users joined her group on Facebook within a few days. Later, more decentralized initiatives were created in different regions.

Mothers Comfort Zone

An initiative that began with a women-only closed group on Facebook³ concerned with proper nurturing of children and the mental and psychological health of mothers. The closed group membership reached 35.7 thousand members. Six months later, a public page⁴ with the same

¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ptWiip3R_D0

² <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2438086782960847>

³ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/motherscz>

⁴ https://www.facebook.com/motherscom/?ref=page_internal

name was created and run by a group of volunteers, stating that it is a free learning initiative concerned with supporting women particularly mothers during pregnancy, birth and child rearing. It also seeks to provide safe space for mothers to speak freely and get the needed support from a variety of specialists concerned with women and child health.

The Mothers Comfort Zone initiative expanded to create a website¹ under the same name and logo. All contributions from writing articles to designing pages were voluntary. The website provides a service to support women entrepreneurs using hashtag #women for women#. The website organizers choose a woman's project from among their users to support, so other users will advertise it on their own pages, and encourage other women to establish their own independent projects. The closed group and the website currently have accounts on most social media platforms like YouTube² and Instagram³.

Assault Police

An initiative concerned with sexual violence that was established as an anonymous account on instagram⁴. It was established by Nadine Asharaf, student in the American University in Cairo (AUC), after deleting another student's post on one of the digital groups of AUC students. The post warned against a reckless young man from a wealthy family who sexually harasses and blackmails young women in AUC.

Nadine posted the his photo and full name, Ahmed Basam Zaki⁵ and the post that was deleted. Next day She received around 30 message from other girls who were also were assaulted or raped by the same person. In a week the followers of Police Assault reached 70.000. Many testimonies on sexual harassment poured into the account, which developed into a new daring platform supporting women's issues. Ahmed Basam Zaki was arrested quickly and charged with sexually assaulting minors, in addition to other charges that included harassment and blackmailing. By the end of the year he was sentenced to three years imprisonment⁶.

In late July, the "Assault Police" account published a post on what was known as "the Fairmont crime". Five young men from wealthy and influential families were accused of luring and gang-raping a girl during a party at the Fairmont, after drugging her and took turns raping her, wrote their names on her body and filmed the incident and shared it with their friends. Although the incident happened in 2014, the victim didn't speak up for fear of retaliation from her rapists and their families. She even left the country. However, she spoke up after the testimonies and campaign on Ahmed Bassam Zaki

In August, the Fairmont crime became the talk of social media. The authorities began to take measures to arrest the defendants in the case. As Nadine personal security was jeopardized she

¹ https://motherscz.com/?page_id=2477

² <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCQlgZPjZfkzNeB5rdThemBw>

³ http://instagram.com/mothers_comfortzone

⁴ <https://www.aucegypt.edu/ar/news/i-want-keep-conversation-going-personal-note-nadeen-ashraf-assault-police-founder>

⁵ <https://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast-55100230>

⁶ <https://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/5184008>

decided to suspend the “Assault Police” account. Ten days later, she activated the account again focusing on raising women’s awareness of their rights, and providing them with support to speak about what they are subjected to. BBC chose Nadine Ashraf as one of the list of the most influential and inspiring women in 2020.

With Permission from the Egyptian Family

Menna Abdel Aziz was not the first girl to be tried for publishing content that violates the values of Egyptian society. As of April 2020, the security authorities began targeting a group of influencers on social media platforms e.g. TikTok and Instagram on charges of human trafficking and publishing content that threatens the Egyptian family’ values.

The authorities arrested Haneen Hossam and Mawaddah Al-Adham because of a visual content they published that offers ways to gain profit through using a group of social media applications and platforms. In less than 3 months, the authorities had arrested 9 women for allegedly posting content against public morals and the values of the Egyptian family and indecent video clips and provoking instincts with the aim of attracting viewers for money gain.

The advocacy campaign questioned the vague accusation; what are these “Egyptian Family values”? Are they monolithic or do they differ from one family to another and from one class to another, Highlighting that the arrests are clearly targeting women of lower social strata¹ contrary to the supportive attitude towards middle-class women, whether those complaining of sexual violence or those running initiatives addressing sexual violence and sexual relations in general.

Speak Up

“Girls for Girls” is the slogan of the Speak up initiative². A feminist initiative created by dentist Jihad Hamdy on social media (Facebook and Instagram) in July 2020, in response to the horrifying increase of harassment incidents in Egyptian society, and the increased intensity of violence linked to such incidents. The initiative gained 347.616 followers on Facebook³, and 205.000 on Instagram⁴.

In addition to launching awareness campaigns on harassment, the initiative provided psychological and legal support to victims of sexual violence. It has a support center on its website with a database for institutions and organizations dealing with and supporting women exposed to harassment and violence. The initiative seeks to provide safe space for victims of sexual harassment to tell their stories without revealing their identities, being judged or socially stigmatized.

The initiative adopted and joined forces with many campaigns against harassers. On the top of those campaigns: the campaign that lead to conviction of Michael Fahmy, the campaign against the AUC student Ahmed Bassam Zaki, with long record of published testimonies recounting inci-

¹ <https://www.change.org/p/مصر-اطلقوا-سراخ-ستات-التيك-توك>

² https://speakupeg.com/?fbclid=IwAR0Fv0HaBj_6b1gUNMs98ep4bR5CQ8LifiXh4Bt6jDEv7qhV-uRFBP_zDCs

³ <https://www.facebook.com/SpeakUp00>

⁴ <https://www.instagram.com/speakup.00/>

dents of sexual harassment and violence; campaign against “Maadi Harasser” who sexually harassed a girl child in the entrance to an apartment building, and other sexual harassment incidents that were commonly named with “the train harasser,” “the Metro harasser,” and “the airport harasser.” The positive impact of the campaigns launched by the initiative, yet it received many provoking inciting messages and threats of legal action against it.

El Modawana (Stories’ Blog)

An anonymous blog that was created in July 2020¹, publishing testimonies of anonymous women on sexual violence using only the initials of the harassers. The blog stirred up commotion with every testimony it published, especially after many of those interacting with the blogs volunteered to publish the full name of the aggressor.

The blog is run by women and provides a safe space for victims/survivors of sexual violence who decide to share their stories, what they have been through and their journey of recovery. The founders identify themselves as a group of independent Egyptian feminists who believe in women’s right to have safe spaces in the public sphere, without being subjected to threats, sexual violence or discrimination.

The blog was attacked and criticized by many including sometimes supporters of the same cause, claiming that publishing anonymous testimonies negatively impacts its credibility, and publishing the initials of the attackers and stigmatizing them widens the circle of suspicion and accusations.

Furthermore, following each testimony, the blog received criticism, denigration and threats to close the blog, or questioning its main goal. One of the aggressors, in an attempt to clear himself, pushed two young women to provide fabricated testimonies against him. After publishing the testimonies, he exposed their fabrication to raise doubts on the credibility of the testimonies published on the blog.

In December 2020, after publishing a group of testimonies regarding a film director, the press conference for the film in one of the film festivals was canceled. Following an unprecedented support and solidarity campaign with the victims, the film director filed a defamation lawsuit against two of the victims’ supporters.

However, and despite all this, the blog managed to achieve small victories through publishing women’s testimonies. In the case of journalist Hisham Alam, the Egyptian Journalist Union encouraged women journalists to file reports against him, promising to support them. Furthermore, on the background of the testimonies against him, most of it were verified, some media organizations and platforms stopped dealing with him². Testimonies against Islam El Azzazy, film director, pushed the Cinema Workers Syndicate to issue a statement to clarify guidelines for Actors’ and Actresses’ auditions³ to avoid repetition of such incidents any more.

¹ <https://elmodawana.com>

² <https://zaina-erhaim.com/الب-يفتح-قد-المؤسسات-تد-يفتح-الب/>

³ <https://mobile.twitter.com/AidaElkashef/status/1476179403759566857/photo/1>

#Support Meit-Ghamr Girl #Where is Basant's Right

Since 2011, mass sexual harassment incidents were increasingly exposed. Digital documentation of these incidents facilitated societal debates on such crimes. However, the case of Basant, in addition to being a mass-sexual harassment incident turned to be also a case of incitement and threat, after the defendants' lawyer became personally involved and posted a video on social media that contained a combination of harassment, incitement and threatening¹.

Basant was harassed by seven young men in the Mit Ghamr area on her way back to her home.



The design of Basant's support campaign "a documented crime audio/video"

She tried to take cover in a cafeteria, the young men waited for a long time in front of the place, and when she decided to leave, they surrounded her and took turns physically assaulting her. Bassant took refuge in a garage in the neighborhood, they followed her shouting rape threats. When the owner of the garage took Basant in his car, they chased him on a motorcycle, but he managed to escape from them in the end.

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=419822779060606>

On the same day, Basant posted on Twitter what she had gone through, and filed a police report the next day against the seven young men. Shortly, all social media were discussing the case under the hashtags [#ادعم_فتاة_ميت_غمر](#) (support Meit-Ghamr girl) and [#حق_بسنت_فين](#) (shere is Basant's right). Yet, Basant and her family were bombarded with threats and intimidations. She filed two more complaints against the defendants' lawyer after he posted his video on social media and against one of his colleagues who also threatened her.

The court acquitted the seven defendants in Basant's case after witnesses changed their testimony, and the court is still considering her appeal. As for the case against the defendants' lawyers, Hani Ebada was sentenced to two years imprisonment (suspended) and fine of 300,000 LE (reduced to 50.000 LE). The other lawyer was sentenced to 6-months imprisonment and a fine of 15,000 LE.

Analysis

After the 25th of January 2011 revolution; citizens' relation with the Internet took a new direction. The internet was transformed from a means of following news and social communication, to be an essential organizing and mobilizing tool through social platforms. The number of users in that year and the following year recorded the highest rates of using social media¹, yet the number of women users did not reflect a similar leap. However, 2011 marked the beginnings of some feminist groups and women-lead initiatives on social media².

It had been ten years since the uprising (2011) till the current state of suffocation under legislative and security constraints on digital activism (2020). The paradox is that the number of initiatives launched in the last few years and in 2020, i.e. under restrictions, is double the number of feminist and women lead initiatives in 2011. This might be because women, despite the unrestricted internet spaces in 2011, were still navigating their way to discovering the internet as a means and tool to achieve their goals.

However, despite the restrictions characterizing the past few years, women's assimilation and understanding of their capabilities in organizing, directing, campaigning, publishing, and launching initiatives has enormously increased. In addition, they gained courage and self-trust that enabled them to discuss controversial issues on the internet and social media platforms,, moving beyond the traditional topics that characterized the first years since 2011, e.g. sexual harassment and female genital mutilation³ to thorny issues such as the concept of consensual sexual relations, marital rape, giving birth outside traditional marriage institutions, young women independence, supporting women's financial independence, etc. Still, sexual harassment and violence against women were at the forefront of feminist initiatives, together with women's efforts to raise the ceiling of discussions on feminist issues departing from tradition topics and approaches.

Feminist solidarity against social media platforms

Despite the limited feminist issue discussed on social platforms, and the trial of some political movements to impose agenda priorities that ignore women's rights, something that was clear in assaulting the women's march downtown on International Women's Day in 2011; yet feminist groups were not deterred from pushing their agenda, particularly against the intransigence of social platforms such as Facebook. As we have seen, the Women's Uprising in the Arab world initiative, October 2011, gained huge momentum after the Facebook administration deleted some posts by women bloggers and the campaign administrators and blocked their accounts. The deleted post contained a photo of activist Dana Baqdonis without veil carrying her passport (with her veil on), with a banner stating "I support the Women's Uprising in the Arab world, because I

¹ <https://mystudentvoices.com/the-role-of-social-media-in-the-2011-egyptian-revolution-9867a5f32be1>

² https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332281593_Women_and_the_Digitally-Mediated_Revolution_in_the_Middle_East_Applying_Digital_Methods

³ <https://fount.aucegypt.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2122&context=etds>

was for 22 years deprived from letting the air touching my body and hair”¹. The image aroused a digital campaign reporting the post as offensive content. Facebook administration deleted the post and froze any account that republished the image, including accounts of the page managers.

Facebook administration had to revoke these measures after they were faced with a regional signatures campaign and thousands republishing the post; this could be marked as the first utter feminist victory in the Arab region against social media platforms and their patriarchal policies.

Discourse and language

In Egypt, where the society defines itself as a conservative one, you can use whatever language that suits you (swearing using rude, obscene, or derogatory words,) in your personal conversations or even fights in public spaces as long as you are male. However, it is totally unacceptable to use such vocabulary in public statements or posts on social media, especially if you define yourself as a female! This is exactly what happened in 2011 and the years that followed. The strident political movement was enmeshed with verbal and physical violence, of which women received the greatest share. When women groups tried to speak up and document the violence they were subjected to in the Egyptian streets, social media platforms were bombarded with angered response. Those users were not angry because of the gravity of harassment and violence against women, but were offended by the audacity of the language women used to describe the mischiefs they suffered.

Maybe this was the first time women had the courage to record on social media what precisely happened to them. Instead of anger for what women have been exposed to, the anger was against women for using dauntless and bold language to describe what happened to them. However, most women did not bend to the disapproval and admonition; which in itself contributed greatly to transforming the general mood, to accepting women’s narration of what they were and still are exposed to, understanding their anger and the need to reroute anger at the harassers and aggressors not the victims. Thus the narrative of “women’s attire lead to sexual harassment”, transformed into harassment/harasser criminalization and punishment.

Amendments to the Penal code

Decree No. 11/2011 was issued in response to the intense discourse on combating sexual harassment, and the role played by the social media in wide, timely and sometimes live dissemination of sexual harassment incidents. The decree increased penalties for all harassment crimes, including digital harassment, replacing articles No. 267, 268, 269, 269 bis, 288, 289, 306 bis “A” of the Penal Code.

In 2014, after the series of sexual assaults in Tahrir Square in 2014, a new article (306)² was added to the Egyptian Penal Code (No. 58 of 1937), describing, for the first time in Egyptian legislative history, the crime of sexual harassment “whoever addresses a female in a way that in-

¹ <https://syriauntold.com/2014/02/21/المرأة-السورية-والانتفاضة-الحرب-على-ح-ج-21/02/2014>

² <https://harassmap.org/ar/laws/law-text>

fringes on her modesty by word or deed on a public road or a frequented place, would be punished by imprisonment for a period not exceeding one year and a fine of no less than two hundred pounds and no more than a thousand pounds, or either of these two penalties". "The provision of the previous paragraph shall apply if the infringement of female modesty occurred by telephone. If the offender returns to committing a crime of the same type stipulated in the preceding two paragraphs again within a year from the date of the ruling on the first crime, the penalty shall be imprisonment and a fine of not less than five hundred pounds and not exceeding three thousand pounds, or one of these two penalties.

The first amendment did not only describe sexual harassment crimes in the streets, but extended its criminalization to cover both wired and wireless communication means including internet and social media¹. In 2021 law no. 141 increased the punishment of sexual harassment in article 306 bis of the penal code, transforming sexual harassment crime from a misdemeanor to a felony punished by no less than two years' imprisonment, included using the internet and social media in the definition of sexual harassment crime. It also specified abuse of authority and power to obtain sexual favors as a reason to harshen the punishment to 7 years' imprisonment².

In July 2020, as a result for the campaign launched by the "Assault Police" group, against Ahmed Bassam Zaki, and the reluctance of many young women to file official complaints for fear of slandering or leaking their data to the perpetrator's family, the Parliament approved a law that allows the investigating judge not to document victims' data in sexual harassment and indecency crimes, and keep the data in a sub-file to guarantee total confidentiality. The file could be presented to the court, the accused and the defense upon request³,

The new law seeks to encourage young women to file complaints against the harassers without fearing being slandered. However, the problem is still there, due to non-abidance by the law and hence lack of enforcement. In the case of Basant in Miet Ghamr, her photos and personal data were all over multiple websites the next day she filed the complaint, contrary to the new article 113 bis recently included to the criminal procedural law, stipulating the protection and confidentiality of sexual harassment victims' information⁴. Ironically, defendants' data were keenly hidden.

Qualitative Change of feminist initiatives' nature

The #The MeToo campaign in Egypt was not a mere reaction to a global campaign, nor was it a campaign with a specific timeframe. It was an important starting moment in Egypt, a stone thrown into stagnant water creating widening circles of interests. Its clangor disturbed many, threatened some, and drove many traditional institutions to try to halt women's disclosures to preserve their own privilege. It was an inspiring moment par excellence, daringly raising the ceiling of discussions pushing boundaries, and placing women rights and mutual consent as the basis

¹ <https://alwafd.news/article/3072196>

² <https://www.youm7.com/story/2021/8/20/-الجديد-واعتمادها-5430174/جناية>

³ <https://www.skynewsarabia.com/middle-east/1359505-لإخفاء-بيانات-ضحايا-التحرش-مصر-تعديل-قانوني>

⁴ <https://legal-agenda.com/شهور-بعد-التعديل-قانون-حماية-بيانات-ضح>

for relationships rather than religion and culture. Every societal debate following that campaign owes it the first blow in raising expectations and enhancing societal debates on feminist issues, from consensual sex within or outside marital relations to calls for criminalization of marital rape.

The feminist initiatives changed since 2017. Though the work on sexual harassment continued, yet the vision, language and discourse remarkably changed. The discourse which was mostly conservative embracing patriarchal values and populist rhetoric on the need to protect women; changed in the last few years. It moved away from blaming victims to stressing the principle of women's rights to a safe environment, and that harassed women should not be blamed for their attire, social or sexual activities.

The #MeToo international campaign had a parallel local campaign in Arabic in Egypt, with regional inputs, shedding lights on sexual harassment in Egypt. The campaign posts helped many women to use the internet to narrate sexual harassment in non-consensual sexual practices. It meant getting beyond the traditional descriptions of sexual relations outside the marriage system, declaring consensual relationships, and defining nonconsensual sex as sexual assault. The first incident that followed the International #MeToo movement was an email by a young woman accusing two prominent and influential members of an Egyptian human rights organization of sexually harassing and raping her some years ago. The e-mail definitely had a strong impact, leading to a crack within the Egyptian human rights movement. Yet, the social and feminist gains were the stepping stones for other initiatives.

The incident of the "email-girl", as it was called at the time, addressed the issue of extra marital relationships, in a guilt-free manner for the first time, as a fact needing no justifications, considering any nonconsensual sexual relation, even within marriage, as rape or harassment. For the first time, the idea of "consent" within sexual relations was raised explicitly and strongly discussing nuances related to consciousness and informed explicit, not implicit, consent on the sexual activities.

Discussing these issues at the time wasn't as easy as writing about them now. Social media users were divided on the issue. Some were in shock and disapproval of the mere idea of raising sex issues, and even more, discussing and acknowledging sex outside the marriage institution. Others contested discussing sexual issues of individuals working the human rights movement that might reflect negatively on the movement, and provide its opponents an opportunity to use such incidents against the movement as a whole, which ultimately happened. However, these positions didn't stop the debates on definitions of harassment, rape and consent. Perhaps every feminist initiative on sexual harassment in Egypt from a progressive standpoint owes this incident and the e-mail girl for raising the ceiling of discussions on social media, and paving the way for society to become more courageous and determined in condemning harassment, sexual assault and rape regardless of the context in which it occurred. This can be noted in the initiatives launched against "Ahmed Bassam Zaki", the "Fairmont's Girl", "Yousry Fouda", and a number of testimonies published on "Elmodwana".

We can also notice the qualitative change in the daring nature of initiatives beyond harassment issues. For example, establishing women-closed groups, "accepting any individual who defines herself as a woman", thus including transgender people in its membership. In addition, discussing

topics outside traditional frameworks related to bodily rights, sexual practices, sexual health and sexual relations between women, contraceptives, oral sex, etc.

In parallel, the Internet was an organizing means for traditional groups interested in the issues of marriage, reproduction and motherhood. However, these groups were unconventional in accepting in their membership single or married women without children.

Even the type of harassment crimes that were brought to public debate has changed. For the first time, taboos like sexual harassment in religious institutions were discussed. Discussing issues intersecting with sex and religion is very sensitive, particularly if it has a toll on religious clergy as was the case of hashtag #مترش_خادم (harassing servant).

Qualitative change shows also in the daring nature of initiatives in issues other than harassment, e.g. establishment of closed groups for women that adopt a progressive definition of women by "accepting any individuals who identifies themselves as a woman" to include transgender women in their membership. It also shows in discussing other issues beyond traditional frameworks related to bodily rights and sexual practices, sexual health and sexual relations between women, oral sex, contraceptive methods, etc.

On a parallel level, the Internet was a means of organizing traditional groups interested in marriage and motherhood issues and their problems. Single or married women without children were not excluded from their membership in groups interested in motherhood and childbearing issues!

Furthermore, women used the internet as a means of protection, and a platform to restore lost rights. A good example, is the campaign #Haq_Diala Adel El-Siwi, which gained great popularity and sympathy on social media platforms without falling into details of the relationship being outside conservative frameworks, and supporting the daughter's right to be recognized from a clear human rights perspective, i.e. child's right, without pushing the mother to express repentance and admitting wrong-doing.

The animosity in Adel Al-Siwi's case was disproportionate in terms of authority and influence, in favor of the man who had wide connections and social influence within cultural circles. The great sympathy, support and encouragement that Diala's mother received and the eventual victory she achieved could be attributed to two previous incidents that paved the way for this kind of cases, albeit they didn't receive similar support and sympathy, the cases of #HadirMekawy and Hind El Henawi.

The story of Hind Al-Hinnawi dates back to the turn of the millennium, before the emergence and widespread use of social media platforms. In 2003, Hind Al-Hinnawi announced her customary marriage to the artist Ahmed Al-Fishawy, and that she was pregnant. She fought a long and tedious battle in the courts to prove the lineage of her daughter in response to Al-Fishawy denying their marriage. Despite the fame of Al-Fishawy and his family (all were movie stars), Hind eventually triumphed and established the lineage of her child, in a bold precedent for the conservative Egyptian society¹.

Hadeer Mekawi, a young woman in her mid-twenties, posted on social media, asking for help and

¹ <https://akhbarak.net/news/20517832/articles/علاقة-غرامية-انتهت-في-ساحات-المحاكم-التفاصيل>

assistance after giving birth to a child, outside the traditional institution of marriage, and the father refused to acknowledge him as his child. Contrary to the support, sympathy and encouragement in the case of Diala's mother, Hadeer did not receive a similar reaction. In fact, she mostly got violent responses and smear campaigns on both regular and digital media. The discourse supporting women's rights to sexual relations, and the children's rights to recognition irrespective of the nature of their parents's relation was very hushed in case of Hadeer. However, the fruits of such continued feminist discourse and efforts bore fruit when the incident was repeated with different people yet with the cumulatively transformed social awareness.

Organized violence against women on the internet

Violence against women on the internet has always been a phenomenon that called for attention and study. Egypt was no exception for such an international global phenomenon. By and large, it remained within the realm of individual violence incidents motivated by revenge, terminated love affairs, or sometimes by relatives or co-workers.

However, in recent years, violence against women on the Internet has acquired a different disposition. It became no longer confined to circles of acquaintances or motivated by revenge. Even when there was a joint reaction protesting against what was seen as an offending content, as in the case of "Women's Uprising in the Arab World"; it was not an organized effort but rather a spontaneous reaction to the audacity of women's discourse at the time.

Violence against women became more organized in the years following 2014. Men began to create closed groups on Facebook that shared what they see as controversial posts, then target such posts collectively through reporting "an abuse", providing degrading and offensive comments, or using the belittling expression "Hahaha" (what are known as "hahaha" groups). Such organized attacks usually target posts daring to raise feminist and sexuality issues or supporting LGBTQ communities or their issues and problems.

The prelude of organized violence events showed in 2016. Perhaps the most famous incident was what happened following the raising of the rainbow flag in a musical concert. It was a targeted campaign but not an organized one. Such aggressive practices drove young Sarah Hegazy to Canada to avoid both security pursuits and social stigma. However, this targeting didn't stop by leaving Egypt and continued through social media. Deprived from all the support she needed drove her eventually to ending her life in her room in 2020.

Sarah was a left-wing activist and an active member of the LGBT community. The posting of Sarah's suicide note sparked massive wave of sympathy on social media even among conservative and non-LGBT groups. The sheer momentum of sympathy with Sarah Hegazy brought back the original incident, assessing, in retrospect, the massive harm and injury she was exposed to because of the mere simple act of "raising the rainbow flag". On the other hand, such momentum and debates provoked many extremist or right-wing groups on social media and they began to organize themselves. All posts, especially those receiving heavy interaction, became crammed with "hahha" expressions as well as derogatory, offensive and obscene comments. The personal accounts that changed their profile pictures to a colorful picture of the rainbow flag or Sarah's

picture were subjected to a violent hate campaign in the message box. In addition, targeted posts were designed to bring together the personal accounts of sympathizers with Sarah with the aim of inciting against them.

The phenomena of organized violence against any feminist or daring discourse on social media can be explained by the panic of the afflicted right-wing and conservative groups because of the way women groups and LGBT community publicly expressing their solidarity with Sarah and discussing cruelty of punishment versus personal freedoms.

It also could be explained by the successes of women and queer communities in raising the ceiling of social discourse. Their daring and explicit human rights based discussions with regards to individual personal freedoms, without resorting to traditional justifications to get sympathy, panicked right-wing and conservative groups.

Another example of the continuous targeting of women's attempts to use the internet to transform social reality clearly shows in the systematic organized campaigns against young women using the TikTok application, what was known as "the Tik Tok girls".

In April 2019, a group of men lead by Nasser Hekaya¹-owner of a popular channel on YouTube and an account on Tik Tok with the same name- launched an organized campaign under the hashtag #Let it be clean, targeting young women's accounts on Tik Tok and YouTube. Nasser would start the campaign with an episode on his channel, criticizing and slandering the account of a specific young woman. This would be the signal for the others to begin, over different social media, writings, blogs and episodes targeting her with slander and defamation campaigns. With more people accessing these content a kind of snowball effect is created, getting more people to voluntarily comment and attack her too. The second step of targeting begins with a lawyer submits a report to the Public Prosecutor to prevent this content and arrest its owner. Then, episodes on YouTube call upon the Attorney General to arrest the owners of those accounts under the pretext of insulting values and promoting obscene content.

Such campaigns began to bear fruit in 2020, with the prosecution arresting the young women posting on Tik Tok, on the charge of "violating the values of the Egyptian family". Then the story is repeated targeting another young woman on YouTube or Tik Tok. Nasser Hekaya's platform became the door for handing over young women to the Public Prosecutor, who seemed to respond swiftly to those demands. Nasser's hate campaigns alone resulted in the imprisonment of more than ten young women with sentences of ten years in some cases together with exorbitant fines.

The economic factor

Most of the women arrested following the violence, hatred and incitement campaigns, were from modest economic backgrounds. They were influential on the platforms they used and gained wide fame among its users, and gained profits through these platforms.

The economic/class factor behind the targeting of women and girls, whether by individuals or the

¹ <https://kohljournal.press/ar/tiktok-women-egypt>

state, cannot be overlooked. Their financial returns enabled them to look like wealthy girls, and most of them became a main breadwinner within their families because of the interactions that take place on their social media platforms. Furthermore, the financial independence these women achieved and the feeling that they are not obliged to marry in its traditional form, prompted some of them to rebel against the traditional framework that society is trying to enforce on them. In the light of this assumption, it is possible to explain the campaigns carried out by male-led groups to discourage other girls from following the same path. There also can be an element of competition, these girls' platforms impact the volume of viewing and number of followers of males' channels. Indeed, many of the males who led smear campaigns against the girls gained their fame by attacking the content of these young women's platforms.

As for the state, the economic/class factor was also influential and decisive in the state's choice to intervene and punish those young women. The state targeted those who were affiliated to modest socioeconomic backgrounds, while those affiliated to higher socioeconomic class or influential backgrounds kept posting similar content without being questioned.

The illusion of access and social justice on social media platforms

Despite the efforts of social media platforms to promote policies to combat online violence, challenge hate speech, and set standards to refine digital content, these platforms failed to protect women from violence, and in some cases facilitated their harassment by ignoring all abuse reports, banning girls' accounts and deleting their private digital content in response to the organized campaigns to silence their voices.

During the past ten years, social media platforms were not the voice of the voiceless, although it was less discriminating at the beginning of 2011. Although these platforms allow relatively easy access to the internet and creating online account., yet , the opportunity to become heard is not as easy. No one will hear you unless you have a documented account, a sizable number of followers, or followed up by a group of influencers who support your position.


Facebook's policies, the mysterious way of algorithms' work, the nature of the post and the use of certain words; impact on how your post may be received. If a woman user writes a post describing a man/men with a word that has multiple meanings and one of these meanings might be, or looks like it can be humiliating, usually Facebook sends an initial warning. In case of repeating what the artificial intelligence tools classify as a violation, the account can be frozen for some period. With more repetitions the closure periods would be extended, and the account might be totally blocked.


At the same time, Facebook and Twitter administrations keep a blind eye and fail to close accounts or delete posts that incite hatred or violence against women. The two platforms follow double-standard policies in responding to complaints. For example, Twitter responds faster to reports of abuse if they come from a verified account, but it takes multiple reports if the owner of the reported account has a large number of followers.

It is worth mentioning here the serious need for more in depth studies on the phenomenon of organized violence against women on the Internet. To explore systematic reasons behind it, its impact on women's use of the Internet as a tool for economic and social empowerment, and its impact on their mental health that sometimes cost them their lives.




Motoon is a social enterprise that nurtures a free, connected, empowered, and gender-sensitive technological society that promotes and enables social development and prosperity.

 <https://motoon.org>

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