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In the Twenty-first century, many new media environments have been flourished. In fact, digitalization had led to the birth of virtual communities that emerged from the amazing intersection of humanity and technology. This has helped in constructing new forms of social ties that goes beyond geographical locations, a concept that was first raised by Marshall McLuhan [1] when he voiced the development of communication technologies that bridged time and space and ushered in the creation of a global village. Practicing socialization can be a totally new experience with implications for both youth and the social sphere.

Generally speaking a virtual community is defined as "social relationships forged in cyberspace through repeated contact with a specified boundary or place that is symbolically delineated by topic of interest" [2]. In fact, with the increasing population of the online communities, virtuality is no longer perceived as a characteristic of new media [3], but rather it is a social practice that is creating new communication potentials, constructing new social ties, and raising challenging questions that need to be investigated.

One of the current virtual communities is Facebook, which is a social utility that connects people worldwide. Facebook is a free-access website that allows users to join networks, such as school, place of employment, or geographic region, to connect and interact with other people. Users can post messages for their friends to see and update their personal profile to notify friends of happenings in their life.

But, can Facebook as a new social media be considered an extension to the social space? It has been proven that Facebook has furnished the opportunity to build new forms of social ties and another type of community among youth. A case that further proves the former aspect is the role of Facebook in fostering Egypt's January 25th 2011 Revolution. The Facebook as a new form of social media was used as a very strong tool for social engagement. Further, it was a powerful mean of communication away from government's censorship that strengthened revolts' empowerment and helped in organizing their strategies.

One can argues that through Facebook, participants are engaged in a new form of public sphere, and public discourse. In fact, the previous points have a paramount implication on the enhancement of civic relationships as the integration of various kinds of people at one public sphere regardless of their social hierarchal standards and ideological backgrounds indicate the availability of virtual social equality and democracy that reinforced the civic inclusion of participants.

The latter points further reflect that online communities extended the notion of the public sphere as participants experience new forms of social options. For elaboration, the democratic atmosphere nourished at virtual communities; the diversity of discourse due to the diversity of people; the two way flow of communication that depend on personality and beliefs rather than external appearance; the liberation from interactive obstacles that exist in the physical world; and the harmony of discourse due to the sharing of common interests, are all categories for the kinds of new social options that are provided through the virtual community. New social media played a role in expanding the notion of public sphere. People practice virtual socialization, which as a consequence has created a new type for civic inclusions

The discussion of the expansion of public sphere created by the virtual communities has some civic implications, and thus is inevitably linked to the term of social capital as virtual communities represent an unhindered form of communication and liberal deliberation that characterize the new social media of the twenty-first century.

References

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