
Investigating the Impact of Various Social Ties during Egypt's Governmental Transition

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Abstract

Tie strength is fundamental to the examination of interpersonal forces (Solomon, 2013). Social ties enable collaborative creation and sharing of ideas, which provides diverse communication power (Granovetter, 1973). In this study, the researcher assumed that: strong ties and weak ties are positive in the effective socialization process regarding political topics in Egypt. This study was considered conclusive research, with a cross-sectional design and a descriptive purpose. Each of the variables was measured using a 5-point Likert scale. 384 questionnaires were used in this study. The SPSS analysis showed that the hypotheses were supported. Both strong and weak interpersonal relations were able to impact significantly the socialization process. Though, strong ties had a more statistically significance than weak ties. This study contributes on the theoretical level by adding to the field of political socialization and social influence in the Middle East context and by demonstrating the validity of the scales of in the Egyptian context. It contributes on the practical level by defining the impact of interpersonal ties during social dealings.

Keywords Political Socialization, Social Influence, Strong Ties, Weak Ties

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1. Introduction

Social interactions impact citizens' attitudes and behaviors in the political context (Fay, 2006; Levitan and Visser, 2009). According to Almond and Verba (1963), socialization: "not only gives us insight into the pattern of political culture and subcultures in [a] society, but also locates for us in the socialization processes of the society the point where particular qualities and elements are being sustained or modified" (p.31). Political socialization represented "the patterns and processes by which individuals engage in political development and learning, constructing their particular relationships to the political contexts in which they live" (Sapiro, 2004, p.3). Thus, during periods of governmental transition and upheaval, socialization is crucial for political mobilization towards regime change and pro-democracy movements (Settle et al., 2011).

In Egypt's current political context, Egyptians socialize to gain understanding about the contemporary political domain; apprehend the important issues facing society and the critical thinking skills required to evaluate different political views (Negm et al., 2012). Social interaction implied comfort and assistance in learning about the country's political transition (Settle et al., 2011). Discussions informed people of various civil, governmental, constitutional, and electoral matters that were unknown (Negm et al., 2012). It provided people with the opportunity to accumulate knowledge that lowered the political understanding barriers (Fay, 2006). Ultimately, people's regular conversations with different people in a society aided in knowing how the government functions are essential in solving society issues and participating in politics. Therefore, this research investigated the impact of various social ties in social interactions during Egypt's governmental transition.

There is a rare emphasis devoted to how verbal communication can sway people's judgments and behaviors in the political arena (Lamprianou, 2013). Social interaction is important and influential within political perspective, given their intangibility and high associated risks (Fay, 2006). For these reasons, this research is academically significant. This study will be one of the very few to be carried out in the Middle East, especially in Egypt (after the Arab spring revolutions of 2011).

2. Theoretical Framework

People enter and become part of various affiliations in their societies (Sweeney et al., 2008). Interactions among people are based on various tie strength. Relationships are either short-lived (informally distinct links) or firmly established and long lasting (intimate links, such as primary family and friends). Tie strength is fundamental to the examination of interpersonal forces. Social ties enable collaborative creation and sharing of ideas (Granovetter, 1973). Hence, it provides diverse communication power (Solomon, 2013).

Granovetter (1973) suggested two generic forms of social relations: strong ties and weak ties. The “weak” and “strong” ties correspond to “acquaintances” and emphasized the issue of transitivity, which is the extent of overlap in affiliation. “The strength of a tie is a (probably linearly) combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie” (Granovetter, 1973, p.1361). The concept of relationships, emotional closeness, and intimacy are subjective; people have different interpretations of how strong their ties are (Brown and Reingen, 1987). According to Granovetter (1973), weak ties are those who interact more than once per year and less than twice per week (relationships among looser acquaintances). In contrast, strong ties are those who interact at least twice per week (relationships between family and close friends).

Various researchers have investigated tie strength. Money et al. (1998) mentioned, "Tie strength is a multi-dimensional construct that represents the strength of the dyadic interpersonal relationships in the context of social networks" (p.79). Duhan et al. (1997) stated "WOM recommendation sources can be categorized according to the closeness of the relationship between the decision maker and the recommendation sources or the tie strength. Tie strength of a relationship is defined as strong if the sources of someone who knows the decision maker personally (p.284). Brown and Reingen (1987) implied strong ties bear greater influence on people's behavior than weak ties. This notion is further supported by Bansal and Voyer (2000) research.

Strong ties tend to bond similar people to each other. These similar groups of people are all mutually connected. The information gained from strong ties is more likely to be repetitive and contains similar point of views. Therefore, this network is not a means for collecting new

ideas, thoughts, and behaviors. Weak ties, on the other hand, connect various social groups that usually are not linked. Weak ties provide new reports and insights from different parts of the community (Granovetter, 1973).

In the political context, interpersonal ties play an important role in the spread of governmental and civil issues (Settle et al., 2011). Social ties enable the creation and sharing of ideas between people (Levitan and Visser, 2009). Prior literature suggested that diversity in strong ties might lead to political inhibition. Furthermore, weak ties might be more helpful in political mobilization (Mutz and Mondak, 2006).

Prior research clarified that people with different social backgrounds and thoughts allow democratic thinking to flourish (Putnam, 2000). Weak ties are beneficial for the diffusion of distinctive information and political mobilization (Mutz and Mondak, 2006). Casual contacts bring people into acquaintance with diverse philosophies of social perspectives (Dalton, 2007; Putnam, 2000). Thus, political dialogs among weak ties allow people to constantly rethink and adjust their political standpoint. It allows people to potentially challenge their opinions by non-likeminded others (Scheufele et al., 2004).

Additional research revealed that strong ties (people with similar views and opinions) expand perspectives, detect common problems, and encourage collective actions (Levitan and Visser, 2009; Putnam, 2000). However, strong ties with different opinions might create conflict of ideas and attitudes, which complicate and discourage people to take part in politics (Mutz and Mondak, 2006). Since many people favor social harmony (avoid arguments with close friends and family), they may decide to stay out of political discussions with people holding diverse opinions. Thus, strong ties can make people more tolerant or discourage political sharing (Mutz and Mondak, 2006). Due to the reviews of prior research, this study postulated two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Strong ties are positive in the effective socialization process regarding political topics in Egypt

Hypothesis 2: Weak ties are positive in the effective socialization process regarding political topics in Egypt

3. Methodology

During the quantitative phase, the researcher used administrated questionnaires to collect data. The researcher used a quota sampling nonprobability technique because the probability-sampling technique (calculation of the known chance of the respondents being chosen as subjects) was not feasible in this study. There was no list or sampling frame that contained the details of the target population in this study (lack of availability of official governmental information, reports, and statistics). The researcher began the conduction of the quota sampling method by grouping the target population into four homogeneous and mutually exclusive subgroups (quotas), concurring to Egypt's metropolitan cities of Cairo, Alexandria, Port Said, and Suez. Once the groups were set, the researcher drew from every quota numerous respondents; proportionate to the actual population size of each town.

The consumers intercept data collection method was used to reach the respondents and to ensure the collection of large amounts of data in a relatively short period of time in order to test the hypotheses. The data collection was conducted during November and December 2014. Random people on the streets (street intercepts), in shopping malls (mall intercepts), college campuses, sports clubs and retail outlets were stopped by the researcher and asked if they were willing to participate in a research study. Those who agreed were given a brief description of the survey process. The respondents were given an administrated questionnaire on the spot.

The questionnaire contained words that were simple and straightforward. The survey was originally created in the English language. However, an Arabic version was also created due to the fact that the native language in Egypt is Arabic. The researcher used the back-translation process in order to ensure that the language conversion was done accurately. A bilingual speaker whose native language was Arabic translated the questionnaire from the English language. Another bilingual whose native language was English then retranslated the translated version of the survey back into the original language. This procedure was vital because it helped to develop an equivalent questionnaire.

4. Data Analyses

Out of 700 questionnaires that were distributed, only 384 questionnaires were returned correctly, resulting in a response rate of 55%, which was acceptable in social science research (Bryman, 2012). The collected data was coded and entered in the SPSS program for the initiation of the analyses. The reliability analysis ensured the consistency of the instruments that measured each variable; descriptive analysis counted the frequency of certain statements; and the regression analysis clarified the significance of the variables in the research model.

The respondents in this study were from diverse cities of the metropolitan area of Egypt, holding different socio-demographic backgrounds (age, gender, marital status, career, and income). Table 1 illustrates the respondents' frequency outcomes regarding their personal information.

Table 1: Frequency of the Respondents' Socio-demographic Traits

Demographic Characteristic	F	%	Demographic Characteristic	F	%
City of Residence:			Age:		
Cairo	235	61	15 to 19	71	18.5
Alexandria	119	31	20 to 24	217	56.5
Port Said	15	4	25 to 29	62	16.1
Suez	15	4	30 to 34	34	8.9
Gender:			Level of Education:		
Female	212	55.2	Elementary School	30	7.8
Male	172	44.8	High School	112	29.2
			College	202	52.6
			Post Graduate	29	7.6
			Other	11	2.9
Job Status:			Average Monthly Income:		
Manager/ Executive	8	2.1	Less than 2,000 L.E.	69	18.0
Clerk	75	19.5	2,000 L.E. less than 5,000 L.E.	123	32.0
Academic	62	16.1	5,000 L.E. less than 10,000 L.E.	123	32.0
Self employed	73	19.0	Over 10,000 L.E.	69	18.0
Labourer	42	11.0			
Other	124	32.3			
Marital Status:			Number of Children:		
Single	255	66.4	None	265	69.0
Married	77	20.1	One	64	16.7
Divorced/ Separated	50	13.0	Two	38	9.9
Widowed	2	0.5	More than two	17	4.4

The variables in this study were measured using different scales from prior studies, taken from the “Marketing Book of Scales”. This book contained a collection of different scales from previous research that assessed a wide range of diverse variables. The scales used were modified according to the nature of this research topic, Egypt’s political context. According to the reliability analysis, the Cronbach’s Alpha for all the scales used in the questionnaire were higher than 0.6, indicating a good and excellent internal consistency among the items measuring the constructs. The variable “strong ties” contained a Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.892, the variable “weak ties” contained a Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.880, and the variable “effective socialization process” contained a Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.712.

Pearson Correlation analysis was conducted in order to recognize the bond between the variables under investigation; measured the association amongst the variables in each proposed hypothesis. Pearson correlation analysis indicated the strength, direction, and significance of the relations between two variables at a time. The results of this analysis for both the relationship between strong interpersonal ties and effective socialization process and the relationship between weak interpersonal ties and effective socialization process indicated moderate, positive, and significant associations. The Strong ties had a correlation of 0.307 and a significance indicator at the 0.01 levels and the weak ties had a correlation of 0.380 and a significance indicator at the 0.01 levels. Accordingly, there were correspondences among the variables, as the isolated one-to-one relationship existed separately.

The researcher used the multiple regressions to explain each variable’s contribution in creating effective socialization. This discovery was recognized through the Beta coefficients. The variable with the largest Beta value had the strongest effect (Pallant, 2007). The results showed that strong interpersonal ties (0.165) had a stronger impact than weak interpersonal ties (0.102) in the effective socialization process.

The researcher used the multiple regressions to test the hypotheses. The researcher wanted to know whether the values with the high-standardized beta coefficients were significant. According to Pallant (2007), a sig. value of 0.05 meant that there was a 5% chance that the relationship emerged randomly and a 95% chance that the relationship is real. If the Sig value was less than 0.05, the variable contributed in an exceptional way. The sig. value for both variables contained a low rate ($p < 0.05$). Strong ties spawned a sig value of 0.001 and weak ties

were 0.040. These coefficients implied that the hypotheses were supported. In other words, the assemblies of interpersonal ties were a meaningful addition to the proposed model because changes in the predictor's value were related to changes in the response variable; both strong and weak interpersonal relations were able to impact significantly the socialization process. Though, strong ties had a more statistically significance than weak ties.

5. Conclusion

In this study, the researcher assumed that: “strong ties and weak ties are positive in the effective socialization process regarding political topics in Egypt”. The analysis showed that these hypotheses were supported (positive relationship with sig value correspondingly 0.001 and 0.040). The researcher concluded that social interactions were powerful learning opportunities. Countless of valuable information were acquired through the exchange of opinions, exposure to new ideas, and the sharing of experiences from the social ties. This finding was similar to prior research outcomes.

Previous studies indicated that strong and weak ties offered one of the most important conceptual explanations of the social interactions (Bansal and Voyer, 2000; Sweeney et al., 2008). Socialization paved the path for the spread of information (Christian et al., 2012). Brown and Reingen (1987) found that strong ties activated in the flow of influence, while weak ties played a more crucial role in the movement of information across groups. According to Granovetter (1973), strong ties' communication had a positive effect since the intermingled people shared similar tastes. Furthermore, the frequent interactions encouraged people to approach them for reliance and comfort with the redundant access of information (Bansal and Voyer, 2000; Sweeney et al, 2008). However, weak ties were beneficial for the realization of different information and the alternative ways of thinking (Granovetter, 1973). People approached them since they were perceived to have new knowledge (Levitan and Visser, 2009).

In Egypt's current political context, strong and weak ties provided significant political influence. During political upheaval, social interactions implied people's yearning for guidance, understanding, and peace of mind. Citizens approached family and friends (people whom they cherished and held in high personal-esteem) for information because they were respected and encountered regularly. The daily discussions and its intensification augmented and strengthened

political viewpoints, promoted recognition of common governmental and civil problems, and stimulated collective political engagements. Colleagues, neighbors, and other random contacts contributed in additional discussions. People from different social contexts (social-class), socio-demographic backgrounds (age, gender, occupation, and education), personalities (mental personas), and political groups (Muslim Brotherhood, Liberals, and other political parties) allowed citizens to challenge their viewpoints by non-likeminded others. The diverse opinions that emerged in the discussions made people rethink or adjust their perspectives, which made them more likely to participate in politics.

A number of limitations prevent this study from being generalized among the Egyptian population. The first arises from the use of the nonprobability sampling technique in order to reach the respondents. This method ensured the collection of large amounts of data in a relatively short period of time and in an economical way. However, this technique has the disadvantage of convenience sampling. Therefore, the end results are not truly representative and cannot be generalized. Future research in this area would benefit from drawing a larger probability sample using, for instance, random sample selection techniques. Secondly, the data for this study were collected over a period of two months. The comparatively brief period of time allowed only a restricted number of respondents (384) to participate. The sample size was very small compared to the cities' populations. This research also focused only on large cities, so that the outcomes are not representative of the whole country of Egypt. For future research, a larger sample is needed and the data should be gathered proportionately from all regions of the country.

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