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Social Media coverage of “Maspero”: Solidarity between Muslims and Christians post The Egyptian Uprising

Abstract

The current study examines the print and social media coverage of the “Maspero” massacre in Egypt, in which military forces attacked Coptic Christians in a predominantly Muslim country. By employing a qualitative content analysis, the authors examine the role of media in inducing a state of social cohesion. Data were collected from a state-owned newspaper, *Al-Ahram*, and an independent newspaper, *Al-Masry Al-Youm*. Data were also collected from a blog that compiles testimonies of witnesses to the “Maspero” massacre as well as three of Egypt’s best-known online activists: Alaa Abd El Fattah (@alaa), Salma Said (@salmasaid), and Rasha Azab (@RashaPress). The results reveal the themes of print and social media coverage of the events, with the suggestion that social media was much more effective in inducing social cohesion than the print media.

Keywords: Maspero, Egypt, Social Media, Social Cohesion, Community Media

Introduction

Social media can play a key role in enabling activists to organize and communicate news on the ground (Khamis & Vaughn, 2012). Studies examining the Arab 2011 uprising have supported social media’s strong role in these uprisings – or what some scholars call “Twitter revolutions” (Khiabany, 2012). Between 2004 and 2011, Egypt has witnessed the emergence of an active virtual social community, providing an opportunity for disparate oppositional groups, representing conflicting ideologies, to collaborate (Lim, 2009; 2010).

Community media scholarship indicates that media, such as newspapers and radio, nurture a community’s social cohesion (Rodriguez, 2005; Yamamoto, 2011). Social cohesion relates to a structure of “relations, bonds, and beliefs that connects different individuals to a large collective unit”, enabling people to develop a sense of being involved in a common endeavor (Yamamoto, 2011, p. 2). Rodriguez (2005) found that indigenous radio has strengthened the communal cohesion among different ethnicities that live in southeast Mexico. The purpose of this study is to examine the role of social media in creating social cohesion in the aftermath of the 2011 Egyptian uprisings.

Social communities that emerge online are defined as weak but diverse social ties that allow individuals to interact with one another over a prolonged period of time (Castells, 2001). In Egypt, social media has created virtual communities that satisfy the requirements of Castells’ (2001) definition of online social communities. Egypt is located in a region that is governed

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by authoritarian regimes and where the media is state-owned and government-controlled, which makes it a worthy of such an examination because social media offers a space *free* of government control. Since 2004, the emergence of a vibrant virtual social community in Egypt has enabled oppositional movements, such as Kefaya, to attract and mobilize groups and individuals from different ideologies (Lim, 2012).

The current study examines the role of virtual social communities in fostering social cohesion in Egyptian society. According to Simmel's (1955) external conflict/internal cohesion proposition, social cohesion increases during external conflict. After the successful ousting of Hosni Mubarak, the Maspero massacre took place in Egypt – an event in which the Egyptian army crushed peaceful Christian protesters by driving military vehicles into the crowd. The current study employs a content analysis to compare Arabic-language, traditional and social media coverage of Muslim-Christian ties in response to the “Maspero massacre”, which took place in October 2011. The traditional media examined in this study would include the state-owned newspaper, *Al-Ahram*, and the privately-owned newspaper, *Al-Masry Al-Youm* from between October to November 2011. The social media examined includes messages from 41 individuals, who contributed to the Maspero Testimonies blog as well as the Twitter accounts of the activists, such as Salma Said (@salmasaid), Rasha Azab (@RashaPress) and Alaa Abd El Fattah (@alaa).

Media and Social Cohesion

The media are important actors in developing social cohesion. For example, national newspapers are said to engage in conflict-oriented journalism, which front-page focuses on events issues or experiences that are wrong and may be controversial (Campbell, Martin & Fabos, 2011). This can be contrasted with the consensus-oriented journalism that is often found in newspapers which cover local activities that occur in schools, town government, and social organizations (Campbell, Martin & Fabos, 2011). The latter form of journalism can be found in community newspapers that are non-daily as well as in community newspapers.

Community newspapers are local newspapers that describe the “activity of local institutions such as government agencies, businesses, schools, churches and volunteer organizations, and are generally supportive of these institutions’ agendas and perspectives” (Yamamoto, 2011, p. 20). While these newspapers do not practice conflict-oriented, they do not avoid local problems (Yamamoto, 2011). Rather, these newspapers report on such conflicts in such a way that would “identify common goals and mobilize collective action to address them” (Yamamoto, 2011, p. 21). In this environment, reporting on external conflict is more acceptable because it builds solidarity among the locals. Reporting on external conflict can “bind a loosely connected group of people and increase its identification with a local community” (Yamamoto, 2011, p. 21). In this way, media such as newspapers contribute towards social cohesion.

In fact, Yamamoto (2011) found that newspaper reading was correlated with increased local social cohesion. In his analysis of secondary data set including 4,119 observations from the Northwest Area Foundation 2005 Ventures Social Indicators Survey, Yamamoto (2011) found that reading community newspapers contributed to a sense of social cohesion even when he controlled for the influence of demographic variables and variables dealing with social ties to the place of residence and community. When examining the interaction among variables, Yamamoto (2011) found that residents who lived in the community for a longer pe-

riod of time and read community newspaper were more likely to contribute to a sense of social cohesion.

While the medium of community newspapers contribute to a sense of social cohesion, it is not the only medium to do so. Rodríguez (2005) examined themes in the content of a Mexican radio station and their effect on social cohesion of indigenous people. In fact, Rodríguez (2005) called the radio a community radio because it “derives the participative nature of its programming” (p. 157). Rodríguez (2005) found that radio was most often used to relay personal message, but that it was also used “as an instrument of denunciation and defense” when indigenous people were abused (p. 163). Similar to community newspapers, a sense of solidarity can be created by emphasizing the connections between members of the community and contrasting it to external groups in community radio.

In fact, the community radio was used to convey feelings of security and confidence by members of the community in the southwestern Mexican region as well as those who had left. Some of Rodríguez’s (2005) data indicated that some listeners felt that the radio is all they had, and that it kept the indigenous people together. Even indigenous people who immigrated to New York admitted that their memories and experiences with community radio profoundly influenced their lives and “ignites feelings of nostalgia for their lands of origins” (Rodríguez, 2005, p. 164). The community radio also gave intellectuals in the marginalized indigenous community an ability to emerge in the public sphere, confirmed that the indigenous culture existed despite its lack of dominance, and even extended the meaning of community to encompass individual listeners with other ethnic identities that may be listening and can relate to the broadcast content. Similar to newspapers, the radio medium can contribute to social cohesion.

Television is another medium that can contribute to a sense of social cohesion. In an analysis of television in Amsterdam, Costera Meijer (2010) found that a local broadcaster was successful in contributing to a sense of belonging to the city of Amsterdam. While Costera Meijer (2010) found this to be true for immigrants and non-immigrants, she did find that the visual nature of television was more effective in creating a sense of social cohesion among white residents than immigrants. In her analysis, Costera Meijer (2010) revealed that a journalist “found out that her stories could be made more exciting, layered and complex (for white *and* non-white viewers, Muslims *and* Christians) when she used the amazement, perspective or experience of the marginalized group as an angle” (Costera Meijer, 2010, p. 338). Therefore, local television could contribute to a sense of social cohesion – even among various religious and ethnic groups.

To summarize, the media are effective in creating a sense of social cohesion. Sociologist Noah Friedkin (2004) described a cohesive group as one that produces “positive membership attitudes and behaviors” (p. 410). He notes that this cohesive quality is as important of the group as a whole as it is of the interactions of individuals within a group. This definition comes from many decades of scholarship, which began by examining group members’ decision to stay in or leave groups (Friedkin, 2004). The current study examines the role of social media in contributing to social cohesion in Egypt during the Maspero Massacre and its aftermath.

Egypt's "Maspero" Massacre

The term "Coptic" is the term that refers to Christians in Egypt that were present before the arrival of Arab Muslims in the seventh century (Dowell, 2012). While its roots are attributed to an Arabic transliteration of the Greek word for Egypt, the term today refers to Christian Egyptians regardless of their religious demonization or ethnic origin (Dowell, 2012). The Coptic Church is not only one of the "longest-standing Christian institutions in the world and the largest Christian community in the whole of the Middle East" (Dowell, 2012, p. 108), but it has also been independent of influence from the Roman Catholic papal authority (Dowell, 2012). Further, the Coptic Church supported Hosni Mubarak as he rose to power in the aftermath of socialist and Islamist leaders like Gamal Abdel Nasser and Anwar Sadat (Dowell, 2012).

After the events of the Arab spring and the resignation of Hosni Mubarak as the president of Egypt, the place of Christian minorities in Egypt was highlighted in the public sphere (Dowell, 2012). Here, it is important to note that the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) ruled Egypt after Hosni Mubarak's resignation until May 2012 (Stork, 2012, p. 466). One event which highlighted the struggle to define the place of Christian minorities in Egyptian society occurred on October 9, 2011 when a violent demonstration occurred in front of the state-owned media headquarters in Cairo. The event, known as the "Maspero" massacre, brought together a "cocktail" of human rights issues including using state-owned media to incite violence on anti-government protesters, failure to train forces to protect religious minorities such as the Coptic Christians and their places of worship, and failure to control crowds among others (Stork, 2012, p. 474). The violent attacks ended with the death of 27 civilians, "13 by the rampaging armored vehicles and 14 by gunfire – and more than 200 wounded" (Stork, 2012, p. 475). The state-run media described the cause of the massacre as provocation by homemade weapons targeted at the forces of the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF), which released a statement after the incident, blaming "the violence on 'unknown culprits'" (Stork, 2012, p. 475). On the other hand, protesters – including Muslims as well as Christians – claimed that they were attacked by the military without any provocation (Stork, 2012). The violence "quickly degeneration into several hours of car-burning, rock-throwing and street-fighting between groups hard to identify" (Stork, 2012, p. 475).

The events of the "Maspero" massacre marked "an attempted re-inscription of the terms of the debate surrounding politics, public religion, minorities, and the alliance between religious and state authorities" (Dowell, 2012, p. 113). Not only did it bring into question the place of the Coptic Church in Egyptian society, but also questions about evangelical establishments that offer less traditional services with "up-beat soft-rock-influenced worship ballads" (Dowell, 2012, p.115-116). Further, the events of the "Maspero" massacre influenced the relationship between Muslim and Christian communities in Egypt. The protests in response to the massacre included "striking slogans of religious unity between Christians and Muslims in Egypt" (Dowell, 2012, p. 120). In fact, joint prayer on Nov. 11, 2011 (also referred to as the 11-11-11 prayer night) exemplified the "increased kindness and tolerance" that Egyptians perceived to dominate the new Egypt after Mubarak's resignation (Dowell, 2012, p. 127).

This prayer night was not a one-time event. Rather, Dowell (2012) interviewed Christian Egyptians who joined the Muslim communal prayers on Fridays in Tahrir Square, and even "invited thousands of Salafis to the church building to perform their ceremonial washing and prayer" (Dowell, 2012, p. 127). Further, the Egyptian identity being inclusive of Christians

and Muslims has existed at least since the 20th century when Egyptians fought for a secular, modern nation-state independent of colonizers (Galal, 2012).

Iskander (2012) showed that newspapers reflect the emphasis on unity between Egyptian Christians and Egyptian Muslims in the public sphere. In a content analysis of *Al-Masry Al-Youm* and *Al-Ahram* newspapers, Iskander (2012) found three ways the interaction of Christian and Muslim identities manifested themselves in the analysis. First, Iskander (2012) found that a selective collective memory remembered and forgot events depending on their support “of national unity as a natural state of relations between Muslims and Christians in Egypt” (p. 33). Second, he found that newspapers framed conflict between Christians and Muslims as foreign and due to the influence of “outsiders” (p. 33). Third, Iskander (2012) also found that newspapers identified individuals within a religious group as being either moderate or extremist, such that an ordinary Muslim citizen can be contrasted to a member of the Muslim Brotherhood and an ordinary Christian citizen can be contrasted to the Coptic diaspora. The current study includes a content analysis of *Al-Masry Al-Youm* and *Al-Ahram* newspapers as well as some social media coverage of the Maspero massacre.

Social Media and Social Cohesion in Egypt

When the Egyptian government blocked Internet access in Egypt during January 2011 due to the use of social media by anti-government protesters, social media in Egypt was discussed in association with the Arab spring events; however, the history of social media in Egypt precedes the events of the Arab spring. The Egyptian government did advance media freedoms online even before the Egyptian uprisings that took place in the end of 2010 (Al Nashmi et al., 2010). Al Nashmi et al. explain that the government did this by increasing the access to the internet in rural areas across Egypt and by making “it clear that it has no intention of controlling or censoring content over the Internet” (p. 724). Despite allowing for some articles that were censored from print to appear online, the government did “crack down on people who posted controversial material online” (Al Nashmi et al., 2010, p. 724).

Yet, the role of social media users during the Egyptian uprising which resulted in the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak cannot be ignored. Franklin (2011) reported that journalists at state-run newspapers, such as *Al-Ahram*, “held demonstrations at their offices decrying corruption in journalism and lack of professionalism” (p. 17). The result was news coverage by independent newspapers such as *Al-Masry Al-Youm* reporting on “government thugs staging lootings” (Franklin, 2011, p. 17). Franklin (2011) attributes “this newfound honesty” to those “who risked their lives openly defying the government”, including journalists as well as social media users. Social media “became electronic megaphones, delivering both practical news (what streets were safe, where medics were needed)” and mobilizing “thousands of supporters online” (Franklin, 2011, p. 17).

A content analysis of 661 Facebook posts on a page of the April 6th Youth Movement, a youth activists Facebook page, revealed that 13.5 percent of the posts dealt with the issue of national unity (Alkazemi, Bowe & Blom, 2012). While this category was defined broadly to include solidarity among Egyptians of varying socioeconomic levels and genders, the authors quote a post in which the unity between Muslim and Christian Egyptians was stressed (Alkazemi, Bowe & Blom, 2012). The post included individuals with Egyptian Christian names (such as Botros) and Egyptian Muslim names (such as Ahmed) claiming that they wanted to

protest to protect the rights of one another (Alkazemi, Bowe & Blom, 2012, p. 271). The purpose of this paper is to examine how social media contributed to social cohesion between Muslims and Copts in Egyptian society.

The current study will examine both blog posts and Twitter accounts dealing with the “Maspero” massacre posted between October 2011 and November 2011. The blog examined is a compilation of eye-witness testimonies from 41 individuals who were mainly Muslims that make up what is referred to as the “Maspero Testimonies” blog. The Twitter feeds of three Muslim Egyptian activists were also content-analyzed.

Alaa Abd El Fattah is the author of a blog that Middle East historian Mark Levine calls “what is likely the best-known blog in Egypt” (LeVine, 2008, p. 95). In fact, Alaa Abd El Fattah received awards from Reporters Without Borders and other international organizations after he was jailed for 45 days in 2006 for “protesting without a permit” (Levine, 2008, p. 95). Abd El Fattah is one of several in the Egyptian blogger community, where activists train one another “in computer technologies” and “attend demonstrations and pass out new website information” (Levine, 2008, p. 95). As a result of exposing the violations committed by the Military Police and the Central Security forces during the “Maspero” Massacre, SCAF claimed that Abdel Fatah committed acts of violence during the massacre, made him face a military trial, detained for three months, then later released him as a result of local and international pressure. The current study also includes tweets made by Egyptian activists, such as Alaa Abd El Fattah (@alaa), Salma Said (@salmasaid), and Rasha Azab (@RashaPress).

Research Questions

RQ₁: How did print media and social media cover the “Maspero” massacre differently?

RQ₂: How was social media coverage of the “Maspero” massacre related to social cohesion of Egyptian Christians and Egyptian Muslims?

Method

In this study, data was examined using qualitative content analysis. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) define qualitative content analysis as “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (p. 1278). Qualitative content analysis emphasizes a text’s contextual meaning and categorizes the implicit as well as the inferred meaning of a communication (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

News stories relating to the “Maspero” massacre that appeared in *Al-Ahram* daily newspaper and in *Al-Masry Al-Youm* between October 9th and November 30th 2011 were analyzed. Non-random purposive sampling was utilized in order to investigate the study’s research questions. *Al-Ahram* daily newspaper was selected as it is representative of the ruling authority since it falls within the category of state-owned media. *Al-Masry Al-Youm* was selected as it is the most popular privately-owned daily newspaper. Every fifth story appearing in those two newspapers relating to “Maspero” was reviewed to create thematic categories about the data.

The sample of this study consisted of forty-one testimonies that constitute the “Maspero Testimonies” blog, which was developed by Egyptian activists between October and November 2011 in order to compile eye-witness testimonies of the “Maspero” massacre. In addition,

50 tweets of three young Egyptian activists Alaa Abdel Fatah, Rasha Azab, and Salma Said -who have been renowned for their leadership role during the 2011 January uprising- were analyzed. For each activist, every fifth tweet of that activist's Thursdays and Fridays tweets relating to “Maspero” which appeared between October 9th and November 30th 2011 were included in the study. A total of 60 news stories, thirty of which appeared in *Al-Ahram* and the remaining thirty appeared in *Al-Masry Al-Youm* between October 9th and November 30th 2011, were included in the sample.

Results

The content analysis of traditional and social media text revealed four different themes: unknown culprits, army-led violence as opposed to sectarian violence, lack of credibility of state-owned media, and solidarity with Copts.

Violence was caused by “unknown culprits”

News stories that appeared in *Al-Ahram* consistently offered the explanation that the violence that erupted in “Maspero” was caused by unknown culprits that slipped into the protest and that attacked the security forces and Military police causing them to respond in defense. This was contradictory to the eyewitness testimonies that were included in the “Maspero Testimonies” blog and the activists' testimonies who confirmed through their tweet feeds that the security forces opened fire first. In order to give this explanation more credibility, *Al-Ahram* repeatedly mentioned that the church, and the fact-finding committee, which investigated the incident confirmed that unknown culprits opened fire at both protestors and security forces. *Al-Ahram* mentioned that these unknown culprits, who have a sense of allegiance to the former regime, wanted to create tension between the army and the people. This explanation provided by *Al-Ahram* offered the SCAF a way to avoid responsibility for what had happened.

Not sectarian violence but an army-led one

A main theme that surfaced from “Maspero Testimonies” blog and twitter feeds was that the “Maspero” massacre was not a sectarian violence against Copts but rather an army led one. Ahmed Mounir mentioned “Suddenly, without any warning, the tanks burst in and ran a lot of people over. It was a scene reminiscent of the 2011 Day of Rage. The army that began by killing protesters, mowing people down, and provoking the others into a confrontation.” In her testimony on the “Maspero Testimonies blog, Amal El-Mohandes said “Only 30-40 seconds after the march arrived the Military Police started shooting demonstrators... We were scurrying like chickens, watching people fall around us. Injuries and lots of blood.” In one of his tweets, Alaa Abdel Fatah said “God, again they will say third party ..is that what made the army kill the unarmed?” Rasha Azab mentioned in one of her tweets “bottom line: fake sectarian clashes+ announcing a state of emergency+ return of military trials+ making Egyptians believe in international intervention= welcome Supreme Council for Armed Forces,” in another tweet she adds “our role as activists is to show how SCAF is putting us all in a lot of confusion because SCAF doesn't hold any truth and survives on a bunch of lies.”

In addition to the messages and testimonies that appeared on social media, *Al-Masry Al-Youm* did not frame the massacre as being caused by sectarian tension or by unknown culprits, instead, it attempted to provide an objective account of the situation. For example, some of its news stories highlighted that Biblawy, Minister of Finance at the time, resigned to express his disappointment with the government. In addition, it equally represented the contradictory stories that were offered by both SCAF and protestors. Some news stories reported on the press conference held by SCAF which mentioned that protestors were armed as well as that held by youth coalitions which held SCAF responsible for the massacre. Other news stories reported on TV shows which hosted figures from the opposition and from youth coalitions who condemned SCAF and dismissed its press conference.

The state-owned media is inciting strife

Another main theme that resulted from the content analysis was related to the role of state-owned media in inciting strife. In his testimony on the “Maspero Testimonies blog, Ahmed Mounir mentioned “It was the despicable Egyptian state television that incited strife by broadcasting news of the death of army soldiers and reporting that the Christians were killing the army! Not only that, it even issued a call to citizens to go out and protect the army from the Christians!!! This was a clear attempt to ignite conflict between Christians and Muslims.” In another testimony, Ahmed Magdy said “I saw enough duplicity, lies and deception from that thing they call national TV.” In one of his tweets Alaa Abdel Fatah challenged TV’s allegations that Christian protestors were armed and that they initiated the violence by attacking security forces by saying “What rifles? Do you believe anything mentioned on TV?” Exposing bias on the part of ONtv - a privately owned channel- which forced its renowned presenter Yosri Foda to suspend his program *Akher Kalam*, Rasha Azab mentions “Yosri’s battle with ONtv indicates one thing: there’s no such thing as in free media so long as it is controlled by businessmen.”

Al-Masry Al-Youm reported on the negative role of state-owned media while the massacre was taking place. A number of news stories mentioned that youth coalitions and oppositional figures called for the resignation and the trying of the Minister of Communication whom they held responsible for inciting strife against Christian protestors. In addition, there were mentions of protests by the media calling for the Minister’s resignation as well as mentions of tweet feeds that ridiculed the Minister’s statements about the television presenters being emotionally confused. Several news stories mentioned that an independent fact-finding committee was charged with evaluating the performance of the media in relation to the massacre. Follow-up news stories mentioned that the media fact-finding committee found that the media was biased and lacked objectivity.

We must show solidarity with Copts

Solidarity with Copts and taking an active role in uniting Muslims and Christians was a forth theme that resulted from examining the media text. In one of his tweets, Alaa Abdel Fatah mentioned “Vivian Magdy’s fiancée Michael was crushed by army vehicles, condolences will make a difference to her,” in another he said “we either avenge them or die like them,” and in a third tweet he mentions “I went in and saw 17 corpses and Mina Daniel is one of them, how will we forgive ourselves?”

Tweeting while the massacre was taking place Rasha Azab called onto others to go to "Maspero" by saying "take to the streets now so that it does not get framed as a sectarian protest, your brothers are in the midst of a battle." In another tweet she announces an upcoming protest in solidarity with "Maspero" martyrs "thousands of posters were distributed today in Maadi calling for a protest tomorrow at 6 pm in front of the metro station," in a third tweet she mentions that one of the martyrs' sisters joined activists at the military court while Alaa Abdel Fatah was being questioned "Mina Daniel's sister is with us at the Military Court."

In solidarity with Christians, Salma Said tweeted "down with the Army there's no place for us in this country if there's no place for Christians." Tweeting from marches to commemorate Maspero martyrs she mentioned "The protest is moving from the Cathedral to Tahrir," and "Photos of a march with candles from Talaat Harb square to commemorate Maspero martyrs." Calling onto others to protest and demand justice she tweeted "this coming Friday there's a call for a huge protest from Tahrir to Maspero, be optimistic," and "If people can not see that last Sunday's massacre is a good enough reason to protest then it's a hopeless case."

The first research question asked, "How did print media and social media cover the "Maspero" massacre differently?" Social media included eyewitness testimonies by Muslims which was a credible way of challenging the story put forward by SCAF and its state-owned media. Activists shared photos and videos they took in "Maspero" and at the morgue which showed that protestors were unarmed, and that some of them were shot by live bullets while others were ran over by armored vehicles. In addition, social media included messages that aimed at mobilizing others into action such as encouraging them to join solidarity protests and marches. Unlike *Al-Ahram* and *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, social media did not mention anything about unknown culprits as possibly being responsible for initiating the violence. Instead, twitter feeds of the three activists indicated that thugs collaborated together with security forces at throwing stones and terrorizing protestors with white arms. *Al-Ahram* news stories consistently attributed the violence to the unknown culprits implying that SCAF was being unfairly framed by the old regime. *Al-Masry Al-Youm* was much more objective in covering the massacre and represented both stories the one offered by SCAF as well as that put forward by the protestors. Unlike *Al-Ahram*, *Al-Masry Al-Youm* humanized martyrs through a number of human-interest stories about them. It also represented the press conference held by youth movements along side that held by SCAF, thus exposing readers to an alternative story from the one offered by SCAF.

The second research question asked, "How was social media coverage of the "Maspero" massacre related to social cohesion of Egyptian Christians and Egyptian Muslims?" To answer this question, first it may be necessary to explain the role of *Al-Ahram* and *Al-Masry Al-Youm*. *Al-Ahram* is a state-owned newspaper that is unofficially run by SCAF at the time of the "Maspero" massacre. This could be one of the reasons that they attributed the attacks to unknown culprits who were also mentioned as being supporters of the former regime. *Al-Masry Al-Youm* is an independent newspaper, which presented several perspectives, including accounts of the army firing against protestors first and accounts of the protestors attacking the army first. Over time, they included more testimonials from eyewitnesses and human-interest pieces about the martyrs, which were humanizing to the Christian martyrs that were killed by armed forces.

Social media coverage of the events urged Muslims to attend the protests to protect Christian Egyptians. The social media was not only used to explain the events, but also to mobilize protesters. In this way, social media differed from newspaper coverage of the "Maspero" massacre.

Over time, as conflicting reports came out to explain the “Maspero” events, bloggers and social media users advocated for the creation of a fact-finding committee to evaluate the performance of traditional media in inciting hatred and violence against protesters on October 9, 2011.

When the SCAF held a press conference to deal with the evidence against the unidentified, third parties that began the violence that night, *Al-Ahram* did not cover the press conference held by the youth movements in response. However, *Al-Masry Al-Youm* did cover both the press conferences of the government and the youth movement.

Discussion

The role of social media in relation to the “Maspero” massacre went beyond merely sharing photos and videos and mobilizing protests. Twitter messages called onto everyone to come together in solidarity with Christians by providing testimonies, participating in protests and marches as well as joint Muslim-Christian prayers. By circulating tweet feeds about Mina Daniel, one of the “Maspero” martyrs, as being one of the heroes of the January 25th uprising, activists aimed to create a sense that Muslims and Christians were both involved together in the struggle against the former regime and they that they should continue working together to uncover continued violations and injustices. A photo of Daniel while being treated in a mosque in Tahrir square from an injury during the Battle of the Camel on February 2nd 2011, and another in which he was escaping from tear gas on January 28th 2011, which was known as the Day of Rage, positioned Daniel as a nationalistic hero who was no different from other Muslim youth who participated in the 2011 uprising. Rasha Azab tweeted that Mary, Mina Daniel’s sister went to the military court in solidarity with Alaa Abdel Fatah who was being accused of inciting violence during the massacre. “Maspero Testimonies” blog also highlighted that Daniel was one of the January 25th heroes and that his death was a great loss.

“Maspero Testimonies” blog and twitter feeds of activists emphasized that thugs and security forces attacked Christian protestors in the same manner they have been attacking all other protestors and peaceful sit-ins ever since the ousting of Mubarak. Tweets by Rasha Azab, Alaa Abdel Fatah, and Salma Said implied that the massacre was SCAF’s plan to divide Muslims and Christians in order to continue in power. Those activists wanted to get the message across to Muslims and Christians alike that their struggle against SCAF is a common endeavor. Due to the freedom offered by social media and the censorship that is exercised over traditional media, the former facilitated the activists’ task and enabled them to circulate graphic videos and photos of martyrs in the morgue. They were also able to circulate videos showing security forces firing at protestors and armored vehicles running over them. Without the ability to widely circulate such videos, photos and eyewitness testimonies, there would have been confusion over whether the Christian protestors were armed or the unknown culprits were the ones who initiated the violence. While Egyptian television incited strife by mentioning that Christian protestors were attacking the army and called onto people to go to “Maspero” to protect “their army” from Christian protestors, social media messages warned everyone from believing such a story.

In addition to providing an accurate account of the massacre to social media users, social media acted as a source of reference for privately owned traditional media such as *Al-Masry Al-Youm*. News stories on *Al-Masry Al-Youm* included information that originated on Twit-

ter and “Maspero Testimonies” blog. By referring to social media messages, *Al-Masry Al-Youm* was able to provide a more objective reporting about the massacre in which both the SCAF’s story and the protestors’ story were represented. As time went by, *Al-Masry Al-Youm* represented the view of the Christian protestors more predominantly, announced solidarity marches, joint prayers, and youth coalitions’ press conferences and statements. This would not have been possible without the testimonies, photos, and videos that were being widely circulated on social media.

The findings of this study suggest that social media can foster social cohesion in countries that are governed by autocratic regimes, in which state-owned media is highly controlled and censored.

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