

## **Online News Information Seeking: An Analysis of the Usage of Search Engines vs Social Networks in Egypt**

**Noran Aref**

The American University in Cairo

E-mail: n.fekry@aucegypt.edu

### **Abstract**

With the rise of social media in the 21<sup>st</sup> century predications are circulating around their role in replacing search engines as the primary source of finding news information online. This study aimed at examining this notion, assessing the power of each platform in the area of news information retrieval and describing how both platforms are competing to attract internet users. The researcher also analyzed the different motivations and gratifications obtained from using each, while linking the study to the uses and gratifications theory.

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to examine whether users relied on search engines or social networks to get their news online and the reasons why they rely on each one. A survey was conducted on a convenience sample of 402 Egyptian internet users and qualitative interviews were also conducted with experts and professionals, producing recommendations for future research as well as for search engine, social network and online news media companies.

**Keywords:** search engines, social networks, information seeking, news online, digital media, Egyptian internet users

## **Introduction**

We live in a twenty-four seven world of journalism, a world of news about news that exist providing people with near-instant and ever-present news information. In this fast paced technology driven society we live in, it has been proven within the last few years that one of the most sought after channels in finding information is no other than the Internet. In 2009, amongst 3,348 Egyptians surveyed, 50% of them preferred reading newspapers online while 34% preferred reading newspapers offline (Ghannam, 2011).

Initially online users would log on to specific websites or use a search engine such as Google or Yahoo! to find relevant news about a topic of interest. However, recently, social networks such as Facebook and Twitter have been playing an instrumental role in the “search” scene where individuals are relying on them further as online news sources (Newman, 2011). In Egypt, and specifically after the revolution, an increasing dependence on social networks has been observed. People have started to use social networks frequently to learn, send and share news about affairs within the country and the region (Arslan et al, 2012).

The purpose of this study is to identify which internet platform are Egyptians more reliant on as a news source and what are the different motivations and gratifications obtained from using each platform.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The Uses and Gratifications theory will be the basis of the analysis of this research’s theoretical framework.

Surveillance needs are seen as one of the important gratifications users gain from using the Internet. A uses and gratifications study of Internet usage among English-speaking Egyptian students was carried out by Abdulla (2007). This study was the first of its kind in the region at that time. Five hundred and two undergraduate and graduate students filled the online survey and the results showed that males spent more time online than females. In an average week the average time students spent on the internet was 18.7 hours, a high percentage of them were either satisfied or very satisfied with the Internet. More than 95% of the students saw the Internet as a channel that represents an opportunity to the Arab region

where it “could help Arabs learn about the rest of the world”. Five motives for using the Internet were found: entertainment, information seeking, personal utility, surveillance, and social interaction. Interestingly, information seeking was indicated as the most significant motive in this research as well as in others that were done before in the U.S.

Quite a number of studies have explored the area of the Internet and its various uses since its introduction but little have focused on search engines in particular. From those few was a study by Ancu and Cozma (2009) where they found that the development of search engines has amplified and better served the audience’s surveillance needs.

Social networks have also been on the rise as a source of fulfillment to users surveillance needs. A school survey distributed in March 2011 on Egyptian Facebook users in Dubai showed that: 29.55% used Facebook to organize actions and manage activists, 24.05% to spread information to the world about civil movements 30.93% to raise awareness within the country on movements and 15.46% for entertainment (Joseph, 2012, p. 166).

In this study it is important for the researcher to not only identify which internet platform are Egyptian users more reliant on for news consumption but to also identify the different reasons and gratifications obtained from using each. Which as a result, will enable the researcher to assess the kind of competition that exists between search engines and social networks.

### **Egypt, News and the Internet**

In October 1993, the internet was introduced in Egypt by efforts from both the Supreme Council of Universities and the Information and Decision Support Center. At that time the number of users utilizing the Internet were only a few thousand in comparison to Egypt’s population, which was 63 million, back then (Abdulla, 2005).

In 1996 the number of internet users increased to 20,000 and at that time, internet connectivity relied on Internet Service Providers (ISP’s) that provided chargeable internet services to anyone who could afford them. Back then, in one year, Egyptians had to pay from 1,000 to several thousand Egyptian pounds (around \$300 - \$1000) for the internet service. (Abdulla, 1995; Internet Society of Egypt, 2001). The government later on, in 2002, implemented a new initiative to increase the internet penetration in the country and as a

result, dial-up internet subscriptions through ISP's became free of charge. Users now are only required to pay the minimal price of a landline phone call (Abdulla 2005).

Initially, factors such as high illiteracy rate, information and digital illiteracy, cultural and communication barriers, were seen as obstacles by a number of scholars regarding internet penetration. Amin (1996) raised the question about how English and computer illiteracy rates were high enough to impede the development of the internet in Egypt. Abdulla (2006) wrote about how the internet has a strong potential to increase Egypt's development but it has "not made the difference it is expected to make, simply because of the challenges facing penetration rates in Egypt." On the other hand, Amin (1996) in an answer to his question had a very optimistic view when he mentioned that with the new generations "the intellectual will be defined by the computer".

In Egypt, the number of internet cafes is significantly high; they even exist in the poorest countryside areas of the country (Abdulla, 2007). Internet penetration rate as of June 2012 was 35.6% of the population, which is equivalent to 29,809,724 Internet users, ([www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm](http://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm)). Thus, indicating that factors once feared as major obstacles might not be the case anymore.

Throughout the years the government provided newspapers with free internet service however no news organization made use of it at first (El Gody, 2000). The first Egyptian newspaper to utilize the Internet was El Gomhoria in 1996. During the decade more and more newspapers have established their presence on the internet in their efforts to reach a larger number of audience and to stay in pace with global technological developments. This has in turn gradually decreased the monopoly of the government on news.

During the last couple of years blogging has become a common and increasing trend among Egyptian internet users and it specifically increased during the 2005 presidential elections, the People's assembly elections, and for portraying human rights violations and police brutality going on in the country. Any written media in Egypt had to usually pass by the Ministry of Information for approval for publishing. However, blogging had broken this barrier where there was no permission required to publishing seeing as it is an open source on the internet and the ministry of information cannot control it. As a result of that, a number of blogs and bloggers throughout the years have faced legal action from the government.

This might have been the case ten years ago, however the online news media landscape has changed drastically in the past couple of years, and more so in the past year alone. The Internet and its different outlets, including search engines and social networks, have indeed played a crucial role in the individual development of Egyptian citizens and in the development of the Egyptian nation in general and in 2011 in particular.

### **Search Engines and News**

Searching for information online is one of the most sought after activities performed by individuals. Search engines are most popular among users online and they mainly function as the key to answering all their questions. Fallows (2005) conducted a research on search engine users in the United States and in her findings she found that on an average day 56% of online users, 38 million, used search engines. 87% of those say that most of the times they have successful search experiences and 17% always find what they are looking for.

Realizing the importance of integrating news search in their search engines to facilitate news information retrieval, the three search engine giants Google, Yahoo! and Microsoft have emerged successfully in this category (Gillmor, 2004), making them the first-generation news aggregators with hundreds of news links from a wide number of different sources all in one page (Doctor, 2010). Gillmor (2004) sees their contribution as an “essential, part of the web news infrastructure” (p.165). These new mass medium of our times as Doctor (2010) has named them, have collectively and successfully surpassed the number one mass medium of past decades – the newspaper.

With regards to searching for news online Bradshaw (2011) stated that the type of people that are the first to search for a particular piece of information online are usually the ones affected by it. Thereby indicating that news organizations that rank the highest on search engine results have both editorial and commercial benefits. In this case one of the key advantages of search engine optimization by news organizations is that it also serves as a public service value where journalists are more accessible to reach by potential witnesses, sources, experts etc.

Carlson (2007) in his study compared Google News with traditional media and illustrated how news on search engines are providing internet users with a wide variety of

news articles offering different stances on the same topic therefore exposing users to different opinions unlike traditional media where news are filtered and given their importance according to certain agendas by news agencies. In this manner Google News is said to be re-conceptualizing the relationship between the presentation of news and the audience by giving the people interested in news information a more active role in the selecting their news.

For a long time now Yahoo! has been very successful in its news content offerings, it has been among the top news sites in the United States. Yahoo!'s homepage is plagued with all sorts of customizable news allowing the end user to obtain highly personalized news information all in one spot. It is also one of the first to realize that people wanted to choose their news, and thereby taking advantage of its search engine characteristic. In the company's efforts to take advantage of grassroots journalism, unlike GoogleNews, in 2004 it added RSS into their service thereby allowing users to select news feeds from blogs or other websites and adding them to their MyYahoo! news page. In the United States Yahoo! has partnered with nearly half of the newspaper companies, and the same concept has been implemented in many countries around the world. According to Gillmor (2004) "It's the best blend yet of old and new" (p.166)

In Egypt, according to alexa.com Google currently ranks #2 as the top visited website in the country, followed by Yahoo! at #5. Seeing as Bing currently ranks #77 in Egypt according to alexa.com, Bing will be excluded from this research.

### **Social Networks and News**

"Twitter and Facebook accelerate the travel and twitch of each new thought, like a drunken pinball machine on hyperdrive." (Doctor, 2010, p. 1)

The average time spent on Facebook is 10 times more the time an individual spends on a news website (Doctor, 2010). The relationship has become a "socially-engaging and socially-driven activity" where people are now an integral part of the news process and are able to "filter, access and react to news" (Purcell et al., 2010). People retrieve news from a number of news sources but social networks in specific have exacerbated a common trend which is having the news brought to us from the people we know. "On one hand we have become free agents, choosing our own news. On the other hand, we've become each other's

editors.” (Doctor, 2010, pg.15). Doctor (2010) also classified another news source on social networks, they are, as he named them, recommenders, they are the strangers that we don’t know in person but who make the “most shared story” boxes and assist in making seductive and odd stories go viral and reach us and almost everyone we know.

Social networking sites are also acting as alert systems for people. This might be hindering the act where people have to go and hunt for news. Studies have showed that an increasing number of online users depend on news being circulated by other users on social networking sites. Users now “stumble” by news and another name for this is “serendipitous” news consumption.

A research conducted by the Dubai School of Government showed that in 2010 the amount of Facebook users in the Arab region was two times that in 2009. In 2009 there was 11.9 million users while in 2010 there was 21.3 million. In the first quarter of 2011 this number rose an additional 30% and as of April 2011 Facebook penetration rate was 36.83% in Bahrain, 22.49% in Tunisia, 21.25% in Jordan, 13.1% in Palestine, 7.66% in Egypt, 3.74% in Libya, 1.49% in Syria and 1.37% in Yemen (Joseph, 2012, p. 157).

People under the age of thirty made up 70% of the users of Facebook in the region. Youth in the Arab world today are very tech-savvy and are active social media users. According to a study conducted by Nielsen in 2009, it indicated that the number of youth using Facebook by far outweighs the number of elder users, in absolute terms and even combined. As of December 31, 2012, there were over 12 million Facebook users registered in Egypt and the penetration rate had increased to 14.5% (<http://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm>). According to recent statistics from SocialBanker, in December 2011 Egypt was the 11th fastest growing country on Facebook but as of January 2012 it was in 3rd place after Columbia and Brazil. This indicates that in a period of one month Egypt’s number of users increased by over 2 million with a growth rate of 30.76% (<http://techloy.com/2012/01/30/egypt-facebook-growth/>)

Facebook has played a huge role in enhancing communities to have a voice especially those in authoritarian countries whose governments have strict media censorship and where freedom of expression is limited (Faris, 2008). It has also given people the opportunity to organize political protests and helped gather people and mobilize the community to defend a

certain cause.

One of the first examples of this in Egypt was the 6th of April 2007 strike against the inflation in food prices in the city of El Mahalla El Kubra. Female Egyptian activist, Israa Abd El Fattah, initiated the strike where she was able to mobilize 70,000 members on a Facebook group she created by the name of 6th April (Ali, 2011)

Shapiro, in 2009 wrote in the New York Times about how he anticipated that Facebook will provide “a new structure for a new generation of Egyptians” (as cited in Gamal El-Din, 2010, p.6). Which is exactly what happened, in 18 days Egyptian ex president Mohamed Hosni Mubarak was ousted by protestors that first gathered in Tahrir Square on January 25th 2011 as a result of mass mobilization of protestors by Facebook groups such as “6th April” and “We are all Khaled Said” and other social media allies (Ali, 2011). On January 25, 2011 tens of thousands of people gathered in the streets of Cairo to demonstrate against the government corruption, high inflation rate, high unemployment rate, minimum wages, lack of freedom of speech and most importantly for political reasons (Ali, 2011). Wael Ghoneim, described as the hero who inspired the Egyptian Revolution, is a political activist and the administrator of the Facebook page “We are all Khaled Said”. In an interview by 60 minutes, Ghoneim stated, “without Facebook, without Twitter, without Google, without YouTube, this would have never happened.” Activists on Facebook are transforming into “the oxygen and blood of Egypt’s civil society” Eltahawy (2008).

Joseph (2012) explained that these pages were not necessarily “the defining or only factor in people organizing themselves on these dates, but as the initial platform for these calls, it cannot be denied that they were a factor in mobilizing movements” (p. 162).

Facebook is such an effective tool with such a great impact that several governments feel threatened by it and therefore impose high restrictions on its usage. Out of fear of the power of Facebook and the internet the Egyptian government blocked the internet in the country for 5 days during the Egyptian revolution. A couple of months later in efforts to reach out to the Egyptian public the Egyptian government created Facebook government organization pages such as “The Official Supreme Council of the Armed Forces page” and “The Official Egyptian Cabinet of Ministers page”.

In the Arab region, Twitter had a very strong impact in the organization of protests



and the dissemination of information, a concept that has been labeled as “Twitter Revolutions” for the role it played in the protests that took place during the Iranian elections 2009-2010, the Tunisian Revolution 2010-2011 and the Egyptian revolution 2011. Political issues have been dominating the use of Twitter in the Arab region (Joseph, 2012). In the Jan 25 2011 Egyptian revolution the hashtag #jan25 was one of the highest trending topics on Twitter. It ranked 8th on a global level in the most popular hashtags of 2011 by Twitter while #egypt took the title as the most popular hashtag of 2011 ranking #1 worldwide (<http://yearinreview.twitter.com/>). Additionally hashtags such as #libya, #syria, and #protest, along with a number of others have plagued the Arab Twitter scene (Joseph, 2012).

### **Defining Social Search**

To “harness the collective intelligence of the web” (Scale, 2008) online users are nowadays leveraging social media in order to find information, as a result of the difficulty of finding it on search engines. This introduced the concept of “social search” with its different terminologies such as “social search engines”, “socially enhanced search”, “social information retrieval” and “social navigation” (McDonnell & Shiri, 2011).

Social search has become the latest buzzword being a major breakthrough in the online search community (Scale, 2008). The definitions of social search have varied but they still offer the same concept. Evans et al. (2009) defined it as “the way individuals make use of peers and other available social resources during search tasks”. Vuorikari and Koper (2009) also defined social search as “using the behavior of other people to help navigate online. It is driven by the tendency of people to follow other people’s footprints when they feel lost”.

The idea of social search has continued being debatable where according to some scholars the idea of social search has emerged as a result of user’s dissatisfaction with the algorithmic search results presented to them on search engines. A number of other scholars including Sherman (2006) have refuted this idea stating that algorithmic search results on search engines are “based on software written by people which incorporates human judgments about quality, relevance and importance of websites” (as cited in Scale, 2008, p.546).

### **Search Engines vs Social Networks**

“If searching for news was the most important development of the last decade, sharing news may be among the most important of the next” (Frean, 2011).

For a very long time, Google has been on the top of the game in the news referral sector, with its Google Search and Google News features being first in place in sending traffic to news websites. However, this is beginning to change according to a study conducted by the Pew Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism in collaboration with Nielsen (cited in Frean, 2011) where they monitored how users reached the top 25 new websites in the United States. The research illustrated that Facebook registered as the second or third website from which traffic originated from (Frean, 2011). Surprisingly however, Twitter merely registered as a referring source of information.

In 2007, Facebook was reportedly the number one “people search engine” and between the top 20 biggest search engines (Fox, 2007). This significantly shows how Facebook now has a comparative advantage in the online search field. According to Scale (2008) Facebook is used as a “tool for resource discovery and the articulation of one’s information need” (p.543). Facebook draws online consumers that create their own searchable content, which is a characteristic, not found on traditional search engines (Fox, 2007).

Morris et al. (2010) conducted a study where 12 participants searched for information on the internet and simultaneously posted a question about the same topic on Facebook. Results showed that both search engines and social networks offer information on different levels and that using both platforms was rather complimentary to their search experience. The subjects generally preferred using search engines because they got results in real time, using Facebook required extra time for friends to respond. More time indicated more responses. Search engines also facilitated the experience where multiple searches could be performed at once. Social networks also offered some benefits where replies to the questions were more personalized and the subjects had more confidence in the credibility of the answers. Social networks were particularly beneficial in opinion based questions.

Another similar study was conducted by Evans et al., (2010) where eight very sociable and internet savvy subjects were required to search for a US energy policy query. In this study “social conditions” were not only limited to social networks, they included, Q&A websites, blogs, friends and colleagues. In reply to their studies title, “Do your friends make you smarter?” the results generated implied a clear yes. Social connections help people during their search task and assist in retrieving “sense making” information. But similarly to the pervious study by Morris et al. (2010) both platforms working together will aid immensely to the quality of information users retrieve.

## **Methodology**

### *Research Questions:*

**RQ1:** Are social networks replacing search engines in their role in news information seeking?

**RQ2:** What kind of competition exists between search engines and social networks in news information seeking?

**RQ3:** What are the different uses and gratifications of search engines and social networks?

### *Research Hypotheses:*

**H1:** Social networks are taking over the role of search engines in news information seeking.

**H2:** Uses and gratifications of social networks differ than uses and gratifications of search engines.

### *Survey Methodology*

A total of 20 close-ended questions were formulated and the survey started with a consent form followed by questions that were general and straight forward in order to “warm up” the respondents, accustom them to the questions and to get them to think about the survey topic. A demographics section was placed at the end of the survey. Two methods were used to distribute the questionnaire, online, via personal emails and social networks where a link to the consent form and survey was distributed. The survey was hosted on the popular website

www.surveymonkey.com and this method was chosen because of the existence of no interviewer bias, its low cost and ease of conduct. The second method used was the self administered method where the questionnaire was distributed to a number of students at the American University in Cairo to ensure a diverse sample and since previous studies have shown that the internet is heavily used by university students (Abdulla, 2005). This method was chosen because of the high response rate, low cost and no interviewer bias. Measures were taken prior to distributing the survey to make sure it was reliable and correctly validated.

### *Survey Sampling*

Non-probability convenience sampling was used using the snowball procedure. The questionnaire was aimed at Egyptians with high internet frequency usage. Information clarifying that the survey is only targeting Egyptian citizens was mentioned in the consent form and non-Egyptians were asked not to complete the survey. A filter question was also used to identify high frequency internet users and to eliminate low internet frequency ones. The latter were directed to the demographics section once identified. A second question prompting respondents to identify how many hours they spent on the internet on an average day was used to further identify the respondents internet usage frequency range. 402 surveys were completed successfully, 5 of them were later on discarded from the sample for being from the low internet frequency users and hence making the total number of surveys analysed 397.

### *In-depth Interviews*

Alongside the surveys, five in-depth interviews were conducted with internet and journalism experts in the fields of news, search engines and social networks. Seeing as this topic is of a rather recent nature and there is a limited amount of research on it, in-depth interviews were essential to help fill in the gaps and to provide essential information that will be of great importance to the study.

## **Findings**

Survey results were downloaded in excel and csv formats and then processed using the popular data analysis software SPSS. The survey results mentioned will only include the 397 respondents that marked “Yes” for being high internet frequency users.

### *Respondents*

Results showed that more than half of the respondents, 63%, were females and nearly half of the sample, 45.6%, were between the ages of 26-35. The average participant was employed and held a university degree or higher. Slightly less than fifth of the participants were students. Respondents also showed a high frequency usage of the internet where users were estimated to spend at least 5 hours on the Internet on a daily basis. Results indicated that there was no significant difference between the respondents’ demographics and the research results and between the different questionnaire distribution methods used.

### *Uses and Gratifications*

The study found that the internet ranked first among the news sources Egyptians refer to first to find news. With regards to the mean average, internet came first having a high frequency rating of 4.45, followed by TV (3.41), word of mouth (2.91), newspapers (2.35) and then radio (2.04). The mean average rating for respondents going online specifically to get news was also significantly high at 3.99 indicating an often to frequent usage. The survey results also examined the motivations behind users logging online to find news. One of the highest statements agreed upon by 66.8% of the respondents was “I like talking with my friends, family and colleagues about things happening in the world,” indicating a social gratification obtained from reading news online, in addition to a civic one where more than half of the respondents, 59.2%, also agreed on the following statement “I feel I have a social or civic obligation to stay informed.” Self-construction and entertainment gratifications were also identified in the research representing, 43.3% and 28.7% respectively.

The research also identified the most used search engine and social network in Egypt, results from the survey supported statistics found on the popular website alexa.com, where Google is highly ranked above Yahoo! and Facebook precedes Twitter in its popularity. The research found that 97% of the sample preferred using Google and 92% of the sample

preferred using Facebook. According to alexa.com, Google is ranked #2 in the top sites in Egypt and Facebook is ranked #1.

The research interestingly found different motivations for using each type of platform answering the third research question: What are the different motivations for using each type of platform and supporting the second hypothesis: Motivations for using social networks differ than motivations for using search engines.

Search engines were primarily used “to get general information” while social networks were primarily used “to socialize”. However with regards to getting news, both platforms had high rankings in this area, social networks having a slightly higher ranking than search engines. 74.3% of the sample surveyed said they use social networks to get news while 61.1% of the sample chose search engines. This finding was also supported in responses to a frequency question indicating that that mean average rating for people referring to social networks to find news is higher than that of search engines. The mean average rating for social networks is 4.09 falling between often and frequently and the mean average rating for search engines is 3.64 falling between sometimes and often.

The research also found further elements of social gratifications obtained from following news on social networks. This was indicated by the high levels of agreement regarding the personal satisfaction people gain in sharing news on social networks and the reasons for doing so which include receiving friend’s opinions on posts they share and preference in reading news that have a personalized point of view. Previous research by Morris et al. (2010) also found socialization and display of interest as secondary benefits to people’s preference in using social networks.

Experts have also more or less agreed that the surveillance motivations for using each kind of platform do differ, where social networks are used to learn more about trending topics and search engines more about topics that are not time sensitive. The research also found that 58% of the people surveyed hear about breaking news first from social networks and then refer to search engines to follow up on these news.

*Are social networks replacing search engines and what kind of competition exists between them*

Facebook received the highest rankings, 53.9% chose Facebook as their main source of breaking news while news websites and Google ranked the highest at 35% and 34.5% respectively as sources of following up on breaking news. This brings us to the finding of the first research question: are social networks replacing search engines in their role in news information seeking? and hypothesis one: social networks are taking over the role of search engines in news information seeking. The results of both the quantitative and qualitative parts of the survey show that social networks do have the potential to replace search engines as the primary source of new information seeking and that both platforms are in essence complimenting one another rather than entirely competing also answering research question number two: what kind of competition exists between search engines and social networks in news information seeking?

The results of the research showed that social networks have a potential to replace search engines but as the experts described it, it won't be an entire replacement it will rather be a replacement of rankings. This is quite evident in the statistics retrieved from alexa.com, which showed Facebook preceding Google as the number one top site in Egypt. The experts also stressed on the concept of both platforms benefiting from the presence of one another. News shared on social networks help in pushing search rankings on search engines and search engines are using applications on social networks to widen their audience reach. The first to foresee the success of both platforms together was Google by introducing Google+ which ideally speaking has the best of both worlds. According to Hind Rasheed, Google's +1 button is being served 5 billion times a day and 1 billion shares are performed daily on Google+.

This is particularly proven as the research found that 52.4% of the respondents have resorted to asking their friends on their social networks about news updates. This finding along with previous ones about how people like to read news that include their friends point of view is evidence on the growing dependency of people on social networks, and therefore having a search engine that would integrate the results of one's social circle will mean the best of both worlds. In Google's own words it is "bringing your world, rich with people and information, into search."

The research also found interesting reasons for this growing dependency, which included less effort in finding news information on social networks and the avoidance of an

overload of information retrieved from search engines. Respondents perceived asking their friends as easier and more relevant to them but not necessarily quicker (see Table 1). This was also supported by the high number of respondents that agreed that reading status updates or pictures of news is easier than reading an entire news article; which is the only thing search engines could offer.

**Table 1: Search Engines vs Social Networks**

Statements	Frequency (%) in degree of agreement						Mean Average Rating
	S. Disagree-1	Disagree-2	Neutral-3	Agree-4	S. Agree-5	Total	
Asking my friends on my social network is quicker than searching for news information on a search engine	29 (7.3%)	114 (28.8%)	109 (27.5%)	82 (20.7%)	62 (15.7%)	397 100%	3.09
I can relate to news information on my social network more than results I find on search engines	14 (3.5%)	82 (20.7%)	124 (31.3%)	125 (31.6%)	51 (12.9%)	397 100%	3.30
I get news from search engines and post them on my social network	16 (4.0%)	62 (15.7%)	100 (25.3%)	173 (43.7%)	45 (11.4%)	397 100%	3.43
It takes me less effort to find news information from my friends on my social network rather than searching for it on a search engine	17 (4.3%)	76 (19.2%)	93 (23.5%)	131 (33.1%)	79 (19.9%)	397 100%	3.46
I get an overload of news information from search engines I'd rather ask my friends on my social network	16 (4.0%)	97 (24.5%)	142 (35.9%)	102 (25.8%)	39 (9.8%)	397 100%	3.13

It is also worthy to note a very important finding that could be described as the catalyst for the booming of social networks as news sources, and that is the increasing phenomenon of news finding people rather than people finding news. The research statistics concluded that people often come across news online while they are online doing other things and they also often get news forwarded to them through posts on social networking sites. Almost half of the respondents stated that they frequently get subjected to these two findings (see Table 2). This



affirms what Golovchinsky et al. (2009) stated in the fifth component of his social search taxonomy: the finding process will be more of search vs discovery. Interviews with experts Newman and Sabe also supported this finding where they both perceived that social networks offer a more push approach than search engines' pull approach. Newman describes search engines as active platforms of news sources and social networks as a more passive one. The researcher views that this rising phenomenon is one of the main reasons that can explain further the competition between both platforms describing why people alternating social networks with search engines. According to the findings it is quite evident that people expect to be informed about everything that's happening around them all in one place i.e. their social networks, in comparison to searching for news on search engines. Yousef Gamal El Din highlighted this widespread experience in a status update he wrote on his Facebook fan page where he described how his Facebook news feed became a flood of continuous hard news about the country rather than about his friends social updates. Thereby seeing a twist in the initial purpose of the creation of Facebook's news feed.

**Table 2: News Finding People Rather than People Finding News**

How often do you	Frequency (%) in degree of agreement						Mean Average Rating
	Frequently-5	Often-4	Sometimes-3	Rarely-2	Never-1	Total	
go online specifically to get news?	170 (42.8%)	97 (24.4%)	89 (22.4%)	38 (9.6%)	3 (0.8%)	397 100%	3.99
use search engines such as Google or Yahoo! to find news?	129 (32.5%)	88 (22.2%)	100 (25.2%)	70 (17.6%)	10 (2.5%)	397 100%	3.64
use social networks such as Facebook or Twitter to find news?	196 (49.4%)	90 (22.7%)	72 (18.1%)	28 (7.1%)	11 (2.8%)	397 100%	4.09
come across news when you are online doing other things?	185 (46.6%)	117 (29.5%)	70 (17.6%)	19 (4.8%)	6 (1.5%)	397 100%	4.15
get news forwarded to you through posts on social networking sites?	159 (40.1%)	110 (27.7%)	80 (20.2%)	29 (7.3%)	19 (4.8%)	397 100%	3.91

The research also found results that described the different characteristics of both platforms. As supported in earlier findings, search engines performed better than social networks regarding their speed, credibility and overall information satisfaction. Also, search engines were seen to cater more to people's need for international news and social networks for more local news (see Table 3). Both platforms were given almost equal levels of agreement regarding "not being able to live without them."

**Table 3: Cross Tabulation: Characteristics of Search Engines vs Social Networks Mean Average Ratings**

Statements	Mean Average Rating	
	Search Engines	Social Networks
Information satisfaction need	3.76	3.74
Finding relevant information quickly	4.08	3.77
A wide variety of news retrieved	4.03	3.95
Credibility	3.38	3.07
I get more international-local news	3.98	3.96
I can't live without search engines – social networks.	4.33	3.92
<b>Total Mean Average Rating</b>	3.93	3.73

## Conclusion

The researcher concludes that surveillance needs are emerging as one of the most primary motivations for using social networks. Socialization, however, is still dominating social networks' uses and gratifications but in comparison to search engines, social networks succeed in satisfying Egyptian's surveillance gratifications.

A mere glance at the tables and figures of the research reinforce the popularity of Facebook and Google in specific among Egyptians. The results of this research harmonize with previous uses and gratifications studies done by Morris et al. (2010) and Evans et al. (2010) in addition to findings supporting the notion of search engines and social networks

complimenting one another rather than competing.

### **Future Recommendations**

#### *Recommendations for Search Engines, Social Networks and News Websites*

- Search engines and social networks should find more effective ways in integrating with one another. Facebook likes should appear on Google search results and links to quick searches on Google should be found on Facebook seeing as they are both the most sought after social networks and search engines today.
- News websites in Egypt that are not fully integrating social media in their websites should start doing so if they want to stay in pace with the trending technological advancements.
- Existing news websites with applications and/or fan pages on social networks should invest more time and effort in this field.

#### *Recommendations for Future Research*

- Conduct research comparing both social networks and search engines in their role in the news process, however this time from a news agency perspective. This is necessary to see the importance and the role of each platform as intermediaries in the dissemination of information from news agencies to the public and how news agencies are trying to fit in all the different platforms created. Also analyze the different traffic received from each and the benefit behind using each one.
- Conduct research on Google+ to study the effect of having both search and social in one online platform.
- A similar research can be conducted using the experimental methodology, which could yield to more detailed and observational results.
- Conduct similar research but on information in general rather than focusing on only news.
- Narrow down the research by focusing on one social network or search engines and its role regarding news seeking in Egypt.

### **Limitations of the Study**

- The survey conducted in this research is a non-random convenience sample. Therefore, the results can't be generalized.
- Due to the novelty of the topic there was a lack in the number of studies retrieved related to search engine usage in Egypt as well as social networks usage as news sources.
- The minimum amount of published academic research on news and social networks in Egypt.
- The research only focused on the two popular social networks and search engines excluding other existing social networks and search engines.

## References

- Abdulla, R.A. (1995) 'Welcome to the World of the Internet', *Brains Beyond Borders* 1(1): 1, 3.
- Abdulla, R.A. (2005). Taking the e-train: The development of the internet in Egypt. *Global Media and Communication*, 1(2): 149-165.
- Abdulla, R. A. (2006). An overview of media developments in Egypt: Does the Internet make a difference? *Global Media Journal* (GMJ), Mediterranean edition, 1, 88–100.
- Abdulla, R.A. (2007). *The Internet in the Arab World: Egypt and Beyond*. New York: Peter Lang, Inc.
- Ali A.H. (2011). The Power of Social Media in Developing Nations: New Tools for Closing the Global Digital Divide and Beyond, 24, *Harvard Human Rights Journal* 185, 185–87.
- Amin, Hussein (1996). "Egypt and the Arab World." *New Patterns in Global Television: Peripheral Vision*. Edited by John Sinclair, Elizabeth Jacks, and Stuart Cunningham. Oxford University Press.
- Ancu, M., & Cozma, R. (2009). MySpace Politics: Uses and Gratifications of Befriending Candidates. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 53(4), 567-583.
- Arslan, M., Tantawi, P., & El Sahn, F. (2012). Investigating The Effect of Young Adult's Reliance on Social Networking Sites on Political Participation in Egypt. *American Academic & Scholarly Research Journal (AASRJ)*, 4(5).

- Ballard, C. L. (2011). *What's happening @ Twitter: A uses and gratifications approach*. Unpublished master's thesis, University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY.
- Bradshaw, P. (2011). *Mapping Digital Media: Social Media and News*. Open Society Foundations.
- Carlson, M. (2007). Order versus access: news search engines and the challenge to traditional journalistic roles. *Media, Culture & Society*, 29(6), 1014-1030.
- Doctor, K. (2010) *Newsonomics: Twelve New Trends That Will Shape The News You Get*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- El Gody, A.M. (2000). Egyptian based model for the uses and limitations of online journalism applications. Unpublished master's thesis, The American University in Cairo, Cairo, Egypt.
- Eltahawy, Mona. 2008. The Middle East's Generation Facebook. *World Policy Journal* 25(3): 69-77.
- Evans, B., Kairam, S. & Pirolli, P. (2009). Exploring the cognitive consequences of social search. Proceedings of Computer Human Interaction 2009, April 4-9, Boston, MA, ACM, New York, NY. Retrieved from: <http://bryneevans.com/papers/Cognitive-Consequences-of-Social-Search-WIP.pdf>
- Evans, B., Kairam, S. & Pirolli, P. (2010). Do your friends make you smarter? An analysis of social strategies in online information seeking. *IP&M*, 2010.
- Fallows, D. (2005). Search Engine Users. *Pew Internet and American Life Project*. <http://www.pewinternet.org/>
- Faris, David. "Revolutions Without Revolutionaries? Network Theory, Facebook, and the Egyptian Blogosphere." *Arab Media and Society* 2008.
- Fox, V. (2007). Searching for people in all the new social places. *Information Today*, Vol. 24 No. 8, p. 25.
- Frean A. (2011, May 12). Social network or search engine? *The Times*.
- Gamal El-Din, Y. (2010). *Uses and gratifications of Facebook in Egypt*. Unpublished master's thesis, The American University in Cairo, Cairo, Egypt.
- Ghannam J (2011) *Social Media in the Arab World: Leading up to the Uprisings of 2011*. Washington, DC: Center for International Media Assistance.
- Gillmor, D. (2004). *We the media: Grassroots journalism by the people, for the people*. Sebastopol, CA: O'Reilly.

- Internet Society of Egypt (2001) 'Internet History in Egypt', [<http://www.ise.org.eg/history.html>] (consulted January 2002).
- Joseph, S. (2012). Social media, political change, and human rights. *B.C. Int'l & Comp. L. Rev.*, 35, 145.
- Katz, E., Blumler, J., & Gurevitch, M. (1974). Utilization of mass communication by the individual. In J. Blumler & E. Katz (Eds.), *The uses of mass communication: Current perspectives on gratifications research* (pp. 19–34). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Kink, N. & Hess, T. (2008). Search engines as substitutes for traditional information sources? An investigation of media choice. *The Information Society*, 24, 18 – 29.
- Kwak H., Lee C., Park H. & Moon S. (2010). What is twitter, a social network or a news media? pages 591–600. ACM.
- McDonnell, M. & Shiri A. (2011). Social search: A taxonomy of, and user centered approach to, social web search. *Program: Electronic Library and Information*
- Morris, M.R., Teevan, J., & Panovich, K. (2010). A comparison of information seeking using search engines and social networks. *ICWSM 2010*, 291-294.
- Morris, M.R., Teevan, J., & Panovich, K. (2010). What do people ask their social networks, and why? A survey study of status message Q&A behavior. *CHI 2010*, 1739-1748.
- Newman N, (2011). Mainstream Media and the Distribution of News in the Age of Social Discovery. *Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism*. University of Oxford.
- Purcell, K., Rainie L., Mitchell, A., Rosenstiel T. & Olmstead K. (2010). Understanding the Participatory News Consumer. *Pew Internet and American Life Project*. Retrieved from: <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Online-News.aspx?r=1>
- Scale, M.S. (2008). Facebook as a social search engine and the implications for libraries in the twenty-first century. *Library Hi Tech*, 26(4), 540-556.
- Sherman, C. (2006), "What's the big deal with social search?", Search Engine Watch, available at: [http://searchenginewatch.com/showPage.html?page=1/4\\_3623153](http://searchenginewatch.com/showPage.html?page=1/4_3623153) (accessed 5 August 2008).
- Tremblay J. (2010). Twitter: Can It Be a Reliable Source of News? Nieman Reports. The Nieman Foundation for Journalists at Harvard. Retrieved from: <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/article/102416/Twitter-Can-It-Be-a-Reliable-Source-of-News.aspx>
- Vuorikari, R. & Koper, R. (2009). Ecology of social search for learning resources. *Campus-wide Information Systems*, Vol. 26 No. 4, pp. 272-86.

**Personal Communication**

Newman, N. (19 April, 2012). Personal Communication

Rasheed H. (17 April, 2012). Personal Communication

Sabe, M. (2 May, 2012). Personal Communication

York, J. (10 April, 2012). Personal Communication