

Artificial Intelligence and the Militarisation of New Media in Egypt: Challenging the Role of Technology in Resistance

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Abstract

This paper explores the transformative role of technology, focusing on its dual capacity to both empower resistance and reinforce state control. It contrasts the potential emancipatory capacity of social media with the emerging usage of Artificial Intelligence (AI), focusing on its deployment as a surveillance technology in Egypt. In this context, its role highlights a contradiction, whereby technology that once enabled democratic participation during the 2011 *thawra* ('revolution') now threatens to undermine it. Drawing on Virilio's concept of "polar inertia" this analysis argues that the influence of AI on public discourse exacerbates entrenched power hierarchies, particularly highlighting the growing integration of military forces into governance structures. It foregrounds the significant ethical and political dilemmas posed by such dynamics, expanding the discourse on AI's implications within authoritarian contexts. Moreover, it underscores the need for adopting rigorous policies to promote equity and inclusive technological advancement.

Key words: Surveillance, Activism, AI Technology, Military

Introduction

This article discusses the role of new media technologies as sites of resistance, showing how the introduction of AI is part of a political-structural transformation in Egypt. Its purpose is to contrast two different perspectives on communication technology: the first contends that media development is central to the process of inclusion and political engagement, and the other argues that technological innovation dissuades meaningful activism and facilitates social

control. In particular, this paper explores the role of social media during the 2011 *thawra* to support the argument for a recent paradoxical shift brought about by the adoption of AI into the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector. The concept of *polar inertia* is used to describe the phenomenon where technological advancements accelerate communication yet simultaneously create a sense of inertia or immobility.¹ Focusing on the securitisation of AI systems in civil spaces, the study contends that the Egyptian military has leveraged these technologies to enhance its capacity for controlling diverse social actors. It thereby contributes to the discourse on military hegemony in Egyptian politics by underscoring the regime's systematic application of violence and militarisation across civil domains.² Moreover, while existing research on the impact of AI within Middle Eastern media politics predominantly concentrates on Gulf countries and Palestine, this study seeks to expand the scope of inquiry by addressing its implications in the Egyptian context.³

The first section examines the intersection of politics and artificial intelligence within the domain of mass communication. It provides an overview of key theoretical frameworks concerning technological innovation, analysing the growing integration of AI technologies in the Middle East. It highlights how such advancements serve to realise the strategic ambitions of dominant political actors, underscoring the complex interplay between technological progress and power consolidation.

The second section delves into the role of technology in facilitating public mobilisation during the 2011 Egyptian *thawra*, critically examining whether social media effectively disrupted established dynamics of political communication.

The final section argues that the integration of AI technologies has enhanced the legitimacy of the Egyptian military regime by enhancing its capacity to control and surveil social activism. It posits that, contrary to earlier perceptions, technology has ceased to function as an effective tool of resistance, instead becoming an instrument for reinforcing authoritarian control.

¹ Paul Virilio, *Polar Inertia*. (SAGE Publications, 1999). In Virilio's work *Polar inertia* refers to a phenomenon in which the dynamics of movement and perception are shaped by rapid advancements in technology and media, causing profound changes on human relationship with space and time. The term implies stagnation or resistance in the perception of movement, where the immediacy of digital experiences creates a detachment from physical reality. This "inertia" can be seen in the shift from physically experiencing travel to abstract, high-speed consumption of images and information. *Polar inertia* thus highlights the tension between the physical act of movement and the virtual representations that increasingly dominate our experiences.

² Heba Raouf Ezzat. "Imagining Egypt in Postnormal Times: The State of War" *The Routledge International Handbook of Contemporary Muslim Socio-Political Thought*, no. 14 (2023): 373-386.

³ For instance, see: Mark Owen Jones, *Digital Authoritarianism in the Middle East* (Hurst Publishers, 2022); Ameera Kawash, "Impacts of AI Technologies on Palestinian Lives and Narratives" *7amleh* (2024)

The military's deployment of AI for surveillance in Egypt exemplifies how the vantage point of state and military entities influences both the application and perception of technology. This intersectional perspective underscores the selective and context-specific nature of technological progress, challenging the notion that technology inherently promotes democratic participation or social equity. Acknowledging these intertwined perspectives allows for a more nuanced understanding of how AI and new media function in Egypt — not merely as neutral instruments, but, rather, as mechanisms of political authority and social regulation. This perspective calls for a critical examination of the broader societal ramifications of technological development, emphasising the need to interrogate whose interests such advancements ultimately serve. By doing so, we recognise that our comprehension of technology's role in resistance and governance is perpetually mediated by specific contexts and institutional perspectives.

AI relies on the convergence of data, computing power, and engineering expertise. Recent advancements in AI have fuelled significant public debate, driven by AI's capacity to analyse extensive datasets, discern patterns, and generate predictive insights. However, its significance extends beyond computational capabilities, encompassing broader processes of information management, communication, and integration into increasingly complex social dynamics. This integration holds particular importance for governments, military institutions, and businesses, underscoring AI's role as a mediation tool in shaping communication and influencing political and social landscapes.⁴ This article examines AI as a mediation tool for communication and its influence on political and social dynamics. Examining the emergence of AI in Egypt, therefore, reveals how technological developments often create barriers to achieving social justice.

Virilio provides a critical thinking of Western political evolution, arguing that traditional historiography has largely neglected the crucial role of speed ('dromology') and military strategy in shaping historical trajectories. He challenges the notion that modernity inherently causes social advancement or humanistic progress, arguing instead that it drives a growing preoccupation with speed and technological efficiency; an emphasis which often privileges warfare, surveillance, and control over democratic and egalitarian ideals.⁵ This essay adopts Virilio's ontology to examine the role of new media technologies in the Egyptian context, assessing their deployment as instruments of social control.

⁴ Haroon Sheikh, Corien Prins, and Erik Schrijvers, *Mission AI* (Springer, 2023)

⁵ Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1986)

In *Polar Inertia*, Virilio argues how media technologies, ostensibly designed for communication, contribute to a “loss of sight,” ultimately producing a state of world alienation.⁶ He conceptualises the proliferation of technological interfaces as an extension of Bentham’s panopticon, facilitating new mechanisms of observation and control.⁷ Building on this framework, this analysis demonstrates how AI-mediated communication has emerged as a powerful tool for the Egyptian military, legitimising practices of surveillance and social control, specifically in ICT and urban planning sectors — both online and offline. National security narratives are frequently used to justify the military's involvement in these sectors, reflecting its entrenched role in shaping Egyptian politics. By focusing on the pervasive use of brutality and war in civil spheres, attention can be given to the study of the Egyptian military's dominance within the state and its influence on societal change.⁸

AI Entanglement: Political Communication, Social Representation, and State Security

To start, we will explore the intersection of politics and AI within the domain of mass communication, with a particular emphasis on the Middle Eastern context. This will involve an examination of the principal theoretical frameworks and key arguments pertinent to this subject.

The integration of AI in Middle Eastern society highlights its role in shaping political communication, social representation, and state security. In this region, the expanding influence of AI, particularly in social media, has intensified tensions between political actors seeking control and those resisting it. Its utilisation in certain Middle Eastern states underscores its function as a tool for surveillance and control, raising ethical and political questions about its significance for authoritarian regimes. This section argues that critiques of AI have become central to institutional policies, as those in power increasingly leverage the technology to dominate political discourse, societal representation, and state security.

The notion that human identity is intrinsically shaped by the integration of tools and technologies is central to Technological Post-humanism⁹—a perspective that disrupts the conventional dichotomy between humans and technology, profoundly influencing political discourse by reconfiguring the balance of power between human agency and machine autonomy. As reliance on AI for operational efficiency intensifies, there is, therefore, a

⁶ Paul Virilio, *Polar Inertia* (SAGE Publications, 1999): 19

⁷ Ibid. 33-35

⁸ Ezzat, “Imagining Egypt in Postnormal Times” (2023)

⁹ Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1* (Stanford University Press, 1998): 134-135.

diminishing capacity for human participation in democratic processes and the resolution of issues related to social inclusion is strongly undermined.¹⁰

AI is a powerful mass communication tool, offering increasing capabilities to analyse social media data, identify trends, target specific audiences, and deliver tailored content, significantly influencing how people perceive and react to information. Drawing on Zuboff's notion of behaviour modification, it becomes evident that such personalised targeting is not merely informational but also transformative, as it can subtly influence and even manipulate individual behaviour to align with commercial or ideological objectives.¹¹ Consequently, it is crucial to question the compatibility of democratic governance with advance technologies, particularly given the uncertainty surrounding the extent to which AI might supplant human decision-making and shape hegemonic power structures.

The integration of AI into society drives significant subjective transformations by influencing public discourse, ethical considerations, cultural norms, and the very perception of human identity in the digital age; changes which highlight the importance of addressing social biases and contradictions to ensure a balanced and fair technological future.¹² Unequal or distorted portrayals of minority social groups in the media facilitate misrepresented images and social prejudices that inform social imagination and political decision making. For example, Saudi Arabia employs chatbots to automate the dissemination of information on social media, aiming to create bias, obscure human rights abuses, and control domestic audiences.¹³ In this context, AI has the capacity to control and influence the formation of social bias raises concerns that individuals from certain segments of society might become overly visible to technological systems. As such, this dynamic poses a critical dilemma: while AI increasingly becomes a central focus of institutional policy, it simultaneously offers dominant political actors the means to exploit this technology to consolidate power and serve their interests.

The level in which technology becomes more present in people's daily routines also ensures the future relevance of AI. For instance, the rising prevalence of self-driving vehicles which relies on sophisticated machine learning capabilities and advanced image processing techniques. While many individuals may perceive benefits in adopting such technologies, their incorporation often implies the expansion of a system of mass surveillance. The Israeli

¹⁰ Jerold Abrams, "Pragmatism, Artificial Intelligence, and Posthuman Bioethics" *Human Studies* 27 (2004): 250-255.

¹¹ Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, (London: Profile Books, 2019): 292-298

¹² Alexander Monea, "Race and Computer Vision". In *The Democratization of Artificial Intelligence*, Sudman, A. (Ed.), (Transcript Verlag, 2019):189-208

¹³ Jones, "Digital Authoritarianism in the Middle East," (2022): Chapter 14

government's use of AI technology to surveil Palestinians online and control their movement in the physical space serves as just one case in point.¹⁴ Similarly, US public policies promote AI integration in institutions, as seen in companies like Amazon and Microsoft providing biased facial recognition technology to law enforcement agencies.¹⁵ This implies that legal frameworks legitimising surveillance coexist with the increasing exposure of private life, a development that holds significant implications for the consolidation of political hegemony by governments.

The ability to shape public opinion is a crucial form of political power, determining how people and groups perceive and interpret information. This influence goes beyond merely guiding thoughts; it shapes the beliefs and attitudes of broad populations, especially in contemporary societies where public opinion significantly impacts governance. Traditionally, this power has been linked to military and economic strength, as political leaders have consistently depended on persuasion to shift public sentiment.¹⁶ Ownership of technology is essential for governments to divert public opinion. For instance, during the Iraq war, state-controlled cable TV shaped public opinion, but this control was disrupted by the rise of satellite TV, particularly *Al Jazeera*.¹⁷ As technological innovation enables access to new sources of knowledge, it should not therefore be surprising to see that political actors are eager to leverage control over these new technologies to influence political communications, social representation, and state security for their own benefit. This creates a paradox: while technology is heralded as a means to foster societal progress, it simultaneously has the potential to amplify political power and control.

Turning to Egypt, the Egyptian government has been shown to employ technology to suppress political opposition and censor citizens.¹⁸ Under President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, who came to power after a 2013 coup, the regime has used advanced technology to strengthen its control. This tendency includes the development of smart-cities, extensive surveillance via Wi-Fi hotspots, key card access, and cameras, as well as advanced internet monitoring tools acquired internationally,¹⁹ allowing the military to track communications, monitor social media, and identify dissenters, leading to repression of those who express opposition. Despite

¹⁴ Kawash, "Impacts of AI Technologies on Palestinian Lives and Narratives," (2024).

¹⁵ Yuni Wen, Matthias Holweg, "A phenomenological perspective on AI ethical failures" *AI & Soc* 39 (2024): 1932-1934.

¹⁶ Eduard Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939* (Palgrave, 2001): 120-130.

¹⁷ Mark Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public* (Columbia University Press, 2006)

¹⁸ Andreas Sudmann, *The Democratization of Artificial Intelligence*. In *The Democratization of Artificial Intelligence*, Sudman, A. (Ed.), (Transcript Verlag, 2019):18

¹⁹ Nicholas Sturos, "The Dark Side of Technology" *State International Law Review* (2024)

passing a data protection law in 2020 and Sisi's declarations of promoting human rights, the regime continues to use technology to stifle free speech and maintain political dominance, violating international human rights standards for privacy and freedom of expression.²⁰

The increasing use of AI by authoritarian regimes to manipulate social perceptions and dominate public discourse highlights the urgent need for robust policies and frameworks that protect human rights. To ensure a balanced technological future, it is imperative to continuously scrutinise and challenge the ways in which AI is employed by those in power. This vigilance is essential not only for safeguarding individual freedoms but also for fostering a more just and inclusive society. As AI technology evolves, so too must our approaches to its governance, ensuring that it serves the broader interests of society rather than merely reinforcing existing power structures.

Egypt and the Duality of Media Technology: From Social Media to AI

When discussing technology's impact on society, it is essential to consider the complex interplay between society, technology, and politics. In the context of the Arab Spring, digital evangelists view social media as crucial for organising protests and spreading ideologies, while techno-realists emphasise its limitations, such as low internet access, government surveillance, and manipulation risks, arguing that meaningful change requires more than just digital tools.²¹ This suggests that technology has the potential to shift power from the centre to the periphery, while simultaneously reinforcing the dominance of established hierarchies. This paper, however, proposes that AI technology is advancing faster than the capacity of civil movements to integrate it, highlighting the contradictions of using technology as a tool for resistance.

The Egyptian government's dominance over traditional media was challenged by the independent rise of social media platforms. While new media outlets shifted the landscape from a largely monolithic to a more diverse one, it was not until the 2011 *thawra* that the expansion of these platforms truly contributed to political reform in Egypt.²² The independent ownership of social media helps explain how the internet provided a safe space for political activism. During the revolution, the Egyptian government's limited control over platforms like

²⁰ "Egypt: Freedom on the Net 2021" *Freedom House*. Last modified September 13, 2024 (<https://freedomhouse.org/country/egypt/freedom-net/2021>)

²¹ Francesca Comunello and Giuseppe Anzera, "Will the Revolution Be Tweeted?" *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 23, no. 4 (2012): 453–470.

²² Sahar Khamis, "The Transformative Egyptian Media Landscape" *International Journal of Communication* 5 (2011): 1161

Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube made them ideal channels for turning people's needs and aspirations into concrete political action. The presence of groups advocating for different ideologies, ranging from secularism to Islamism and liberalism, testifies the richness of online discussions. The introduction of social media contributed to produce a diverse media environment, therefore, opening the political arena for multiple voices.

Social media platforms played a crucial role in supporting the revolution by facilitating communication and bypassing government repression. By evading government surveillance, these platforms became a powerful catalyst for public discussions, sparking street activism, civic engagement, and the coordination of protests. They also gave rise to citizen journalism, allowing ordinary individuals to share their opinions and perspectives publicly.²³ The 2011 *thawra* demonstrated the potential of technology as a practical tool for political resistance.

When considering the uniqueness of social media, it also involves drawing comparisons with pre-existing forms of media, including the telephone and television. During the protests in 2011, for example, social media brought innovation in terms of raising the scale of public awareness, testing public opinion and trends, rallying support for a political cause and boosting civic engagement and mobilisation.²⁴ The technology behind social media platforms proved to be the most singular tool for resistance during the 2011 uprising because it helped civil society translate the debate into a scale that television and the telephone did not allow for.

While it is true that new media technology was essential to create an active civil society where diverse ideologies emerged and escaped the government censorship, it is also true that not everyone had access to internet communication. The exclusion of certain groups from online public discourse potentially accounts for the misrepresentation of specific social and political movements during the uprising. In fact, as of 2020, only 40% of Egypt's population had internet access.²⁵ Consequently, assessing the efficacy of new technologies as instruments of resistance necessitates a nuanced understanding of the socio-political realities. To critically investigate how AI-mediated communication challenges Egypt's political status quo, it is essential first to analyse the interplay between technology and the nation's ICT sector.

Egyptian governmental legislation on the ICT sector has typically favoured state authority, often at the expense of accountability within public institutions. For example, the Central Agency for Public Mobilisation and Statistics imposes restrictions on the release of

²³ Ibid. 1165

²⁴ Ibid. 1164

²⁵ Nagla Rizk, "Artificial Intelligence and Inequality in the Middle East" *The Oxford Handbook of Ethics of AI*. (2020): 638

public data, thereby limiting transparency.²⁶ Additionally, the absence of robust legal frameworks supporting a secure data environment has contributed to a growing dependence on foreign entities for the collection and management of social data, as observed by the 2018 authorities' request for "pertaining to access and storage data collected by Uber", highlighting the reliance on external platforms to fulfil domestic data needs.²⁷ The government's lack of transparency and the absence of a clear and comprehensive regulatory framework regarding an AI-driven economic strategy in Egypt also arouses suspicion over its capacity to implement fair policies, making people and businesses hesitant to embrace these initiatives. This does not imply that the technology sector will avoid adopting AI altogether. Rather, it underscores the uncertainty surrounding the mechanisms and objectives through which AI will be developed and integrated into the economy.

At COP27 in Egypt, concerns over surveillance heightened when the extensive capabilities of Egypt's official conference app were uncovered as the Egypt's Ministry of Communications and Information Technology faced accusations of conducting invasive surveillance practices. According to cybersecurity experts and rights groups, the app could potentially spy on users, access their emails, texts, and even monitor their conversations.²⁸ This revelation sparked widespread caution among international delegates, with some Western governments advising against downloading the app due to fears of compromising sensitive communications, highlighting broader concerns about state surveillance in Egypt, where technology is used as a tool to strengthen political power both domestically and internationally.

Indeed, the development of Egypt's ICT sector under a neoliberal strategy has aligned with the country's authoritarian governance, receiving little international criticism as technology is viewed as a solution to socio-political issues. Under the guise of promoting development and disregarding Egypt's socio-political realities, the international community, particularly Western countries, has financially supported the Egyptian regime with minimal resistance. For instance, the International Monetary Fund approved a new \$3 billion loan agreement with Egypt in 2022.²⁹ This, despite issues like the opaque role of the military in the economy and insufficient social protections, indicates a willingness to overlook the regime's

²⁶ Ibid. 637

²⁷ Ibid. 640

²⁸ "Security Officials Raise Fears over Egypt's COP27 App," *Politico*, Last Modified on November 9, 2022 (<https://www.politico.eu/article/cop-27-climate-change-app-cybersecurity-weapon-risks/#:~:text=Security%20officials%20raise%20fears%20over,conversations%20and%20access%20encrypted%20texts.>)

²⁹ "Egypt: IMF Bailout Highlights Risks of Austerity and Corruption" *Human Rights Watch*, Last modified on January, 31, 2023 (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/01/31/egypt-imf-bailout-highlights-risks-austerity-corruption>).

authoritarian nature in favour of economic development. Given these circumstances, it appears increasingly unlikely that the impetus to enforce robust data protection regulations will originate from either the Egyptian regime or its international supporters.

One cannot ignore the impact of social media in promoting social justice against an authoritarian regime in 2011 as technology was central in organising protests and in the articulation of an active and diverse new public sphere. This section, however, shows that the government relation with the ICT sector and with the international community contributes to the evasion of data regulations and practices that increase to the suspicion over the uses and applications of new media technologies. Thus, when facing the transformation posed by AI, it is important to consider its dependence on political and economic factors, entailing its alliance with existing power hierarchies and entrenching these dominant structures.

AI and Militarisation: The Transformation of Military Technologies in Egypt

AI's growing relevance in a technology-driven daily life lies in its dual ability to manage vast datasets by tracking trends and optimizing information flow through communication networks. In Egypt, the government's dominance in the ICT sector casts uncertainty over AI's development, yet the military's strategic positioning suggests a clear intent to capitalise on this technology.

By examining how new media technologies reinforce power hierarchies, it becomes evident that technology contributes to a phenomenon of militarisation. Paul Virilio argued that technology onstills a military logic of totalitarianism, where military institutions transcend subordination to political objectives and instead use technology as a form of camouflage, seamlessly integrating into the broader environment.³⁰ For him, the process of militarisation reflects how technology "appropriates the displacement of bodies as its energy"; a process accelerated by advancements in motors and machinery, which have progressively reduced reliance on human bodies in warfare.³¹ Machines began to acquire energy independently, reducing the need for human involvement, a shift which represents a transformation in politics, where the energy once derived from mobilising people is now generated by technology, fundamentally altering the relationship between humans and power. This idea is particularly interesting when examining the transformation of new media technologies in Egypt and how they have become increasingly intertwined with dominant political actors, such as the military.

³⁰ Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1986).

³¹ Michael Drake, "Politics or Apocalypitics?" *Security Dialogue*, no. 6 (1997): 481-497.

In investigating the growing role of the military in Egyptian politics under Sisi's regime, it appears that the military maintains its dominance over the state by impeding political and economic balanced participation.³² This is achieved by prioritising state-led initiatives, restricting private sector autonomy, and focusing on revenue generation rather than fostering competition and innovation; exemplified by the military's heavy involvement in various public projects, including large-scale infrastructure and construction initiatives, like large real estate developments.³³ A relevant example is the construction of smart-cities, like the New Administrative Capital on the outskirts of Cairo, which targets the technology-literate upper-middle-class. Projects like this not only promote notions of modernity and development, but also obscure the military's presence in the city, thereby increasing its ability to surveil and control online and offline spaces.

Virilio's suggestion that technology allows the military to subsist independently of human participation is particularly interesting when examined within the context of capitalism.³⁴ The generation of knowledge through AI operates within an asymmetric power dynamic, where the quantification and surveillance of lived experiences are seen as natural and desirable aspects of modern life. The capture and transformation of big data thus becomes a process of capitalist accumulation by dispossession. This process commodifies everyday life by repurposing data collected from human behaviour to primarily serve market interests and its operators, rather than the individuals from whom the data is derived—illustrating the phenomenon of appropriation. The rise of the "third modernity" marks a significant shift in the evolution of capitalism, where instead of serving people's needs, capitalism now focuses on exploiting them—otherwise known as "surveillance capitalism".³⁵ Such a phenomenon operates on a unique logic of accumulation, where surveillance is the core mechanism for transforming human interests into profit. Within this system, information and connections are commodified, with behavioural data extracted to manipulate individuals, fuel growth and profits.

In 2019, the Egyptian National Artificial Intelligence Strategy began promoting inclusive growth, fairness, transparency, security, and accountability through the establishment of regulations and oversight bodies for AI implementation.³⁶ However, this ideal remains far from reality since the military occupies a grey zone in the law. For example, Sisi has designated

³² Yezid Sayingh, "Praetorian Spearhead" *LSE Middle East Centre Paper Series 43* (2021)

³³ *Ibid.* 6-8

³⁴ Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1986)

³⁵ Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (2019) 56-55.

³⁶ OECD, *OECD Artificial Intelligence Review of Egypt*, (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2024)

various parts of national territory as strategic zones, placing 21 inter-city highways and a two-kilometre strip along either side under military control.³⁷ This gives the Ministry of Defence full rights not only to profit from rents but also to potentially oversee everything that passes through these spaces, indicating comprehensive control over the movement of both people and information.³⁸

The promotion of technology is frequently presented as an endeavour to enhance efficiency and modernity; however, it also operates as a mechanism of control rather than solely a catalyst for social development. For instance, the proliferation of AI technologies in regions outside the West can be interpreted as an example of data colonisation at the institutional level, wherein local data is appropriated to serve external interests.³⁹ Indeed, much of Western technological progress, including the development of modern computer science, has been driven and financed by military interests focused on enhancing national security and improving operational efficiency through advanced research and development.⁴⁰ This suggests that the development new technologies has a record of partly underpinning western military interests, aimed at projecting an image of modernity through the assertion of control.

This situation is particularly problematic in Egypt, the Central Agency for Public Mobilisation and Statistics, which is responsible for compiling data, operates under the influence of political leadership and the military. In autocracies official data is often manipulated to present a more favourable image of the socio-economic situation, leading to a distorted understanding of reality.⁴¹ Simultaneously, international institutions like the IMF incorporate Egyptian government statistics into their reports without critical scrutiny.⁴² This suggests that knowledge obtained through AI will be used accordingly to similar practices; an alignment which can obscure the limitations and potential misuse of these technologies, causing them to overlook the broader issues and negative consequences associated with their implementation.

³⁷ Sayingh, "Praetorian Spearhead," (2021): 12.

³⁸ Ibid. 13

³⁹ Paola Ricaurte, "Data Epistemologies, the Coloniality of Power, and Resistance" *Television & New Media* 20, no. 4 (2019): 350–365.

⁴⁰ Michael Dertouzos, *What Will Be* (Harper Collins Publishers, 1997): 36

⁴¹ Luiz Martinez, "How Much Should We Trust the Dictator's GDP Growth Estimates?" *Journal of Political Economy* vol. 130, issue 10 (2022)

⁴² "More than window dressing" *OrientXXI*, Last modified January, 27, 2022 (<https://orientxxi.info/magazine/more-than-window-dressing-on-the-credibility-of-public-statistics-from-al-sisi,5330>)

Virilio suggest that hyperreality comes with the reduction of time and space in which interface communications occur in new forms of media.⁴³ It is interesting to observe this dynamic as a phenomenon of alienation produced by the integration of technology into daily practices, especially when translated into the Egyptian context. Here, it raises questions such as to the extent new media technologies have substituted, rather than promoted, democratic participation.

Social networking platforms construct an illusory domain within the digital realm, obscuring the distinction between the simulated and the tangible; spaces which facilitate the articulation of ideals such as home, patriotism, and freedom, both on individual and collective levels. Over time, these ideals transform into hybridised constructs, shaped by the interplay of personal agency and collective will.⁴⁴ It is crucial, therefore, to recognise how these virtual interactions occur in spaces where opinions can circulate freely, with citizens actively participating by creating improvised alternative media channels to share information, opinions, and factual content. Through this participatory process, individuals reflect on, evaluate, and debate their experiences, thereby establishing fluid boundaries that render the virtual-real dichotomy obsolete. This dynamic underscores how media activists in Egypt employ a range of technological tactics — including encrypted communication, VPNs, social media campaigns, citizen journalism, fake accounts, pseudonyms, and hacktivism — to leverage technological to their advantage, rather than be exploited by them.

However, while activists in Egypt are leveraging technology to challenge the regime's narrative, it is equally important to recognise that the regime is expanding its presence in online and offline spaces, exploiting technology to its advantage by employing smart technologies and cybersecurity measures to mitigate uncertainty. Through a range of policies and practices, this effectively curtails the activities of its opponents⁴⁵, significantly boosting the regime's capabilities in information access, surveillance, and censorship, and thereby influencing the dynamics of political competition in an environment marked by high uncertainty.

Therefore, articulating Virilio's critique of technology within the Egyptian context helps one to recognise the regime's increasing efforts to implement a strategy that balances power and resistance in favour of military control and its subsistence within the political system. The regime has been increasingly controlling and suppressing online dissent and

⁴³ Paul Virilio, *Polar Inertia* (SAGE Publications, 1999) 33-35.

⁴⁴ Cristina Ivan, "The Multitudes" In *Manipulating Uncertainty*, Hassib, B. (Ed.) (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015): 75

⁴⁵ Ibid

political activism through various methods including censorship by blocking websites, monitoring online activities, and using legal tools to target and prosecute dissenters.⁴⁶ The government also spreads misinformation and fake news to discredit opponents and manipulate public opinion, while social media platforms are manipulated through coordinated campaigns to promote pro-regime narratives and drown out dissenting voices.⁴⁷ Furthermore, its focus on digitisation has leveraged technology to streamline governance, while simultaneously tightening control over cyberspace. Initiatives like e-government services, although modernising state functions, further extends the state's surveillance and control capabilities over citizens' digital interactions.

Conclusion

This work explores the role of technology development in Egypt, highlighting its dual capacity to empower resistance and reinforce state control. Its findings indicate that while social media platforms initially facilitated civic engagement and bypassed government censorship during the 2011 *thawra*, the subsequent integration of AI has shifted this dynamic. AI, particularly utilised by the military for surveillance and social control, has paradoxically enhanced the state's capacity to monitor and manipulate public discourse, thus eroding the democratic potential of these technologies. Within this context, AI's role in reinforcing existing power structures poses significant ethical and political challenges.

In short, it critically examines the impact of AI on Egypt's media environment, considering Paul Virilio's perspective that technology is linked to militarisation. The use of AI for surveillance by the Egyptian military demonstrates how these technologies can strengthen authoritarian regimes and reinforce existing power structures. This contrasts with the notion that technology is inherently democratic, highlighting the debate over whether technology reinforces or challenges power dynamics. As technology can enhance the military's ability to conceal control mechanisms while presenting an image of modernity and efficiency, there is an urgent need to follow guidelines that address the ethical implications of AI and prevent its misuse in reinforcing authoritarian control.

⁴⁶ Mostafa Hussin, "The Sisi Firewall" *Strategic Analysis 4* (2020).

⁴⁷ Joe Shea, "Misinfo, Disinfo, and Fake News in Egypt's COVID-19 "Infodemic"" *Tahrir Institute for Middle Eastern Policy*, May 8 2020 (<https://timep.org/2020/05/08/misinfo-disinfo-and-fake-news-in-egypts-covid-19-infodemic>).

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