What the Internet Has Done to the Left Organization?

The Impact of Using Digital Media on the Egyptian Revolutionary Socialists

The internet has become a host of almost all political groups; the allure of the user-friendly, quick and cheap digital communication encouraged many people to use them, especially with the width of audiences of the online media. Amid all that, a question comes to the fore about the use of leftist movements to digital media, should the leftist organization go digital or should it not? A pragmatic response to such question lies on the results of using the internet.

In this chapter, I answer the question: How the digital media of the Revolutionary Socialists in Egypt have influenced the movement's organization? Certainly, at the time being there are hundreds of leftists groups using digital technologies, but they often do for publicity purposes. The rationale behind selecting this group is its achievement of using digital media for communication with people as well as internally. Moreover, to far extend, the Egyptian Revolutionary Socialists managed to bridge the digital gab, and let member from different age groups and economic classes use digital media. This leftist group was formed in 1995, it is inspired by the socialism of Leon Trotsky and Vladimir Lenin.

To see the results of digital media on the Revolutionary Socialists, as leftists group, I first explain the motivations of the movement to go digital and the process of digitalization with

focusing on its influencing factors. Subsequently, I show the impact of digital media on the Revolutionary Socialists intellectual and organizational wise. Digitalization in the context of this chapter is the process of using online media, digital devices and mobile application for internal communication (between members of the movements) or for publicity.The RevSoc denotes the bunch of accounts which belongs to the Egyptian Revolutionary Socialists movement on the different networking sites, including the website RevSoc.me, three Twitter accounts (@Egycapitalism, @Egystrikes and @RevSoc), a Youtube channel (The Socialist Television تليفزيون الاشتراكي) a Facebook Page (The Revolutionary Socialists Movement حركة الاشتراكيين) and an account on Soundcloud (The Socialist Radio راديو الاشتراكي الثوريين).

For data collection, I conducted several in-depth interviews with the leaders of digitalization in late 2016 and in 2017. Basically, I chose those who could provide insightful answers to: what should make them insightful in answering the questions: why digitalisation was or was not need? How it happened? And what has it led to? My participants are Hossam ElHamalwy, a famous journalist and blogger, who initiated to push the movement to digital media. And Karim Ali (pseudonym), Head of the Publicity Committee, the media arm of the Revolutionary Socialists. Ali preferred anonymity and I deliberately covered any information that might lead to their identification.

The influences of the digitalization on the Egyptian Revolutionary Socialists could be identified in three areas; publicity, organizational structure and the members' vision to the revolutionary media.

Firstly, in terms of publicity, RevSoc as a collection of digital media has become a credible point of reference for the public when they look for information about the movement or its ideology. This is proven by the Increase in the number of visitors and followers on social media when the Revolutionary Socialists are in the news. An example of that is an incident happened in September 2011, the state-run television broadcasted a video for an event in the Center for Socialist Studies, the premises of the movement and the venue of its public events. In this video, the socialist leader Sameh Naguib speaks in what appeared as a seminar, about the need to demolish the old state that existed before the 2011 revolution and establishing a new one. The same video was also covered in the popular talk shows, what raised the number of Likes of the movement's page on Facebook hugely, from 3,000 to 30,000 users in only 48 hours (Interview with Ai, 2016) If this happened before the movement has RevSoc, the public would have been interested to knowing about it and its ideas too, but they probably would not find credible sources for that, or they may find one, but the movement then would not be aware of the size of such interest in it. Moreover, the online channels of the Revolutionary Socialists worked as a platform to refute the media smear against them. So, in that example, a number of articles appeared on the Revolutionary Socialists website to defend themselves, such as The *Revolution Does Not Demolish.. it Construct* (2011 ,الاشتراكي) , *In Solidarity with The Revolutionary Socialists: Down With Their State and viva our Revolution* (The Socialist Innovation Current, 2011)*, The Revolutionary Socialists Present Their Own Investigation Report* (ElBasiouny, 2012) *and Why Do the Revolutionary Socialist Want to Demolish the State?* (Yousri, 2013)*.*

Also, the use of digital media in the publicity of Revolutionary Socialists has caused changes in the communication between the movement and the membership seekers. Originally, fundamental parts of the member recruitment, was sharing some readings with the members-to-be and seeking their feedback on them. In the past, this was to take months, especially if there is no branch of the movement in the applicant's location. But after digitalization, the members were comfortably using end-to-end encrypted emails for this step, what was time and money saving (Interview with Ali, 2016). Nevertheless, after the launch of the Revolutionary Socialists current websites RevSoc.me in 2012, people can seek membership through an online form[1], where they provide personal details, interests and their preferences in the sub-committees they wish to work within if their membership is completed. In the same form, there is a given email to send complaints to in case of the delay of reply to the membership request.

Secondly, in terms of structure, digital media required the foundation of subordinate bodies inside the Revolutionary Socialists, whose mission was to run and coordinate the new channels of communication. For instance, the increase of the movement's media made the publicity committee was expand to include working groups for the world and regional news, features, running the RevSoc Youtube channel, updating the RevSoc account on Soundcloud and looking after the movement's Facebook page.

More importantly, going digital helped the Revolutionary Socialists to increase its coherence and to avoid potential fragmentation. Basically, the movement was getting high requests of memberships during 2011 and 2012, the new members were adhering to its

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[1] , http://revsoc.me/join-us/

different committees based on their geographical location and action groups, it was very likely that they do not get to meet each other unless their paths crossed in one of the movement organization (sharing the membership of certain committee or work group) or action (attending org convening an event together).

And, thirdly, the digitalization process of the Revolutionary Socialists helped the members developing their perception of Leninist literature about the revolutionary newspaper, and consider and interpretation of it in the age of the internet.

This research was conducted between December 2016 and April 2017 amid a state of political inactivity in the political arena. A notable decay of street actions started by the end of 2013, as on 24 November 2013, the former president on 24 November 2013 signed a protest law (act 107, year 2013), which grants the Ministry of Interior the right to utilize methods of gradual dispersal for protests in breach of the law (Chapter 2, Article 12), what Amnesty International described as "a serious setback that poses a grave threat to freedom of assembly and gives security forces a free rein to use excessive force" (Amnesty International, 2013). Three years later, the Egyptian parliament adopted a law on civic associations in November 2016, which eliminates the civil society by allowing an entity formed by the president to determine all the matters related to the NGOs in Egypt, including the financial matters. The two laws have implicitly criminalized the forms of political mobilization. Furthermore, the year 2016 witness numerous cases of closure of development and rights organizations, assets' freeze and criminal charges against their members, noting that the establishment of the Egyptian

human rights movement in the 1980s and 1990s was largely attributed to the Leftists of the 1970s (Shehata, 2010).

The state restrictions on the protesting events and political activism in particular had its implications on my research. The number of participants, the locations of interviews and consequently, the size of data was influenced by political stagnation. Keeping in mind the correlation between political activism and digitalisation alerts us to the research reliability, as its findings would definitely vary if it was conducted a few years earlier. For instance, over the course of three months (December 2016 to March 2017), I tried to reach out to three journalist who are also members of the Revolutionary Socialists, particularly to get their insights from their professional perspectives. In fact, one of them told me she has quitted the movement some years ago. And the two others agreed to be interviewed, afterwards retracted, either because they feel busy and have other priorities, or they thought the questions to be more generic. From my communication with them, I could strongly feel lack of enthusiasm of them to participate, which I interpret with the general state of depression and indolence among political forces. In fact, these two journalists I was approaching did appeared in media, local and international public events during the years 2011, 2012 and 2013 to comment on the 2011 uprising and the following political events from their Leftist perspective. So, during the time of political mobilization and rigor activism these members were active to speak about, whereas after the struggle on the ground is fading, they felt less motivated to discuss subjects related to their political organization.

The Journey of Digitalizing the Movement

Commonly, the objectives that are commonly motivating political parties towards the internet are mobilization, fundraising and news agenda (Johnson, 2011), however, these goals were absent in the case of the Revolutionary Socialists. There were motivations for the Revolutionary Socialists to revise their media practice, first is the emergence of protest and solidarity movements which proved capability of mobilizing people on the ground, what evoked the left to reconsider the efficacy of its communication strategies and answer: why would a new movement organize a protest of thousands in the heart of Cairo while we are not?. Subsequently, more grassroots organization was established and their mobilization had a digital dimension represented in web blogs. By that time, a few members inside the movement, including the participants in this research, started to push for using social and digital media to promote the leftists ideology and actions, as well as to facilitate the Revolutionary Socialist organization.

The Palestinian Intifada in 2000 formed a momentum for the Egyptian socialists who found huge street action organized by student organizations; the socialists were totally isolated from these students (ElHamalawy, 2013). In fact, the generation of these student organizers continued to impress the organized left with their mobilization on the ground. For instance, in 2003, the students of the American University in Cairo demonstrated at the heart of Tahrir square in rejection to the invasion of Iraq, what ElHamalwy describes as "the biggest ambition" of the left. The grassroots action galvanized after the foundation of Kefaya الحركة المصرية من أجل

كفاية - التغيير (Enough!, also known as The Egyptian Movement for Change) in late 2004, which was a coalition of leftists, Islamists and different opposition figures who wanted to protest against the regime of Hosni Mubarak and denounce the potential inheritance of power by his son, Gamal. Kefaya succeeded in the convention of hundreds of protests nationwide, sometimes with the participation of hundreds and even thousands of people, one of them was in front of the Ministry of Interior premises in rejection to torture and ill-treatment, what was "surrealistic" for leftists(ElHamalaway, 2013).

Effectively, the digital media of the Egyptian Revolutionary Socialists was a the foundation of a digitalization process the movement underwent since the year 2008 We can distinct three phases of the digitalization of the Revolutionary Socialists movement between 2009 and 2016; the first between 2009 until the step down of Mubarak in 2011.

The first stage of digitalization of the Revolutionary Socialists starts with the launch of the website e-socialists.net in the first anniversary of Mahalla Uprising. The Mahalla event was a strike of around 24,000 textile worker in objection to the corrupt CEO of the Mahalla Textile Mill.

During this first stage, the movement's website was updated irregularly, and most of its content was books, booklets and articles about the ideology of Marxism. It was more like an online archive for the literature of the left, rather than a publicity tool. In contrast, at the third phase (from 2012 onwards), the news and statements dominate the content of the RevSoc.me website and all the RevSoc media, what was inevitable because of the surge in political activism and labour strike, as over 500 strikes took place in 2011 alone, and almost 3,500

strikes in 2012 (Benin, 2013). Coverage of all that number of actions would require bigger publishing platforms than the newspaper.

On parallel with the early digitalisation phase of the Revolutionary Socialists, there were a number of Marxist youths using the blogs to articulate their ideas. Atef (2016) observes that

> "..these blogger were keen to highlight their identity, whether by including the name of the organization in the title of the blog… such as "Small Socialist Dreams", "Egyptian Left" or to use images of leaders on the front of the blog, especially Trotsky, Lenin and Marx. Also they their headers usually included pro-leftists slogans, such as "I am defending the socialist revolution""
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> (Atef, 2016, p.72)

Most of the Socialist blogs which appeared in 2008 focused on criticizing state policies, exposing a number of cases of administrative corruption in factories, clarifying socialist concepts, and covering protest activities carried out by revolutionary socialists. In fact, the organisation did not neither support these blogs nor confronted it. On the other side, the blogs rarely tackled the organisation of the Left, it could be that these young bloggers were preoccupied with the rebellion against the political system rather than its rebellion against the organization (Atef, 2016).

The Revolutionary Socialists started taking to social media since 2008, but did not has strong presence back then, mainly because of two reason, first the choice of the channels was

not appropriate for a political movement. For instance, on Facebook, the Center for Socialist Studies had a personal account, people were adding it as a friend, and people's interaction was in a form of comments and posts on the account's wall. Second reason for the weak presence of the Revolutionary Socialists on the social networking sites at the beginning of its digitalization is the lack of originality to its channels, which means that the content was not made especially for the social media. For instance, in 2010, the Revolutionary Socialists Movement page was created, and linked to the website of the movement in way that lets the updates of the website appear automatically on the page. However, in 2012, that all changed, the personal account of the Center for Socialist Studies and the page of the Revolutionary Socialists were merged in one page, and some members were assigned to update the Facebook page.

The second phase starts with the step-down of former president Hosni Mubarak in January 2011, and lasted until the end of 2013. In this period, digitalization had its quickest pace of digitalization. Besides using the Revsoc.me from August 2012 onwards, the Revolutionary Socialists were also using several mobile applications for communication on the ground, and paid more attention for cyber security I comparison to before. Plus, there were further adoption of digital communication within the Revolutionary Socialists. Lastly, the phase from late 2013 onwards, digital media were used for internal communication between different committees and across the Egyptian republic, mostly, Gmail and Skype, as they are both familiar and secure. The RevSoc website and social media were used for publishing statements of the movement, its commentary and analysis to events

The Revolutionary Newspaper Becoming Digital

Classically, the Validimir Lenin's *The Urgent Tasks of Our Movements (1899),* What *is to be Done?* And *Where to Begin? (1903)* have been essential sources for the leftists' vision to media, including the Revolutionary Socialists. They believe in the revolutionary newspaper as an organizer. Like many leftists movements around the world, the media of the Egyptian revolutionary socialists started underground, and its newspaper was only sold to the members. In the nineties there were two socialists groups, the Revolutionary Socialists and their newspaper was الاشتراكي The Socialist, and Labour Liberation group, whose newspaper was الشرارة The Spark. Later on, these two groups went united and had راية الاشتراكية The Socialism's Flag as their only newspaper in 2011. The current The Socialist was not released before 2006, and it is the first publication of this movement to be sold to the non-members.

From the nineties until the solidarity movements with Iraq in 2003, the Yahoo groups were common discussion boards for political and social activist groups in the Arab region. (Bishara, 2012) and the Revolutionary Socialist were using them for theoretical discussions (Interview with ElHamalawy, 2017), but their revolutionary newspaper remained print. With the fast growth of internet and mobiles users in Egypt, there was an urge to catch the train of digitalization, the main problem of that was the theoretical foundation of this step. In other words, the members of the Revolutionary Socialist Movement needed to know whether digitalization was compatible with their ideology.

Ali and ElHamalawy went on numerous debates inside the movement to prove that digital media empowers the role of the revolutionary newspaper as organizer. "By time, the comrade were able to see how getting connected to each other and to the internet users saved time and generated new type of data that was very hard to get if without digital media, such as the readership statistics of our media" (interview with Ali, 2016). Eventually, with the launch of the RevSoc.me in late 2012, the movement released that:

> "Today, if we consider the website as the organizer it means that we must update this site minute by minute, and follow political events and activities that occur in Egypt before any traditional source of expertise. The arrival of reports and updates for the site around the clock translates organizationally into the presence of revolutionary correspondents on the ground, getting involved with events and then sending a report to the "center", which is the site editorial board, which imposes in turn, a faster rhythm of organizational work."

(The Revolutionary Socialists, 2012)

At all times, the Revolutionary Socialists regarded the publicity as a political position rather than professional, which means, the leaders of publicity are sought have got very good understanding of the movement ideology instead of being professional journalists or technology geeks. The internet skills would come as the second important requirement is the skills of using the internet and awareness of securing their web connections, also the good command of the standard Arabic language (Fus'ha).

For internal communication, which is a role the publication of the leftist organization is supposed to perform, the digital channels work beside personal communication. Since their formation, the Revolutionary Socialists entirely depended on face-to-face communication and hard copies. Members were holding weekly meetings for discussions and decision making, and the decisions and tasks would be shared through verbal communication. This means that one member was travelling to other city to inform their comrades with the outcomes of a central meeting held in Cairo (Interview with ElHamalawy, 2016). The problem with this type of digital-free organization is that it holds risk of documents confiscation, it endangers the massager, and often caused a delay in circulation of news. Moreover, the member may misunderstand a message, and therefore transfer it inaccurately. Overall, the nineties style threaten the movement with fragmentation, as each group barely knows about the other. The verbal internal communication continued to form the internal media apparatus because the members were extremely fearful to let their communication go through public services like email. Plus, internet was not nor common nor cheap in comparison to today. Also, the small membership and its concentration in the capital made many members underestimate the need of a facilitator media for their communication (Interview with Ali, 2016).

The manifestos of the editorial board of Iskra in 1899 states roles of the newspaper of a leftist organization are: Connecting members, providing the news from a socialist perspective and to be a platform for discussions between members. (Taha, 1989). The Revolutionary Socialists were conscious of that as they digitalizing their media, thus the movement's digital media a mirror of its activism on the ground, the RevSoc.me has its sections representative to the structure of the movement publicity on the ground.

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Normally, in the different protesting events the Revolutionary Socialists used to have two tables set on the ground; one for the recent releases and publications, the other is for the translated books and the left literature. The flag of the movement is there, and one of the two table are used as the meeting point of the member, particularly, those who are tasked to sell out copies of The Socialist, the newspaper of the movement. Around the two tables, the Revolutionary Socialists hold their one-to-one discussions with the participants in the event, answer their questions about the left and its ideology and explain the membership procedures for those who show interest in joining the movement.

On RevSoc.me, the table for the recent leftists publications were represented under the selection Media, instead of handing out the press releases, they were made available for download under the Press Releases section, the discussions about membership were channeled into the email, simply by letting the applicants fill up a form on the Revolutionary Socialists' website and handling these applications by email correspondent. And the debates over the movement actions or ideology between members and the public are present online in the availability of commenting on the content of the RevSoc.me website. The expansion of RevSoc and the take to social media since 2008, was particularly effective in supporting the discussions between members and non-members.

Generally, there were no tangible differences in the presentation of content in the website and the print copy of the newspaper. The names, titles and body are kept the same on both outlets. Looking at the timing of publishing, the material on the website precede or come after the publication of the newspaper, what happens because "some members finish their

contributions earlier than the print time, so they got published earlier than others who just finish on time" (Ali, 2016).There are only marginal differences between the content of the publications and their online copy on RevSoc, we can say that the content was adapted to the digital media rather than changed. Regarding imagery of RevSoc, most often, the photos and illustrations which appear in The Socialist newspaper vary from the website. Also, we find that the photos have got captions, while in all the movement's publication they do not.

The evolution of the vision of the Revolutionary Socialists to digital media is reflected in the changes between their old website e-socialists.net which was launched in 2009, and the new one that went online in late 2012 RevSoc.me. The older website was basically a horizontal red banner on the top, with one image, and in the home page, the recent content appear, with a navigation bar in the top middle of the page. Hence, the outline of the old website gives prominence to the textual content. This traditional design reflects "a traditional political vision to the function of a website as an online copy of The Socialist newspaper, which the movement was releasing monthly at that time" (The Revolutionary Socialists, 2012). But with the change in the vision of digital media role for the leftist organization, the look of the new website (RevSoc.me) looked radically different, the current website is into sections with videos on the main page and social media sharing button in a medium size placed on the left top. This give significance to the choice of the extension '.me' for 'media' in the new address of the website instead of '.net' . So, having a web page on the internet is not merely being present online.

In fact, the newspaper of the workers action is becoming digital, the Facebook pages which were created for the thousands of strikes that erupted in different sectors in 2011 and

2012 "served as platforms for the dissemination of content created by the workers concerns" (Alexander & Aouragh, 2014, p.901). This might be influenced by a push of the Revolutionary Socialists activists to the strikers, or could be simply an organic action as Facebook was becoming a handy tool for publicity. In both cases, the examples provided by Alexander and Aouragh (2014) support the fact that the revolutionary newspaper could be digitalized and work in the favor of the leftist organization.

What Digital Media are used For in the Revolutionary Socialists?

Over the period between 2009 and 2015, there were two main functions of the Revolutionary Socialists' digital media; one is them as carrier of content or the RevSoc. This is the visible part of their digital media, the website RevSoc.me and the account of the movement on social media. The using the digital media of the movement as an online backup of its publications was an easy job, just a republishing step. However, the production of original online content was difficult, either because the members did not realize why they should care about digital media, what was the case especially in the start of digitalization (Interview with ElHamalawy, 2017), or due to their lack of knowledge or expertise in reporting, as in many cases members send coverage to events or real time update that lack fundamental information. Therefore, the Editorial Board of RevSoc.me published a manual of style news reporting[2], which includes corrections for the common mistakes of the members.

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[2] http://revsoc.me/messages/styleguide/

Thus, the Publicity Committee was providing advice to the members on that regard, and held a few workshops to illustrate the essentials of reporting and photography, as Ali tells me. The movement would take any opportunity to enhance the reporting skills not only of its members but also of supporters who may contribute to its media. For instance, in an event entitle How to Support the Labour Movement?, which was convened in the Center for Socialist Studies in 2013, ElHamalawy urged the audience to not waiting for the mainstream media to cover, neither to me nor to the CSS, alternatively, he encouraged them to write a coverage for the protest events they attend and email it to the Socialist newspaper, also to give live updates regarding it on social media. ElHamalway also pointed some basics to consider for writer a report or a short update, and explained a checklist of information that must be in the content the audience makes. (The Socialist Television, 2013).

Overall, the Publicity Committee works as the checkdesk of the reports made by the members. So, If a member wants to share a textual content with their comrades or with the public, they just write it and send it to the Leader of Publicity Committee, who ensure the clarity of the content and double check that it has the classical Five Ws and H, subsequently publish it online, then on the movement's print publication. But the multimedia production is made by the Publicity Committee.

The second function of digital media in the Revolutionary Socialists movement was supporting its internal communication. Here, digitalization becomes the adoption of a variety of internet tools and mobile application for the purpose of fast communication between members, and widening their outreach to leadership. But, why the Revolutionary Socialists have paid much attention to the facilitation of internal communication? Hossam ElHamalawy

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answers this question in his article ICT and The Revolutionary Organization in the 21st Century by (2013). He assimilates the Marxist organization to an army, and emphasis the importance of its internal communication apparatus. He cites Sun Tzu's Art of War to remind us that good generals are capable of communicating effectively with all their soldiers, at the same time, ruin the communication of enemies. The article emphasis that the weakness of internal communication turns the movement into a "virtual organization" which only exists in the minds of its leaders, because their visions remain in their heads if they were not shared on the right time with the members.

Also, since the year 2011, there was a practical nee d to improve internal communication and to adopt fast and secure digital channels, because there were many events convened by the movement, a lot of political incident to comment on and tangible increase in the membership. Ali affirms that if the Revolutionary Socialists continued their struggle without a revision to their internal communication system, especially after 2011, they would have been in a serious organizational trouble. He told me:

> "The most negative side of slow or weak internal communication between the members of Revolutionary Socialists [like in the classical face-to-face model] is making many of them unaware of the movement's struggles, hardships and successes. More importantly, it might cause the movement to lose its coherence and be turned into distant circles of students, farmers, factory works ..etc)"

> (Interview with Ali, 2016)

Todd Wolfson (2014) proposes the term Cyber Left for the use the internet to establish crosss-national communication between Leftists. He originates this concept to the Zapatista movement in Mexico in the nineties , as the Zapatista Army of National Liberation called activists in 1996 to create a network of communication among all our struggles. Nevertheless, the fulfillment of this goal in the case of the Egyptian Revolutionary Socialists was challenged by digital and economic gap between members, which make buy smart phones or laptop unaffordable for some of them, and digital illiteracy of a number of members. To get over that, the movement was encouraging members to purchase smart phones by installments and stimulate peer learning of mobile use. In fact, the Egyptian environment helped on the bridging of digital gap, because the mobile phones are being increasingly used. For instance, between 2012 and 2013, smartphone users increased from 15% to 36% of the total Egyptian mobile users, and in 2013, active mobile data service users reached 80% of the total mobile data services users, compared to 76% (Ministry of Communications , 2015), what means that each member should have one of their family members using smart phone and supposedly supporting his learning to this digital technology.

Clearly, within RevSoc , the given names to the accounts of the movement on social media simulate the mainstream media. For instance, the Souncloud channel is called The Socialist Radio, and the Youtube channel is The Socialists Television, what I first interpreted as a sign to indicate the counter discourse these channels would provide, or being an alternative to the mainstream media. But Ali explained to me that these names were given "to make an impression of the regularity of content update, which was the case when these accounts were

created in 2011" (Interview with Ali, 2016). Regularity becomes important because, as Lenin contends in *What is to be Done?,* the organizer newspaper must be published regularly.

What influences digitalization?

The digitalization process of the Revolutionary Socialists had four variables; firstly is the level of political activism or stagnation. The political sphere was affecting the pace of the Revolutionary Socialists' digitalization; at the time of strong mobilization, the movement was searching for more digital tools to use for publicity of the movement's work on the ground, mobilization, internal communications between the members and external between the movement and audiences. But in the time of limited political mobilization, the Revolutionary Socialists barely explored new digital channels or media and used the online channels they already have been using.

Secondly, the match between Socialism and using digital communication media influenced the process of digitalistion of the Revolutionary Socialists media and organization. As Ali told me "at start, there were a lot of debates over the compatibility of the use of the internet and the ideology of the left. I remember sharing many papers about whether the digital media serve the left or not" (interview with Ali, 2016). The absence of discussion about digital media in the classical Marxist literature continued to hinder RevSoc at the begning.

Thirdly, the cultural and economic circumstances pushed the Revolutionary Socialists towards digitalisation. The Revolutionary Socialists underwent gradual digitalization from 2008 onwards, over that time, the political and social conditions varied several times, due to the frequent change of regime in 2011 (step down of Hosni Mubarak and the takeover of the Supreme Council of Armed Forces, the election of President Mohamed Morsi in 2012, the coup d'etat in July 2012 and handing the presidency over to President Aldy Mansour, and the election of Abdel Fattah ElSisi in 2013. Among this political instability, information needed to be circulated quickly inside the movement, what could not have been achieved without using digital technologies, and digital media could be a good alternative to most of the face-to-face meetings , because securing digital messages becomes easier than securing personal communication.

Furthermore, the 2011 uprising has underscored digital activist, as using social media for political mobilization and organization of protest events, what made the internet host the different ideological and political currents in Egypt. There are numerous examples of Egyptian state officials attempting to catch up with the wave of technological advancement sweeping activist communities and portions of civil society in the country, by having an online presence of their own. Hence, in 2011, the Supreme Council of Armed Forces started a Facebook page, following which all the ministries and governmental bodies followed suit.

In fact, the Revolutionary Socialists linked the intensity of using social media to the size of users. So , during the peak of political protest movement (in 2011, 2012 until late 2013), Facebook has been the main channel for the Revolutionary Socialists to publish updates,

because it is the most popular social networking site globally and locally. In June 2012, the number of Facebook users in Egypt reached 16 million, with a 41 percent growth compared to 2011.

In practice, RevSoc did not made the members of the Revolutionary Socialists very interactive with the internet users nor very responsive to them. Actually, the accounts of the movement on most social media platforms are for content broadcasting only. Even at the time of highest political activism, the social media of the Revolutionary Socialists were not interactive. The content is published and visitors are left to comment and debate over it, and moderators would only intervene to delete the comments which include swearing or spam. ElHamalawy links the decrease of sociality of the RevSoc   to the political stagnation, as "The rhythm of event is very slow in comparison to three or four years ago. Hence, it is becoming a bit meaningless to ask a member to dedicate time and effort for updating or moderating our Facebook page." (Interview with ElHamalawy, 2017). The low interactivity in using social media is common across the world, studies in Italy (Mascheroni & Mattoni, 2013), Canada (Small, 2008) and France (Vaccari, 2007) show that political parties lack interactivity on social networking sites, what Klinger (2013) describes as a "challenge of having to adapt to the new logic of social media" (p.733).

However, the member of the Publicity Committee of the Revolutionary Socialists has been keen to follow the analytics of the content viewership and the feedback they get from social media users. The RevSoc enabled the Revolutionary Socialists to know what content people are reading, watching or listening to on their media, who are the audiences, in terms of

geographical locations, age range and gender. Plus, the digital media guided the Revolutionary Socialists to times where people are searching for content. The readership statistics encouraged the Revolutionary Socialists to make and share content, and to follow on the audiences' feedback on it.

Did Digital Media Benefitted or Harmed the Leftist Organisation?

Digital tools helped the movement to avoid possible incoherence after increasing membership in the year 2011, as it worked as a public sphere for them to meet older members, especially those who live in other provinces of Egypt or belong to other sectors. Moreover, digitalization has fastened the pace of decision-making, since many of the members' discussions were facilitated by end-to-end emails, particularly Gmail. Actually, in modern, internal fragmentation, and the lack of cohesive organizational infrastructure and to mobilization are main left problems (Shehata, 2010).

The shortcomings of the digitalization of the Revolutionary Socialists are the issues that any political movement may have if they go digital. Basically, ElHamalawy identifies two main issues:

> "first is that in social media, anybody can present themselves as a revolutionary socialist; just by writing that or their profile or using the #revsoc hash tag . The problem with that the person who claims to be

leftist can give their insights and present them as if they belong to Leninism. Often times, people on the social networking sites do perceive these opinions are representatives to the left. The second issue is the fact that the availability of digital content holds the members back from reading the leftists literature. If the one has a brief and concise reading, like what the digital content is, why would they go read books? I call this an' issue' because reading is essential for the preparation of a political cadre.

(Interview with ElHamalawy, 2017)

ElHamalawy's point regarding the online content as a more consumable intellectual content in comparison to the primary sources of the leftist ideology brings the notion of clicktivism to the fore. So, if the members of leftist organisations are reading the online distilled content as alternative to the big deep literature of Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin, would they, similarly, click hyperlinks on their computers instead of taking an action on the square?

Many political movements would have clicktivism as its biggest fear when it comes to digital media, but in practice, it is not necessarily caused by the internet penetration in the organization. In his article *Clicktivism is Ruining Leftist Activism*, Micah White (2010)introduces clicktivism as a consequence of the digitalization of action. Micah, who is co-creator of Occupy Wall Street, gives many examples for the online platforms that were used for protesting and reads the influence of their creation on the way the leftist actions in the U.S were taken until

2010. He slams a commodification of the protests and political activism. In fact, Micah (2010) raised different concerns the leftists may be having so far towards digitalization, nevertheless, reading looking at the many examples he provided, we find the problem of clicktivism arises when the digital tools are used to invite the public for the action. So, the people who are out of political organization are more likely to be drawn in clicktivism, but the real activists of certain movement would continue to work on the ground as well an online.

The solid structure of the Revolutionary Socialists was a shield for them against clicktivism. ElHamalawy believes that the "Clicktvism is an action taken in response to the question of 'what should we do?'.. in a strong organization, the member is assigned roles and tasks, they get the answer of how question" (interview with ElHamalawy, 2017). Ali agrees that digital media were serving the activism instead of replacing it, he recalls how mobile applications for texts and voice calls worked effectively for the members on the ground, in the occasions of massive actions, such as during the numerous protests which took place in Egypt in 2011, 2012 and 2013.

The Revolutionary Socialists did not think of digitalization as a replacement or even equivalent to the activism on the ground, but only facilitate it in real time, for instance by maker communication between members easier, faster and of less cost. And digital media can help in following up the results of the activism. For instance, publishing a flyer online and che cking the number and demographics of its views.

Conclusion

Digital media could be successfully employed to serve a leftist organization in both publicity and facilitation of organizational work. In the case of the Egyptian Revolutionary Socialists, digital media as carrier of the content of their publications, and for allowing the members to connect instantly, with less cost and surpassed the limitation of outreach to those who are on the run or live abroad. In the assessment of the Egyptian Revolutionary Socialists, clicktivism is less potential to happen to members of political groups, and solid organization of their group would let none of the members limit their actions to the internet and become inactive on the ground.

Effectively, digital media served the Revolutionary Socialists in terms of becoming trusted news hub for them, and a point of reference to those of the public who seek information about the left. Besides, on the internal level, digital media supported the coherence o the movement, by the creation of communication channels between members especially that after the 2011 uprising the number of members has increased. A possible lack of contact between members would have led to internal fragmentation. Furthermore, the process of joining the movement became easier and faster with the facilitation of digital media, as the internet services enabled members from outside the capital to purse the procedures of adherence to the Revolutionary Socialists remotely.