RADICALISM VS. CONSISTENCY

The eyber knfluence on kndividuals' pqn-t outine wses in the j eritage public spaces of Cairo

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Abstract. Since the emergence of the concept of user-generated content websites – Web 2.0, Internet communications have developed as a powerful personal and social phenomenon. Many Internet applications have become partially or entirely related to the concept of social network; and cyberspace has become a space about 'us' not 'where' we are. This paper investigates the theoretical grounds of the effect of cyber experience on changing the individuals' uses of the public spaces, and sustaining this change through maintaining the ties and reciprocal influence between actions in physical and cyber spaces. It aims at examining the impact of cyber territories on the perception, definition and effectiveness of personal space within different circumstances; and its role in changing the uses of spaces where people used to act habitually. The personal space, here, will be represented as the core of both: change and consistency – the space of bridging the reciprocal effect of cyber and physical counterparts, which is transformed through the experience of physical events mediated into the cyberspace. The paper is part of a study which looks at the case of Tahrir Square during the Egyptian political movement in 2011. We will compare the activists' actions and practices in the Square during different events of non-routine use of the square and its surroundings. The case study will show the level of consistency in the features of the produced personal space within different waves of the revolutionary actions for all that different circumstances, motivations and results.

1. Introduction: The Cyber influence on Individuals' Practices in Physical Public Spaces

Since the emergence of the concept of user-generated content websites "Web 2.0" [1], the Internet has developed as a powerful personal and social phenomenon. Many Internet applications have become partially or entirely related to the concept of social network (Park 2009) and cyberspace has become a new home of the mind (Hunter 2003). The term *'space'* generally conceptualizes the ability to move, act, create and describe (Krippendorff 2010). Breaking the physical borders, Klaus Krippendorff (2010) argued that space is about 'us' not 'where' we are. 'It exists only for actors who recognize possibilities and act in them: changing the location of their bodies, interacting with one another, or creating new artefacts' (ibid). Cyberspace, here, is an example of this abstracted space. It is based on the communities of actors who exceed the physical boundaries through mediated communication.

The number of studies on cyber communities has significantly increased in five perspectives: social, business, development, application and methodology issues. According to its multidimensional approach, all five perspectives, especially the social perspective, appeared unable to produce a conclusive definition of cyber communities (Li 2004). The social perspective of virtual communities addresses the definitions into two main approaches. The first one is the sociological definition of Tönnies community of mind, where virtual communities are defined using the elements of bonding and culture (Etzioni & Etzioni 1999). According to Tönnies definition, there are three types of communities: (1) community by kinship, (2) community of locality and (3) community of mind. Virtual communities resemble a community of mind but through an electronic communication medium (Rothaermel and Sugiyima 2001). The second one considers virtual communities as the opposite concept of 'offline community of place' or proximal community (Scott et al. 2005), where the offline face-to-face interaction is converted into mediated one (Park 2009). Offline communities are defined as a group of people who share common ties and social interaction through an area physical space for a specific period of time (Hamman 2001, p.75)[2]; while virtual communities are *"mediated social spaces in the digital environment that allow groups to form and be sustained primarily through ongoing communication processes"* (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2002, p. 3); or a group that shares thoughts or ideas, or works on

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[1] It includes social networking sites, blogs, wikis, video sharing sites, hosted services, web applications, mashups and folksonomies. Source: Wikipedia.com

[2] Hamman, R. (2001) Computer Networks Linking Network Communities, Source: Al-Saggaf and Begg: Online Communities versus Offline Communities 2004

common projects, through electronic communication only (Digital Future Project 2007).

The motivations of participants in virtual communities include: daily-life needs (Bakardjieva 2003), online friendships (Coon 1998)[3] and the desire to obtain and exchange information (Ridings et al. 2002); but, mainly, the intention of participants is determined by the social identities of the individual (Bagozzi & Dholakia 2002). The theory of 'uses and gratification' is used to explain this argument. The theory hypothesizes that different consumers use the same media messages for different purposes, depending on their individual needs and goals (Sheldon 2007, p. 40[4]); and users meet their motivation within three main categories of virtual communities: Blogosphere, Wikis and social network sites. The world now faces new forms of association which are called social networks. It is a rich source with several dimensions, which mobilizes the flow of resources between countless individuals distributed according to variable patterns (da Costa 2005).

2. Literature Review: Virtual Communities V. Cyber Space

Based on different platforms, motivations and ways of interaction, Cyber communities represent the virtual version of the real counterpart. Coon (1998) was among the first to suggest that the virtual communities resemble real communities and that people can form communal relationship through computer-mediated communication on the Internet.[5] Therefore, involvement in virtual communities/ cyberspace leads to offline actions: in social activism, daily use, members' interactions, social links and posting information. Space and cyberspace are roughly equivalent, at least in the sense of sharing the four common notions of place, distance, size and route (Bryant 2001). These four items reflect: locating specific targets in cyberspace, time value and its relation to distance and size, and finally the description of the movement within the space. Terms like 'visiting' a web 'site', typing its 'Uniform Resource Locator' and 'entering' chat 'rooms' are indicators for this approach.

Places in cyberspace are, in fact, software constructions which create environments of interaction. These places (cyber objects) are dependent on cyberspace, while the opposite is untrue. Cyberspace can exist in the absence of all information; the potential to transmit does not disappear along with the information. Actually, cyberspace depends on human use of these potentials. It is not only a matter of investigating cyber objects within cyberspace, it is about the responsibility for creating and protecting those cyber objects and the space in which they exist. Without these ongoing human activities, cyberspace and cyber objects would

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[3] Source: Li H. (2004)
[4] Source: Katherine K. Roberts (2010) Privacy and Perceptions: How Facebook Advertising Affects its Users, *The Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communications,* Vol. 1, No. 1, 24-34.
[5] Source: Li H. (2004)

become meaningless. Networks provide platforms for media resources to be shared among nodes, resulting in the flow of information – which activate cyberspace. Since then, a direct relationship is standing between existence and actions. For example, even users enter and leave cyberspace whenever they please, the point for users is not just to 'be there', as traditional meeting places, but to 'present' themselves and to interact with others.

Individuality, the effective factor in changing the concept of community, has its reflections on the cyberspace. Cyberspace has been divided. People hold rights of exclusion to a property, and millions of tiny land-holdings appeared (Hunter 2003). Taking into consideration the self-defining and self-regulated structure space, cyberspace "embodies the liberal democratic goals of individual liberty, popular sovereignty, and consent of the governed" (Hunter 2003). People hold the responsibility to define the space through their properties *(territories)*, shape it into networks and sub-networks, enhance it while contacting and, continuously, reshape it by eliminating people and posts.

Territory, also referred to as personal space, is defined as more distant, somewhat removed from the immediate person, and it involves use of places and objects in the environment (Daskala and Maghiros 2007). Although boundaries are not always very clear, people are aware of their existence and act accordingly. This starts with the territorial behaviour which is a boundary-regulation mechanism of: marking of a place or object, communication that it is owned, regulating interpersonal interaction and to achieve a desired level of privacy.

In the physical space, personal space is literally 'attached' to the self; and in the cyber milieu, personal territory is stands for the cyber personal space. It includes all the cyber personal data of the individual, as well as the online activities. According to Daskala et al. (2007), the use of the notion of territories and personal space may provide us with a better way to map out and conceive the personal space and the management of personal data and privacy in the cyberspace. Within this space, the individual controls all data and actively decides on who and what part to access.

The personal territory is shaped by a dynamic data-sphere (bubble), whose size varies according to its content, the type of interaction and the level of trust to the interaction milieu. This bubble set as the nucleus of a two-way interaction, where any taken action is applied to: the direction of the movement of data, the classification of the personal data (level of privacy) as well as time and spatial factors – either physically: personal or public device, or virtual: the type of used website. This bubble sets adaptable borders, which change according to its will of increasing or decreasing them, and represented by markers to convey the idea of ownership (for example: Log-in screens). The last dimension is the built up bridges which provide links between physical and cyber milieus.

Frequent logging into cyberspaces converts them to online stages for interaction, which affect the offline counterpart. Internet has increased the number of people to contact with; and as the related apps and devices are developed, the number of virtual communities' members who keep in contact with their cyber world increased steadily. While logged in, people post and receive information from their communities. This interaction is considered to have a positive impact on the world,

according to the Digital Future Project Reports, which shows an increase in the positive responses 2013-2015, even for those who do not use Internet.

Such participation affects the behavioral patterns within the physical spaces (offline communities), on one or more of the following dimensions:

Social activism: Participation in social causes through the Internet has increased, even for those who were not familiar with such activities (Digital Future Project Reports 2007).

Social links: a) cyberspace helps the users to find growing numbers of online friends, as well as friends they first met online and then met in person, 5 friends on average (Digital Future Project Reports 2015); b) cyberspace users show an increased regular stay in contact with online friends. This indicates a belief in the use of internet for maintaining social relationships 58%, with 62% specially using texting (of mobile phone users).

Daily life activities: a) Using mobile phones for functions other than talking has increased for a wide range of internet based actions: access the internet, send/receive pictures/video/messages, use apps, GPS mapping services, use social networking sites, watch/listen to streaming video/music, instant messages, personal digital assistant functions, download ringtones/music/mp3/videos and check into locations; b) Online purchasing for 78% of the adult internet users, who became more confident about their personal and security information while shopping online (Digital Future Project Reports 2015).

In parallel, political life was affected by the cyber experience. First of all, people almost trust in Internet. 43% of Internet users said that most or all of the information online is reliable. The percent increases to 74% when users talked about websites which they visit regularly, 76% of the information posted by governments and 69% of the information posted by established media (DFP 2015). On the other hand, information posted by individuals on social networking sites do not have the same reliability for users.

A small percentage of respondents said that governments should regulate the Internet, this real involvement in the cyberspace as a source of information has a significant impact on the political campaigns, knowledge and freedom to respond towards governments actions. In spite of that, in compatibility with Fox and Roberts (1999)[6] argument of the complementary relationship between virtual and real communities instead of completely replacing them, the majority still do not consider virtual communities as the only tool to gain political power.

This impact of cyber experience inspired examples of protesting around the world, as a means of public contribution in political life. Social media was the driving force behind the swift spread of revolution throughout the world during the last six years, as new protests appear in response to success stories shared from those taking place in other countries (Skinner 2011). Through social media, protestors create communities to: organize their movements, share insights, news and support; and, finally, learn from the experience of others, which is essential for activists' success.

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[6] Ibid.
* See: Skinner, J. (2011). "Social Media and Revolution"

Significant examples are drawn around the Arab spring uprisings since 2011; in Tunisia, in response to oppressive regimes and a low standard of living, and in Egypt, the case of public participation affected by cyber-physical relationship. These cases reflected on the political movements in other countries of the region in several forms in Libya, Yemen, Bahrain and Syria; in addition to minor reflections in Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait and Lebanon. Some spaces appeared as the physical spaces of these movements. Tahrir square of Cairo was the biggest example with successive waves of events. A smaller example was of Pearl Roundabout (Lulu Roundabout) in Manama-Bahrain. Inspired with the Arab spring (Skinner 2011), the Occupy movement instigated in USA [7] 2011; called together by groups like Adbusters and Anonymous. The online organized protesting was transferred into physical public spaces, which were occupied by protestors, of both Arab Spring and Occupy Movement. The longest period of continuous occupation, the Hong Kong version of Occupy Movement (15 October 2011 - 11 September 2012), as well as other examples all over the world, transferred the protesting into physical spaces. This has created reactions and impacts on social and political dimensions within their countries. These cyber-organized, physical-applied movements led to several impacts, such as regime change (Tunisia and Egypt), passing of various laws (Spain) and alerting some economic issues (USA).

In all cases, social media played a major role in motivating protestors. Hashtags converted the scattered tweets into public discussions; Facebook allowed people to express their support; Skype was used to hold conference calls with participants of different locations; and multi-media was used for documenting and publishing events. In conclusion, it was a tool to connect protestors and send their messages to the world. On the other side, governments also recognized the role of social media in such movements, since then took actions like shutting down specific sites, blocking Internet service, and accusing active users of unrelated crimes. In parallel, physical spaces of protesting were places of clashes between protestors and police, while trying to clear them even with force.

3. The Case Study Background

The Egyptian revolution that took place in *Tahrir* Square in 2011 continuous to provide evidence on the frequent movement of the activists between cyber spaces, like Facebook, blogs, twitter and YouTube, and the public spaces, like squares and streets. Facebook was elected as a space which was able to represent the physical counterpart. It was the main turning point which has transformed social communication in the history of social network sites (Roberts 2010). Facebook, the republic of 1.59 billion monthly active users (Facebook, December 2015) all around the world, stands as the most popular and influential social networking website (Di Capua 2012) - in comparison with WhatsApp (500 million population), Twitter (284 million) and Instagram (200 million) (Source: CNBC) [8]. 1.04 billion People who log

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[7] This movement which began in Manhattan to protest corporate greed as well as the performance of elected officials, encouraged protestors around the United States and then around the world.
[8] Source of statistics: https://zephoria.com/top-15-valuable-facebook-statistics/ and

into Facebook every day spend 20 minutes in average per visit (Source: Infodocket), upload: 136,000 photos, update 293,000 statuses and post 510 comments every 60 seconds (Source: The Social Skinny). Statistically, it is vital and big enough to represent the community, with sufficient hours of interacting on a wide range of interests through a wide variety of verbal and non-verbal expressions: symbols, words, photos and videos.

Tahrir square stands for the most important public space in the Egyptian experience of the Arab spring. The square, originally named "Ismailia Square", was part of the political movements in Egypt and well connected to its revolutions since 1919 – when it was informally named "Tahrir Square" (Salama 2013) until officially being renamed in 1960. The square, then, became surrounded by several public and governmental buildings; such as: the Egyptian Museum, the House of Folklore, the National Democratic Party-NDP headquarters building, the Mogamma government building, the Headquarters of the Arab League building, the Nile Hotel, Kasr El Dobara Evangelical Church and the original downtown campus of the American University in Cairo. All these have converted the square to become a part of the concept of *melk el hokomoa* (property of government) which occupied the Egyptians' conception of public space for the following six decades. This notion started to change gradually since the 1970s, when socialists started to consider public spaces as places to protest against capitalism. The government contracted these actions through police surveillance. Therefore, the cyber alternative was established and got tied to the public spaces like Tahrir Square.

This paper is part of a study which aims to analyse the individuals' cyber and physical practices during political movements in public spaces, and through their personal spaces – the building unit of space. Through a case study analysis, the study attempts to provide evidence on the relationship between defining cyber and physical personal spaces, through users' inputs – whose communities represent the space.

The case study will be conducted in the city of Cairo, namely in Tahrir Square and its surroundings. A series of major events will be selected as key events of the political movement within the defined three years scope. The events are all non-routine acts which have made: a) a significant change in the actions took place in the selected public spaces and b) a direct impact on the community engagement in this movement and its results. Two events are considered turning points of regime change, while the others established for these changes. The selection criteria is that: a) the event is caused by a physical action which motivates the protestors b) the event took place in a public space which is geographically inside the selected case study and within the defined timeline, c) the event was mediated in the cyberspace, d) the event has been initiated with collective effort; and finally e) had a significant impact on the political movement of the selected case (see figure 1).

The series of event starts with the death of Khalid Sa'eed under police custody. The memorial Facebook page "We are all Khaled Said" stands as a nucleus of change, which started online and moved to the streets of Cairo. Second is the major wave of Jan.25th which sparked with online demands to protest against the

deterioration of political, economic and social conditions; as well as a reflection of Khaled Sa'eed death. The third event was under the rule of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces when Mohammad Mahmoud Street hosted the protestors who moved to speed up the transfer of authority. This has resulted in changing the government team and announcing a timetable of the authority transfer. The fourth event took place in August 2012, following the state declaration of a new a constitutional to enhance its power, followed by the Rebellion movement; and finally, the turning point that took place in Tahrir Square in June 30th, 2013.

The selected events, within the three phases, display variety in the circumstances and motivations of actions; while the relationship between the cyber and physical spaces of engagement keeps constant. The activists' inputs – virtually and physically, will be tracked through documented writings, archives, newspapers and visual materials which are saved either as hardcopies, soft copies or on cyberspace. The sample and its aim of engagement will be the constants of the study, while the circumstances will vary upon the several parts of the analysed case. They, all, have an active social media account (Facebook, twitter etc.) and have participated in all selected events of the study as indicated above.
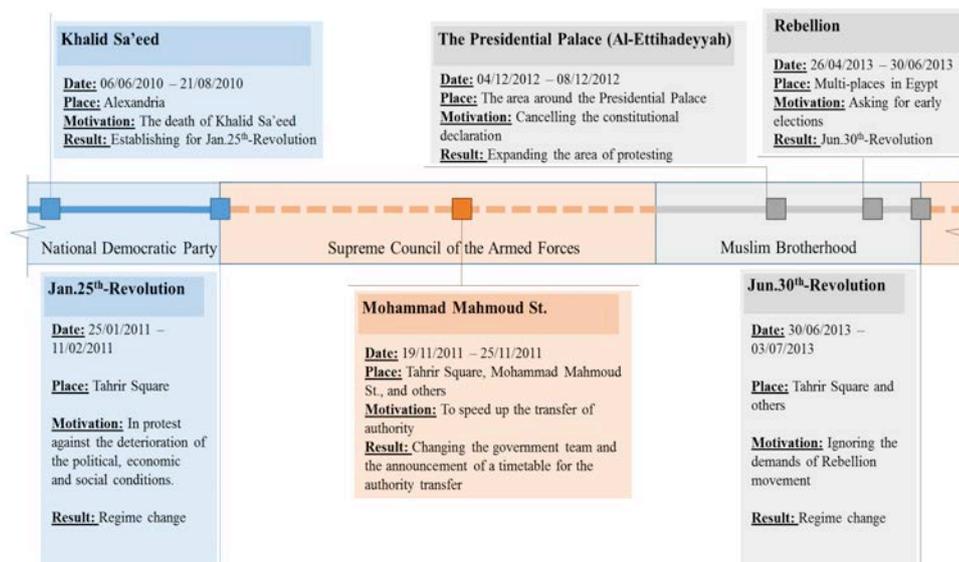

Figure 1: The Case Study Timeline

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