

The Activists' Use of Social Networking Sites in the Arab World

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ABSTRACT

Social Networking Sites (SNS) became one of the most important tools to activate people in various issues including political and social causes. SNS is widely used by activist; individuals or groups, especially in the regions of conflict and chaos. Arab Spring is one of the recent and crucial examples to see how SNS is being used in activating and mobilizing societies against the autocratic state authorities. Thus, the roles that SNS can play by activists have been increasing day by day to the extent that activists are able not only in mobilization but in the functions of traditional media, such as setting the agenda of followers and exercising a gate-keeping function\process ... etc.

In this research study interviews will be conducted with the active users of SNS who have a power to mobilize their followers through the new media. The data that is collected with interviews will be analyzed in relation to the pre- defined thematic frames to answer the research questions of the thesis. The demographic data related to the activists is summarized in few tables with a statistical analysis. With the collected data, answers are tried to be found for the research questions such as: the role that activists play in setting the agenda of users, further forming mental images towards events, how SNS gratifies the needs of activists and their relation with the traditional media in light of SNS. Also, they attempted to examine the validity of SNS for collective actions such as campaigns, and the challenges that activists meet whether by governments, society, or even by SNS itself.

The interviewees are chosen from different countries such as Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Iraq, Morocco, Jordan, Tunisia, and Yemen. Some of the interviewed activists, due to political and economic reasons, are located in the countries different than their own nationalities such as in US, Malaysia, and Turkey.

The findings of the research study showed that the activists consider SNS as suitable alternative to practice their roles in the society compared to traditional media where the abilities of SNS allow them to gratify their needs and desires. Also, the activists can play a role in forming a mental image of their followers, and setting the agenda of them towards certain issues. As well, the study found out the efficiency of SNS for conducting collective actions accompanied with reflections in reality. In addition, the study highlights the control mechanism that activists suffered from and the forms of censorship imposed on them whether by regime, society or the administration of SNS itself which contribute to restrict the activists of practicing their roles and the ways of meeting these restrictions.

Keywords: SNS, Mobilization, Collective action, Agenda-Setting, Censorship

ÖZ

Sosyal Ağ Siteleri, siyasi ve sosyal gayeler de dâhil olmak üzere, birçok konuda insanları harekete geçirmenin en önemli araçlarından biri haline geldi. Sosyal ağ siteleri, özellikle çatışma ve kaos bölgelerindeki aktivistler, bireyler ya da gruplar tarafından yaygın olarak kullanılıyor. Arap Baharı, Sosyal Ağ Sitelerinin, toplumu devlet otoritelerine karşı harekete geçirmede nasıl kullanıldığını görmenin en yeni ve en önemli örneklerinden biridir. Sosyal Ağ Sitelerinin aktivistler için oynayabileceği roller gün be gün artmaktadır. Aktivistler bu siteler aracılığıyla, toplumu eyleme geçirebilmemin yanı sıra takipçileri için gündem belirleme ve enformasyon akışını kontrol etme gibi geleneksel medyanın işlevlerini de yerine getirebilmektedir.

Bu araştırmada, takipçilerini yeni medya kanalıyla harekete geçirme gücüne sahip olan aktif sosyal ağ sitesi kullanıcılarıyla mülakatlar yapılacaktır. Tezin araştırma sorularına yanıt vermek için, bu mülakatlardan toplanan veriler, önceden belirlenmiş olan tematik çerçeveler ile ilişkilendirilerek analiz edilecektir. Aktivistlerle ilgili demografik veriler istatistiksel analiz ile birkaç tabloda özetlenmiştir. Toplanan verilerle, şu gibi araştırma sorularına yanıt verilmeye çalışılmıştır: kullanıcıların gündemini belirlemede ve olaylara dair zihinsel imgelerinin oluşturulmasında aktivistlerin oynadığı rol; Sosyal Ağ Sitelerinin aktivistlerin ihtiyaçlarını nasıl karşıladıkları ve geleneksel medya ile ilişkileri. Ayrıca, Sosyal Ağ Sitelerinin kampanyalar gibi kolektif eylemler için geçerliliği ve aktivistlerin, hükümet, toplum ve hatta Sosyal Ağ Sitelerinin kendileri tarafından karşılarına çıkarılan zorluklarla nasıl başa çıktıkları incelenmeye çalışılacaktır.

Görüşme yapılan kişiler, Mısır, Suriye, Filistin, Irak, Fas, Ürdün, Tunus ve Yemen gibi farklı ülkelerden seçilmiştir. Görüşme yapılan aktivistlerden bazıları, siyasi ve ekonomik nedenlerden dolayı, ABD, Malezya ve Türkiye gibi kendi ülkelerinden farklı ülkelerde ikamet etmektedirler.

Araştırmanın bulguları, aktivistlerin toplumsal rollerini yerine getirmeleri için, Sosyal Ağ Sitelerinin, geleneksel medyaya göre daha uygun bir alternatif oluşturduğunu ve bu sitelerin onların ihtiyaç ve arzularını tatmin ettiğini göstermektedir. Ayrıca, aktivistler takipçilerinin zihinsel imgelerini oluşturmada bir rol oynayabilmekte ve belirli konulara dair takipçilerinin gündemini belirleyebilmektedir. Çalışma, Sosyal Ağ Sitelerinin, kolektif eylemler yapılmasındaki verimliliğini de ortaya koymaktadır. Buna ek olarak çalışma, aktivistlerin karşılarına çıkan denetim mekanizmaları ile rejim, toplum ve bizzat Sosyal Ağ Siteleri tarafından uygulanan sansür biçimleri ve aktivistlerin bunlarla başa çıkma yolları da bulgular arasında yer almıştır..

Anahtar sözcükler: SNS, Toplumsal Hareket, Kolektif Eylem, Gündem Belirleme, Sansür.

DEDICATION

To my dear friend Mamon and all martyrs.

To each human who resist the injustice throughout the world, to all activists and journalists who still suffer in order to advocate the humanitarian issues within the communities.

To the dearest, my family members, especially my mother Rodayna and my father Barakat, who sacrifice their time, efforts, and money for the sake of me and my dear brothers. For everybody supports me to the success of this achievement.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

This introduction chapter will cover the background of the research study, motivates to conduct it, also the aims that encourage the researcher to get the results of the research and the significance of it, as well the research hypotheses will be highlighted.

1.1 Background of the Study

Social Networking Sites (SNS) offers a group of tools and ways to express opinions and interact with social and political occurrences and events in different ways. These tools are using texts, voices, pictures and videos (Steinfeld, Ellison, Lampe, & Vitak, 2012) in their transfer of texts. The ability of (re)producing and transferring audio, visual and written texts makes these sites suitable platforms for social movements and provides more facilities for activists to get support for their causes in comparison with traditional media outlets (Alghamidi, 2012) .

That is what mostly happened during the Arab Spring which is indicated to the series of anti-government protests, and uprisings that have been starting in several of Arab regions in early 2011 like Egypt, Tunisia, Bahrain and Morocco (Khondker H. , 2011). Those protests were leading to fall some presidents who were step down in different ways (Khondker H. , 2011) and it has become armed rebellions in other countries such as Syria, Libya, and so on (Manfreda). The Uprisings were protested

against the unemployment, high prices, violence of the security forces, and the corruptions in general.

In the period of Arab Spring SNS played a significant role in coordinating tasks among the activists and transfer the experiences via social sites such as Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube. The activists of Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Libya, and Syria shared each other experiences within online action groups (Khondker H. , 2011). These groups included dozens of activists, who gave instructions to their followers, guided users and held discussions among activists (Info centre, 2014). SNS has a big role throughout the world (Round, The Role of Social Media Networks in the Political Change in Egypt and Tunisia from Jordanian Journalist's Perspective, 2012, p. 57).

SNS offers several of tools and services to the users to practice their needs, so activists have used it in achieving their wants. Some of the important tools they use are "Hashtag" where it is considered as an important tool to access many people who interact with events, and also helps in gathering information from different sources in order to keep in touch with any updated news, (Posch & Claudia Wagner, 2013) Also the secret groups on Facebook as an important tools to exercise actions via it, (Info centre, 2014). And Hangouts on Google+ (Hangouts Help, 2015) which is also an easy way to have online meetings among activists, besides coordinating efforts, developing plans and preparing action steps about particular occasion to promote the entire online communities (Jackson G.). These actions aimed to set the public agenda of users, increase the proportion of awareness and mobilizing and to build mental image in the mind of users for different issues on internet, which the active users played an important roles in achieving that.

Ditto, the different advantages show the importance of SNS as a real handy tool for the political and social activities. It can be invested for advocacy, mobilization and setting the agenda for online community (Alex Rutherford et al, 2012). SNS was suitable for active users to do collective actions and conducting campaigns for a variety of targets, down to be used within the official electoral campaigns around the world. For instance, during his election campaign in 2008, the US president Barack Obama organized a special team to send and receive messages from millions of people on social networking platforms (Lutz, 2009). The Australian election in 2010 is another example of using multi social networking platforms in variety of styles during elections (Gibson & McAllister, 2014). Besides the existing number of protests SNS were used in political campaigns as well.

Also, one of the sign that indicates to the importance of SNS is the restrictions that activists have faced in practicing their actions. The restrictions are, in a way, proving the capacity of SNS for active users in mobilizing people, forming their mental images, and setting the agenda about events and etc..

1.2 Motivates for the Study

The modernity of SNS and plenty of debates around it are the prominent motivations of the researcher to formulate the research study on this topic. SNS started to be considered as a powerful tool to activate people around any cause even by the ordinary people. In this regard, questions on the facilities and the challenges of SNS for the use of mobilization, social and political movements need to be clarified. A better understanding on the challenges and facilities of SNS will pave the way for a better use of it.

Another motivate for the researcher is being active in NGO's and being in touch with a number of activists in his real life. His ability to reach and conduct interviews with leading active users of SNS will make it easier to conduct interviews with them to understand the ways that they use SNS. The researcher attempts to know the perception of activists towards SNS is, and how they consider social networking platforms. Also, the study stands on the capabilities that SNS offers for activists in order to practice their activities express their opinions and gratify their needs and desires. Also, it's an attempt to organize the categories of users on SNS believe that they are layers and there are differences among them.

1.3 Aims of the Study

This study presents challenges and advantages of SNS which are beneficial for activists to increase the effectiveness of work and interaction with different issues. Moreover, the researcher reviewed the negative aspects related to restrictions that activists suffered while they were practicing their activities during multiple universal events. By making discussions with activists via interviews, the study aims to:

- Stand on the role that activists have played by using SNS in activating political and social matters in communities.
- Find out the reasons of moving to use SNS by activists, and its impact on the role of traditional media outlets regarding setting the agenda of users.
- Know the contribution of activists in shaping the mental image, and setting the agenda of users towards different events and news through platforms on SNS.
- Examine the effectiveness of activists in mobilizing users towards a particular issue during a limited period, by coordinating group action among activists and preparing directed online campaigns include unified Hashtags,

profile pictures, cover photos and also various contents supporting the main aims of action.

- Examine the ability of SNS to be suitable platforms for activists to do collective action.
- Discuss the constraints that activists face while working, through concentrating on the volume of those restrictions exercised by governments such as banning using of SNS inside the country, detaining activists and preventing the expression and publication. Furthermore; the constraints imposed by administrations of SNSs include surprisingly closing activists' accounts, indirectly reducing the ability to access users and publishing posts and arguing the self-censorship that activists face because social, political, or personal factors.

1.4 Research Questions

Answers to the below research questions will be searched through interviewing the activists:

- 1- Is SNS used as the main valid source or not?
- 2- How do activists think about the traditional media outlets in light of SNS existing?
- 3- Why the activists prefer to practice their role on SNS more than traditional media?
- 4- Do activists consider SNS an appropriate outlet to practice collective action?
- 5- Are activists able to mobilize their followers and make an impact on them?
- 6- To what extent activists have the ability to form the mental image and to set the agenda of users towards daily news via SNS?

- 7- How do activists practice the process of “Gate-Keeping” towards their followers?
- 8- What are the forms of censorship and the control mechanisms on the activists?
- 9- How do the forms of restrictions lead to generate self-censorship for activists?
- 10- What are the ways that activists follow to confront the challenges?

1.5 Significance of the Study

In recent years, the style of communication among people has evolved with the advent of “Social Networking Sites” and its spread rapidly. So, there have become whole virtual communities in the cyberspace which are active in different areas of life nowadays. The group of SNS becomes the most prominent way that online audiences use daily and SNS provide information, news and entertainment. Also these social sites are able to execute electronic campaigns of various kinds and objectives.

Within each society, millions of people rely on at least one of SNS to receive information and interact more freely with events. Moreover, the discussion space via SNS is larger than those offered by traditional media outlets. SNS allow many dynamic and active characters platforms to stand out themselves through expression of opinions and exercise activities in all social, political, and other fields. Additionally, these sites allow gratifying needs and various wants of these characters, which are the so-called: “Activists”.

Activists become stars through these social platforms because they have a large number of audiences who follow activists and keep waiting their opinions towards

several issues via activists' accounts on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and other. Thus, activists are able to influence their followers. Dynamic activists use multimedia to achieve their aims individually such as videos, posts, photos, or unified Hashtags (#) within teamwork which includes many activists. The possibility of interaction, discussion, participation and mobilization via SNS makes these platforms favorite for activists, more than traditional media to some extent, in order to achieve the previous matters.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

The study sample is a purposive sample aimed several of Arab activists (21 activists) who are known in their communities via SNS. The activists have had great contributions within revolutions and significant events. In addition, they have influence through various projects such as public campaigns or main pages they have created. The number of activists interviewed is not enough to generalize the results of study for all activists around the world. The societies of the activists that the researcher interviewed are non-democratic, which expose activists to difficult circumstances work and raise the restrictions and limitations more than democratic societies.

This study did not cover all activists around the world because the difficulty of conducting that, besides the different circumstances from country to another and also because of the different characteristics among the third and the first world countries, particularly regarding freedom, democratization and existence of conflicts. In this study, the activists are from ten Arab countries: Iraq, Syria, Morocco, Jordan, Yemen, Palestine, Lebanon, Qatar, Egypt, and Tunisia. Some of the activists are staying in Turkey, Malaysia, and United States. So, the researcher conducts this

study from Northern Cyprus via using SNS to make online interviews because he could not reach activists in their countries due to the difficulties, security situation and prevention.

The researcher did not comply with the limited period of time to measure the process of using SNS by activists. Because of that, the topic is linked with active users not with event linked with a time. By this way, there is a chance to deepen more with each activist's experience during different events. This research was conducted between March 15, 2015 and August 5, 2015.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter highlights the definition of social networking sites by mentioning brief history about it, as well clarifying the increasing number of online users. Also, it covers the relation of activists with traditional media versus SNS and their transition from using traditional media to SNS. The chapter discusses the facilities and tools that these social platforms provide. Considering SNS as a source of information will be argued. The chapter concludes also the efficiency of SNS for mobilization by mentioning cases throughout the world such as during the Arab spring, and while conducting campaigns, etc. As well, this chapter studies the impact of modern communication tools for collective action. And lastly, arguing the restrictions and control mechanisms on SNS.

2.1 Social Networking Sites: Definition & Brief History

Many phrases are being used to indicate the new media. The terms social “network” sites and social “networking” sites both used interchangeably. (Boyd & Ellison, 2008) In this study , social networking sites (SNS) will be used as a term pointing to these electronic sites which provide the audience tools and ways to share their opinions, activities and interests with their large family circle, friends and others (Thefreedictionary, 2013). Also in some positions within the current study the researcher uses “social network sites” in order to clarify some related points to the subject. SNS uses go beyond merely the connection with family or friends to be as platforms covering all aspects of life such as education, art, marketing, media and

politics (Info centre, 2014). In other words, SNS means:” the web sites that enable users to articulate a network of connections of people with whom they wish to share access to profile information, news, status updates, comments, photos, or other forms of content” (Steinfeld, Ellison, Lampe, & Vitak, 2012).

Facebook and Twitter were not the first SNS as lot of users assume, but there was a long history for developing social media until it becomes as we see today (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). According to a study entitled “Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship” the first social network site was released in 1997 and called *SixDegrees.com* which allowed people to create their own profiles, collect friends in a list, send messages to others (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). AIM and ICQ buddy lists supported friend lists as a feature. Moreover, *Classmates.com* was released before *SixDegrees.com* and it also offers set of features as well. However, the website which combined all of these features in one page was *SixDegrees.com* which attracted millions of users who were using it at that time, but in 2000 the service was closed (Ibid).

Long list of websites have come up with similar features that provide the ability to create profiles, join friends, and keep in touch via these sites such as: *AsianAvenue*, *BlackPlanet*, *MiGente*, and *LiveJournal*, *Ryze.com*, *Tribe.net* (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). After 2001 *Friendster* and *MySpace* which were created by two friends were followed with huge number of people and became extremely popular (Thefreedictionary, 2013). The cost of *MySpace* in 2005 arrived 580\$ million when a news company purchased it only two years after its launch (Hampton, Sessions Goulet, Rainie, & Purcell, 2011).

Facebook is the top social site (Thefreedictionary, 2013) that has been founded in February, 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg in Harvard University. *Facebook* aims to give people power to stay connected with others around the world, to follow all kinds of updated news in the world and also to share different matters with huge areas of interactions among users (Facebook, 2015). Therefore, *Facebook* grew exponentially and got millions of users in short time (Facebook, 2015). Two years after, *Twitter* was launched with different approach which qualified to create its revolution in short period (Thefreedictionary, 2013). *YouTube* then has existed in 2005 to enable people to share, upload, or watch videos easily (YouTube, 2005). This is besides dozens of social networking sites like: *Instagram*, *Flicker*, *Pinterest*, and *Linkedin*, which lead the New Media throughout the world (Hampton, Sessions Goulet, Rainie, & Purcell, 2011). The following figure shows the history of Social Networking Sites (Boyd & Ellison, 2008):

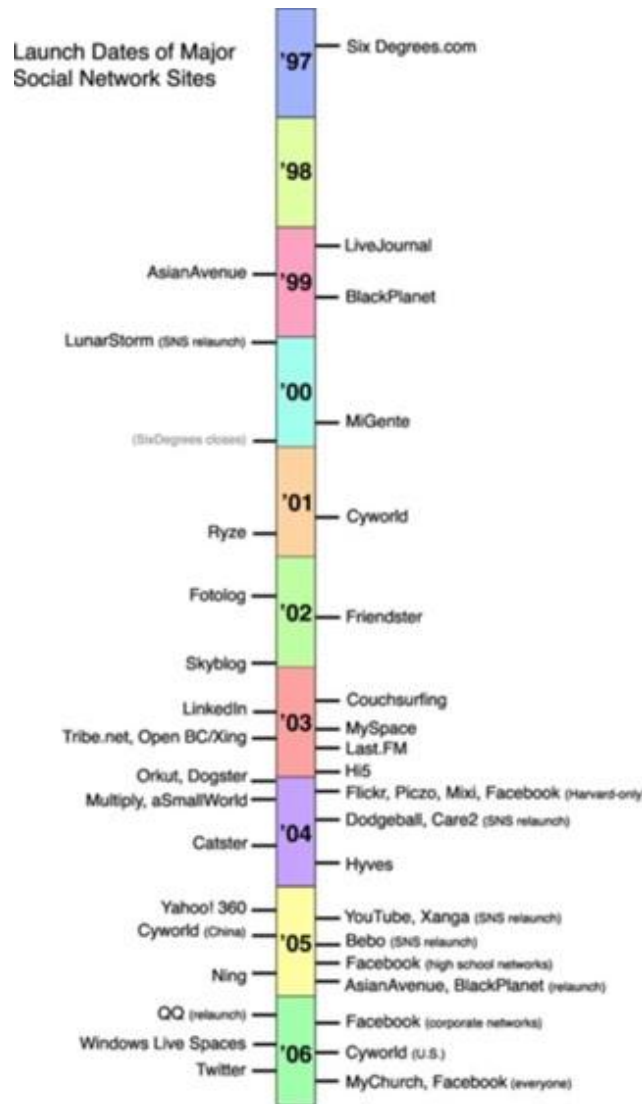


Figure 1: Date of launch for many of major SNS (Boyd & Ellison, 2008)

2.2 Social Networking Sites Users

The secret power of SNS lies in the huge number of its users. The number of SNS users grows to the extent that almost entire societies are online most of the time nowadays. These societies share different interactions and materials in the form of posts, pictures, sounds, videos, texts..., etc.

Several figures indicate the large percentages of internet users. In 2008-2010, 79% of American adults used internet, and most likely each one who accessed to internet signed in at least one of SNS (Hampton, Sessions Goulet, Rainie, & Purcell, 2011).

According to Pew Research Center Report 2013, 42% of the online adults use more than one SNS, whereas Facebook rests the best choice for users. The percentage of Facebook users passed 71% in 2013 while it was in late 2012 around 67%, which refers to the growing number of people who have become using SNS (Duggan & Smith, 2014). In 2012, the percentage of internet users who use only one social networking site reached 63.1% around the world, and this percentage was expected to increase (Statista, 2014).

Facebook as the leader of SNS has been a good example for the hysterical increase in number of users day by day. After only 11 months of its launch one million users signed up for Facebook. Then on Dec 2005, the number reached to 6 million users. One year after, the number of users became the double with 12 million users. In 2007, the number of users reached 58 million. Thereafter in 2009, FB achieved a qualitative leap with 360 million users. Down to Nov 2011, 845 million users were already on Facebook (Facebook, 2015). Last statistics confirmed that Facebook exceeded 1.35 billion users (Kemp, 2014).

Twitter, as another social platform, included 284 million users around the world (Kemp, 2014). In Britain in 2014, there were 38 million adults with 76% of adults accessed to internet every day. Also a Statistical Bulletin, issued by Office for National Statistics, cleared that the difference in percentage of using mobile for internet and SNS increased from 24% in 2010 to 58% in 2014 (Statistics, 2014). In 2014, three quarters of online people use at least one or more social websites like Facebook, Twitter, or *YouTube*, especially knowing that 85% of the world's population has access to internet nowadays (UNCP, 2013).

At the beginning of 2015, a recent statistical report showed that 3 billion people accessed to internet in 2014, and hundreds of millions join one or more of SNS daily (Kemp, 2014). Thus, the previous report clarifies the massive growth of users on SNS and how it has changed people daily life in the present era (Kemp, 2014). This indicates the large time users spend monthly on SNS.

2.3 Traditional Media versus SNS

Within social media era, individuals have had similar tools. Via internet, they have ability to post, share their opinions, transfer information and interact with others around the world by themselves (UNCP, 2013). Some facilities can be used such as camera, photos and voice record with high quality technique that smart phones and computers offer for people (Alghamidi, 2012). Therefore, the new generation mostly prefers social media rather than traditional media which refer to the set of means of media that have existed before the advent of the internet. The traditional media, which had been used for communication among communities, are like books, cinema, cable TV, newspapers, radio, movies, etc. (Collinsdictionary, 2015).

Several differences are between traditional media and SNS. One of the most important differences is represented in “distribution”. The process of collecting data, producing, designing, printing or broadcasting procedures to reach information for audience by traditional media will take too long time comparing with the process of information flow via SNS and internet (Pridmore, Falk, & Sprenkels, 2013). The new media has changed the distribution ways. In terms of audience, distribution has become faster over the internet, digital devices and smart phones. Furthermore, it was a core problem for mainstream media by its dealing with audience (Pridmore, Falk, & Sprenkels, 2013). After internet developing, most of traditional mediums

have shifted to do electronic copies for its works to publish it via internet and also establish its official pages via SNS. This is in order to keep in touch with their audiences who have become more interested to spend their time on SNS (Ibid). Thus, that indicates to the convinced owners of traditional media that SNS are better in distribution process and also SNS are important to keep pace with it in different aspects (Hanson, 2011).

Further advantage happens during work, which it's in favor SNS than old media: "Dealing with materials" (Hanson, 2011) where dealing with a large amount of information, storing, editing, and sharing it via SNS are easier than mainstream media in this era. Computers have a main role in changing the nature of data processing; also technology evolution has played a role how to deal with information, accessibility to news such as smartphones, applications, software, e-reading and so (Pridmore, Falk, & Sprenkels, 2013). Thus, "People have ability to share a lot of information about themselves and their life, including personal data and the music they listen to, videos of their friends, pictures, ideas they have and plans they are making, people, and places that they have been and are going" (Ibid).

Additionally, the ability of using SNS is affordable, so people can make their own online space to talk about whatever they want, in any time, wherever they are, which is not available for traditional media (Pridmore, Falk, & Sprenkels, 2013). It becomes easy to use these sites, especially the aggregator sites which provide surfers access to e-mail, online news, stories, videos and so on within one window (Hanson, 2011). A social activist Ahmed Ashour expressed about differences by saying that SNS is a free media, free from restrictions and censorship. Because of that, there has become citizen journalism which enables individuals to coverage events in their

areas which pushed traditional media to relying on SNS users to get details about news and events in particular in places that old media crews can't reach to such as the events of Arab spring (Alghamidi, 2012). Thus, this situation contributed to create fierce competition about who get information and control people more as a scoop holder (Ibid).

This is exactly the challenge that faces traditional media in all its forms (printed, audible, visual media) where citizens are no longer as only recipient news from old media but they become active partners in media messages creating as well (Alghamidi, 2012).

2.4 The Activists Transition from Using Traditional Media to SNS

Last years, the technological advancements led many to replace the traditional media outlets with electronic copies, which led observers to say that the internet will be the mediator instead of the traditional media entirely during the next few decades (El-Taher, 2012, p. 12). This explained by 2002 in America that around 5000 newspapers have electronic websites on the internet. In addition to offering services to watch radio and TV channels via internet pages, some of them were created only to broadcast on the internet (El-Taher, 2012, p. 14).

Under the shadows of decline of liberties and freedoms in a lot of places in the world, such as the Arab area, Arab activists could not able to express their opinions and attitudes by using traditional media (Ibid). The old media within the nondemocratic states were under the control of governments either directly or indirectly (Ibid). Thus, it was necessary to find another way to explain their ideas, so the internet was the best alternative for the activists. The internet has been an

appropriate platform to argue different subjects and issues which are important for large number of people in communities (Hanson, 2011). In spite of some who consider the internet is a “virtual life”, many of social and political activists have seen the internet as an outlet offers platforms to gratify their causes and wants more than traditional media (El-Taher, 2012, p. 14).

At the end of the last century, and on their way to find an alternative, the Arab youth used the discussion forums to open political and social arguments. Some considered it as a risk (El-Taher, 2012, p. 14). The online forums gave a good area for freedoms although there was a kind of censorship on the contents in addition to the self-censorship that activists were practiced on themselves. Due to the increasing of using the internet, the number of forums which allow users to express themselves politically and socially increased (Ibid).

After that, the technique of “mailing groups” appeared, which enabled Arab activists to use it in different fields, for example, Egyptian activists used it to advocate for political events, and also they used it for opening discussions which influence the attitudes of many of followers (El-Taher, 2012, p. 14). During 2005-2007 a political movement in Egypt called “*Kefaya –activists for change*” used the technique of “mailing groups” to call for different protest and political events (aljazeera.net, 2011).

The technical activists created their own sites (bloggers) in order to interact with the general news and political matters, and also to present their ideas and positions (El-Taher, 2012). In 2003 an Iraqi activist created a blogger called: “*Salam Pax*” talked about the last moments in the fall of Baghdad during the US invasion on Iraq

(Abdulmunem, 2003). The traditional media was not able to coverage there which led the international agencies to rely on “*Salam Pax*” as an important source of information to get the last updates from Iraq (Abdulmunem, 2003). This story clarifies the contribution of bloggers throughout the world in forming the mental images of people, and also to influence their opinions towards various events (El-Taher, 2012). The activists were leading the bloggers, especially in the states which were controlled by authoritarian regimes such as the Arab world (Ibid).

After the invention of web 2.0 and development of smart phones year by year, people have relied on the internet more and more to the extent they use it as a mediator that transfers photos, sounds, texts, and videos (El-Taher, 2012). So, this case contributed in increasing the numbers of the internet users in short time. The easiness of participation of multimedia and interaction with it among people on the internet helped to emergence the term of “New media” (Ibid). Therefore, the competition between the traditional media and the new media platforms has started (Alghamidi, 2012).

The development of online apps makes the internet usable for the social and political activities wider than before, particularly after the appearance of bloggers, photos and videos websites and social networking sites (El-Taher, 2012, p. 16). The activists depend on these different platforms on the internet as a source of information, and also as bases which are valid to interact with various events. Recently, another SNS during Arab spring allowed activists to make use of is “live broadcast” such as *Bambuser* in order to cover the news and protests (Ibid). Several of traditional media outlets counted on these techniques of living broadcast to stay in touch with the course of events moment by moment (Alghamidi, 2012).

Thus, the activists have been trying to find alternative platforms instead of traditional media outlets to enable them to use these platforms for achieving their aims such as: organizing protests, mobilizing people and interacting with events. The trip of activists started by using the forums, mailing groups and bloggers and then accessed to the group of SNS like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube etc. as a real alternative of traditional media outlets (El-Taher, 2012). Also, through SNS, they can express themselves, their needs, and exercise political and social roles. As well, activists have the ability to choose messages and select content that suits their conviction, so they use the media outlet and the media outlet does not use them (Alghamidi, 2012).

2.5 Facilities and Tools Provide by SNS

Social Networking Sites provides different facilities which made it a favorite for general users and in particular for activists, where these facilities and tools that activists use on SNS is not existed on the other old media outlets. Mostly, each SNS has its own facilities.

The facilities have increased continuously, where using SNS was for limited purposes at first such as sharing photos with friends or creating own profile to add simple data or collect your friends into a list such as Sixdegrees.com in 1997 (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). The ability of the recent aggregator sites like Facebook, at the beginning, was limited as well, in form of a small group of people inside a university, but growing these sites ravidly in unexpected way has increased its abilities (Newsroom, 2015). Activists can use SNS in different way that general users do in particular when they realize the special tools available on SNS.

Facebook has included several of useful tools for activists, such as: control on who sees the private information by editing the privacy setting, block who monitoring the data of activists to occur harm, and report any inappropriate content, which means the ability to report a specific user, account, page, or post if any user feel it not suitable (Safety Center, 2015). Pages on Facebook are good tools to publish information. It enables anyone around the world to follow activists' updates, public figures, associations, NGOs, and other entities that can create their official pages to invest it in addressing people about their ideas with easy opportunities in order to promote the page among huge number of online people (Info centre, 2014). As well, Facebook offers for users' three forms of groups, public, close, and secret group (Info centre, 2014). Each form is used for a particular function which enables activists to use for instant a secret group to arrange their plans, preparing themselves as group members for an online campaign, or coordinating for collective works among themselves. So within a group, activists can decide who is allowed to see the content that group members argue (FacebookGroups, 2015).

Twitter also has features enabling activists to reach news or any updated rapidly. Activists can add a common word as a hashtag regarding an event to let anyone around the world join and talk about that event and share their own ideas toward events by tweets (Help Center, 2015). So Twitter is great SNS to follow updates second by second. Many of SNS offer for people the ability to hold a guaranteed online meeting (Jackson G. , 2015).

Hashtag (#) is a tool not only on Twitter, but it becomes used via Facebook, Instagram, and other SNS which allows activists to find the interesting topic in different field. Hashtag enables activists and users to collect information about news

and actions around the world under one umbrella (Posch & Claudia Wagner, 2013). Users can follow-up any updates regarding the issue that Hashtag is covered round the clock (Posch & Claudia Wagner, 2013). Also with this tool it becomes easier to know all activities linked with the subject of a Hashtag. One can discover who shares or posts about that subject under the name of a particular Hashtag (Hashtag benefits, 2013). Additionally, one realizes the power of solidarity with the issue covered by using a common Hashtag (Hashtag benefits, 2013) which ease the work of activists to reach their messages for users on SNS.

Google+ is one of these sites provide the users places to easily meet with different members in different places, such as “Hangout” which are important service for activists who want to coordinate their next campaigns or plans (Hangouts Help, 2015).

One of the most important SNS is YouTube. People watch millions of videos via YouTube window constantly. Each one of online internet people use YouTube to follow news, interviews, channels, discourses, or any updates with sound and image for free (Info centre, 2014). Activists can benefit from YouTube as well by upload their interested actions, news, events, and share them across other SNS to broadcast their materials speedily for people (youtube, 2015). Each activist can personally invest YouTube to express their political, social ideas, or share what happens within the community on the internet to allow others showing details of actions, especially in countries having a political problem. When the government seeks to prevent publishing information by using smartphone cameras, individuals are able to record a video for any event and only upload it to *YouTube* (Alghamidi, 2012). Bloggers were used by activists to satisfy their attitudes before the dominance of SNS which gratify

the wants of action groups in particular within authoritarian states such as Iran (Hanson, 2011, pp. 360-362). Scholars call the way to interact with actions individually by uploading different videos as a term of “citizen journalism” (Hanson, 2011), (Antony & Thomas, 2010).

Group of SNS tools can be benefit generally for users but activists can use the previous services to achieve their own needs and to practice their aims online which would to be political, social, cultural, and so on.

2.6 SNS as the Source of Information

As a result of the growing number of users on SNS, and due to the facilities, tools, and services that these platforms offer for the users; SNS is in competition with traditional media with respect to News, where it has the ability to be an important source of news.

At present, SNS play a significant role in news and information transfer, and also discussing news details among its audience until being as a core source providing millions of people of news about whatever any time throughout the world (Aljanahi, 2013). To the extent that 123 heads of states and governments in the world at the end of 2012 have been starting use SNS, such as Facebook and Twitter regularly to post their political messages or attitudes toward the various actions via their personal accounts with a higher 78% compared with 2011 (digitaldaya, 2013).

According to a study entitled “Media Use in the Middle East” conducted on eight Arabic nations by Northwestern University in Qatar, 76% of users head to Facebook to provide news, particularly in Bahrain 84% and Egypt 67% then Tunisia 66%

(Dennis, Martin, & Wood, 2013). 78% of users generally get the news incidentally while they use Facebook for other motives (Matsa & Michell, Media & News, 2014).

The nature of news on SNS is different from the traditional media news. The news on SNS is fast, individually, not institutional sense, so news do not go through stages of production like in traditional media enterprises. Therefore, any user can impart news directly to the purpose of telling others, and then massive users will discuss the news, share it, and comment on their own profiles, while the classic reporters were being collecting their data before any broadcasting (Laird, 2012).

The news on SNS is wide, which means that users easily can read entertainment news, and observe political news, or follow-up photos in the field of art, and watching a video for sport news (Matsa & Michell, Media & News, 2014). All of that is within the main page of a social networking site, which is a good feature in favor of SNS guide users to prefer being on social networking platforms more than traditional media outlets because the ability of SNS to fulfill their needs in a comprehensive manner (Matsa & Michell, Media & News, 2014). This is the conclusion of a thesis conducted at Eastern Mediterranean University in Cyprus on 1600 students of different nationalities and various faculties where the researcher found that using newspapers as a traditional media are retreating in terms of reliable as a source of news, compared with tendencies of students toward using SNS like Facebook or Twitter as a source of local, national, regional and international news (Mesole, 2014).

Besides, the space of freedoms, abilities, and facilities that SNS offer for users and active users to interact, comment, discuss, and share information about events more

than the space that old media offer for people (Matsa & Michell, Media & News, 2014). Thus, this is what makes users and, in particular, the activists are closer to the outlet which meets their needs more, increases their roles in their society, and leads them to feel not only as recipients but also effective members (Mesole, 2014).

Thus, the orientation of people to SNS and the increasing rates of users who depend on these sites as a source of news, also the nature of SNS that allows commenting, interacting and taking an attitude on events; point to the possibility of the activists who have high number of followers to play a role in forming the mental image towards events, or setting the agenda of their followers.

2.7 Using SNS in Mobilization for Social & Political Life

The positive points which explain the importance of SNS within societies are many these days. These sites have changed the nature of dealing with the events daily by offering set of advantages making these sites preferred by people and in particular by the online action groups and activists. On SNS, Users have the ability to practice promotions in each aspect around the world anytime (Jackson G.). In the last few years, activists used SNS during conflicts to express their attitudes toward different issues. (Round, 2012) The advantages of SNS allow for active users to invest these online services for free to achieve multiple aims in the society and policy (Alghamidi, 2012).

So, this part focuses deeply on mobilization via SNS, by mentioning experiments and examples throughout the world improve the effectiveness of these sites to mobilize people. Also, the researcher comes to mention the SNS roles during the campaigns and how to guide people and promote them, in addition to highlight on using these

platforms during the Arab spring as a recent case substantiates the efficacy of SNS in mobilization whether in the political life or for social aims. The following headings are a way to improve that SNS is suitable to invest by activists in order to gratify the various needs and goals.

2.7.1 SNS Effectiveness in Mobilizing People

Several events around the world certify that social networking sites are effective platforms to mobilize people towards certain issues by the social movements or the prominent activists within each community. It was succeeded to lead people for solidarity with an event or protests against political or social questions, and many evidence confirming its effectiveness will be mentioned in the following. According to a study conducted in 2013 by Institute of science and technology (Masdar) the mobilization is the process of mobilizing people quickly to deal with challenges of catastrophes and also to aid each other achieving their needs (Alex Rutherford et al, 2012).

The low cost or even the free use of SNS comparing with practicing the action of mobilization via traditional media is an important feature that SNS have become significant for social movements and efficient activists for mobilization. As a result of the foregoing, the easy access to the huge number of audience in short time and SNS power to allow people express in multiple forms help to make it's a way to mobilize audience toward a question or against a given issue in addition to orienting people by activists and online social movements via these sites in different society (Center of Strategic Studies, 2012).

In Washington, 2009 a non-profit organization was able to mobilize more than 200 thousands of people in a march called “The National Equality March”, where it had

done with a new style via several of common SNS which led to save 85% of the invitation cost (Center of Strategic Studies, 2012, p. 73).

As well, mobilizing on SNS was the reason behind closing 800 prisons after killing a Chinese prisoner under torture. As soon as the story of prisoner leaked outside of prison, the activists on SNS started talking about that among people, which quickly spread on the internet. This event turned into a national story, and several of previous Chinese prisoners were posting about their stories in jail by using these sites (Round, 2012, p. 57) .

In order to test the efficiency of SNS in mobilization, the Defense of Advanced Research Project Agency organized an experiment was called “The Red Balloon Challenge”. A group of professors from several countries throughout the world analyzed the power of SNS in this project. They wanted to find out how SNS enables people to communicate, transfer data and interact with each other to take actions. In this project the SNS leaders of each group were expected to lead the members on determining the locations of balloons across America where group of balloons in different cities launched into sky randomly (Chu, 2011). The winning team was able to locate each balloon area exactly within approximately 9 hours depending on interaction within a group of volunteer activists from various regions via SNS in record time (Alex Rutherforda et al, 2012). Obviously the previous studies find out that SNS can be effective platforms for activists to play a role in mobilizing the online communities.

The previous signs and examples indicate to the ability of using SNS in mobilizing people towards different matters, which will be explained more within the following subheadings.

2.7.2 SNS Roles during Political Campaigns

Politicians, public figures, social movements, and traditional media have realized the importance to be part of internet and SNS system (Hanson, 2011). In view of the interactive massive crowds via these sites such as *Facebook, Twitter, YouTube* etc. thus, within any political or media plan directed to audience, must take into account the new media and SNS (Berntzen, Johannessen, & Godbolt, 2014). Given that the proximity of SNS to the human, it allows obviously practicing activists and needs, where the tools and facilities provided by SNS enable activists or any social movement to conduct campaigns and mobilize people to support it (Ibid). In this regard, *Lasse Berntzen* study stated:

“This understanding can aid future campaigns in their planning. Movement organizers can benefit from the use of Internet to enroll supporters and organize events and utilize social media to interact with the broader supporting network and increase awareness of the issue at stake”. (Berntzen, Johannessen, & Godbolt, 2014, p. 24)

According to a study done by Gibson & McAllister in 2011 about the Australian election 2010, the role of SNS was great the period of election. These sites mainstreamed news, broadcasted the electoral programs of candidates, followed-up the reactions of people, and listened their opinions, subsequently driving activists to mobilize audience to cast their votes to a particular candidate (Gibson & McAllister, 2014). Added to this, the style how to persuade the public within online program nicknamed: “YouTube Election” where each candidate uploaded his\her own video on YouTube included explanation of the election platform with large, immediate

publishing across SNS. Candidates' debates also were done online via SNS as well in partnership with some of traditional channels (Round, 2012, p. 58).

The internet and SNS are not enough alone to run in election, but it's an important part can't be ignored by activists for any issue nowadays because group of properties such as: the low-cost, the pattern of interaction, and the easiness of coordination among members, also the ability to share different viewpoints on SNSs (Rice, 2004) Starting from using weblogs -which were used by candidates as part of online campaign, for instance during the American presidential election in 2004 till using SNS nowadays (Rice, 2004, p. 2). So, striking a balance in the media work will be achieved once the recognition of the ability of SNS to gratify needs of social movements' members, also by understanding SNS as an important way for activists, opponents, down to candidates and ministers to practice their actions. (Joy Cushman et al, 2012, pp. 3, 142-144)

Regardless what Hanson mentioned in his book about voters and their physiological behaviors in election which already decided for whom will cast their votes (Hanson, 2011), and nevertheless studies clarified that impact of social platforms is long-term impact (Ghannam, 2011, p. 23), However, SNS can occur an effect on people opinions in elections, and that what happened in Australia (Gibson & McAllister, 2014) and during American Elections in 2008 (Lutz, 2009, pp. 4-12) as well. What is certain is the platforms of SNS have been the most appropriate way for activists, critics, or opponents in order to interact and guide the online public across these sites (Round, 2012).

US President Barack Obama's campaign was aware as well about the SNS consequences, therefore they devoted an integrated team just for working on SNS to study audience behaviors, attitudes, and wants, also to examine users' reactions in order to influence their opinions toward election (Lutz, 2009) and from here, "Obama has changed the style of running election" (Aaker & Chang, 2010). One of the important reasons behind success Obama's campaign was the correct way of using SNS in reaching the largest number of people and spreading information about Obama's program (Lutz, 2009). The team of SNS in reality was able to arrive even into the popular neighborhoods in America (Lutz, 2009, p. 3). And that what Obama's campaign was distinguished from other campaigns because it has given attention to the entire online communities on SNS exactly as giving attention for traditional ways which led to high percentage of participation and interaction with election in America compared with the previous elections. (Lutz, 2009)

Nowadays, SNS gives the ability for activists to practice their activities freely somehow more than previous age. Thus:

"Individuals could make a difference if given the right tools and encouragement. They showed technology was as a transformative force, the campaign understood the power of the Internet to get people engaged in the process on a scale never done before" (Aaker & Chang, 2010, p. 20).

The campaigns that realized the important of use SNS are not only for elections. A lot of campaigns and collective activities were conducted by activists via SNS in order to raise the awareness, or for solidarity with an issue... etc., SNS facilities and tools allow the activists or any collective action to mobilize followers within an electoral campaign or within the other political and social campaigns in the society.

2.7.3 SNS Use in the Arab Spring

The period of Arab Spring started in 2011 when a Tunisian person (*Mohamed Bouazizi*) burned himself in public square protesting against the low quality of life and the bad situations and circumstances of people in his country and majority of Arab world. This event was published rapidly via SNS which resulted to protesting against *Bin Ali* Regime (Breuer, Landman, & Fraquhar, 2012). Hundreds of thousands of Tunisian people protested in all parts of Tunisia, and SNS was the basic tool in the hand of protesters who used several common SNS such as *Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter* to mobilize people to go out in the streets to be part of events and advocate the protests in order to restore people's rights. Furthermore, transferring information about events among people was via SNS (Breuer, Landman, & Fraquhar, 2012).

Audience found that SNS were the suitable tool to demand their needs and rights. Each one of Tunisian people was able to express her or his ideas, also protest against regime, and criticize the government which mean crossing all red lines strongly, resulting in escape the President of Tunisia Bin Ali at that time, and moving to a new stage in Tunisian history (Khondker H. , 2011).

The impact of Tunisian Revolution reached Egyptian audience after only few days (Ghannam, 2011). Coordinating of protests started by using SNS and following the news of Tunisia which made Egyptians more daring to go out and protest against the previous regime in Egypt, thus millions filled several of main squares in Egypt (Round, 2012, pp. 61,69). The demonstrators were sharing advices, instructions, and news among themselves depending on social networking sites which were the most important tool, besides a great help of some of traditional media channels like

Aljazeera Channel which played a prominent role to let the social movement succeed and lead to jail the president of Egypt Mubarak that time. Same roles SNS played in Libya, Yemen, and other countries after that (Ghannam, 2011).

The regimes attempted to ban publishing on SNS or Bloggers and tried to block the internet and SNS; in addition, the dominance and nature of traditional media in the authoritarian states are consistent with state policy, but regimes could not control the massive numbers, information, and protests in these cases (Hanson, 2011, p. 527). Arab countries' activists have moved their experience and experiments among each other by social networking platforms as the best tool to gratify their political demands, earning a living, and getting the human rights of people, especially with the low chances and areas that traditional media give activists to express their opinions or claim their needs. (Khondker H. , 2011)

The Arabic uprisings 2011 were a proof that SNS is important outlet for activists and social movements to claim their demands, and to coordinate the protests, also to guide people where led to massive demonstrations which were filled the streets. Substantially, the facilities provided by SNS for active users, and the appropriate tools that ease practicing the actions of activists on these sites have enabled SNS to be an effective outlets in mobilizing the followers, and guiding them on the events, where it has become a source of news for users.

That was clearing during Arab Spring 2011, and while conducting campaigns whether for elections or for common issues till nowadays, which clarify the importance of SNS in mobilization for political or social aspects, and the importance

of the active users on SNS individually or within collective action to guide the followers.

2.8 The Impact of Modern Communication Tools on the Collective Action

Social movements are based on the idea of collective action. Therefore, the collective action formed many of social movements in communities throughout history (Tilly, 2004). A crucial part of the social movements is the “Identity” as Charles Tilly the author of the book “Social Movements” mentioned in his book which is the main source in relation with this topic (Ibid). He explained the identity by saying “We” which indicates to the group of activists who make up a significant Unified force that seeks to generate a certain change within the community (Tilly, 2004, p. 52).

Since the beginning of the social movements in the 19th century until today, various tools of communication contributed to broadcast messages of campaigns, promote the upcoming activities and also for monitoring and evaluation the work (Tilly, 2004, p. 176). In 20th century, the development of communication tools shaped a new shift through presenting unprecedented opportunities and openness for social movements and the collective action (Ibid). Access to the modern social networking platforms that allow new possibilities contributed in establishing the relationship among activists and people (Schwarz, 2011). SNS reduced the isolation of individual work and created a suitable environment considered as the initial steps of any social mobility, and also helped in providing quick easy chances for meeting among activists, and less costs of collective action (Schwarz, 2011, pp. 7-9) (Friedland & Rogerson, 2009, pp. 2-5)

In the following subtitles there is an explanation about the social movements, concepts and areas where it's active, and also the characterization of its members (Tilly, 2004). Additionally, mentioning concepts related to social movement for doing a micro-mobilization (Dobson, 2001), as well as reviewing the impact of evolution of communication tools on the effectiveness of social movements and collective action (Ottaway & Hamzawy, 2011).

2.8.1 The Essence of Social Movements

The traditional media shaped the news frame of audience until now (Dobson, 2001, p. 8). With the development means of communication and proliferation of new media tools and application including SNS, the activists are having a clear contribution in forming the cognitive framework of the public (Friedland & Rogerson, 2009).

Social movements rely on the idea of organized collective work to achieve awareness in order to bring societal changes (Tilly, 2004). These movements perform its activities through prior coordination among activists who are experienced in the specific areas and also depending on the previous activity of individuals and their membership in the various social work organizations (Friedland & Rogerson, 2009).

The social movements try to bring about social changes include political, cultural and economic aspects by focusing on the all communications tools to create intelligent responses (Dobson, 2001). These responses are able to influence the broad scene of the community (Ibid). The political movement is the most prominent kind of social movements which is the result of “activists’ group action” in order to obtain local, national, regional or universal political goals (Tilly, 2004).

The social movements consist of a group of activists who have a set of characteristics and seek to change or interact with various issues whether political or social (Tilly, 2004, p. 14). Also the term of activism points to "the process of taking action that makes a claim for change on behalf of a wronged, excluded or neglected group" either for political or social issues (Thorpe, 2012).

Thus, the "activist" as a term indicates to an active member who is interested in political, social or economic issues which are concern to his\her society by seeking to focus on it using all available communication tools including SNS in order to participate his\her voice and to be part of collective action aiming to bring specific changes in the community.

During the twentieth century, the Western democratic systems were evolved, and as a result of a long series of social activist's efforts, the social movements were able to impose a new reality (Tilly, 2004). Therefore, social activists managed to negotiate with the authorities on their demands (Ibid), which were not very effective in the undemocratic states where the conditions of freedom are not at the same level (Ottaway & Hamzawy, 2011).

2.8.2 The Ways of Social Movement for Micro-Mobilization

For achieving micro-mobilization, the social movements follow different ways such as:

- **Kindling in small group:** these groups are linked with a loose network including friends and colleges, or sub-groups within a large group (Dobson, 2001, p. 4).

- **Familiar members:** they are privileged members who are ready to participate in protest activities whether leaders or members in action groups (Dobson, 2001, p. 4).
- **Capable leaders:** they have distinctive qualities and properties such as intelligence, honesty, awareness and the ability to express the needs of people (Dobson, 2001, p. 4). Thus, it's possible through them to promote the idea of "Optimistic expectations" to make a change (Ibid). The elites and media outlets that can contribute in the success of social mobility (Ibid).
- **Frame alignment:** the process that happens within informal groups which seek to promote the social change by involving others in the process of mobilization to legitimize the activity (Dobson, 2001, p. 5).
- **Emotional achievement:** focusing on the emotions plays a big role in activating the collective action among people, particularly when activists target people's emotions and powerful feelings that touch the reality of the people (Dobson, 2001, p. 3). The topics are related to difficulties of People's lives, violation of rights, crimes against humanity, massacres, and all humanitarian cases in general. All these topics direct activists and the organizer of social movements to determine the suitable materials to promote, such as music, videos, photos, speeches and other (Tilly, 2004, p. 176).

2.8.3 The influence of communication tools growth on social movement

Historically, social movements managed to use all innovative tools of communication at each stage in order to establish the collective consciousness (Dobson, 2001, p. 7). Each social movement uses mobile phone and e-mail, as well as the early activists employed the mass communication via traditional media such as TV, radios, electronic mailing and opinion polls (Tilly, 2004, p. 176). So, it was

necessary to keep up with the development of communication and also to invest the global spread of Journalism throughout the world for the purpose of maintaining the technological awareness within the working groups (Ibid).

During the 19th and 20th centuries, the social movements were based on the individual communication, and the awareness of activists for the importance of mass communication was weak (Tilly, 2004, p. 177). In the twentieth century, the activists discourse has become a mass with the growth of communication tools (Ibid). Thus, when social movements shifted from individual scope and personal contact to the collective and mass communication, social activists campaigns were able to influence in media coverage and the agendas of traditional media (Ibid).

By the end of the last century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, the communication tools become in the form of social platforms (Khondker H. , 2011). Nowadays, in the presence of social networking sites, the role of activists has emerged more clearly. They have their own accounts in the form of pages, channels or projects (Friedland & Rogerson, 2009). Thus, social activists can post via these SNSs, express their own attitudes towards events and interact with their followers. Additionally, there is a possibility of working within online collective groups also on the ground (Boyd & Ellison, 2008).

The expansion of using communication tools contributes in universalizing the social movements. There has become a youth international alliances meeting on particular issues (Tilly, 2004, p. 242). As a result of the diversity of services and ease of networking, activists become able to get “feedback” for their activity, which is useful

in evaluating their actions and measuring the reactions to the campaigns (Tilly, 2004, p. 176).

The modern communication tools were not a pivotal change in the structure of social movements, but they were important tools which activists invest to match with their activities, aims and needs (Ibid). The modern tools in communication which includes SNSs help during the process of societal transformation and consolidation of awareness for change (Ottaway & Hamzawy, 2011).

The following studies show the evolution of using communication tools among social movements:

- In 2000, Annelise Riles compared, in a study, among a survey about using the modern media tools by a number of social movements which participated in a conference on women's rights in Beijing in 1995, with an ethnographic study for FIJI movement activists (Riles, 2001). Riles found that using the internet, phones, fax networks and the space communications was effective, and also these tools were able to increase the impact of social movements (Tilly, 2004, pp. 181,182).
- On January 16, 2001 in Philippines, people received a message via mobile phones reads: "Go 2 EDSA ST., Wear black" and in just one hour, tens of thousands were present there (Tilly, 2004, p. 195). Over 4 days, more than one million of people gathered for demanding the President Joseph Estrada to step down, and actually the social movements led him to left the rule on 20 January (Ibid). The Filipino activists succeeded in their demands. The technological analyst Howard Rheingold described this event by saying: "The Philippine adventure" (Tilly, 2004, p. 198). Filipino Events predicted the

begging of which so-called: “Smart Mobs”. Rheingold said that people are able to work in harmony together, even if they do not know each other (Ibid).

- After Filipino Events, the new communication networks have played a role in guiding behaviors, mobilizing, and building informal relations among activists and users involved in campaigns and activities which have a common goal (Schwarz, 2011, p. 4). This study considered that the network evolution and the diversity of communication platforms is a catalyst that improves activists’ action, especially as the modern social networking sites allow easily to meet the interests of activists about certain topics leading to do campaigns, practice collective action and mobilize for specific issues (Ibid). What happened in the Arab spring (Khondker H. , 2011) also during the elections and different campaigns throughout the world (Joy Cushman et al, 2012) is a good proof for the validity of that.
- The facilities that SNSs provided are ideal for encouraging the interaction, expanding relations, providing information and participating in political and social issues at all times (Schwarz, 2011). The study showed that SNSs increase the civic participation by young people (Schwarz, 2011, p. 12). This study indicated that activists believe that SNSs pave the way for increasing relations and interaction with activities, regardless the level of online activism (Ibid).
- In 2009, Institute for Homeland Security Solutions conducted a study pointing that SNS offers social movements the suitable tools to practice the collective action and communication (Friedland & Rogerson, 2009, p. 5). In this study the researcher mentioned as proof the demonstration in Iran, Arab

Spring countries, and protests in Toronto and several European capitals (Ibid).

2.9 The Control Mechanisms on SNS

The true potential has been provided by communication tools for activists, social movements, and the general users to achieve their goals and seek to bring about change (Khondker H. , 2011). Besides, there has been an explosive growth in the number of internet users and SNS in record times even in the third world countries (Statista, 2014). All these reasons were the real causes for the results achieved by activists via SNS and other web platforms.

This rapid paradigm shift in using the modern social platforms was able to overcome regimes failed to impose the security options timely, and could not prevent the impact of these SNS or control it (Ghannam, 2011). As it happened in 2011 with the beginning of Arab spring when Tunisian government was trying to ban video-sharing on YouTube or Facebook (Breuer, Landman, & Fraquhar, 2012). Also the Egyptian government's decision to forbid the use of internet inside the country was a try to discourage activists and social movements to achieve their demands (Ibid).

But soon the ruling regimes and countries have realized the importance of studying this emergency, so they sharply set controls and restrictions to use the internet and SNS, especially the repressive and authoritarian states which are the most obvious to censor the contents, blocking access, or withholding the use of web and SNS (Jackson B. F., 2014). In addition to emerging determinants and limitations by SNS itself (Ibid), all of which may cause creating a state of self-censorship within the entire online communities (Poell, 2014).

Iran, Syria, Saudi Arabia and China come within the ten most censored countries in 2012 according to a report conducted by The Committee to Protect Journalists (The Committee to Protect Journalists, 2012). In Iran, the government possesses high technological techniques for withholding millions of news sites including SNS, as well as controlling the flow of information, obscuring the details and practicing the intimidation (The Committee to Protect Journalists, 2012). Likewise, the infrastructure of censorship in Iran censors the content technically through filtering the keyword, DNS hijacking, protocol-based throttling and HTTP Host-based blocking (Aryan, Aryan, & Halderman, 2013.). For instance in the 2009 elections, Iran imposed strict controls included closing Twitter and YouTube intermittently, which were used by demonstrators for exercising their activities and sending their messages to the world (Canaves, 2011).

For the Syrian case, the censorship was existed before the events of the Arab Spring. Syria was in the ninth position for the list of the most censored states in 2006 (The Committee to Protect Journalists, 2012). But with the start of the events in Syria in 2011, the censorship has increased remarkably, where Syria has been in the third place according to this report (Ibid). The report conducted by the Committee to Protect Journalists in 2012 stated that the increasing control of the different media outlets in Syria have played a major role in maintaining “Al-Assad” in power (Ibid).

Even if most SNS in Syria are not completely restricted, but the regime blocks specific pages and accounts which the regime is concerned in, beside tightening censoring on “Instant Messaging software” (Abdelberi Chaabane et al, 2014, p. 285). This censorship resulted in preventing news coverage and prohibiting any journalistic attempt to interact with the protests (The Committee to Protect

Journalists, 2012). Furthermore, the regime has practiced arrests and torture against journalists and activists without any charge (Ibid). Moreover, the regime seeks to wrest the passwords of personal accounts for the prisoners on SNS, and repeatedly, the government has also tried to disable the use of mobile phones and the internet there (The Committee to Protect Journalists, 2012).

Although China contains half of the number of web users in Asia with 52%, 60% of them are younger than the age of 30, but the censorship there is strict (Synthesio, 2011). For example, in 2010 nearly a million of articles were subjected to censorship daily and less than 1% of China's population can log in to Facebook because “the great firewall project – *GFW*” (Ibid). The GFW project was established by the government at the end of nineties in order to monitor the web inside the state (Synthesio, 2011). Also 350 million pieces of information including text, photos and videos were withheld by using GFW system as declared by the Chinese director of information *Wang Chen* in 2010 (Ibid). If one uses Twitter or Facebook, he will be exposed to punishment, such as the Chinese woman who was sentenced to work in the camp for a full year because of a “satirical tweet” in November 2010 (Canaves, 2011).

The government in China realizes that it is difficult to ignore the world of SNS and other modern platforms, so it adopted the “Copycats networks” project which is directed to the Chinese in their own language (Synthesio, 2011). This Copycats networks aim to reproduce private Chinese platforms and SNS similar to Facebook, Twitter and other, which qualify Chinese people to use it instead of using the non-Chinese platforms (Ibid). The private Chinese platforms have been controlled by the authorities to the extent of filtering and censoring the comment of Chinese users

(Ibid). Thus, the situation in China shows clearly that government imposes restrictions on the possibility of physical access to the platforms as well as controlling people and contents.

Many of social movements that appeared and took an active role in the Arab society were due to the revolutions that happened in different Arab regions (Schwarz, 2011). The governments in these regions rushed to stop and prevent these movements' activities (Khondker H. , 2011). Saudi Arabia realized that SNS weren't the main reason behind the appearance of the social movements but they played a major role in activating these movements (Aljabre, 2013). So the government there was explicit in practicing censorship within its borders (Ibid). There is the ISU system in *the King Abdul Aziz University* in Riyadh which is responsible in monitoring by determining filters to censor the prohibited and allowable content (Aljabre, 2013).

Within a report published by “SasaPost” website in August 2014, human rights organizations estimate that the number of political prisoners in the kingdom was ranging from 25 to 30 thousands (Sasapost, 2014). They are subject to the trials on the background of opinion, freedom of expression, criticism of the authority's policies, or because claims of human rights and political reform (Ibid). For example, in 2013, the Saudi authorities arrested a human rights activist *Waleed Abu al-Khair* who is considered according to “Forbes magazine” as one of the most 100 influential Arabic activists on Twitter (Sasapost, 2014). The Saudi justice sentenced “Abu al-Khair” for 15 years in prison because his defending on 16 political activists arrested in 2007 (HRW News, 2014). Also the government closed his website then withheld his pages on Facebook in May 2009 (Sasapost, 2014).

During the recent months, the Saudi authorities issued 715 decrees to ban travel for activists and oppositionist (Sasapost, 2014). Moreover, in March 2014, the Saudi authorities arrested “Muhanad El-mhemed” for 8 years because of writing tweets on Twitter inciting to protest (Ibid). Furthermore, the government shut down the accounts of the activist “Mohammed Hudhaif” and banned him from writing on Twitter because of criticizing the policies of Saudi Arabia (Ibid). The Saudi courts accused them loose charges, such as contempt of the judiciary, defaming of the country, communicating with foreign bodies, stirring sedition and so on (Ibid).

Another challenge that activists face is the administration of SNS itself, where it may censor certain content in response to political pressure, pressures from group of users, or in order to promote a certain agenda (Jackson B. F., 2014). For instant, *Myspace* deleted for two times more than 35 thousand member in a group which has social and religious thoughts after an organized anti-campaign by users opposed the content of this group, beside many similar examples on the various SNS (Jackson B. F., 2014, p. 131). This limitation may weaken the ability of active individuals to express themselves freely; also it can restrict their effectiveness and losing them their followers on SNS in touch of a button due to a difference with political ideology or social tradition among group of users (Ibid).

The seriousness of the censorship on SNS is real, which it is represented in the existence of external and internal pressures (Jackson B. F., 2014, p. 134). These pressures are targeting to reduce the capacity of users on these sites, especially activists, action groups or social movements that belong to certain political viewpoints which can affect the real life in communities (Ibid).

The fact is that these sites are privately owned seek to profit (Jackson B. F., 2014). Therefore, SNS may be subject to certain conditions regarding access to users' information, reducing the publication of certain contents or blocking pages and accounts determined by authorities in those countries as long as there is guarantee of spread to reap more profits (Jackson B. F., 2014, pp. 154-156). This is a scary index that the great strength of SNS may fade without checking (Ibid).

These different obstacles can be considered as a censorship process on the works of activists in ways that directly or indirectly, where the restrictions impose on the activist not to mention certain topics which are not suitable with the bodies impose the constraints.

In spite of activists expressing, even individuals about their worries and concerns about the inevitability of access to their information and privacies, as well their awareness of this, in addition to what has been mentioned about the challenges that activists faced by non-democratic governments in their own countries because the activity on the Internet, "They are still willing to engage in risky online activities" (Ching-man Au Yeung et al, 2009).

From another side, the active users who are interested in political or social issues and have a platform on SNS to interact with the followers, can also practice the gate-keeping process. The gate-keeping is practiced by selecting some materials to tell followers about as the most important, and cut what the activists do not want to post from what does not agree with their beliefs.

2.10 The Related Communication Theories

The way each activist use the SNS is different and the satisfaction or gratification they seek to get using the SNS is also different and that is why we have incorporated uses and gratification theory. Also, activists' use of SNS to control the access to information and their use of it to set agenda beside the gatekeeping process will be discussed. The three theories aforementioned will be explained in this section in relation to their appliances to SNS. And it is important to note that these three theories have been mostly explained in relation to traditional media. However, in this study, they will be discussed in their relation with SNS.

2.10.1 Uses and Gratification Theory

Uses and gratifications theory is an approach that seeks not to know “what does media do to people”, but it pays attention on “what do people do with media” according to Elihu Katz study in 1959 (Katz, 1959). So this theory aims to understand the reasons and motives which guide audience to use a specific media outlet (Ananzeh, Darwesh, & Hijab, 2009).

Uses and Gratification Theory differs from other theories that is about audience usage of the media, basically this theory according to Hanson (2011) does not treat people as “A sheep-like mass of receivers’ messages “ (Hanson, 2011). On the contrary, it comes audience to light as active members who know what the suitable media has the ability to gratify their needs and goals. Therefore, this theory considers audience are brilliant to choose specific medium and the theory is based on the understanding of satisfaction of needs of audience members (Mesole, 2014). The theory assumes that audiences are aware about what they need from media; they also choose the particular media that's qualified to gratify their needs or aims. (Ananzeh,

Darwesh, & Hijab, 2009) For example, some people use Facebook to gratify the need of reaching family and friends.

Overtime, uses and gratification theory studies have been highlighted to be better with new media more than the traditional media, this is what Ray Born referred to when he said that uses this theory is suitable for internet studies because the high level of interaction which people practice every day by using various websites including social networking sites (Ananzeh, Darwesh, & Hijab, 2009)

As a result, the developing of the internet and the expansion of social networking sites capabilities these days has resulted to grow the motivations that lead audience to prefer SNS than other mediums, especially with advantages the internet and SNS offer for users like the social, political interactions, encouraging to raise the self-reliance level, expressing individual ideas which might not be that possible on traditional media (Dainton & Zelle, 2015)

In this study, Preferring SNS by activists more than other platforms is an indicator to the ability that active users have to select their needs and motivates. The individual is active in the communication process on SNS as the platform allows them to play an active role according to their wants. He\She uses the communication tools to achieve intended goals that gratify their needs (Cummings, 2008). It would exceed the stage of being the activists as only recipients to the stage of playing a role as senders of messages for their followers on SNS (Alghamidi, 2012) which this study also investigates into.

2.10.2 Agenda-Setting Theory

In North Carolina, Donald Shaw and Maxwell McCombs conducted a study on the voters in the 1968 presidential election (Hanson, 2011, p. 59). They found out that there was a strong relation between the subjects that media considered important and the subjects the voters considered important (McCombs & Shaw, 2006). This was the beginning of the agenda-setting theory (Freeland, 2012). Accordingly, the theory suggests that the media outlets set the agenda of audience by telling them “what to think about”. (Hanson, 2011)

One of the important assumptions of this theory is that media do not reflect the reality but they filter and shape it (Freeland, 2012). As well, the theory assumes that media highlight on specific issues, therefore the audience perceive these topics are most important than others (Ibid). Thus, the audience will be greatly affected by the subjects are presented in media (Hanson, 2011).

This is the function of traditional media to set the agenda of their audience in the societies, according to what they believe is most important to present for people, also to hide what they think is not important to present to audience members (Freeland, 2012). Thus, the social and political activists, who have platforms on SNS and have a large number of followers, can choose as a sender what they want of news considering it's the most important. This is similar to the function of traditional media in selecting certain sources and filtering specific contents to send for its audience on the basis that the most important (McCombs & Shaw, 2006) and this is what the agenda-setting theory talks about.

In the current study, the researcher seeks to find out the ability of those activists in setting the agenda of their followers via SNS.

2.10.3 Gate-Keeping Theory

In 1947 Kurt Lewin presented the term “Gate-Keeping Theory” which is basically the process of filtering information before it is sent to receivers (Roberts, Gatekeeping Theory: An Evolution, 2005). This theory accedes that information is produced in large amount in our everyday life, but only limited number of news chosen to send to the audience. So, the Gatekeeper is the body who has the capability to make decision about what information to pass to the audience and what to block out (Onwubere & Okuwa, 2011). This process affects the content of messages that is sent to the public. (Ibid) Also, the gate-keeping process determine according to the policies, owners of the media outlet and their agendas (Roberts, Gatekeeping Theory: An Evolution, 2005).

The gate-keeping is the process of telling half-truths by senders which contributes in setting the agenda of people (Onwubere & Okuwa, 2011, p. 59). One of the definitions of the Gate-Keeping Theory is:

“Managing the information through a process contain to move the information through gates or filters. The gatekeeping process includes selecting, writing, editing, placing, scheduling of the information. Moreover, every person can practice gatekeeping individually in daily life for example, the information you post in the blog or the email you send” (Rodrigo, 2012).

The process of controlling the flow of information is linked with the aims, editorial policy, and the owners’ considerations. This process is practiced within several stages starting with the reporter by choosing his specific resources, access to the decision of the medium owners and the bodies who have power. The aim of this process is to send the messages for the receivers in the form that the gatekeepers want (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008). Thus, the information pass through several gates and

each gatekeeper filters it according to what commensurate with their agenda. Some studies considered it is a kind of censorship (Ibid) (University of Twente, 2010).

The active user has the ability to post the information that they like to talk about and focus on. In this present study, the researcher seeks to examine if the activists are practicing the process of gate-keeping.

Chapter 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter highlights the structure of the methodology that the researcher used to conduct this research study. Also it contains explanations about research context, population, sample, data collection and analysis.

3.1 Research Methodology and Design

For the current research, qualitative methodology has been favored. Qualitative research differs from quantitative research. Quantitative methodology is based on statistical figures and percentages. Quantitative methodology is unlike qualitative research that relies on information and verbal data more than numbers and statistics (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002). Qualitative research is a social science research which focuses on the people's attitudes, their behaviors and stories of their reality while the researcher attempts to understand people's lives towards the various issues of daily life (Bouma & Atkinson, 1995).

What distinguishes qualitative research is that it is more subjective, and goes deeper into collection of data to help in understanding the nature of humans (Bouma & Atkinson, 1995). A study conducted in 2002 clarified that the purpose of quantitative research is to: "address questions concerned with developing an understanding of the meaning and experience dimensions of humans' lives and social worlds". (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002)

In order to collect data to understand the use of SNS by activists a semi-structured interview with 31 open ended thematic questions under five frames is designed. Since the activists have been one of the most important groups of people who are using SNS especially in social and political fields they have been chosen to consist the sample of the study. Activists have been considered as an affective group who are able to influence the daily events by mobilizing individuals in the society. The form of freedom provided by these sites for activists, and the growing number of followers for their accounts is the crucial point in the mobilization. In addition to the facilities provided through the SNS platforms for constant activity and interactive communication, beside guidance and mobilization for the social movements that are seeking to bring about a change in a society (Schwarz, 2011).

The present case of study involves 21 Arab activists who are well known in their communities, as prominent active users of SNS in the Arab world and who are staying in other countries. The researcher conducted detailed interviews with them to find out the essence of their use of SNS; to know more in depth their mechanisms of action, and the challenges encountered; and also to highlight their different personal experiences in their use of SNS. In order to get real results by collecting more accurate information, and to achieve the goal of the research via deeper details, the researcher should have followed the qualitative research methodology as the most suitable method for this kind of research (Bouma & Atkinson, 1995).

3.2 Research Context

In this research study, the researcher targets the Arab world. Since the Arab region is an ongoing social and political conflict area, especially after the start of the Arab Spring in 2011 until today the activists of these conflict areas are chosen. During the

Arab Spring, the activists have played important roles in bringing about political changes into their societies at all levels. The activists who played a leading role in those regions worth to be understood better because despite the difficulty of security conditions and scarcity freedoms by the majority of regimes in the Arab countries; those activists continue their actions to mobilize the people.

Due to the so called security restrictions, political conditions and the constant conflicts in their own counties which puts the activists in a vulnerable conditions, some of the Arab activists that are interviewed in this study, have been living abroad. This is also due to tightening of security while they were practicing their activities and roles via SNS, which was reflected on the street in the form of flowing social movements. The activists were chosen based on their impact on followers and interaction with updated issues via SNS such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.

3.3 Population and Sample

This research is conducted from Northern Cyprus 2015. The researcher focused on the conflict cases in several Arab countries. Therefore, the activists who have a leading role in their national region are chosen as the sample of the research study. Their influence areas include hundreds of activists from different nationalities who have contributed to make an impact on followers or on some specific events itself. 21 prominent Arabic activists from 10 Arab countries were chosen to consist the population of this study. Some of them have been living abroad which are not their own countries. “Engaging the Future” conference which organized by ALSHARQ FORUM in Istanbul during 16-19 April 2015 provided chance for the researcher to meet number of activists who are efficient users of SNS. Therefore the researcher traveled to Istanbul to explain the idea of the research study for them and to ask if

they would accept to be interviewed for this study. It was unfortunate that there was a time limit to do the interviews face to face. However, they agreed to conduct the interview via SNS. The researcher also joined the rest of the interviewees through their accounts on SNS and coordinated with them to do the interview.

The data were collected with semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted with 21 activists from the following countries: Iraq, Syria, Morocco, Jordan, Yemen, Palestine, Lebanon, Qatar, Egypt, and Tunisia beside those who are staying in Malaysia, Turkey, and United States. The interviews were conducted only with 4 females and 17 males, depending on whom the researcher was able to access. Also, the proportion of males has been higher than females in many of online collective groups, and this may be due to the political and social conditions pertaining to the Arab region. Therefore a gender perspective has been excluded from the research study.

As well, the researcher continued following-up the accounts of activists and their interactions on SNS to measure the extent of their suitability for the objectives of the study. Furthermore, for the purpose of research, he managed to Login within some secret groups for social activities on Facebook, WhatsApp, in order to observe how activists work and interact among each other to prepare for campaigns, or discuss certain issues about events...etc. The researcher selected the activists of his sample according to the criteria, such as if there is a:

- Constant interaction between the activist and the followers.
- Large number of followers, which exceeded hundreds of thousands for some activists interviewed in this study. The lowest number of followers was more than nine thousand in this study.

- Following-up of the updated news and the current events by the activist on and on.
- Organized collective action taken place through the activist's interaction with campaigns of mobilization.
- People know the activist through SNS not via traditional media, which means that the reason for his\her fame is SNS, where their fame begins because of SNS.
- The account is not accompanied with blue tick mark on Facebook (The verifying sign), and it's not funded as well.

A non-random sample type which is called "Purposive Sample" is used in the study. Purposive sample allows the researcher to choose the sample population on the ground that they will meet the criteria defined for the purposes of the study through generating beneficial information about the research topic (Patton & Cochran, 2007, pp. 9,10). So, the researcher has followed-up this approach in here by choosing group of certain activists from different countries according to the criterias listed above.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

This study followed-up a basic technique in behavioral and social science to measure the variables, which are the semi structured interviews (Bouma & Atkinson, 1995).The data were collected through the interviews. The researcher used: Semi-structured interviews, which is formal and they are conducted based on a topic guide (Loose structure) which consists of open-ended questions covering the aspects of the study (Patton & Cochran, 2007, p. 11). The questions are ordered and related to each other, which allows the researcher to gain deep understanding about the subject (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Also, it allows for the interviewees to express their

opinions and experiences (Ibid). The guide can also keep the interview on track and avoid discussions of topics unrelated to the subject, so the researcher can get reliable, qualitative and comparable information (Ibid).

One of the reasons to use this kind of interview according to Bernard (1988) is that it's difficult to reach the interviewees and to interview them more than once; (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Therefore the semi-structured interview is commensurate with the research goals.

The researcher interviewed the activists individually, for the purpose of obtaining the personal experience for each activist separately. Thus, he analyzed the collected information after conducting all the interviews in order to compare each other and draw conclusions from them. Beside the statistical analysis application to the demographic data, a frame analysis is applied to the answers of the interviewees.

The interviews have been done in two ways, firstly via SNS through voice or video call with the activist and discussing him / her about the topics of study. The interviews were recorded by using sound-recorder on Laptop, as well as the researcher took a hand notes or electronic typing during every interview with activists. The second way to answer the interview's questions was by filling online form prepared by the researcher on *Google form* (google forms, 2015). The form included demographic data for activist (Age, Sex, Nationality, and Place of Residence) in addition to basic information about career and specialization of activists. Also, it contains the main interview questions, which were about 31 open questions that involved the content of study. Technically, the researcher allowed

activists to write/say what they want without limiting the numbers of words for each question.

Before the start of filling out the form, the researcher conducted direct talks with activists via SNS such as: *Facebook*, *Telegram*, *Skype*, and *WhatsApp*. The researcher aimed to argue the subject of the study with every activist, and to explain the idea of the research, as well as to clarify the questions for them in order to get the information required and to avoid misunderstanding. Duration of the interview or answering the form lasted between 40 minutes to approximately two hour with some activist.

7 activists filled the form by themselves, and some of them requested to answer the questions of form via their smartphones by using the chat window on Facebook because of the difficulty of communication and join internet for them. The rest 14 of activists were able to conduct live interview with them whether voice or video.

The researcher modified the questions and designed them in an online form, and then he tested the form by conducting a pilot interview with three activists from three different countries that are Turkey, Morocco, and Palestine. After taking the last notes, the researcher has modified the final version of the form which was valid to use for conducting the interviews.

Thus, the researcher collected the data of the present study either by the audio-recording of the interview or by obtaining the activists' answers through the form. Framing analysis has adopted as the method of analysis. The researcher divided the interview questions into main headings, and then he compared and analyzed the

personal experiences of the 21 activists for each topic by using framing analysis method. Thereafter, the researcher started in typing the analysis and results of interviews in this way. The interviews of the research study were conducted between April 2015 and 30 May 2015.

Chapter 4

ANALYSIS

The data collected through semi-structured thematic interviews analyzed in two ways: First the demographic data is applied to a quantitative analysis to find the characteristics of the activists as the sample of the research study. The data about the interviewees in the study (See Figure 2) contained the name of activist, Age, sex, Place of residency, Nationality, the number of followers, SNSs being used, Major of study, and the job, start day of using, and the purpose of use. For ethical reasons the name of the interviewees in my sample will be referred as three digit alphabetical letters such as AAA, BBB, etc. The next two pages included the demographic information table of the interviewees.

The table of demographic data shows that the mode of age of the activists in the sample of the research study was mostly between 20-30 years old (14 activists), five of them were between 30-40 years old, and two of them were more than 40 years old which indicates that a large proportion of activists are young adults. Seventeen of them were male and four activists were female. The activists in the sample were chosen from the countries that have conflicts or political turmoil, such as: Iraq, Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Yemen...etc., Seven of the activists are staying abroad in the countries such as USA, Turkey, Malaysia, Qatar, Jordan due to security reasons

No .	Name of activist	Age	Place of residency	Nationality	Number of followers	SNSs are using	Sex	Major of study	Job	The way to communicate	The propose of use SNS	Start using
1	AAA	20-30	Turkey-Istanbul	Iraqi	More than 90.000 on different pages	FB, Twitter, Instagram	Male	Law	Editor, writer, and in relief work	WhatsApp, Facebook	All	2008
2	BBB	20-30	Turkey-Istanbul	Palestinian	50.000 on FB & thousands on others	Each one, but FB is the best	Male	Arabic lang. & media	standup comedy presenter on SNS -	Facebook, Online sample	Political, Social, and other	2005
3	CCC	20-30	Yemen-Sanaa	Yemeni	More than 135.000 followers	FB, Twitter, Instagram, Google+...	Male	Media	Journalist	Facebook messenger	Political, Social, & other	2009
4	DDD	20-30	Malaysia-Kuala Lumpur	Yemeni	Almost 7000 followers	FB, Twitter	Male	Engineering	Student	FB, Online sample	Political	2009
5	EEE	30-40	Yemen-Albayda	Yemeni	53.000 followers	Twitter, FB	Male	General diploma	Officer in a cultural center	FB messenger	Political, Social	2009
6	FFF	20-30	Jordan-Amman	Jordanian	Almost 10.000	FB, Twitter & other	Male	Islamic law	Journalist	Facebook messenger	Political, Social	2008
7	GGG	20-30	Jordan-Amman	Jordanian	200.000 followers	FB, Twitter & Instagram	Male	Graphic Design	Designer	FB, Online sample	Social, & other	2011
8	HHH	20-30	Jordan-Amman	Jordanian, Palestinian	4,5 millions of followers on all SNSs	FB, Twitter, & others	Male	Arabic Lang.	Journalist	FB messenger	Political, Social,	2011
9	III	20-30	Jordan-Amman	Palestinian	42.000 followers on all SNSs	FB, Twitter, , Flickr, Instagram & other	Female	Spanish language	Photographer, Film Maker, & Arabic teacher	FB & Skype	Social	2010
10	JJJ	30-40	Palestine-Hebron	Palestinian	48.000 Flowers	FB, Twitter, & Ask	Female	Arabic Lang.	Writer	FB, Online sample	Political	2010

11	KKK	20-30	Palestine-Jerusalem	Palestinian	Almost 10.000	FB & Instagram	Female	Mathematics	Teacher	FB, WhatsApp	Political, Social	2007
12	LLL	20-30	Palestine-Jerusalem	Palestinian	20.000	FB & Instagram	Male	Media	Journalist	FB, WhatsApp	Political, Social	2011
13	MMM	20-30	Palestine-Hebron	Palestinian	3000 on the new account, but FB was closed his account (10.000 followers)	FB, Twitter, LinkedIn, & other	Male	Arabic Lang.	Journalist	FB, WhatsApp	Political, Social, & other	2009
14	NNN	30-40	Palestine-Ramallah	Palestinian-Ramallah	11.500 followers	FB, Twitter, Instagram & other	Male	Multimedia Graphic	Journalist	FB, WhatsApp	Political, Social & other	2009
15	OOO	20-30	Syria-Adlib	Syrian	The new Accounts has 30.000 followers + Thousands of views on each video	FB, YouTube & Twitter	Male	Translation	Trader ,Field Activist	Facebook chat	Political, News	2011
16	PPP	30-40	Lebanon-Sour	Lebanese	45.000 followers	FB, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube	Male	Trading & Management	The manager of <i>Thabit</i> organization	Telegram, WhatsApp	Political, Social	2010
17	QQQ	20-30	Morocco-Marrakesh	Morocco	More than 9.000 followers	FB, Twitter, YouTube, Google+ & other	Female	Law	Student	FB, Skype	Political, Social	2008
18	RRR	40-50	Tunisia	Tunisian	More than 22.000	FB, Twitter	Male	Cultural Anthropology	A researcher	FB, Skype	Political, Social	2009
19	SSS	40-50	Egypt-Cairo	Egyptian	55.000 on FB\ 47.000 on YouTube	FB, Twitter, YouTube	Male	Engineering	Engineering\ Journalist	FB chat	Political	2010
20	TTT	30-40	Egypt-Mansoura	Egyptian	21.000 followers	FB	Male	Sociology	A worker in Stock Exchange	FB messenger	Political	2011
21	UUU	20-30	Qatar- Doha	Egyptian	FB:1.200.000 Twitter:130.000 Instagram:17.000 YouTube:1.500.000	FB, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube	Male	Social service	Presenter of satirical program on YouTube	WhatsApp, International call	Political, Social	2008

Figure 2: The Demographic data of the interviewees

Most of the interviewees were primarily users of Facebook as the favored SNS platform, and secondly Twitter and Instagram. Some of them are active on YouTube, Twitter, and others try to use all of SNS to keep in touch with the followers. Each interviewee has at least 9.000 followers, and the majority of them have tens and hundreds thousands of followers. Some of them exceeded millions of followers especially those who were acting in some collective projects. The most recent use of SNS by the sample activists started in 2011. Most of activists in the sample have started using SNS before the Arab spring which means that they have had good experience on how to use SNS to influence people.

The majors of the sample were varied such as: law, engineering, philology, math, Graphic design, and management. 3 out of 21 of Activists studied media and journalism as their major, more than 13 of them work in media organizations as anchorman, journalist, standup showman, film maker, and etc. That means that the activists are able to practice their activities on SNS regardless of their major of study. 2 out of 21 use SNS for only social issues, but most of interviewees use SNS for political and other concerns.

The analysis applied to the open ended semi structured questions in the questionnaire used the frames defined in relation to the research questions of the study. The questions of the interview aim to find answers to the activists' relation with the traditional media outlets after the existence of SNS. Further, assessing the effectiveness of activists in mobilizing their followers, forming the mental image towards the events, and setting the agenda for the users will be questioned. Also, the interviews aim to find out the validity of SNS to practice collective action. As well, it seeks to examine the gate-keeping process that activists conduct towards their

followers, and to find out the extent of restrictions that activists face whether by security forces, social control, or by the SNS servers themselves, and how may these obstacles consider as a censorship process against the activists while their actions.

The recurrent themes are collected in 5 pre-defined frames which are; the SNS facing Traditional media, the factors of SNS mastery, SNS for collective work and conducting campaigns, Forming mental image and setting-agenda, and about the control mechanism: challenges facing activists. The below sections starting from 4.1 to 4.5 provides the recurrent themes under the five frames.

4.1 The SNS versus Traditional Media

In this frame of SNS versus Traditional media, recurrent statements of the interviewees are gathered in details in the below four categories that are; Receiving information; SNS is the first source, and a main source; the second title checking the validity of information. Further the third title discusses how the traditional media restricts its staff; and furthermore the remaining access point between activists and traditional media will be included in the fourth subtitle.

4.1.1 Receiving Information: SNS is the First Source, and a Main Source

SNS, due to the social networking platforms it provides, is considered the first source and a major source in receiving news for the activists. There were many ways to receive news for the activists in their daily life, but most of them considered SNS as the most prominent platform to know about events. It provided not only reading the news and believing it directly, but taking certain steps to ensure accuracy.

Other activists (and they are few) also recognized the continuity of their dependence on traditional media to receive data because of the disadvantages of the free

publication among users on SNS, which may affect the accuracy and validity of transferring news. So, they go to traditional media because of their belief that the traditional media usually make sure before publication data through implementing a series of steps to ensure the authenticity of the news.

Activists linked the point of receiving news in specialization and confidence. If the resource is specialized in the subject (either geographically or topically) such as: Jerusalem News page, or Sport pages, etc. And if there is also a confidence between the receiver and the resource, it is possible to accept receiving information from it. The interviewee KKK says: “sometimes, I watch an evening news bulletin on TV, but the first source I prefer to get information in accordance with the standards of specialization and confidence is always Facebook, and other SNS’.

The core and rapid spread of the news stories on SNS was mentioned as an important characteristic, BBB, said: “I no longer follow traditional media, but often I watch some of important TV contents through SNS”, thus many pages and accounts post the prominent materials of TV on Facebook or upload it on YouTube, or Facebook, etc. in the form of reports, clips or even publishing the entire original program”.

The presenter of an Egyptian YouTube program UUU considered Twitter as his main source of receiving information via using Hashtag to follow updated news. UUU believes that SNS was an outlet that could not control data on it or impose a given editorial policy as it happens within the traditional. Similarly, the Egyptian activist SSS from UN said that "The traditional way to know the news is over”.

Because of "the traditional media does not mention the full facts or try blackout" as described by the activist AAA, the TV channels, printed newspapers, in a way or another has disappeared from the life of activists as similarly stated by III.

Some of the interviewees follow up of traditional media only in certain cases. A Participant in the February 20 movement in Morocco and the activist on Facebook QQQ said: "I follow traditional media only in some of the big events or continuous coverage, while other everyday things I depend on SNS".

The political activist JJJ has had a different opinion. She still receives the information from international agencies and via reliable satellite channels, as she calls "credible traditional media". She considered that many of news via SNS are losing accuracy. She said: "I do not accept everything I read on SNS". Also, CCC considered the official news channels, especially TV as the main source of getting news. He explained: "despite the acquisition of SNS of most of our communication with the world, which makes it easier to elicit information from which, but dealing with TV is still strong even there is a decline of following-up printed media".

LLL said: "there are important daily events occur continuously but they're not covered by traditional media, and therefore my follow up of traditional media has become less". Thus, the activists rely on SNS as a main source to receive news and the majority of them considered SNS is there first source of getting information.

4.1.2 Checking the Validity of Information

Despite the fact that SNS has become the primary outlet of receiving information for most of the activists, this does not mean that there is a confidence on the accuracy and validity of the news of it. The activists are aware that SNS is a large space that allows anyone to add whatever the one wants to post without confirmation. Therefore

the activists apply some confirmation process through the creation of a particular collective work, as well as multiple individual steps.

“The ways to make sure of news are linked to the type of news” (FFF), he explained: “the event may be a global; therefore, the way to make sure of it is by reference to the global official agencies, the event may be local, so here, making sure is based on our relations with who have a link with the event itself”. So in local affairs activists communicate with related figures and trusted persons who are close to the event” (EEE).

The activists follow multiple methods to ensure the news story. UUU spoke about his style to ensure the reliability of news. He said: "by looking for the news, if it is accompanied with photo or video, it increases the credibility. If it is only a text, I make sure via searching the reliable news sites".

Many of the activists rely on direct returning to the source or contacting with it. AAA stated that he tries to communicate with the present figures directly in the event through their accounts on Facebook besides referring to the official pages, accompanied by blue tick, of the known Iraqi political figures to check many of events. OOO also stated that he checks official accounts of military factions on SNS before publishing.

Other activists become present in the place of the event to reflect their own observation. KKK said: “I use Facebook to transfer events when I'm in the area, such as clashes in Jerusalem between the Israeli Army and the Palestinians, and I cover it with details via my account on Facebook as a source of news”. LLL from

Palestine confirmed: "I am the source in many cases because of my presence at the event venue".

Making sure of information also occurs through communication with honest people who are located in the field. TTT, who suffers from a security prosecution because of his posts on Facebook, clarified that by stating: "i'm trying to find out information from the field by communicating with trustworthy person, and then I estimate the accuracy of data according to my vision of the events". As well, QQQ contacts with her friend activists who have direct observation of their own about event.

There are activists who are still using traditional media to confirm the data they get from other sources. MMM and DDD both stated that they "obtain the information via SNS, but then (they) check it with the traditional media to be sure of it".

As a collective work, there were experiments carried out by a group of activists to ensure the accuracy of news such as *Quds* experiment which is a news network on Facebook in Palestine. HHH, one of the founders of the project, explained that making sure of information was done through a limited number of reporters, personal relationships or other agencies. But with the development of the collective action in the project, there become specialized groups, such as: reporters group and editors group, etc.

HHH explained further about the process of making sure, pointing: "each News passes into the appropriate group. There are now nearly 350 members of volunteers in different groups who are delivering news stories, and then through the specialized editing rooms, we check the accuracy by contact with trust reporters or official

bodies”. This work pattern via SNS is “similar to the work in traditional media institutions but the difference is that this happens across the space of SNS without the presence of offices and headquarters in reality” HHH added.

Also, some activists have formed closed groups of their own which includes journalists, activists and specialists in a field. The members of these underground groups exist in different geographical areas within an area, so they use those underground groups to help each other to check the details of the news. NNN talked about the experiment he has done with a group of activists and journalists. They have established, via Facebook, a specialized closed group called (*Lamet Sahafa*) which means “press clique” comprising activists and journalists from different places in the country. Through this kind of groups, the members can make sure about the latest news and purify data of misinformation or rumors.

4.1.3 Traditional Media Restricts its Staff

There is a belief among some activists that the idea of traditional media originally comes from bodies that wanted to set up these media in order to convey their points of view about world events and deceive the public as well as show the facts that is not the truth. This is one factor that often makes the confidence almost non-existent between the traditional media and the activists.

SSS said: "because I am interested in political affairs, my relationship with the enterprises of traditional media was a hostile relation, so I was fired from work while presenting a radio program in Egypt because I broke their policy". Therefore, his position from the traditional media is negative. Thus, he said: "the traditional media outlets only deal with who wants to be deceived". So, GGG stated: “my dealing with traditional media was ended relatively, and SNS becomes the basis”, and RRR

confirmed: "before the advent of SNS I was forced to follow-up the traditional media due to lack of alternatives outlets".

HHH explained the idea of *Quds* project on SNS, which one of its causes related to the nature of traditional media interaction with events. The idea began among a group of activists after the March 15, 2011 protests in Palestine, which demanded to end the Palestinian division. HHH said that the Activists who participated in activities at that time noticed that the financed and partisan media tried to guide the activities towards their own side, which caused a deflection in the campaign targets. Thus, within a few days, a group of activists put forward the idea of creating a special page managed by themselves to cover the events through SNS without the agendas of traditional media. This idea aimed to "find an alternative media project to traditional media" as described by HHH.

The various social networking platforms give an opportunity even for who work within the traditional media enterprises to express themselves and practice their work and ideas without the requirements of traditional media institutions. So, there is the existence of dozens -who are originally working in traditional media outlets- within secret groups on SNS as volunteers. HHH interpreted that by saying: "their presence on SNS is different from traditional media. They contribute to formulate the editorial policy, which makes them feel freedom within the youth working groups more than the adherence to the editorial policy of traditional media". Also CCC added: "the traditional media is limited and it restricts its employees", while SNS is available to everyone even those who are outside the field of media work", as DDD explained.

4.1.4 Audience: The Remaining Access Point between Activist & Traditional Media

Some activists considered that there is a need for the traditional media, especially satellite channels, because of its possible contribution in publishing what comes out of their campaigns and activities. Thus, media coverage is important for activists to shed light on activity. The importance of keeping contact with traditional media is “that there is a segment of people are not interested in SNS so activists must get them to deliver their messages” as indicated by PPP. This as well was highlighted by LLL, saying: "I do not mind dealing with traditional media because it still has a particular audience". So, this qualifies activists to reach the majority of categories of masses, next to the ability to access their followers on SNS.

Therefore, the integration between traditional and social media in media coverages makes bigger impact. NNN believes that “the relationship between traditional and social must be a complementary relationship and not a contradictory”. So that we can reach the stage that we do not deny SNS or traditional media completely, especially that there is still audience for traditional media, and activists must pay attention for the category of people who still follow traditional media.

Nowadays, most of traditional media platforms created their own accounts through SNS in order to reach the growing massive audience. NNN mentioned an Arabic experiment as an example of traditional media outlet trying to achieve the integration through its presence via SNS. He talked about *Al Bayan UAE Newspaper* which exists on various social platforms such as: Facebook, YouTube and Instagram. *Al bayan* broadcasts the content in an attractive manner commensurate with the new media pattern continuously; as well it attempts to keep the real interaction. So, RRR

considered that “one of the reasons for letting go of follow-up the traditional media is the presence of many of these outlets on electronic space or within SNS in the form of original pages, channels, etc. belonging to the official foundation”.

Accordingly, there is still dereliction in seeking to reach integration between traditional media and SNS. Some Palestinian newspapers for example have no real presence or interaction on SNS as NNN said. He explained: “the Palestinian attempts to achieve the integration between the two still needs to overcome the classic style” and so on to a large extent of general newspapers and media outlets in the Arab world these days.

4.2 The Factors of SNS Mastery

This frame discusses the ways that activists used to find appropriate alternative platforms to the traditional media in order to carry on their activities, which ended with the emergence of SNS. Also, it will present a set of features via which activists demonstrated their experience in using SNS. Furthermore, it will discuss the tools and services that were factors for activists in the performance of their individual and collective actions. Finally, it talks about the contribution of SNS in gratifying and satisfying the needs of activists in comparison to traditional media outlets.

4.2.1 Early Efforts to Find Suitable Alternatives before SNS

In the beginning of the third millennium, activists began seeking alternatives to traditional media that would give them the opportunity to express their opinions and present their ideas and exercise their rights. The result was the presence through online forums and personal blogs, which allow person the freedom of expression trying to bypass the limitation of traditional media.

Forums and blogs were appropriate means for activists. The activists used before the strong appearance of SNS these days, which was confirmed by EEE about the beginning of his activity: "in 2003, I used forums then blogs which lasted to 2009". As well, RRR had a special blog in 2000 in which he used to explain his thoughts, immediately before the start of the spreading of internet usage. The time sequence in the evolution of activist using means of communication was clarified by JJJ: "I used the forums, then blogs, then SNS". In a sign of the activists investment for any way can provide them a space for participation and interaction.

Activists talked about their attempts searching for means of communication long time ago although there were difficulties. OOO said: "we were trying to find contact platforms before the recent events of Syria, and the forums were the only way for us". This was echoed by AAA as well.

Whilst growing appearance of SNS and its spread among people till became known in the Arab region, the activists started moving from blogs and forums to SNS in order to get to know this new space and how to use it. Thus, the activists established their own accounts through these platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter etc., and in a record time SNS became the suitable substitute for them to exercise their social and political roles via it, especially with the presence of entire online communities growing daily on these platforms.

4.2.2 The Prominent Features of SNS for Activists

The interviewees explained the most important features they examined from their experience of using SNS. CCC said that SNS is easy to use. He added: "the user does not need great effort or to move in more than one platform for getting details", OOO confirmed this as well. Also, some activists mentioned the continuous development

of services in SNS as a feature. CCC said: "what distinguish these sites is the ongoing updates in line with the wishes of the user". Furthermore, there is a strong competition among SNS servers in the development of new features and services as DDD said.

SNS provides the users the opportunity to "contact", which is a feature that UUU talked about: "you can make new friends; see a new world and different cultures and different styles of thought. You can observe/identify the offending party for you socially and politically". Also these sites have contributed to "create a space better than the reality which gave the youth an opportunity to express themselves in various fields/areas", as QQQ said. As well the activist JJJ stated that, "these platforms become another online community reflecting the real society in terms of pros and cons".

Activists talked about the instantaneous interaction, where it is possible to view the reactions of people and interact with contents directly through comments, retweets, share, etc. As described by FFF:" SNS enables the person who sends or receives the material to presents his\her own points of view". Thus, he considered SNS is the closest media outlets to the citizen. NNN added: "there is no longer only one sender and receiver/s but real interaction. It's available for all to take part of and criticize in order to influence the event".

BBB also talked about "the speed" as a SNS feature, while LLL considered it heads the list of the advantages of SNS, and exceeds the traditional media. He said: "it is difficult for the traditional media to cover an event and its details immediately and quickly, unlike what is happening via SNS". GGG attributed the importance of speed

to "the large mass base that uses SNS, which make it easier to access the details quickly".

On the other hand, III commented on the speed of completing tasks using SNS as follows: "these platforms save time to meet through online talks and the available services". Because of the large number of preoccupations in the daily life, long distances, and the difficulty of the physical meeting, many existing projects on the ground now was launched through SNS according to AAA.

Another feature for SNS that it is a platform for those who there are not a platform for. The owner of an active account is able to play a role in the events, in the words of HHH. He added: "SNS has enabled any online person having a communication device to be a platform of information to affect the public", and it may reach to the point of influencing the course of events itself. LLL stated that when he "read a story of arrestment on Facebook (he) goes down to the event venue with others....to gather in order to change or get the details of it".

SNS, as well, allows for the normal class of people to play a role to benefit community especially for the youth. KKK said: "SNS attracts young ages. FFF said that the young people are the most widely users of SNS. He added: "for a while, SNS was without censorship, which prompted the youth to put sensitive topics that led to reveal some facts and details that cannot be disclosed on traditional media outlets". That led RRR to describe SNS: "it is the media that there was no leader and public or master and follower".

4.2.3 Services Helping at Work

SNS offers a range of tools and services that enable users to meet their needs. When asking activists about the most important tools and services that grant them help in carrying out their activities, their emphasis were around a set of favorite tools which are the most prominent tools they use as follows:

Most of the activists spoke about the importance of Hashtag for work on SNS. MMM considered that tweeting on a particular Hashtag is a catalyst in our work. OOO clarified that the Hashtag is important for spreading. The Hashtag facilitates access to the posts about a particular topic (PPP), he added: "using Hashtag contributes to distribute the idea more quickly". Also, Hashtag facilitates the process of gathering information about the same event, especially the important and urgent ones (LLL). NNN also spoke about the importance of Hashtag in collective work: "hashtag is important in campaigns".

Activists also talked about the service of different kinds of groups on SNS, either in WhatsApp, Facebook, etc., and about its ability to provide a help to the activists in order to perform their work. AAA considered that "closed groups" and "secret groups" as the most important service provided by SNS. He said: "these groups are useful in communication between the team members". As well, FFF emphasized that: "it's important to manage the project and coordinate its steps". Some activists highlighted the importance of group chat. LLL said: "we are gathered as journalists and activists from different places to exchange data via group chat".

There were activists who mentioned other various services helping them to perform their tasks by using SNS, such as the news pages which contribute to facilitate access

to the details of events in different places, (AAA) said. Activists also considered the ease of use photos and videos by SNS as an important service that contributes in diversifying forms of messages and facilitating the activists' work. (BBB) another activist preferred the share tool as a key helps spreading the activists' posts through its access to the followers and their friends quickly and easily. (PPP, GGG).

Some of interviewees talked about using the service of creating an event in order to invite people to participate in a particular activity. It allows determining the time and place of starting a specific campaign or an activity (III, FFF, and NNN).

Older activists, it was observed that their use of many services is less, compared with the young activists. Generally, they were satisfied by using typing texts and sometimes photos and videos, thus, SSS said that: "I use the tools that contribute to just transfer my idea to followers". Also TTT added: "I rely on writing texts ". As well, RRR did not mention services except writing. He considered that it is enough to deliver his messages.

In general, most of activists believe that one must seek to use all available services in order to convey messages. So, FFF said: "these services must be used as a package to ensure the success of project, and each tool has a special use". This was echoed by NNN and others when they explained the need to use all available tools which benefits in achieving the goals and delivering the messages. To select particular service does not mean that the other tools are not important for them while working, as QQQ described.

4.2.4 Gratification by SNS

Beside the various use of it the activists highlighted the contribution of SNS to satisfy their needs in expressing themselves, their views, and exercising their individual and collective activities. They considered that SNS provides more services which traditional media does not offer, in terms of increasing their sense of their value. Thus, SNS is platforms were chosen by activists to achieve their goals, rights and their needs.

Comparing what was provided by traditional media in satisfying the needs of activists with what SNS provide, the difference is significant according to activists. This was expressed by SSS: "there is no comparison with the traditional media in satisfying needs". He added: " SNS allows anyone a space of freedom to interact with people, but in traditional media there is a restricting editorial policy". Also, "SNS offers a chance to comment on issues, analyze events and broadcast whatever activists want more than the traditional media", as TTT described.

Some activists emphasized the existence of a difference between SNS and traditional media in gratifying needs and uses because the bridge of communication between the traditional media and the youth is broken. QQQ added: "even if you see a youth talking on the traditional media, the reason is his success and performance on SNS, which makes traditional media invite him to participate".

As well, LLL considered that SNS is an only platform for activists, he said: "we reach out with people through it, and traditional media do not provide us this space". Also, it was deemed by GGG: "SNS is the only one that satisfies all my needs in writing and expressing what is inside me". He added: "it was the cause of my Self-

discovery, so I am grateful to it first and last". JJJ talked that SNS has had roles in highlighting ideas, beliefs, and attitudes by posting them and interact with followers.

One of the reasons of preferring SNS to traditional media is the flexibility and services offered via these platforms especially for the youth, which help them to carry out their political and social roles via it. As a consequence, UUU said: "SNS was a reason behind creating my character, which cannot be available to a young man via traditional media ". He added:" "it becomes a destination for youth, so we start neglecting the traditional media".

As well, in using SNS, the activist controls the time more than in traditional media, so AAA said: "in traditional media, it is possible to appear on the screen for a short time as a guest once every several months, but for SNS you are free to communicate and interact on a daily basis".

Otherwise, activists expressed the extent of SNS contribution in creating entity and presence for them in the community. RRR said: "SNS has promoted me and it leads the traditional media to host me with respect". Also CCC stated: "SNS is my way to present my thoughts".

In collective work, the contribution of SNS to meet needs of activists was clear. The coordinator of a campaign PPP explained SNS is more helpful to serve campaigns more than traditional media. He clarified: "through SNS we can reach a large number of people before traditional media makes a decision to cover the activity or to shed light on the subject". Also, HHH, one of the founders of a collective work project, explained their feelings about the difference between traditional media and SNS: "as

a group of collective work, we have implemented an idea of a big project only through SNS", He added, "It has satisfied our needs largely, away from the agendas of the traditional media".

On the other hand, there was among the activists an opposite view of the overall situation. He did not consider that SNS have contributed to satisfy his needs in participating and interacting, because of the constraints he is suffering from on account of his participation via these platforms. MMM explained, "I do not feel that SNS gratifies my needs and there is a set of restrictions on me". This statement reduces the ability to express his wants and rights via SNS.

4.3 SNS for Collective Work and Conducting Campaigns

This frame talks about the activists' use of SNS as collective work places. The first title discusses the validity of SNS to the practice of collective work, and its impact in facilitating and encouraging doing collective work. The second title talks about using SNS to conduct campaigns, and explaining the procedures followed by the activists to prepare and implement a campaign. Personal experiences carried out by activists were highlighted. The third title talks about the possibility of mobilizing via SNS and evidences of its efficacy from the perspective of activists. The fourth title addresses the impact that can be caused by activists on their followers, and the ways to measure this influence. Finally, how the work of activists using SNS associated with the reality, and the implications of that will be discussed in the fifth title.

4.3.1 Working within a Group

The activists unanimously agreed that SNS's platforms are serving the collective action. Activists use it to coordinate the work within collective working groups as a prelude to launch campaigns or activities. At that, SSS said, "SNS is suitable for

collective action", and TTT confirmed that. Thus, the majority of activists have had personal experiences within the collective work groups through SNS, as QQQ indicated: "I had a personal experience. I began with default friends on Facebook from different places. We created an opportunity for long relationship that led to collective action".

A group of activists expressed their preference of SNS. UUU said: "it is the best to exercise a collective work", as well LLL talked about the importance of SNS for the activists. He said: "there is no another platform. It is important to practice collective action. It also provided us with the tools to do so". So, the most collective actions and campaigns have become to start via SNS as DDD said.

Comparing the collective action before the development of means of communication and the advent of SNS at the current time, activists find that coordination in the past was more difficult, unlike today. FFF clarified: "we get rid of 50% of the effort of classic collective action, due to what SNS offers of facilities".

The activists mentioned a variety of reasons why SNS is a suitable medium for collective action. MMM said: "it's characterized by the quick mobilization", and "it facilitates correspondence about a particular issue among regions", described TTT. BBB also explained: "Through SNS we overcome the problems of distances and time", which is emphasized by III when she said: "It provides time for discussion and also ease to share ideas through". As well, EEE joined them: "activists can meet easily through SNS to distribute the roles and tasks". Others considered SNS as a motivational platform. "It can motivate large segments of people to contribute within the work" HHH said. As well, UUU attributed the reason of its suitability for

collective action due to the absence of strict control on SNS. Also, AAA said: "It's possible to invest the high number of youth on SNS to start collective works". All of these reasons cited by activists and inspired by their own experiences were signs indicating the validity of SNS in exercising collective work.

Most of the activists talked that the normal mode in relation to their posts is based on individual decisions, but sometimes some of their posts become based on a collective decision. At that, III explained: "my decision often is individually based, except if the topic is linked to a project within group work". TTT agreed with that: "I decide individually, but it may be a collective decision especially during campaigns". NNN clarified: "even if I take the decision individually, I try to serve the group, and mimic the general atmosphere". LLL also said: "in general I decide, but within collective group we agree on the general content and then I write in my own words". As well, BBB explained: "sometimes I post after consultation and discussion if the case needs that".

Consequently, a large proportion of activists' posts is according to their individual decision, and in other cases, they publish collectively in accordance with the criteria. FFF summarized: "we use the two modes, individually and collectively, according to the nature of action and situation".

From another angle, the nature of work for some activists through SNS is essentially collective, in the form of general pages, networks, YouTube programs, or groups to coordinate campaigns, etc. UUU said: "I present a YouTube program prepared by the entire working team, but I post individually via my accounts". HHH also explained the nature of their work: "our project is originally a collective platform, managed by

a group of activists and volunteers through SNS". As well, many of diverse and multi campaigns were conducted on the shoulders of activists within collective projects.

4.3.2 A Place to Conduct a Campaign

The majority of activists, who were interviewed, have experiences in participation and preparation for political, social campaigns and others. All were done via SNS. UUU expressed: "we conducted a lot of campaigns, and put forward many issues among people". SNS played an important role in completing them. It was major working platforms in arranging campaigns. Therefore, AAA clarified that SNS is suitable platforms to prepare for campaigns, and it has a role in achieving the goals of different campaigns. The nature of campaigns and its working conditions varies according to the target to be achieved. So, in that SSS clarified: "every campaign has a certain target. There is a campaign to bring down the prestige of someone, and also there are campaigns to raise awareness over an issue".

A group of activists spoke about their interaction in many campaigns that they were not the planners from the beginning, but they get involved when they found that the working groups and the content of the campaign is in line with their standards of acceptable collective action. EEE said: "I worked in a team, but I never was the head of the campaign". SSS attributed to the age factor. He said: "this is may be due to my advanced age especially that campaigns are usually carried out by the youth".

As well, Quds Network in Palestine as a collective work group, on many times, they do not begin launching the campaign, but they join the work teams who already started the campaign; to contribute in the success of the action. HHH talked: "if the campaign is suitable for our thoughts, we cover it and become part of the working

group". He stated: "our network played an essential role in covering a lot of public campaigns which led to create reflections on the reality".

Palestinian activists talked about a solidarity political campaign that launched in 2014. A large group of Palestinian prisoners began their hunger strike in protest against the violation committed by the administration of Israeli prisons. (Lobbying & Delegations, 2014) The slogan of the campaign was *#Water_And_Salt* as a symbolic indication on the issue of the campaign. The idea started by volunteers and activists within Quds Network groups, HHH explained.

This campaign was not confined only to the network, but there was coordination with other networks, institutions, well-known pages, active accounts, etc. in order to take part in the campaign. The campaign achieved significant interaction not expected by the activists who managed the campaign. It had great official and popular repercussions in solidarity over the issue of prisoners in all Palestinian cities, and also in number of Arab and foreign countries throughout the world. (NNN, HHH) There were other campaigns referred to by the activists in Iraq, Lebanon, Egypt, Morocco, etc. Additionally, the starting point and the place of managing of these campaigns were through SNS.

Regarding the discussion of the procedures followed by the activists to prepare for the campaigns through SNS, their experiences come close to a large extent and complementary to each other, which will be explained in the next points which summarize the procedures of activists for campaign:

I- The Idea: usually, one of the activists or volunteers presents an idea within a group of collective work which he is one of its members. At this stage, the usefulness of the idea is discussed. Does it deserve evolving it to a campaign or not? So, first of all, what it is important to "study the general situation, and what people need" as clarified by AAA.

II- The secret Group: Most of the activists talked about establishing a secret group for any campaign they want to start to prepare for. It includes little number of activists interested in the subject of the campaign. These members lead and organize the campaign. The group may be on Facebook, WhatsApp or on another SNS that suits activists. The members of this group do the following functions:

- Presenting the idea and crystallize it among members of the group.
- Determining the goal of the campaign: The members should agree on the main objectives of the campaign, as DDD said. Also JJJ explained: "we must realize the message required delivering through the campaign".
- Studying the target audience of the campaign and identifying the scope of the campaign: Is it local, regional, or global?
- Discussing the possible obstacles and reviewing previous campaigns to find out the reasons for their success and failure, as EEE explained.
- Producing a full concept and clarifications about the campaign, to be ready for presenting to others.
- Determining a suitable name and a meaningful code for the campaign.
- Determining the appropriate date for launching.

- Ordering the basic steps for implementation, and studying the best ways to start and causing interaction.
- Distributing the tasks and roles among the other working groups.

III- General Close group: Most campaigns have two work groups, the secret group as mentioned, and also a general closed group which contains larger number of activists, volunteers, journalists, human rights activists and supporters of the campaign idea. The number of members of this kind of groups could be up to hundreds of members as happened in the campaign of *#Water_And_Salt* in Palestine. This was indicated by HHH and NNN. The functions of this group are:

- Promotion and dissemination: A large number of participants prepare to participate in the campaign by promoting and publishing the materials and themes of the campaign.
- Choosing Work teams: Sometimes, one of the functions of this big group is nominating the committees of the campaign. Members of the group agree on a main committee for managing the campaign. Its members communicate with each other via a private group chat or secret Group. As well, this group can be divided into multiple teams for the campaign, such as Committee of Relations, Committee to gather information, media Committee, and so on, depending on the needs of the campaign. NNN explained how to choose members: "we impose on ourselves hard conditions to maintain the quality of the participants". Therefore, PPP considered their work within campaigns is similar to institutional framework. He said: "we are not institution but the way of our working closer to the institutional way".

- Provide feedback: the members discuss campaign details, or draw attention to a particular note, and offer ideas that contribute to develop the last conception of the campaign.
- Collecting data: The group members are of knowledge of the general basics for conducting the campaign every day, and its goals. Therefore, they collect information about the subject, news, updates, and follow-up any relevant event, as well as prepare data required to produce the Information materials for the campaign.
- Networking: Another function of this group is networking relations, in order communicate to different bodies to tell them about the campaign and try to attract them to participate in the activities. Each member in the group connects with the network of his/her relations, whether known activist, accounts, famous pages or figures, and also with active secret groups on SNS. As well, they can text the various media and human rights organizations to clarify the campaign to them and discuss ways of cooperation to ensure the success of work, including traditional media according to relations of the group members, besides following-up the reactions of people in order to take steps accordingly.
- It can also communicate with local, regional, and global working groups of activists to show the campaign to them and exchange experiences. NNN said: "There are groups on WhatsApp included activists from different countries; we join for events and campaigns, which is a quantum leap for activists to organize their collective work".

IV- Ongoing meetings: the activists continue to hold preparatory meetings in the establishment phase and after the distribution of tasks. That's useful to follow up the implementation of tasks and see where preparations have reached, and also to evaluate the work and discuss the latest developments. Part of these meetings may sometimes be on the ground, depending on the circumstances, but mostly it happens through SNS.

V- The Hashtag and the name of campaign: in the secret group, members study the campaign name, and identify a suitable Hashtag which serve its goals and it should be simple, clear, meaningful and easy to use. The Hashtag has to give an impression on the subject of campaign immediately after reading it by users, and address the feelings and reality. Also, it is sometimes translated to variety of languages depending on the target audience. About that, HHH said: "the hashtag of *#Water_and_salt* campaign was appropriate, easy, and clear, so it spread in many countries around the world in several languages". Therefore LLL warns: "sometimes the poor choice of the name may cause failure of the campaign".

Additionally, the name is important to be consensual in order to encourage the largest segments of people to use it. This is linked to the region circumstances and the nature of people. AAA in Iraq explained that because of the multiplicity of ethnic and religious factions, we must move away from the sensitive and sectarian names. He gave an example: "in a campaign about a problem related to the people of *Nineveh* city in Iraq, we chose a consensual name which was without political or sectarian overtone. The name was *#Nineveh_first*. This campaign met acceptance by large segments in the Iraqi society".

VI- Preparing logo design and information materials: Any project must set up a variety of media materials, such as page covers, Infographics about the topic, promotional and illustrative videos organized in an attractive way to send strong messages. Usually, working groups decide a slogan that represents the campaign; this is designed as a profile picture, cover pages, etc. in an appropriate way for every SNS. Sometimes, the teamwork provides designs in multiple languages depending on the campaign extent.

VII- Launching pages representing the campaign: activists usually create general pages on SNS in the name of the campaign, representing its activities. It's important to be managed in an attractive way, with the need of continuing updating these platforms, by adding photos, video, appropriate post, and interacting with the people besides taking into account the characteristics of each SNS in publishing.

VIII- Creating event: it is useful for the campaign because it determines the date of starting, day and hour, and it promotes for the unified Hashtag. Also, it contains a general definition about the campaign and gives indication of how people accept the idea of the campaign. Usually, activists start publishing the event before the agreed date of the campaign, which sometimes exceeds an entire month, in order to prepare people for campaign.

IX- Timing: Determining the hour of departure (zero moment) is of the most importance in campaigns. It contributes in publishing the Hashtag remarkably. Zero moment helps to achieve the trend especially on Twitter. (Help Center, 2014) Getting Hashtag trending is a goal for activists. The trending is a certificate from Twitter that the Hashtag reached a global audience, and massive numbers of people interact with it.

The mechanism of Trend drives activists to determine the zero hour to start tweeting. HHH explained that: "for example, we can reach up to 5,000 Tweets in one hour, so we get the Trend, but if we reach 5000 Tweets during 6 hours, we will not succeed in getting a trend for the hashtag".

The access to the Trend is a factor that drives traditional media to interest in the campaign to the point that some channels during *#Water_And_salt* interacted with the campaign by fixing the main Hashtag on the screen as a general brand name which shows the state of solidarity with the Palestinian prisoners in the period of hunger strike, as referred to by HHH.

In this way, most of activists who have had experience of working in a particular campaign narrated about the prominent steps, procedures and points of interest that they have focused upon in an attempt to achieve the goals of their collective movements. Of course, the steps and the details of applying a campaign differ in each work depending on the circumstances.

4.3.3 SNS as a Way for Mobilization

One of the activists' targets, individually or collectively, behind addressing their followers or launching campaigns is to bring about a kind of mobilization by users. This contributes in causing impacts and implications that lead to achieve the demands, solve problems, or expose what activists see a mistake...etc. So, do activists see that SNS is able to be used in mobilizing followers?

The activists did not disagree on what the role SNS can play in mobilizing people towards specific issues. They mentioned events occurred in recent years as clear evidence of the importance of these platforms in mobilization. SSS clarified: "any

observer for the Egyptian scene in 2011 realized that SNS was powerful in mobilize people". As well, TTT expressed that SNS nowadays is the best way to produce mobilization. He added: "the Egyptian revolution in 2011 is called The Facebook revolution". Also, UUU considered that without SNS, no one had heard about any of the events during the Arab Spring. Further, QQQ clarified that the mobility of "February 20, 2011" in Morocco during Arab Spring was through SNS, to the extent of "the possibility of guiding the visual media through SNS" as a result of mobilization", said CCC.

Others also mentioned some examples of their reality as evidence of SNS importance in mobilization. AAA said: "in Iraq, massive demonstrations came up against the Prime Minister *Nuri al-Maliki*. They called for demonstrations in February 15, 2011", He added: "the protests began through SNS, which it succeeded in creating reflections on the ground". Also, BBB explained about SNS role in making mobilization regarding many of issues in Palestine, such as mobilization during the third war on Gaza on the month of July 2014. This was confirmed by JJJ when she said: "there was mobilization for multiple issues, such as: supporting resistance, pro-striking prisoners, and so on".

HHH gave an example that mobilization via SNS may contribute to change the course of events: "in 2012, there was a formal announcement by the Palestinian authority concerning visiting *Shaul Mofaz* (A former Minister of Israeli Defense) to the Palestinian city of *Ramallah*". HHH added: "we launched a campaign only through SNS, without any instructions from the parties or others, thus the campaign invited for protests in the cities of *West Bank* and *Gaza* leading to thwart the visit and

force the official authorities to apologize". Therefore, DDD deemed that SNS is the prominent way to mobilize people these days.

LLL explained that the mobilization is one of the activist's goals. He said: "this is a responsibility. It is not enough to convey the news, but we must take a position on the news". As well, NNN emphasized the importance of mobilization to be conscious and not just meaningless steps: "it must not be clutter, and any mobilization must be directed and well thought out".

On the other hand, CCC believes that the first outlet of mobilizing in Yemen is still TV, but he said: "This does not mean that SNS is not effective". He clarified: "SNS impact is growing daily, and it becomes putting pressure on governments". FFF mentioned evidence about SNS importance in mobilizing, "in several countries, governments have enacted laws that prohibit practicing these actions for its seriousness, also prosecuted activists because of that".

4.3.4 The Impact of Activist on their Followers

The high number of followers, for each activist of those surveyed in the study sample qualifies them to practice the role as sender in order to make an impact on the followers in an attempt to increase the level of awareness in the political, social and other issues.

Consequently, the activists consider themselves influential at their followers on SNS. There is no activist denying his/her ability to make an impact on their followers by posing ideas and contents individually or within collective actions. EEE said: "I consider myself influential to some extent, especially in the issues that I discuss via my tweets". This is what was argued by most of the activists. They admitted their

ability to influence in varying proportions. NNN thinks it is a target for the activist so he said: "we seek to be influencers".

In this study, it is observed that there is existence of impact for the collective projects which have been supervised by groups of activists. HHH explained that: "we consider our collective project is influential, and it achieved unexpected successes".

There are several methods of measuring the influence of activists on their activities on SNS. A large number of activists measure the effect size through the number of likes, comments and shares of the post among followers (DDD), and the quantity of interaction with the current subject (MMM), in addition to the transmission of content that activist posts via various SNS (CCC). Also, HHH from *Quds project* talked about the impact standard in their project: "through the number of followers, it is the largest in Palestine, reaching 3.0 million of followers only on Facebook", he added that this success happens because a group of activists carried it out without support or real possibilities, which is an evidence of its impact.

Another activists measured the impact in different ways such as: through their audience messages, commenting on the posts and activities (GGG, III), besides the large number of talks about activist's posts (EEE), as well the impact can be measured through the rapid spread of the posts, and the extent of its participation (OOO), some of an activist's video views exceed hundreds of thousands and more (UUU).

The reflections on the ground show that the activists have influence on the public. LLL clarified: "when I invite people for solidarity over an issue, or for participating

in a protest, I meet people talking that they came based on the invitation on my account on Facebook". Also, KKK agreed with that. She said: "in daily life, people stop me on the street and discuss with me the topics I argued on my account, which makes me feel that I have an effect". As well, QQQ compared her impact before the existence of SNS and after. She said: "nowadays, I consider myself effective and I notice that in my surroundings".

Some activists believe that the true measurement of the impact is the implications of activities on the ground "rather than the number of followers or only online interaction" (AAA) which was confirmed by NNN, saying: "the effect is by real engaging with events and getting off to the street, not to remain trapped in cyberspace only".

On a different note, the measure of impact for other activists was linked with the reaction of traditional media to their activities. About that, RRR explained: "the invitations, that traditional media offers to me in order to participate and discuss my attitudes on issues in their programs, is an indicator of my impact". PPP agreed with that: "when we find that the traditional media talk about our campaigns and activities within its reports and news coverage, we feel that we have made an impact".

Also, the government restrictions that activists faced due to expressing their views or exercising their activities may be the impact measurement as FFF explained, so "the presence of security prosecution is a proof of our impact, during an investigation authorities told me clearly that my writings reach a large number of people and it may affect their thoughts". Therefore, "the security forces called me up and arrested me many times", he added.

4.3.5 The Reflections of Online Interaction to the Ground

The interaction of activists through SNS, whether individually or in collective action have reflections on the ground. The activists were able to use SNS as platforms reflecting the reality. SSS said: "a lot of campaigns and activities accompanied by reflection on reality", and the activists action is usually "associated with the field "as TTT expressed.

Activists considered that the mark of success in their collective or individual activity is linked to the extent of its reflection on the ground, as AAA said. This was emphasized by RRR: "It is imperative to make activating on the ground". AAA criticized the campaigns that are not accompanied by a field effect. He said: "any campaign remains trapped only on Facebook is a fake activity ".

The activists talked about experiences obtained with them which demonstrate the association of electronic activities with the reality. JJJ said: "we do campaigns aiming to support the field movements, and that happens when we were motivating people to participate in demonstrations during Gaza war in 2014". Also, HHH agreed that there is a link when he said: "we performed campaigns which have had real implications", and RRR confirmed that: "we conducted activities resulting in solving problems and official intervention".

Ditto, AAA said: "we conducted campaigns which prevented human rights abuses, highlighted the suffering of people and prompted authorities to take decisions sometimes". AAA also mentioned a personal experience he was involved in: "there was an exodus in Iraq from the city of *Anbar* (tens of thousands of Iraqis) to *Baghdad* in April 2015 because of ISIS controlling the city, but people were

prevented to enter to *Baghdad* as well by the Iraqi authorities. So we conducted a campaign via SNS led to opening the way and solving the problem under the public pressure".

On the other hand, some activists pointed to the existence of laziness for the actual participation with regard to the invitations that begin on SNS. They talked that the volume of solidarity on SNS is not accompanied by the same volume of solidarity on the ground. So, in that, RRR said: "for instance, if we create an event on Facebook to attend in a particular place, 2000 users post that they will attend, but on the ground only few people really attend". NNN added: "we always ask ourselves before we start if the work would be reflected on the ground, or not?" MMM insists that the success "starts with the support of people".

There were others who considered that the reflection on the ground is not always a requirement, and what defines the extent of reflection of action is the aim, so the activity may "require invitation people to go down to the street such as in a lot of political cases" as QQQ said. FFF clarified: "there are campaigns that aimed to mobilize on the ground, and also there are activities which aimed to send messages to draw the attention or raise awareness about a certain topic", he added: "the goal of activity determines how to work". So, based on the aim, the activists measure the extent of success in each action.

Eventually, the size of the interaction on the ground is linked with more than one factor; the nature of action and its goal. It is also linked with the security situation, which was explained in this frame based on the activists' experiences in exercising collective action.

4.4 SNS in Forming Mental Image and in Setting-Agenda

Within this frame, three subtitles will be argued. The first title discusses the question: Are the activists a source of news, or their roles limited to comment on the news? With explanations of motives that make the activist a source of news sometimes. The second title is about the activists contribution in shaping the mental image around events, and the method they follow to achieve that. Additionally, the third title highlights the activists' role in setting the agenda of followers, and the way to practice that individually and collectively via SNS, as well as knowing the harmony of this role with the traditional media outlets.

4.4.1 Activists as News Source

Activists' opinions were divided about seeing themselves as a source of news for events. Part of them did not consider themselves a direct source of news, and the other part considered themselves a source of news according to different standards. Nevertheless, they unanimously agreed that their roles are not mere transferring news, but to comment on the events, take a position on it, and also share it with followers.

The group of activists, who denied about themselves being a source of news, justified that their role is to analyze events and to clarify the attitude towards it. III said: "I am not a news platform". Activists explained that followers wait the comment on the events more than just transfer it. CCC confirmed: "they wait my attitude for news". As well, even in the case of talking about event, the activists move away from the formal news formulating of events. KKK clarified: "I write the posts in a way which is not like news agencies".

Furthermore, this team of activists clarified that they do not discuss all of the events on their accounts. UUU said: "I comment on the news that I see it's important". Thus, these activists prefer to analyze events because they believe that their role is not delivering or transferring the news.

On the other hand, the other team of the activists considered themselves as a source of news in many times, but this does not prevent them exercising their role to comment on the events and clarify their attitude towards it. TTT said: "I consider myself a source of news, and I explain my attitude about events for my followers". Also FFF stated: "I invest transferring the news to justify my attitude". These activists highlighted the reasons that make them sometimes a source of news:

Part of them clarified that many of the news channels become deal with their accounts as a source of news in many circumstances as FFF said. As well, EEE agreed with him. Also, the followers ask the activist to clarify his opinion about the events. LLL said: "I receive messages asking me to comment on the events". He added: "I explain my opinion when I see that's necessary". DDD said: "the followers see me as a source to make sure of the news", and the reason for that is the trust with the activist, so if the activist commented on the event, the followers believe it happened, especially, when there is ambiguity and lack of clarity in the course of events, according to OOO from his experience as an activist about the events in Syria.

As well, other activists ascribed why they are a source of news to the bad relation of followers with the traditional media and other sources. QQQ explained: "there is a segment of people boycotting the traditional media, so they know about the events

through my comments on it, which makes me feel that I am a source of news, as many of them told me”. In addition to the confidence of followers in activist more than other news sources, there are a large number of pages, accounts, and sources that include inaccurate information, thus the followers prefer to rely on the activists who they trust in receiving news, as BBB explained.

The people who are using SNS might get the information and details of an event which may not be open to the public. AAA said: "I live outside Iraq, but I know the detail of what is happening in the city of *Mosul* through my relations, so that drives me to transfer the course of events, and post details".

In the case of collective actions on SNS, there is usually a tendency to frame the news more than just transfer it. This depends on the nature of collective action and its objectives. HHH said: "we are a source of news; because of the nature of the project”, although that the project is about news, but he explained their role in providing outlets offering an opportunity of analysis and commentary on the news within the working groups and others.

4.4.2 Attempts to Form Mental Image about Events

Activists did not disagree about the role they play in shaping a mental image about the different issues. They agreed that they have a contribution in building mental impressions for the followers, which was indicated by HHH: “we can form a mental image for the followers". Activists' discussion about their experience in forming a mental picture of followers through their accounts in SNS resulted in a group of ways that assist in achieving this objective as follows:

- I- Suitable style:** Activists spoke about the importance of using an appropriate style to describe issues and address followers. It should be

attractive and non-rigid. Through using a new mold, it will remain stuck in the minds of followers. LLL clarified: "all people may know about the topic, but by using appropriate style, you have a bigger role in shaping mental image". Others also pointed to the use of irony as a way to clarify their attitude about events and deliver their messages to the followers. SSS said: "I contribute in forming a mental image through using irony to sensitize my followers", and so on.

- II- Drawing attention:** This could be through having the subject from new rare angles (III), dealing with aspects not presented before (JJJ), pushing them to think in a way which is not broadcast by traditional media to them, and drawing their attention to aspects that they may not overlook (CCC). Thus, through this, the activists break the prevailing image for many of the issues, and contribute in forming new mental image, as indicated by RRR.
- III- Repetition and frequency:** Put forward the idea through more than one post by more than one style is adequate to form a mental image for the followers (DDD). As well, AAA believes that the convictions consist cumulatively. He explained: "if I talk about a specific topic, and someone else talks about it, then a third, and fourth, etc., this case creates a mental image about this topic for the followers". AAA explained: "if activists agreed on a common direction on a particular topic within working groups that qualifies them to contribute forming a mental image".
- IV- Addressing what's important for followers:** Activists indicated that their posts on topics are interested for followers, which can increase the probability of their role in forming a mental image about those topics. So,

activists can focus on addressing the human side of each event (III). As well, contacting with the people's suffering or talking about their problems (MMM). Also, through talking about things in common between the activist and followers, especially that it comes to their interests circle (EEE).

- V- The boldness:** By posting sensitive issues that the ordinary citizen dose not dare to put forward. MMM said: “people usually wait the person who directs them regarding the issues that they do not dare to argue”. Therefore, the role of activist is to help people to get rid of the stereotypical fears about discussing sensitive issues, by posting it courageously. This contributes to make activists have a role in forming a mental image, as JJJ clarified.
- VI- Mentioning facts:** Inference with axioms (JJJ) and evoke information, and facts about a particular subject contribute to form a mental image for followers (TTT). By mentioning evidences, the activists can invest the event to justify their convictions and visions.
- VII- Using images:** Through the activist's dependence on reliable images on a particular topic. Using correct photos help to create awareness, and also to deny the rumors and misinformation as well as increase the confidence in the activist and increase his possibility to have a role in the formation of mental image.
- VIII- Interacting with followers:** Activists' interacting with their followers, answering them within posts, and not imposing one opinion all help in enabling activist to contribute in forming the mental image for them. SSS added: "this is achieved when I discuss my followers and make them feel

that there is confidence between us, and also when we exchange views together".

- IX- Objective content:** by covering events objectively and honestly. This raises the level of trust (BBB).
- X- Correct the erroneous image:** by clarifying the true image about events and concepts (CCC), and by highlighting the erroneous points that the most of followers may not notice on SNS (RRR).

Thus, the previous ways clarified how the activists attempt to play a role in forming a mental image towards different events in the mind of their followers. That gives every activist the importance, and makes him or her not just an ordinary user of SNS.

4.4.3 Setting-Agenda for the Followers

Generally, one of the functions of the media is to arrange the public agenda through a variety of ways and methods which they depend on as senders. One of the axioms that media outlet does not reflect reality, but it shapes it according to what it wants, by focusing on a number of issues but not others, which lead people to consider these issues as more important than others.

As a result that the activists act as a sender on SNS, as well as they have a large number of followers, they can exercise, to some extent, the function of agenda-setting through their accounts on SNS especially within the collective actions to form the reality about topics they believe they're the most important issues.

Activists talked about their selection for specific topics they consider that they must arrive to the followers. UUU gave a sign on that: "sometimes important events happen, but I ignore it to talk about another subject according to my conviction".

That gives an indication to the activist's role in selecting topics that they consider they're the most important to address the followers although there are many other events happen daily. This is a kind of practicing the gate-keeping process by activists towards their followers as well, which is in harmony with the gate-keeping theory

The main standard which the activists follow in selecting their topics and address followers is (the most important then the important). LLL said:” I try to arrange the priorities of my followers, based on this concept” which is according to the activist's belief. SSS stated: "setting the agenda is based on my assessment for the events". He gave an example about the Egypt situation after revolution: "I do not focus on sports stars, art, because I think that Egypt at this stage has many agendas more important".

Ditto, the activists explained that the setting-agenda of their followers happens by multiple ways. They vary from activist to another, or according to the nature of the work: individually or collectively. Overall, the most important ways, which activists follow to set the agenda, are:

- I- Concentration:** The activists focus on a subject they deem necessary (OOO) by repeating talk around it more than once and from more than one angle (CCC). The intensifying talk about a particular case gives an impression among the followers that it's the most important, thus it becomes a priority for them (BBB).
- II- Diversification:** Activists depends to diversify posts on a particular issue, by using suitable writing ways, relevant images and video (BBB). Using a variety of materials confirms that what activists say about the selected topic is right, thus a conviction generates in the mind of followers that this issue is more important than others (CCC).

III- Specialization: The activists mastering in a particular subject and specializing in it also intensify publication around it. In addition, knowing its details, and the related updates make the subject an agenda for followers. MMM said: "specialization in a particular subject makes the activists a reference, so people go back to their accounts to find out what is going on about that specific topic". As well, LLL stated: "a group of activists, who live in Jerusalem, and I are specialized in Al-Aqsa Mosque news, and we address followers about it. This causes to make this issue a priority for them somehow"(LLL).

From another side, a group of activists believe that collective action qualifies activists more to set the agenda of followers. FFF stated: "in the close groups, discussions and internal coordination happen about some important files, so the members within the group agree on certain agendas and a way to put it forward through their accounts". NNN also talked about the importance of collective work to play this role: "if there is a lobby of activists who focus on a particular issue, they can make it a priority to followers".

The problem of exercising activity individually is that the activist could not reach the level of setting-agenda in an integrated manner yet. The experience of activists as individual regarding setting-agenda is recent and it needs time to mature as some considered. AAA said: "the experience of activists is still new, but there are harbingers of the possibility to practice it". So, that led EEE to describe his experience in setting the agenda via SNS: "not to the point of coordinated action, but I may contribute through groups specialized in the media guidance". The pages and

projects which managed by working groups are able to give a better particular order for events, so it contributes to set the agenda of followers as described by AAA.

Hence, the growing interest of followers in the issues that activists pay attention to more than other is a sign of the ability of activists to play a role in transfer their agenda that they believe it is the most important to become the agenda of their followers, which is in line with the agenda-setting theory.

4.5 The Control Mechanism: The Challenges that the Activists are facing

This frame explains the censorship on SNS by taking about the forms of censorship: governmental censors, social control and restrictions practiced against activists by the administrations of SNS. Also, this frame discusses the reasons behind closing pages or accounts and removing posts, in addition to explain the justifications of the bodies that impose the constraint, and how the forms of censorship may generate self-censorship for activists. As well, it discusses the impact of these challenges on the roles of activists and how to face these difficulties. All will be included in this frame.

4.5.1 Censorship

"Unfortunately, there is censorship" HHH talked when he is asked about the existence of control. The largest proportion of activists talked about the real existence of control on them while performing their works on SNS.

The geographic location had a significant role in determining the activists' attitude about censorship. The Arab activists who live in their countries and under the control of their governments have often suffered from multiple faces of censorship, which

prompted the vast majority of them talk about the cases of censoring on them, its forms, and their experience in the fight. MMM stated that, they have been “facing fierce censorship”.

Also because of the geographic location and the circumstances of the place which activists lived in, there was a group of activists staying abroad spoke about denying the censorship on them during practicing their works generally. These activists linked the issue with the place of residence. SSS, resident in the USA, was among them when he explained: “here I feel a great degree of freedom, and no one restricts me, unlike during staying in Egypt”. DDD from Malaysia confirmed that because he is “out of Yemen” he does “not feel the existence of censorship”.

Nevertheless, all the activists, talked about the difficulty of work as activists within the boundaries of their countries. They cited examples about activists who have been subjected to problems because of their practices. Therefore some of the activists started to live abroad to have freedom of expression in their viewpoints.

Few number of activists mentioned that they are not afraid of censorship even if the consequences are severe. Some others such as GGG “do not write in politics”, and therefore “do not think that there is control over (their) satirical posts”. PPP explained that “because of the nature of the material that we post” there is no serious censorship on them.

In total, most of the activists on SNS talked about the existence of censorship exerted on them, in an attempt to reduce their roles in influencing followers, especially the activists who are under the control of their governments. So, censorship procedures

are practiced on activists in many ways directly and indirectly, trying to determine what they post to their followers.

4.5.2 Forms of Censorship the Activists are Facing

There are several forms of censorship on activists who use SNS. So, when you have an opposite opinion to the authorities or the prevailing traditions, the harassments begin, particularly, with the increase in the number of followers and who interact with the posts. Thus, this is considered as an indicator that activists are influential (SSS).

This title discusses the most prominent harassments that activists talked about; including those imposed by the authorities, and other on a range of social restrictions that may put another pressure on activists in the exercise of their roles in several ways. CCC explained: "in the Arab countries and in the light of the current circumstances, the presence of governments does not grasp the right of expression. We are exposed to limitations that have different shapes and types, including: social, governmental, and others".

Activists, especially political, talked about the forms of censorship and restrictions they experienced by governments in their whereabouts, which increases with increasing influence. HHH expressed about that: "with every achievement, the harassments increase by the authorities". FFF summarized the control by governments: "we are exposed to threat, intimidation, and security breakthroughs of the accounts". He added: "we are facing governmental pressure, arrests, and prosecuting". CCC clarified: "in our Arab world, a single post can lead you to the prison".

Among the most prominent constraints that activists suffered are summons and arrests. QQQ explained: "after 2011, my friends in February 20 Movement in Morocco have been exposed to arrest and trials". She gave an example: "the charges were because they produced a video on SNS containing the king's image. So, some of them were imprisoned for one year, such the activist *Mouad Belghouat*". There are also activists arrested because their involvement in preparing or even just interacting with a campaign as explained by HHH.

Also, JJJ talked about the limitations she faced: "I was exposed to harassments and security threats. Security devices also arrested some of my family members as a means of pressure". MMM mentioned that, he had been summoned by the security forces because of a post that he had put on Facebook. BBB explained: "I was summoned several times for investigation by the Palestinian Intelligence because of my posts on SNS, to the degree that they prevent me from traveling". In Jerusalem, LLL mentioned a personal experience before more than a month of the time of the interview. He said that at the entrance of *al-Aqsa mosque*, an Israeli officer stopped him then told him that his posts on Facebook are distinctive. LLL added: "he wanted to tell me that they have censored me, then he threatened to arrest me if I continue my activities". That demonstrates the degree of control exercised by authorities against activists.

The activists in Palestine face the official censorship by their government and also by the Israeli government. KKK spoke about 9 activists from Jerusalem. They have been arrested on charges of inciting on Facebook. LLL explained about the story: "the Israeli army arrested 11 young men from Jerusalem. The charge was inciting on Facebook. Most of them were sentenced to a year+ 1 day in prison according to the

Israeli law, without investigation and trials. A week before the time of the interview, one of them, called *Omar Shalabi*, was sentenced to 9 months in prison on the same charge".

Some activists alluded at the possibility of exposing to arrest or trials on charges of inciting because post, although they try to be aware to avoid the violation of law, and select their words carefully. LLL explained: "the security devices quotes a part of the words within a post in a way condemns you by the charges of incitement. Then they presented you to the courts according that quotation". That happened with *Omar Shalabi* (based on an expectation). LLL clarified: "they told him he has massive followers on Facebook, so if he talks about political matter, he could lead to mobilize people and this is incitement. Thus, because of this (expectation), he was sentenced".

Some of the activists are wanted to the government because of what they write on SNS. There are issuances of arrest warrants against them. A part of the wanted are in their own country, TTT in Egypt said: "the state security broke into my home twice, and I'm Hiding now, because there is an order to arrest me". The other part is staying outside the control of their governments regions, such as UUU who lives in Qatar. He said: "in Egypt there is a security problem against us. Once we return, we will be exposed to trial and arrest".

Ditto, activists also talked that sometimes the censorship may be in indirect ways through threatening letters accusing them of making problems. These messages are usually from people who haven't got used to the existence of the opposed opinion according to QQQ. It's one of the ways of government in exercising control on the activists, EEE agreed with her: "there is a lack of acceptance of the voice of

opposition". The suffering increases due to the lack of laws guaranteeing the freedom of publication on SNS, as activists described.

The authorities exercise the censorship on the work of activists through the rush to enact laws relating to the control on the internet and SNS, especially after a period of the beginning of the Arab Spring. The Iraqi government has become prosecuting the opinion makers in accordance with these laws, claiming the defamation or incitement (AAA) .As well, the Minister of Communication in Morocco tried to pass “the digital code” which limits the freedom of using internet, but activists prevented it to pass. Nevertheless, the authorities have taken other laws through the criminal law which increases the degree of control on activists. If someone criticized the king, he will be exposed to legal punishment (QQQ).

Also, one of the governmental ways that are exercises to censor activists is to find a way to be present within SNS space. HHH explained: "sometimes the government asks a volunteer to participate with a campaign to penetrate the group of collective action through that person". Some activists believe that the government is no longer able to control the phenomenon of SNS. RRR described: "SNS is such as a foreign embassy and the government cannot shut it down". He added: “therefore, the government creates many of funded pages or accounts in order to distort, and make propaganda, also to engage in this space to fight the agendas of activists, in addition to follow-up their works”.

Likewise, one of the control methods by the governments is intimidating the family in order to put pressure on activists to stop their activity. FFF explained: "the security agencies scare relatives from the consequences of continuing our activities", and that

is confirmed by MMM: "sometimes the security forces press on my family to prevent me from talking about certain topics". This situation generates other limitations for activist caused by authorities through using the pressure on their families.

On the other hand, the activists spoke about the social control that they observe during work on SNS. The degree of social control is different depending on the nature of society and its composition "because of the sectarian tensions, and the sensitivity of religious groups" as stated by AAA from Iraq. MMM said that "people are afraid of breaking something they have been used to do, and therefore they may criticize us when we post about sensitive topics". So the criticisms of some traditions in society expose you to restrictions as CCC explained.

RRR mentioned an example about the social restrictions. He said: "regarding the criticism of the religious matter, I say only 20% of my thoughts because of the nature of society". Putting forward a sensitive topic for the community makes you feel of a type of non-acceptance, which is a limitation as KKK considered. So activists try to create ways to avoid the collision with the community. Therefore, III said: "I am cautious for using my words".

These restrictions imposed by authorities or the community on activists can be considered as kind of censorship that contribute to reduce the activists roles and filter the issues that they want to interact with. As well, these constraints prevent the activists from putting forward what they want by selecting legal and illegal determinants and warnings directly and indirectly. Also, the restrictions are not confined only to the side of government or society; there are obstacles that activist

suffer from because of conditions and terms of SNS itself, which is discussed under the next title.

4.5.3 Deficiency of SNS Laws and Regulations

Along with social and political restrictions, the activists also face a censorship process through SNS itself. Activists spoke about their suffering from the problem of reports on SNS. Any group of users can report against pages, accounts or specific posts, which leads to close or remove it. SSS clarified this problem: “the closure happens because of the rejection of the other opinion”. Especially, when some people note that the content is not in line with their beliefs, so they report the content or the account to remove it.

Many activists have been subjected to closures like this. They deemed that is a type of exercising restrictions. MMM said, "I was at the top of my activity on SNS, but my account has been shut down via Facebook on the pretext of violating the policy of use". He added:” thus, I lost nearly 9 thousands of followers, which reduces the interaction on the new account". HHH said about YouTube: "YouTube deleted more than one video from our channel, and then the administration closed the channel after it had millions of views and followers". Also EEE said that his account on Twitter was crashed because of reports by opponents.

OOO explained about a problem that happened with him: "I had a page about my city in Syria. It had 13 admins, but the continual reports were able to close it with the 13 accounts of admins”. OOO confirmed that the closures were without justification, and he tried to communicate with the administration, but in the result some of admins get their accounts again. The restoration of other admins' accounts needed years and the rest could not restore their accounts. BBB also faced this problem. He said: "my

account was closed for the first time in 2006 and I did not know the reasons. Just they say: violation of the laws".

The reason behind this suffering is due to that the dealing system with reports about a specific account is an automatic system. It's a programmatic procedure. This system may eliminate entirely the role of an activist in his community because of a group of reports without making sure about the validity of what is attributed to him. AAA explained: "the process is mechanical more than dealing with contents; it's linked to the number of reports". As well, RRR described the reports system as unfair; it can be exploited by opponents or even by regimes. He added: "if the administration of SNS was a human and entered into our pages, so they will not find all the charges that guide to us, but we are dealing with software, unfortunately".

The activist's attempt to restore his/her account or justifying for the management is not easy too. The management of SNS may not provide an opportunity for discussion. OOO said: "Facebook does not verify, and does not give an opportunity to defend ourselves. Also it responds slowly". A message from the administration reaches to the activist, stating: "your page or post was blocked due to reporting about you", without a warning or offering a form that can be filled to clarify the situation as AAA said.

NNN explained the work mechanism of the reporters on a specific account: "when we register to SNS we agree to the terms of use directly". He added: "there are hostile electronic armies compare between the terms of use with our posts. So in the case of violation the terms, they report us", which exposes the activists to shut down their accounts.

On the other hand, a number of activists pointed out that the closure of the pages and deletion of posts is not only linked to reports campaign by opposed users, but they talked about what they called "collusion" and coordination between the official authorities and the management of SNS. Some activists believe that the enterprises of SNS are subjected to pressure by governments, intimidation and entice, especially that its goal is the profit. So, SNS is able to close accounts or pages based on a formal request in exchange of continuing publication and avoiding blocking inside the state as AAA explained. He added: "I think there are lobbies that put pressure on the administrations of SNS".

Frequently, the closure occurs because of reporting by users, but "pages or accounts may be closed when the official authorities feel that the degree of influence is high, so they close it, fearing the consequences" according to SSS. Also, FFF explained that: "we faced collusion between the state and SNS. The closure of the accounts and pages conducts at the request of the security forces", then he gave an example that happened with them: "the page of *Islamic Youth Movement* in Jordan had a great interaction, but suddenly it was closed. And all pages that criticize the political approach in the country are closed constantly in the same way". FFF emphasized that it has been repeated remarkably even though the content is part of the freedom of expression, and not incitement.

Therefore, QQQ criticized SNS because she considered that the registration for any SNS is a contract that protects the confidentiality of information between her and the administration of that social site. But she indicated to the possibility that SNS compromises to the government under pressures to move my private data. QQQ

asked: "what does it mean to have a password on SNS if the government will get the information from it?"

Some activists also talked about the existence of specialized teams that follow the governments to monitor the activists' pages. OOO clarified: "as soon as I publish a video or an image, the reports start on it to remove it". He added: "it is not reasonable to remove a post has thousands of likes and hundreds of comments because of reports without making sure". In an effort to register his name officially in Facebook to protect the accounts, OOO said: "I tried to communicate with Facebook in order to get the *blue check* and make my account verified, but they rejected". OOO explained that the head of Syrian section in Facebook is a member of the government institution, which allows him to easy control deletion and closures, and he asked: "why do not the pro-regime pages and the activists accounts that support the regime close?"

In the Palestinian case, more than an activist spoke about the nature of the materials that were deleted. They were related to the Palestinian resistance. The deletion is not because of reports, but because of "violation the terms of use" as described by SNS administrations. For example, when the activist posts an image of a Palestinian resistant during Gaza War, his post will be deleted or he may lose his account as what was happened with TTT. Also, JJJ spoke about removing a number of her posts about the resistance during Gaza War in 2014. As well, NNN mentioned that a strong account on Instagram called *Alyatema* was closed for publishing a picture of the Palestinian resistance.

HHH also talked about hundreds of posts that have been deleted, in addition to deletion sub-pages of their project on Facebook. He explained that most of what has been deleted was related with the course of Gaza War, including the acts of resistance. HHH confirmed that the materials published by the Israeli army are not deleted. He added: "the managements of SNS don't treat both sides equally". Then he mentioned an example about deleting publications that talked about abuses against women and children by Israelis, under the pretext of incitement to hatred. This case is bound to increase the convictions of activists that there is double dealing, or "collusion" as FFF described.

With regard to SNS laws, the forms of restrictions caused by SNS have created a lack of trust by the activists to the conditions and laws of SNS. They described it as loose and not accurate. It is possible to direct a punishment to the activist by the administration based on loose law without clarifying or giving an opportunity for debate, while there is no deal with the cases but the deal with algorithms, which may prevent the activists from the right to express their attitudes and activities.

The activists expressed their attitudes towards the terms of SNS in many forms. TTT said that it's possible to interpret the content in more than one way. Shutting down or deletion of something is based on loose arguments. Also, AAA described the law: "it's a case of the flightiness". He added: "it's loose in the deletion, closure and reports, and it's often incorrect". As well, the conditions set by SNS are not subject to the standards, but to the views of users, their moods, and it's associated with a number of reports against the page". FFF added: "Facebook takes an electronic decision, so if 10% of the followers of a page report it as offensive, it will be sufficient to close the page".

Some activists said that the problem is not in the SNS laws but in the law of the State where SNS exists. HHH explained by giving an example of Facebook. The company exists in America, therefore it operates within the US law, and because the US law considers the Palestinian resistance is terrorist, so any post related to it will be deleted. He said: "SNS is governed by laws of the states in which it operates".

From another angle, SSS from America considered the lack of laws regulating the work is the reason for the success of SNS. He said: "it provides a power for popular forces and general users to correct the mistakes by themselves". But activists considered it is difficult to adjust. In the Arabic case, the activists spoke about the existence of dissidents, or even specialized official bodies that could exploit this gap in order to disperse the activists and weaken their impact and roles. That indicates to exercise a censorship, which creates a situation of constraint that activists suffered from, beside the state and social control.

4.5.4 The Justifications on Restrictions

Each form of censorship has its own rationalizations. Activists spoke about the justifications by those who impose restrictions on their work. The most repeated justifications were those issued by authorities, as well as the justifications by the managements of SNS.

For security agencies and governments, they accuse the activists with loose charges that do not respect freedoms and human rights (CCC) and the government linked the justifications with legal issues such as: the attack on the authorities, awakening sectarian feuds, threatening the civil peace and national security. Also they prosecute activists according to those charges (BBB) and also they charge activists with insulting the army and the police (TTT) as well the charge of promotion of the

affliction. Moreover, they accuse activists of destabilizing security and stability (JJJ). They claim that their provocative materials violate the law (KKK). There are other justifications that hold thousand interpretations which each opponent are exposed to by the government (UUU).

SSS explained that any dictator wants to impose his will. He considers that you cannot appreciate the interest of the country, therefore he charges you under the umbrella of this justification. He said: "these are the justifications of dictatorial regimes that we have seen in movies for many of years, which is perseverance of these governments".

Despite the fact that SNS may delete many publications or close accounts without justification according to what a group of activists said, but also when SNS close an account or delete a post, it may provide a set of justifications which activists considered they are loose as well. HHH described that: "these justifications are just kind of slogans". SNS sends a message that the post violated the laws of the site, or contains materials that incite violence. LLL added: "I wrote a post during the last Gaza War about the Palestinian resistance. The administration justified the deletion by saying that it incited violence".

MMM's account was closed. He got a "pretext stating that the content has sectarian speech and abuse". Also OOO talked about a case of reporting his profile picture: "the justification was that my personal image contains nudity" and he confirmed that he always tries to communicate with the SNS about many publications that are deleted but usually they respond: "the account is not qualified to be verified". As well, they consider that the account is sometimes false as III mentioned.

The researcher observed that the nature of the justifications offered by SNS is similar to the nature of the justifications offered by governmental agencies. Based on these justifications, there can be involved more than one case, charge, and interpretation. The justifications are difficult to pinpoint, which increases the likelihood of pressures of activists to restrict them under the umbrella of the law in many cases.

4.5.5 Self-Censorship

The machine of control and difficulties to work faced by the activists were effective to generate self-censorship for most of the activists. The activists feel that they are engaged in a kind of self-censorship as a result of relentless government restrictions, or social constraints, in addition to the limitations caused by SNS, which have also been clarified.

Activists spoke about the impact of governmental restrictions in the creation of self-censorship on them. EEE said that any person tries to avoid facing any problem or being in prison. Also, there is a pressure from the government on the families of the activists in order to discourage the activist from continuing work as described by FFF, which prompts the activist to engage self-censorship. LLL, as well, spoke about the need of self-terms for the activist that he/she adhered to. He said: "Sometimes I'm confused to talk about a topic or keep silent, because the posting could result in prison or closure of my account", which is a kind of self-censorship on activists.

Some activists did not talk about exercising self-censorship due to political reason; because they live abroad, so AAA said: "I do not practice self-censorship because of government. I am out of Iraq". Unlike activists inside Iraq, they are exposed to threats.

Other activists spoke about exercising self-censorship because of the conditions of society. AAA explained: "in Iraq, I have friends from various sects. I do not want to lose friends because of a tweet". In addition, RRR considers that there are a lot of issues he wishes to argue with on his page but he practices self-censorship due to the nature of the community. Sometimes self-censorship happens because of the family; QQQ explained that she has become to think before publishing or discussing sensitive issues. She said: "there is a family pressure. They fear because of the security situation".

Also, DDD talked about the need to avoid collision with the society because he does not want to offend the values of the community. This was echoed by EEE when he spoke about the need to avoid being out casted in society. They emphasize that these conditions generate self-censorship about what they post on SNS.

On the other hand, few activists denied exercising self-censorship of the content they put forward. JJJ said that she posts what she wants to say without self-censorship. TTT also talked about the lack of practicing it attributing this to his sense of injustice, which makes him refuses exercising self-censorship in spite of the consequences of that. He is being wanted by the security forces in Egypt as it has already been explained.

4.5.6 Activists vs. Challenges

Activists spoke about the impact of these difficulties on their roles, and in spite of all the restrictions that have been previously mentioned, in its various forms, they also talked about how to meet these challenges.

A number of activists considered that these restrictions give an indication of the efforts of activists in the episodes of struggling against authoritarian regimes, HHH pointed. Also NNN clarified that the activists should be more responsible. LLL added: "there are obstacles, but the activist must take responsibility of these obstacles." He added: "every time they close the account I will launch a new one. Our mission is not easy and it requires patience". FFF believes that the attempts of restrictions will not work, especially from official bodies. He said: "there is a difficulty in controlling SNS although the restriction increases".

There is a possibility that the restrictions have opposite effect, which is clarified by HHH: "the security forces in West bank arrested a young man, *Bara Alqadi*, because of a post on Facebook. He was not famous. But after his arrest, a solidarity campaign with him has been launched and it prompted his release, and then he becomes famous. This qualified him to be an effective activist more than the past".

The activists' ways are varied in an attempt to overcome these challenges. Some of them rely on the followers to protect their pages or accounts of closure. SSS explained: "I asked the followers to send reports against the reports that requested to close my page, and I often succeed to avoid the closing because of the strong interaction on my page". Therefore, NNN said that the followers reduce the weight of the challenge.

Further, a number of activists talked about the choice of words carefully and changing the way in an attempt to avoid the restrictions, KKK said: "I try to approach the subject in an acceptable manner". TTT agreed with that when he spoke about changing the style of publishing whenever he faces difficulties. AAA linked

the overtaking of restrictions with the ability to produce the content in an appropriate manner again and again, which was confirmed by DDD.

Activists talked about the use of aliases and reserve accounts in order to avoid the risk from them, especially with regard to social and governmental restrictions. AAA talked about it: "one of the alternatives is using reserve accounts", which was highlighted by OOO: "I am forced to deal with the situation so I have a reserve account". So, activists can use aliases via devices without specifying the geographical location and exercise the activities in this way as FFF and other activists said.

Activists also talked about prevarication and the maneuver as a way they sometimes follow in order to avoid restrictions and control as much as possible as RRR said. As well, AAA explained: "I repeat publishing the post in different ways and for more than one time. We have the will to continue". MMM spoke about the need of abbreviation sometimes in order to continue. He said: "I do the process of hit and run". BBB also talked about moving across different SNS in order to keep continuity. Sometimes, the activists may resort to disable their accounts a period of time if there are reports against them as CCC explained.

In addition to the above, some activists resort to human rights organizations when they are exposed to restrictions in order to meet the challenges (JJJ). Some try to compose extensive relationships with decision-makers to overcome the problems (EEE). As well, some take advantage from the experiences of others in facing challenges. HHH explained: "Quds Network on SNS, learned from the experiences of Egyptian and Tunisian activists", and so on. However, because of the severity of

restrictions, some activists resort to the option of leaving the country and travel abroad. This is also due to the insecurity and the threats of arrest, as pointed by SSS, resident in America.

Finally, this frame attempted to clarify the aspects related to censorship and the challenges that activists face during their use of SNS, forms, justifications, effects and the ways to meet them by activists.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

This chapter is about the conclusion of the research study which highlighted the use of SNS by activists in the Arab world, and their roles via these platforms. The chapter consists of the summary of the findings and the conclusions drawn from this research study. In addition, the recommendations of the researcher for further studies are included.

5.1 Summary of the Study

This study discussed the importance of SNS for activists, their dealing with platforms and the extent of effectiveness of SNS for activists to do their tasks, in comparison to what traditional media outlets provide. The study aimed to examine the experiences of the use of SNS by the activists from different Arabic countries who are the most influential groups among online users.

In the literature review, the studies indicated that the use of SNS during the last years has been increasing. It is proven that the facilities that SNS provide for its users, lead to the massive growing number of users in record time. The features proved the importance of SNS in influencing, SNS effectiveness in mobilization during protests or campaigns, and it became significant as a source of news beside other facilities. The arguments of the differences between traditional media and SNS for the activists are highlighted beside the attempts to find alternatives to the traditional media. Moreover, the researcher mentioned the contribution of SNS to facilitate the

collective action, in addition to emphasizing the challenges that activists face during practicing their actions via SNS. At the end of the theoretical part, the researcher explained three theories which are related with the subject of the study, the theories are: Uses and Gratification Theory, Agenda-Setting Theory, and Gate-Keeping Theory.

This study is conducted through semi-structured interviews with 21 noticeable activists from Arab conflict regions. The interviewed activists that consisted the sample of the study were residing in 10 Arab countries and 3 non-Arab countries. The questionnaire included 31 open ended questions that aimed to understand the activists' use of SNS. The analysis was done according to the five main frames to explain the questions of the present study.

The analysis of the study showed that the political and social contribution of SNS for gratifying the needs of activists in practicing their roles in society. As well, the study showed that SNS is very useful for activists to do collective action. Further, it is a favorite place to conduct successful campaigns and mobilization which achieved reflections on the ground.

The study found out that the activist become very influential among the population. SNS qualifies the activists to play a crucial role in forming the mental image for their followers and also in setting the agenda for them towards dealing with different issues.

The research highlighted the censorship factor that the vast majority of activists suffered from through their governments and the regimes beside the social

restrictions and the limitation by the SNS itself. The study found out that the forms of limitations generated self-censorship for most of the activists.

The study emphasized the suffering of activists because of the loose and inaccurate restrictions by SNS. The system of closure accounts or deletion of posts on SNS is programmatic and automatic which deal only with numbers of reports without making sure of the validity of reports. This system enables any group of people or bodies (which may be a part of regime) to close accounts or page and also stop the activist from working on SNS based on incorrect justifications or without even justifying, according to the study. The findings were also consistent with the assumptions of the theories that presented in the study to test.

The activists stated that these challenges increasingly affecting their activities compared to the previous years. Nevertheless, the study discussed the ways and methods of the activists in facing these challenges to continue practicing their actions.

5.2 Conclusions Drawn from the Study

For the current study, the interview with activists aimed to answer the 10 questions which covered the different aspects of using SNS by activists. In addition, to highlight how the communication theories work in the case of activists use of SNS. In this section, the findings of the questions will be presented:

1- Is SNS used as the main valid source of receiving information or not?

Most of activists in the study considered SNS as the first source and a major source in receiving news. There are many ways to receive news for the activists in the daily

life, but most of them considered SNS as the most prominent platform to know about events. Regardless of the fact that SNS has become the primary outlet of receiving information for most of the activists, this does not mean that there is confidence on the accuracy and validity of this news. The activists are aware that SNS is a large space that allows anyone to add whatever he/she wants to post without confirmation. Therefore, the activists apply some confirmation process through the creation of a particular collective work, as well as multiple individual steps to avoid rumors and the chaos of publishing.

2- How do activists think about the traditional media outlets in light of SNS existing?

The traditional media is restricted by its owners. There are policies and agendas defined by the owners and those in control which are imposed on the staff working within a traditional media outlet, because they must abide by it. This contributed in decreasing the freedom of expression for the employees and also the activists. This created a contradiction in the relationship between activists and traditional media outlets. So, according to the activists interviewed, they were seeking to find alternatives able to satisfy their needs and access to SNS. That is what most of the activists talked about during their explanation of the impact of SNS on their relation with traditional media.

3- Why do activists prefer to practice their role on SNS more than traditional media?

All activists always seek to find alternatives to traditional media in order to gratify their needs and uses, so they used forums and blogs and then they accessed to use SNS. The activists realized that SNSs are suitable platforms that are able to gratify their wants because of the different features provided by these sites, which help activists to practice their actions through them, such as: speed, continuous development, ease of communication, etc. Also, activists use the services and tools that SNS offers to get their action done, such as: hashtag, secret groups, share, pages, videos and photos...etc. The study found out that activists attempt to invest each service or tool which eases their works via SNS; they seek to use all services as a one package in order to play a role in their communities.

The activists agreed to the ability of SNS in contributing to satisfy their desires and needs. SNS has been a substitute through which they can practice their political and social roles and others in society, and also express themselves via it with a degree greater than that is offered to them by the traditional media outlets. The activists confirmed that SNS has helped them to have social status, audience, and own opinions that they through it proved their capability to have an impact and bring about change.

The previous results are in line with the assumptions of the uses and gratification theory. The study showed that the activists are aware of their needs in the presence of SNS more than before.

4- Do activists consider SNS an appropriate outlet to practice collective action?

The activists agreed that SNS served them well in performing collective action, such as group activities, campaigns and others. Most of the activists had their experiences in the practice of collective work and engaging within teamwork via SNS. The nature of SNS has made a collective action through it easier compared to the old means of communications. SNS provided avenues for activists to facilitate the meeting of members and to choose the teamwork and also to coordinate among each other to develop the plan of action. SNS, as well, saves time and effort of activists. It can also invest the presence of large numbers of youth online, all of which contribute to the success of a collective work through SNS.

Also, the study showed that the nature of the work of some activists is collective action, such as annual campaign, projects, or within pages in the form of online shows or networks etc. This is managed collectively by a group of activists. The study summarized the procedures that activists follow to conduct a campaign via SNS. Most of them participated in campaigns or contributed in preparing them from the beginning. Thus, the activists confirmed through their personal experiences that SNS is a suitable platform to practice collective action that may lead to create social movements as it happened in the Arab Spring and other events in various countries, as the study showed.

5- Are activists able to mobilize their followers and make an impact on them?

The activists did not disagree about the role that SNS plays in mobilizing people towards important issues. They highlighted activities they practiced which led to achieve their aims and to cause field reflections. As well, they mentioned evidences

on the effectiveness of SNS for mobilization such as during the Arab spring; demonstrations against the governments in Iraq, Morocco, Palestine, and others, which indicate the efficiency of SNS to mobilize users or advocate a certain issue.

There is no activist denying his/her ability to make an impact on their followers, individually or collectively; they consider themselves influential in relation to their followers due to the existence of SNS. Also, the activists mentioned signs to prove their power to impact, such as the extent of echoes that accompanied their activities in reality, which is not only confined to the electronic platforms. This was argued by the most of activists. They confirmed their ability to influence in varying proportions.

6- To what extent activists have the ability to form the mental image and to set the agenda of users towards daily news via SNS?

The activists unanimously agreed that their roles are not mere transferring news, but to comment on the events, take a position on it, and also share it with followers. So, the activists did not disagree on their roles in forming the mental image of events for their followers. They confirmed their attempts to play this role via SNS in different ways, such as: repetition, frequency, using of suitable and attractive styles, adopting the logic and evoke facts, in addition to drawing comparisons, correcting the concepts and the erroneous images towards events, addressing the concerns of followers and interacting with them about sensitive issues and also drawing their attention. These ways contribute to create confidence between the activist and his/her followers and therefore forming a mental image of followers on the events, so this is what makes them an important category of SNS, and not normal users.

The activists agreed on the possibility of setting the agenda of followers via SNS. They mentioned methods they follow to achieve this goal, such as: diversification and concentration during a period of time, specialization in particular topic, and other ways that contribute to make an issue as the most important for the followers, and to avoid posting other issues with less importance based on the beliefs of activist.

Nevertheless, activists stated that achieving the agenda-setting of followers within collective action is guaranteed more than in individual situation. Pages, campaigns or the collective action groups are able to set the agenda better than individuals. The study found out that the experience of setting the agenda by the activists individually is not yet mature fully, and it needs more time. There has been harbingers of the possibility of success in the exercise of this function by activists on SNS and compete with traditional media.

As a result, the present study clarified the roles that activists play to set the agenda and to form the mental image for their followers toward daily news, by telling them “What to think about”. The study explained the ability to practice the function of agenda-setting through activists’ accounts on SNS in several ways mentioned above. By using these ways, the activists point out specific topics as more important than the others. The followers start to talk about these topics via the accounts of activists on SNS. Especially that SNS provides an interactive platform for discussions more than traditional media.

7- How do activists practice the process of “Gate-keeping” towards their followers?

The study showed that activists exercise the gate-keeping process on their followers. They publish and activate the issues that they consider is the most important. They also avoid posting about other topics that are less relevant to them and they do not promote them. So, the activists expressed their ability to activate the issues that they want, making them prominent through focusing on them and keep posting about them in different ways. Additionally, they do not publish contents that are not of major importance to them. In this process, the activists interact with their followers about an intended topic, and they marginalize talking about others issues according to their convictions and thoughts.

Thus, the process of gate-keeping is another factor that indicates the possibility of setting the agenda of users by activists and forming the mental image towards the different events through practicing this function, especially that they have the tools and conditions to do that via SNS. In this case the activists practice the function that traditional media outlets exercise with the audience, and this is commensurate with the assumptions of gate-Keeping theory.

8- What are the forms of censorship and the control mechanisms on the activists?

The vast majority of activists suffer from censorship exerted on them. The study discussed their experiences about facing these difficulties, especially the restrictions by governments as one of the most prominent types of control on them. Restrictions become greater when the impact of the activist becomes noticeable and potentially capable of arousing opposition to the rules. The activists highlighted the increasing control by government after the beginning of the Arab Spring, prompting them to

consider it as a censorship by the regime in several forms: detentions, summons for activists or one of their relatives to put pressure on them, exposure to trials because of a post. Also, the governments prevented some activists from traveling, and other government restrictions pose a real challenge for activists.

The research showed that the controlling increases due to the lack of laws that protect the activists and ensure freedom of publication, but on the contrary, governments rushed to enact laws in order to restrict freedom of activist and to censor their actions on the internet and SNS, as the study indicated.

Also, the study showed that the activists suffer from social restrictions while they practice their action, especially in the case of criticizing the traditional beliefs or topics that people are accustomed to as principles, which makes posting that kind of issues sensitive and that may develop into a collision. This situation forced activists to pick their words carefully and to select the suitable method at the right time for publishing to the followers.

The study highlighted also the difficulties by SNS itself, which hamper the work of activists. They were exposed several time to delete of contents, or to close their accounts and pages because of reports against them. The current study, according to a large number of activists, found out that the reason behind this is due to the system of SNS. It is programmatic and automatic when dealing with numbers of reports, without making sure of the contents. So, the activists considered this system is unjust and inaccurate because it makes it easier for those who want to impede the work of activists to use this way to close their accounts or to delete their publications,

whether by opposing groups or by bodies allocated by governments to obstruct the work of activists.

The activists talked about the existence of double dealing by SNS, especially in conflicts such as in Syria, Palestine or Iraq. SNS exercises a censorship process against the activists' publications. This process resulted in deleting posts or closing the accounts without justifications or by using loose and incorrect arguments. The activists considered that as collusion by the administrations of SNSs with regimes to avoid blocking these sites within the state, so SNS gives information about activists for government, and it facilitates deletion of the publications or accounts of opponent activists, which is required by governments.

These constraints force activists to avoid talking about certain topics that may cause them problems. The restrictions somehow force them to put forward modified issues in an acceptable manner to the authorities, communities and the administrations of SNS itself. These circumstances directly or indirectly curtail the role of activists in society in an attempt to control them and reduce the efficiency of their influence, as presented in the study.

9- How do the forms of restrictions lead to generate self-censorship for activists?

Governmental restrictions, social control, in addition to the SNS rules and limitations all lead by many activists to adopt self-censorship. In the study, the activists did not deny their thinking about the governmental obstacles that they may face because of a post, so they are aware that a post may expose them to prison, threats or other kinds

of risk. The same is applied for the obstacles by SNS itself, which creates a situation of self-censorship for activists about the content that they want to share before publishing, so they become worry about the possibility of closing their account because of the content. Further, generating self-censorship arises from the conditions in society, such as family pressures and others because of exposure to the traditions and sensitive topics or due to the nature of the community especially those consisting of multiple sectarians, so the activist is afraid of isolation.

On the other hand, a small number of activists denied practicing self-censorship on them while conducting their actions. They reject exercising it. So, they publish any content they are convinced that is important to post without thinking of the consequences.

10- What are the ways that activists follow to confront the challenges?

The activists considered the increase of restrictions on them is an indicator of the ability to have influence through SNS. Also, they expressed the awareness of their responsibilities towards the society and the followers, despite of the difficulty of work in light of the continuing increase of censorship and the real impact of the restrictions. However, the study discussed the continuation of activists to create alternatives for each challenge. They face these challenges in several ways such as, asking followers to face the reports against the activist by increasing the interaction on their account, or by using backup or face accounts, as well as by maneuvering or by re-publishing more than once in more than one way...etc. Activists sometimes resort to deactivate their accounts for a certain period when there are reports against them.

The study showed that some of activists resorted to human rights organizations or decision-makers in order to defend what they are writing about. Also, they keep trying to learn from the experiences of other activists in other places, as to how to meet the challenges. Some of activists were forced to travel abroad because of the prosecution or the threat of arrest. Activists try other ways to meet the control mechanism in order to sustain their actions and roles via SNS.

5.3 Recommendations for Further Research

This study is about the experience of using SNS by prominent activists in the Arab world. It attempted to highlight the most important roles that activists can play via using SNS. Nevertheless, the present study did not use quantitative measures in some of significant issues which further researches may highlight more.

The researcher recommends in addition to the qualitative measures, conducting quantitative researches in order to measure the extent of SNS ability to gratify the activists needs especially for social and political aspects. Furthermore, to examine the capability of activists in practicing the role of agenda-setting and forming the mental image of events for their followers which means performing the function of the traditional media. Also, further researches can study how traditional media deal with the emergence of SNS and the extent of access to its public and success in integration with it; in order to understand the size of the actual existence of traditional media and its impact on SNS in the form of pages or characters representing those institutions.

Likewise, further studies can be based on conducting interviews with heads of several sectors of SNS in different states in an attempt to realize the way that regimes

deal with SNS administration and to articulate the conditions that governments put regarding the administration of SNS to allow them to work within the state. This kind of studies can examine the contribution of these agreements in closing or blocking certain accounts. The researcher recommends conducting comparative studies among experts and activists of SNS about the future of these platforms in light of increasing restrictions. Uses and gratifications theory, agenda-setting theory, and gate-keeping theory can also be examined for further studies to measure the correspondence of these theories of the case of activists on SNS, and it may be by testing their followers scientifically.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1: The questions of interview

- **Demographic questions:**

- Name, or Nickname:
- Age:
- Nationality:
- Place of residency:
- Sex:
- Academic major, Job:
- Email:

- **The interview questions:**

- 1- How do you get information about political occurrences, what the first source of news for you?
- 2- How to check the accuracy of the news?
- 3- How is your relation with traditional media outlets in receiving news, after the widespread of SNS?
- 4- When did you start using SNS? Did you start your activities by using bloggers or online forums?
- 5- What the best social networking site for you? Why?
- 6- Do you have other accounts on other platforms? Does the content and interaction on other SNS are similar?
- 7- For what purposes do you use social media? Political, social...
- 8- What are the advantages of Social media from your point of view?
- 9- What are the most prominent tools (services) that social media present for you? Hashtag, secret groups, hangouts, calls, using videos and photos...

- 10- What is the number of your followers on SNS?
- 11- Do you consider yourself is affected? How do you measure your impacts?
- 12- How far SNS do contribute in gratifying your needs in participating, interaction, and defining your own, comparing with Traditional media?
- 13- Do SNS are platforms help to practice “collective action”? Why?
- 14- What are your criteria to accept involving within an online teamwork includes activists?
- 15- Do you believe that social media is power outlet to mobilize followers and guide them about certain issues?
- 16- How do you decide what to say for your followers on SNS? Individual or collective decision
- 17- Do you participate within online campaigns via SNS? What are its impacts on the grounds? And what is your aim behind promoting people?
- 18- What are the procedures and steps that you act with activists to do a campaign?
- 19- When do you consider yourself are succeeded in an activity? How are your feelings after an achievement? (Signs and criteria point that you done your goal)
- 20- By measuring the reactions of your followers, do you feel that you are a source of information for them? Also are they waiting your impression and attitude of the events?
- 19-how do you contribute in promoting users and guide them towards events? How do you affect in shaping the mental image of different issues of the followers?
- 21- Do you play a role in setting the agenda of users on SNS? How do you play the role in ordering their priorities about the events?

22- Do you feel that you are censored during work on SNS? How does that impact on your interaction?

23- When can you be imposed for restrictions on SNS?

24- What are the forms of these constraints and difficulties?

25- What are the justifications for those who impose restrictions on your activity?

Examples

26- Have you imposed to close account or a page or a working group suddenly before? What were the reasons for closure?

27- How do you handle with these challenges, all kinds?

28- How can these challenges affect the future use of social networking sites?

29- Do you think there are laws regulating the work on SNS? Is it accurate or not accurate?

30- Have you ever exposed to the trials before? Why?

31- Do you exercise self-censorship on yourself (political or social)? What are the reasons that lead you to do that?