

Cyberactivism and Empowerment: Egyptian Women's Advocacy to Combat Sexual Harassment

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The active political participation and remarkable presence of women during Egypt's January 25th revolution in 2011 raised expectations that Egypt would witness improvement in women's civic engagement and empowerment. Sexual harassment is a problem that is often ignored as many Egyptian women refuse to report sexual harassment due to a culture of silence and shame coupled with this taboo issue. This paper highlights the case of Egyptian women's digital activism efforts and initiatives to combat sexual harassment empowered by digital tools and social media. Drawing from Egyptian women's cyberactivism battle against sexual

harassment, the paper argues that social media and online technology have empowered Egyptian women and provided them with virtual spaces to communicate and bring attention to such serious societal epidemic. The paper's goal is to demonstrate how Egyptian women utilized social media and virtual online spaces as nontraditional advocacy tools to demand human dignity, and social justice rights.

Keywords: Advocacy, Cyberactivism, Egypt, Women Empowerment, sexual harassment

IN 2006, Tarana Burke founded the Me Too as a grassroot movement to end sexual violence and support survivors (metoomvmt.org). In 2017, the movement had gone viral in social media after using the hashtag #MeToo resulting in a vital global conversation about sexual harassment and violence against women (Brockers, 2018). However, years before the widespread of the global #MeToo campaign, Egyptian women had already begun their own battle against sexual harassment empowered by social media spaces.

Arab women were, and are still, facing various hardships and challenges on different political, economic, social and cultural fronts. In Egypt, the third most populous country in Africa and the most populous in the Arab World (internetworldstats.com, 2016), social media tools provided women with endless opportunities for mobilization, civic

engagement, and networking. Egyptian women's participation in the January 25th revolution and in all of the political events that followed was remarkable; they were on the front lines organizing, volunteering, and leading. The active participation of women during these political protests awoke hopes of a new beginning in Egypt that would witness improvement at all societal levels. Egyptian women, empowered by digital advocacy tools, began their own uprising to end sexual harassment and to demand human dignity.

This paper explores the potential and limitations of social media tools in social advocacy by demonstrating the case of Egyptian women and their efforts to combat sexual harassment using innovative social media tools. It also illustrates how social media tools can be used as of benefit to our common humanity and universal solidarity by promoting women's equality and empowerment and inducing social changes in Egypt and in other parts of the world.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Women Empowerment

According to Page and Czuba, 1999, empowerment is a social process that "fosters power in people for use in their own lives, their communities and in their society, by acting on issues they define as important". Empowerment is a process to topple negative beliefs about self, and the shift from being passive, lack self-confident, to a more active and attentive to the true human potential (Ahmad, Bromley & Cokley, 2013).

Previous literature on empowerment makes clear distinction between two important concepts: Structure and Agency (e.g., Enck & McDaniel, 2015; Mattson, 2000; Shankar, Onyura & Alderman, 2015). Agency is used to refer to the actions of individuals and groups in the society aiming for change while structure refers to the broad, institutional and recurrent behaviors, systems, ideologies, and policies within certain society. Pettit, 2012, argues that power can be gained, improved and transformed, as it is neither an absolute nor static. In addition, power can be understood as a kind of mutual interaction and interplay of agency (humans) and structure (systems) in any society, and empowerment is the process that requires shifts in both dimensions (Pettit, p.4). For example, women in any society are the agency who should take actions to change current formal and informal structures within their societies (e.g., laws, norms, traditions, family constraints) that hinder their power and limit their rights.

Women empowerment in particular has received lots of attention from scholars within numerous disciplines, such as communication, psychology, management, sociology, political sciences, social movements, education, and women's studies (e.g., Akpabio, 2012; Aronson 2001; Ayish, 2010; Berkowitz, 2003; Chew, Ilavarasan & Levy, 2015; Gatua, Patton & Brown, 2010; Goering, 1996; Papa & Singhal, 2000). The essential goal of women's empowerment is to change the gender inequalities and transform patriarchal social relations and structures within society. According to Williams, Seed, and Mwau (1994), the changes required for women's empowerment occur on different levels, power over, power to, power with, and power within. However, most feminist movements have emphasized two levels of empowerment: "power with" and "power within" (Oxaal & Baden, 1997).

Power within has to do with a person's sense of self-worth and self-knowledge; it includes an ability to recognize individual differences while respecting others.

Power with has to do with finding common ground among different interests and building collective strength. Based on mutual support, solidarity, and collaboration, power with multiplies individual talents and knowledge. (VeneKlasen, & Miller, 2007, p.45).

Accordingly, a power-within is a sense of personal power on individual level: self-esteem, self-confidence, self-awareness, while the power-with is conceptualized in the women empowerment literature as the recognition that more can be achieved by networking with other individuals/groups to act together (macro) rather than alone (micro). This involves the ability to work with others to change society and social institutions and organizing communities with a common purpose to achieve collective and communal goals.

Women, Cyberactivism & Social Advocacy 2.0

Cyberactivism is the use of Internet technologies in activism, while Social Advocacy 2.0 is the use of Web 2.0 interactive tools in particular (such as social media networks and blogs) to reach, inform, and mobilize a group of concerned people around a social issue or cause (e.g., Chamberlain, 2004; Guntarik & Trott, 2016; Khamis & Vaughn, 2013; Liew, Pang, Chan, 2013; McLean, Maalsen, & Grech, 2016; Mogambi & Ochola, 2015; Nunez Puente, 2011; Obar, 2014). It has been argued that social media tools with its low or no

cost, wide-reaching access, and instantaneous sharing of messages, have altered advocacy and provided great opportunities for networking, mobilization, civic engagement, and collective action (e.g., Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Boyd, 2010; Neumayer, & Svensson, 2016). Throughout the world, grassroots social movements, activists and non-profit organizations are embracing these new platforms and the opportunities they provide to achieve social change (e.g., Chaudhry, 2014; Madu, & Moguluwa, 2013; Obar, 2014).

In contrast to traditional media, that are often blamed for the decrease of engagement and social capital, several recent studies provided evidences that social media use (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, blogs) is often positively related to civic engagement and individual's participatory behavior in various societal and political issues (e.g., Baruh, 2015; Vaccari, Chadwick & O'Loughlin, 2015; Yonghwan & Hsuan-Ting, 2015). Other studies made a clear distinction between online participation and offline participation, for incidence, Weiwu and Gearhart, 2015, concluded in their study that social networks use have no impact on offline civic participation and the influence of these social networks use is limited to online participation.

Despite the great potential for social media activism to raise awareness, impact attitudes, and enable behavioral change, efforts to use social media in advocacy have resulted in varying degrees of success and breakdown. While some social media campaigns were very successful and went viral, others have been momentary and ineffective.

Such findings provide some evidence to skeptics who question the effectiveness of digital advocacy to induce a real change. Skeptics presented slacktivism in the current literature to describe some cyberactivism and online advocacy cases that start and stop inside the convenient online spaces and fail to expand to include offline spaces as well. Some scholars raise concerns regarding social advocacy 2.0 arguing that in some cases such advocacy might only represent a symbolic activity that is separate and distinct from real traditional advocacy and participation (e.g., McCafferty, 2011; Penney, 2015; Štětka, & Mazák, 2014).

However, successful cases from several countries, especially developing ones, provide an optimistic view for the role new media tools can play in mobilizing and encouraging engagement and empowerment. Social media provided women in particular with virtual spheres with unique characteristics that encouraged women to communicate

and overcome the barriers existed in traditional communication channels. In addition of providing female users greater control over time and pace of conversation, social media tools also allow anonymity, reduce the importance of physical appearance, and rather put more stress on representation and storytelling through text and other multi-media items.

In Southern Africa, new media is fostering women's participatory communication and assisting greatly in achieving the goals of the gender movement (Akpabio, 2012). In India, professional women used information communication technologies and new media tools to start a dialogue in their society to change gender codes that govern behaviors and to demand gender equality (Anderson & Shrum, 2007). In Spain, women used new Internet technologies to create their own collective online spaces to fight violence against women. Female activists in Spain used both online and offline activism efforts rather than replacing one with the other (Nunez Puente, 2011). Such cases supported the long held theoretical premise that web-based communications can be highly empowering for women as they seek to express themselves and strengthen their positions specially in developing societies.

Previous women empowerment literature suggests that Web 2.0 interactive tools, such as blogging and social media, are particularly powerful for giving voice to women who have been for long isolated, invisible and without voice. Stavrositu and Sundar, 2012, found that blogging as a mean of self-expressing allows women to provide a voice of their own that is also visible to others, which lead to psychological empowerment of female bloggers and enhance their sense of community. In recent years, Arab women empowerment has been increasingly addressed in the context of emerging new media. Radsch and Khamis, 2013, argued that networked social media gave Arab women new tools to articulate their identities and participate in the public sphere and gain more visibility with their own voice. Drawing on the theoretical framework of empowerment, cyberactivism and social advocacy 2.0, this paper highlights Egyptian women's online advocacy to combat sexual harassment and assesses factors that enabled success and identify challenges yet to be solved.

Context of Sexual Harassment in Egypt

For years, sexual harassment remained a taboo and avoided issue in Egypt. Women who have been sexually harassed by various means (e.g., being followed or stalked, indecent exposure, touching, lascivious looks, catcalling), have been so afraid or ashamed to speak up for fear of scandals and public shame. A slight change, however, started back on 2008 with a landmark unprecedented court case in which Noha Roushdy, an Egyptian young woman, was the first person to ever file a sexual harassment case in the country, resulting in her harasser being imprisoned for three years. This unprecedented case was heavily covered in Egyptian and International news media (e.g., Hussein, 2008; Rakha, 2008) and brought the issue of sexual harassment out in the open. It was the first court rule in Egypt that showed that Egypt has sexual harassment laws, but women need to demand that these laws to be enforced on harassers.

In the wake of this case and several other incidents, several NGOs and traditional media started to pay more attention to the epidemic of sexual harassment and to spark a dialogue for the first time among the Egyptian public. For incident, the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (ECWR) conducted a study surveying a sample of 2020 Egyptian participants and was divided equally between male and female Egyptians in addition to 109 foreign women living or traveling in Egypt for different purposes. The results of this study revealed shocking statistics that 91.5% of Egyptian women and 96.3% of foreign women have been subjected to some form of street harassment and only 2.4 percent of Egyptian women reported it to the police (ECWR, 2009). Such study that described sexual harassment in Egypt is a “dangerous social cancer” confirmed the prevalence and severity of sexual harassment and the suffering of Egyptian women due to it and the urgent need to take a collective action.

In another remarkable initiative in 2010, Cairo 678 was the first Egyptian movie to tackle the issue of women harassment. The movie portrayed the stories of three Egyptian women from different social classes who were all victims of harassment one way or another. The movie was well received from critics and the public audience and managed to bring the issue to public attention and discussion (e.g., Asfour, 2011; Dougal, 2011).

The shocking incidents of CBS's reporter Lara Logan and British journalist Natasha Smith who were both sexually assaulted by a mob while covering news in Egypt

2011 disappointed the Egyptian public and caught International Media attention (Rivers, 2012; Wilson, 2011).

After the 2011 revolution and the increasing hopes for essential reforms, Egyptian women were no longer the same. Egyptian women's advocacy to combat sexual harassment resonated with the principal chants that was raised during the Egyptian uprising of 2011, *aish, huriyya, karama insaniyya*, or 'bread, freedom, human dignity'. As Clarke (2013) explains, this slogan captured the three principal collective action frames that protesters used during the Egyptian revolution. In their fight against sexual harassment, Egyptian women were also demanding "human dignity" and "human rights" for every Egyptian woman. According to the United Nation, sexual harassment is considered one form of violence against women and it violates their personal and human rights. Berenson, 2006, explains:

In the context of violence against women, the human rights paradigm views all forms of violence against a woman's body (e.g., rape, battering, homicide, stalking, torture, and genital mutilation) as a violation of a person's fundamental right to freedom of movement, personal dignity, and economic sustainability. These violations are primarily understood as the result of a failure to protect women as a class and promote their equal status in society. (pp.327-328)

This paper's goal is to illustrate Egyptian women activists' efforts utilizing online spaces and tools to raise awareness, mobilize society, and communicate their demands. Examine Egyptian women's digital activism case and its online discourse adds another piece to the literature on how women can be empowered and become agents of change in their societies. It also demonstrates how gender biases prevail in traditional media that diminish women's voices in some societies might be lessened or eliminated by new media technologies. The paper aims to answer the following two research questions:

RQ1: How Egyptian women activists used these online spaces to increase awareness, networking, and advocating against sexual harassment?

RQ2: What are the major themes in the online discourse created by Egyptian women activists in these online spaces?

METHODS

To answer the first research question on how Egyptian women utilized online spaces in their online and offline advocacy efforts to promote change within their society, three advocacy initiatives and online communities were selected to explore: *Harrasmap*, *Bussy, I Saw Harassment*. To answer the second research question about the major advocacy themes, the paper examined the online discourse in the form of blogs and tweets created and shared by Egyptian women activists during their participation in End Sexual Harassment campaign. The campaign was initiated by HarrassMap and other activists to encourage Egyptians women to blog and tweet against sexual harassment using #EndSH hashtag. Scholars have explored how Twitter is used as a conversational space, and how it is quickly becoming a channel through which women are able to feel comfortable with voicing their opinions and expressing their concerns, (e.g., Weathers, Sanderson, Neal, Gramlich, 2016). Tweets and blogs shared on the #EndSH were monitored and collected during the blogging/tweeting day against sexual harassment campaign from June 20 through June 21, 2011. The collected data was then filtered to purposely select tweets and blog posts that included two hashtags/keywords combinations #EndSH and #Egypt. Tweets or blogs that were not specifically about Egypt's case (e.g., blogs and tweets about other countries such as Lebanon) were excluded, which resulted in a total of 976 tweets and 59 blogs. A qualitative thematic analysis was then used to describe and synthesize this online discourse. According to Braun and Clarke, 2006, "thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set" (p.7). During the precoding and screening process, tweets and blogs were initially read to gain sense of meaning. During the coding process, the data were classified into emerging global themes, and themes were labeled. Each theme is described in the following analysis results section with representation quotes from the online discourse.

RESULTS

This section highlights several online advocacy initiatives that illustrate Egyptian women cyberactivism efforts to combat sexual harassment. In addition, major themes that emerged in this online advocacy discourse were identified.

Egyptian Women and Innovative Virtual Spaces

HarrassMap. One of the first innovative initiatives to fight sexual harassment in Egypt is *HarassMap* project. This project started in late 2010 as is a volunteer-based initiative that launched an interactive map and reporting tools stating their mission as “to engage all of Egyptian society to create an environment that does not tolerate sexual harassment, by taking a collective stand against sexual harassment, we as a society can create social and legal consequences that discourage harassing behavior and seriously reduce it” (*HarassMap*, 2010). The *HarassMap*’s website <https://harassmap.org/> allows women to anonymously report (via various new tools such as SMSs, Tweet, post on Facebook, email, etc.) any form of abuse and then reports are mapped using the open-source crowd mapping platform Ushahidi.

Women are urged to report harassment incidents and *HarassMap* provides a constantly-updated map of Egypt with red circles representing harassment hotspots. The Advocacy Online Map creates a powerful documentation of the extent of the problem as well as offering proactive responses highlighting the severity of the problem in various locations Egypt. The *HarassMap* Network includes several volunteers, activists and technical experts, and it won the UN World Summit Youth Award in 2011. In this competition, Nations member states compete for the award that recognizes “youth who use the Internet and mobile technologies to change the world” (Sheena, 2012).

HarassMap uses various social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook) to post online announcements, to recruit volunteers, and call for civic engagement, community mobilization and collective actions. Through these online efforts, they also coordinate offline activities and actual advocacy activities such as organizing a nation-wide *Anti-Harassment Outreach Day* on March 19· the International Day Against Sexual Harassment.

In addition, only few months after the January 25th revolution, Egyptian female activists, in coordination with *HarassMap*, initiated an online campaign to fight sexual harassment. The campaign encouraged all Egyptians to blog and tweet using the hashtag #EndSH on June 20 which was selected to be “a blogging and tweeting day against sexual harassment in Egypt”. Various female activists used #EndSH accompanied by other hashtags such #EgyWomen #StopSH to initiate and accelerate a societal dialogue to end sexual harassment and make streets safer for Egyptian women.

Shoft Ta7rosh. The phrase *Shoft Ta7arosh* in English means, “I saw harassment”. It is a non-prophet organization’s online initiative that started on 2012 using various social media platforms. The goal of this initiative as described on their social media platforms is being “a pressure group that works on monitoring and documenting sexual harassment crimes against women”. The group uses various social media spaces: Facebook (Facebook.com/Shoft.Ta7rosh), Twitter (Twitter.com/ShoftTa7rosh), Instagram (Instagram.com/ShoftTa7rosh) in addition to a hotline using the mobile app Whatsapp.

BuSSy. BuSSy is an Egyptian word means “Look” in English. Egyptian female activists also used artistic and symbolic performance as another innovative and creative way to raise awareness and to empower women to raise their voices and to defend their human dignity as well. One of the unique initiatives that used creative performance to empower women to speak about their own struggles in the society is a group called BuSSy (<http://www.bussy.co/>). It is a project that aims to empower Egyptian women and give voice to the censored and untold women stories through storytelling and artistic means. Young activists who created this project advocated also against sexual harassment in several creative ways. They wrote and directed creative street performances based on real stories written by women themselves and they performed them in public spaces such as the Women’s Metro carriages to reach a larger public. For example, in 2012, BuSSy initiated what they called “BuSSy Monologues in the Metro” where young female activists perform an attention-getter monologue and stories on daily sexual harassment inside the Underground /Metro carriages (Abou Bakr, 2013). The Bussy group video recorded these creative artistic performances and people’s reactions to them and then shared these videos via their YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/user/BuSSyProject>) and other social media platforms (such as their Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/TheBuSSyProject>) to raise awareness and call for social reform. This innovative experiment evoked a wide range of reactions as a new phenomenon in Egyptian streets.

In all of these online initiatives, social media tools were used to bridge online/offline activism spaces. These various online communication spaces were often the starting point of many other traditional advocacy efforts in Egypt’s streets and offline public spaces. That is, these virtual advocacy communities were able to extend their online battle to

offline spaces. Several offline advocacy efforts were first initiated as ideas, discussed, and coordinated within these online spaces before they were moved to the real world (such as visual art exhibitions, street's graffiti art, protests, human chains, street patrols, etc.).

Major Themes in the Online Advocacy Discourse

The analysis of the virtual discourse created by Egyptian women to counter sexual harassment demonstrates the use of social media to inform, express emotions and advocate for collective action by and for the Egyptian Women. Female activists also demanded that women preserve January 25 spirit, sense of empowerment, level of engagement and continue fighting for more women rights and equality. That is, many activists call Egyptian women to become active participants in their society rather than remaining powerless subjects. The following section illustrates some major themes that emerged in their cyberactivism discourse especially the one shared on the #EndSH online campaign.

Attribution of responsibility. Egyptian women activists argued that the blame and attribution of responsibility in sexual harassment incidents should be targeted to the real causes of the epidemic within the existing society's culture, practices, and power structures. Activists called for an end for “blaming the victim” mentality and demanded a vanish for commonly used excuses in harassment incidents, such as women's provoking appearance, youth's frustration due to economic problems, and delay in marriage.

For years, women were used to hide harassment stories to avoid such accusations or blames. Instead of condemning the harassment act and the harasser, it was common to blame the harassed female victim for her provoking appearance or question the safety of the context where the incident happened (e.g., it was late at night, she was walking alone). Female activists counter the “women are to blame” excuse in their online discourse. They shared stories of many women who were fully dressed in moderate clothes such as hijabs (hair cover) or sometime even Niqab (face veil) yet still were victims of harassment. They were sending the message that the way a woman dresses is not an excuse for harassment, and such incidents are not happening to “provocative women who were just asking for it”. This theme was reflected in various tweets and blogs shared by female activists on the #EndSH Twitter campaign: For example, Dalia tweeted: *“I don't care what they wear, nobody has the right to touch them or harass them”*.

Female activists used this discourse to send a strong message that the blame should be aimed instead to gender inequality practices, culture's misconceptions, and the legal system. For example, Yasmin wrote: "*A culture that has a police force that partakes in these attacks and a legal system that won't back her up. A culture that has a thriving 'boys will be boys' mentality that has conditioned her to feel inferior to her male peers thus depriving her of the will to retaliate in the first place.*"

Female activists also called for women empowerment and requested that women stop blaming themselves or feeling ashamed if they were victims for such assaults. They condemned the victims' feelings of guilt and shame that lead to a long-standing hiding of the problem and urged women to stop question themselves and underestimate their value: For example, Leila wrote: "*Let's face it, women are considered incapable of making decisions for themselves ---this lack of respect for the female as an individual, free and independent is pervasive in our society and sadly not limited only to the male part of it, women are just as guilty of underestimating their value.*"

Storytelling and breaking the silence. Egyptian women activists challenged the long-standing cultural assumptions that anything that goes against traditional social morals should be kept private. They used these spaces as self-expression means to share their own personal views and explain their feelings and struggles. For example, Nadine tweeted: "*I want to walk in Egypt without looking at the shadows around me trying to calculate how close they are & what should I do if they get closer*".

They also urged women to break the silence, report such incidents, and speak up freely arguing that it is not a shame for women to report or stand up for sexual harassment, the real shame is to stay silent and helpless. For example, Marwa tweeted: "*Blaming girls for passiveness, living shame, fear & silence! Sexual Harassment is never your fault! Speaking about it threatens them!*".

Female activist used social media virtual spaces to share powerful victim exemplars who took strong action against harassment and their harassers. The shared stories of victims who stood for their harassers such as Eman, a poor and young girl in a small Egyptian village who stood up for her harasser and were shot to death. Eman's story was framed as revolutionary and the victim was presented as an iconic hero who was described and known as "Martyr of Harassment".

Language use. Egyptian female activists used strong condemning language and negative words to associate with their advocacy dialogue on the issue of sexual harassment. The discourse shows that female activists deliberately used the word “sexual harassment” to describe various types of inappropriate sexual harassments whether they are verbal (e.g., cat calling) or physical (e.g., groping). They countered previous language use that might reduce the perceived severity of the harassment issue such as the use of the Arabic word “*muakssa*” which implies playful behavior by young men having a good time. Although female activists used both English and Arabic languages in their online spaces, many of them were mostly writing in their own Egyptian dialects of the Arabic language to the interest of the average users.

Engaging men in the dialogue. Another interesting theme that emerged from this analysis, is that men were not excluded from the dialogue. They were invited to join the battle and were addressed in various female activists’ mobilization calls, here is a message from a female activist to Egyptian males: *“Stop treating women like second-class citizens in their own land. Give them the dignity we have fought so long and hard to achieve for everyone. Take responsibility. Stand up to Sexual Harassment when you see it”*.

It was interesting to find that several Egyptians males especially young ones, were also active creators and participants in such advocacy discourse and showed their solidarity for the cause and the call for collective change. A young Egyptian man wrote: *“Egypt won’t change unless Egyptians change, and I’ll start by myself”*.

Demands for gender equality and reforms. Women activists have called for imposing harsher penalties for harassers, they acted as agency who ask for rearrangements of power and reforms for various society’s structures. They demanded gender equality and more women empowerment and rights. They urged policy makers to start immediate reforms for the defect legal system and to take concrete national strategies to combat all forms of sexual harassment. Many advocacy efforts call on these official institutions to address the issue and making street harassment a criminal offense.

In their fight against sexual harassment, social media tools have been used thoroughly by Egyptian women, and tackling sexual harassment that used to be untouched in their own surroundings and in most conventional media. The following section identifies success factors and potential opportunities of social media in women

advocacy and also inquiries into both the limits and practical lessons drawn from this case. It also discusses how social media tools can be used to promote women's equality and empowerment in other parts of the world using Egypt as a case.

IMPLICATIONS AND DISCUSSION

During 2011 revolution, Egyptian women have become more engaged in political and civic actions. Post-revolution, Egyptian female activists' utilization of social media had evolved to include their social issues and demanding for social change. The case of Egyptian female online advocacy to end sexual harassment contributes to the ongoing scholarly dialogue on how social media spaces are increasingly becoming integral tools in various advocacy and empowerment efforts. Consistent with various successful online advocacy campaigns (e.g., Liew, Pang & Chan, 2013; Obar, 2014; Sanderson, 2014), the case of Egyptian women activists supports previous optimistic views that suggest that using new communication technologies can "generate horizontal networks, build communities, and extend influence on a national and even a global scale" (Salzarulo, Mundorf, Sakar, Terui, & Wen, 2015, p.1).

Social media spaces serve various advocacy goals such as promote awareness of the problem, networking with other women and advocates, in addition to coordinating and linking various advocacy efforts in both online and offline spaces. Egyptian activists used social media spaces to disseminating information on an issue of community concern and to alert community members to the severity of the sexual harassment problem. They also used these spaces to create a sense of disquiet, encourage actions, and call for community discussion and collaboration in facing this epidemic.

It is important to note as a lesson learned from this case is this combination of online activity and offline participation in activism that makes social media tools a fascinating element in the development of social movements and social change for the sake of a dignified common humanity. Egyptian Women activism against sexual harassment demonstrates the ways in which the Internet can be used artfully as a supplement to, but not a replacement for, other traditional forms of social movement mobilization and advocacy. HarassMap and BuSSy projects along other online initiatives are good examples of the mechanisms by which online activism participation and engagement can move

further to the offline space. In this case, online efforts /virtual communities were used to facilitate offline advocacy efforts such as real streets protest and volunteering activities on the ground.

In addition, the Egyptian case illustrates how online advocacy can lead to real social changes in offline spaces. Egyptian activists were asking for “social justice” by expressing their frustrations from prevailing social norms and existed policies, and laws that hinder dealing with this epidemic. As Robbins and Jamal (2016) explain, “at its core social justice means creating a just or equal society by ensuring all members of society are treated the same, human rights are respected, and there is no discrimination based on membership in a group or other forms of Identity (p.127).

There are some recent incidents that further support the optimistic view on the power of online social advocacy to induce a real social change and more social justice. In 2014, and as a result of Egyptian women’s strong advocacy efforts both online and offline, Egypt finally issued a new anti-sexual harassment law by which sexual harassment is now a crime and harassers can face from six months to five years in prison. In addition, there is an increasing noticeable intolerance of any kind of harassment practices or justifications. For example, in 2015, there was an increasing public outrage at a TV Host who aired private photos for a victim of a harassment incident that happened in front of one of Cairo’s shopping malls. The airing of the victim’s private photos and questioning her previous relationship with the harasser perceived as “victim blaming” that implied accusation of immorality. The private pictures and video segment of the TV show were widely circulated in various social media spaces and provoked huge outrage with the TV host and her show in various social media domains. Shortly after, Egyptian activists initiated a Twitter campaign to condemn the unprofessional practice of that TV host and her show and demanding advertisers and audience to boycott the show and the TV station. The heated and furious reaction social media campaign received lots of support from various sexual harassment online advocacy communities. For incidents, “I saw Harassment” initiative used their social media spaces on Facebook and Twitter to condemn the incident as a violation of the victim’s rights of privacy. They called for a legal action and demanded a trial for the host and suspending of her show. In unprecedented incident, many advertisers announced their withdrawals as sponsors for this show and

eventually the show and its host were suspended and the TV channel offered an apology to the victim and the Egyptian public.

Examining Egyptian women's online discourse on social media helps us better understand how women are using these tools to define and participate in ongoing debate and how gender biases among traditional media that diminish women's perspectives might be lessened or eliminated by new media technologies. Social media offered an additional pathway to women empowerment and helped them to improve themselves and force change on their communities.

These tools are providing female activists with numerous opportunities to initiate a dialogue about what used to be taboo in traditional communication channels. They are also offering alternative means for self-expression where muted voices can share their own stories and explain their own struggles. Egyptian women, empowered by social media, are enforcing a shift in societal structures and breaking the patriarchal attitudes of yesterday in their fight against sexual harassment.

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