Call for papers for a scientific international conference on

Social Media in a Changing Media Environment: Lessons from the Arab world

Tunis, October 16-18, 2014

The beginning of 2011 was marked by the considerable contribution of the new social media in mobilizing and rallying Arab streets, and in inducing changes in the political, social, educational, media and other sectors. While conventional media had long been mirrors reflecting the marginal role played by recipient audiences as consumers not participants or active players, new media was able to enforce new debating, exchange and participation opportunities by offering people broader windows to look for information and the right to contribute to communication operations, and by making the virtual space an alternative to the conventional public space.

The need-driven interaction between technology and the public enabled new media to recognize that the communication democracy requires participation of all individuals with no exclusion. Social networks, blogs, video-sharing websites and satellite channels that have chosen to stream on the Internet have enforced another type of social freedoms and one of individuals' and groups' right for free communication. In particular in the Arab world, social media has played a tremendous role in the political awakening marked by the Arab spring.

However, social media do raise a number of issues subject of heated debates and controversies; issues are multidimensional and relate to epistemological, technical, cultural and historical factors reflecting two major trends: the first is skeptical due to the technology's ability to muddle social life with no consideration to technical contexts, the importance of social innovations and the communicative and cultural usages of these technologies, while the second trend is optimistic considering that new media have induced positive change in culture, economy, science, politics, etc… This view considers the virtual world to be an extension of real social life, and that identity can be constructed both socially and virtually.

From a political perspective, technology offers new tools for political life although it does not constitute the only factor inducing political change.

Arab media discourse is still disturbed and anxious in dealing with the impact of the new media on culture and innovation. On the one hand, this discourse looks at Arab users as being active and engaged in "alternative media" reflecting a new culture based on freedom, diversity, and creativity; on the other hand, it considers them victims of new powers subjugating the online space.

In this context, some believe that the widespread use of technology in media, education and other institutions does not necessarily reflect their development or the emergence of efficient manpower. Similarly, the development of new social, political and cultural trends does not mean they are shared by all societies i.e. they are not universal.

The misuse of new media has also resulted in a number of blunders reflecting the real moral face of some media players in the twenty first century and how ideologies are trying to manipulate new media in order to reinforce some parties' domination over others; this has led some media institutions to address the issue of social media manipulation attempts by developing specific charters that constitute a part of the new digital media ethics including broad or specific areas depending on their contents.

What is then the guarantee to ensure safe usage of new media? How can we prevent against risks raised by the new media in the Arab World now witnessing a number of political, social, cultural and information transformations?

This conference will make an attempt to understand various approaches dealing with the new media and to identify the role of online stakeholders in dismantling the sets of values and developing them again. It thrives to comprehend transformations induced by the use of new media in the political, social, cultural, and economic spheres. It will also tackle the changes affecting the work of media and communication professionals, and also their influence on professional ethics and the need to respect individual privacy. Presentations dealing with the aforementioned issues will be welcomed and should be integrated into one of the following panels:

- **Topic 1**: Social Media in the Arab World: Theoretical and Historical Approaches
- **Topic 2:** Social Media, Democratic Change and Political Participation
- **Topic 3:** Social transformations in the Arab World and the role of the elite: disaggregating and emerging elites
- **Topic 4:** New media and communication practices: Violations against ethics and privacy of individuals
- **Topic 5:** Professionals' experiences in the field of new media: towards an Arab Code of Digital Media Ethics

Schedule of the International Scientific Conference:

- **May 15, 2014**: Deadline for the submission of scientific contributions to the international conference (a 500 word abstract describing the Topic, the Issue, and a preliminary bibliography)
  The abstract must be sent by email as a word document and a PDF-Document to the International Conference's Secretariat. All submissions will be anonymously peer-reviewed according to the criteria of originality, relevance, theoretical foundation, appropriateness of the methods used, clarity of language, and reference to the conference theme.
- **June 15, 2014**: Decision of the Scientific Committee about selected abstracts
- **June 30, 2014**: Participation confirmation from selected applicants
- **August 25, 2014**: Final versions of the scientific presentations sent to the Scientific Committee as a word document for publication on time.
- **October 16-18, 2014**: International Scientific Conference on "Social media in a changing media environment: Lessons from the Arab world"

For selected Arab presenters a limited amount of funding will be available through the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) covering travel and accommodation. Please indicate on the title page whether you apply for funding.

Scientific Secretariat

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