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# **Are People More Connective Than Political Actions? Towards an Empirical Approach for Action Participants**

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## **Abstract**

The recent wave of Internet-based social movements in the Arab Spring countries and elsewhere has considerably changed the organizational structure of contentious action. One of the current and most significant theories that has handled this change is the logic of connective action, which distinguishes between two major types of contentious action: collective and connective. In the context of this theory, this article puts forward a new conception of political action participants and attempts to classify them along the categories of collective or connective. This conception, which consists of participants' orientations and behaviours, is empirically examined through a survey conducted in Egypt on a representative sample of 527 respondents aged 18 to 35. The results show that the Egyptian political actions that occurred after the 2011 revolution were mostly connective actions, and the majority of the actions participants were connective individuals. In addition, a strong significant relationship was found between both actions and participants as collective or connective. This suggests that identifying the nature of action participants provides a mean to better understand the nature of actions themselves.

## **Keywords**

contentious action, collective action, connective action, Internet-based social movement, political action participants, collective participants, connective participants

## **Introduction**

The Arab Spring (AS) movements have brought about two structural changes in contentious action: the rise of the role of social network sites (SNS) as crucial platforms for political mobilization and the rise of non-organizationally affiliated individuals as the main coordinators of protest actions. These changes have been considered fundamental transformations of traditional collective action, which has been organized by, as described by Olson (1971), groups and hierarchical organizations.

In Egypt, such changes in collective action were manifested especially in the effects of youth, assisted by SNS, in leading the 25 January 2011 revolution (25J), which forced the former president Hosni Mubarak to step down (Meier 2011; Mason 2012; Gerbaudo 2012). Egyptian youth emerged as a strong political actor post-25J, despite having no organizational affiliation. However, their effect started to decline – especially after the army seized power on 3 July 2013 – mainly as a result of political repression. The rise and decline of youth as a political actor seem to have been closely related to the nature of the political actions in which they participated, as well as to their patterns of involvement in those actions. The discussion section of this article will shed more light on this point.

Recent changes in collective action can be traced back to the 1990s, when the Internet started to give rise to a New Wave of three closely related phenomena (Shehata 2016). First, individualization: people became more separated and interested in segmented media content (Castells 1996, 2012; Bennett and Enteman 2001; Bennett 2003a, 2003b; Bennett and Segerberg 2009; Walgrave et al. 2011). Second, personalization: people's behaviour became dependent on personal views, interests and issues (Bennett and Segerberg 2011, 2012; Bennett 2012). And third, the creation of new organizations characterized by a loose structure and loose working policies (Tilly 2004; Bimber et al. 2005, 2012; Tarrow 2005, 2011; Della-Porta and Diani 2006; Chadwick 2007; Gilbert 2008; Bennett et al. 2011; Earl and Kimport 2011).

These three notions have been handled in social movement literature as developments of collective action, not independent phenomena. However, Bennett and Segerberg (2012, 2013) consider them benchmarks for a new kind of action – ‘the logic of connective action’ (LCA) – which distinguishes between at least two actions: collective and connective. Empirically, LCA literature has used two major indicators to differentiate between collective and connective action: action organizers and mobilization channels (Bennett and Segerberg

2013; Cristancho and Anduiza 2013; Lim 2013; Mercea and Funk 2014; Bennett et al. 2014; Anduiza et al. 2014; Vromen et al. 2015; Boler et al. 2014; Wright 2015). While collective action depends basically on hierarchical organizations and perhaps also digital media for mobilization, connective action relies largely on individuals and digital media.

Based on LCA, this article examines, through a survey, the nature of political actions that occurred in Egypt after 25J as collective or connective. The article also explores the nature of the political action participants and attempts to classify them according to the categories of collective or connective. Two indicators are used to examine the actions participants: political orientation shared on SNS (namely manifestations of political interaction on SNS, such as discussions, shares and friendships) and political participation activities (namely patterns of involvement in political actions, such as elections, protests, strikes and sit-ins). Both indicators consider whether the orientations and behaviours were individual- or organizational-based processes.

As LCA has been criticized for omitting people's behaviour (King 2014), I draw here on the notion of action participants, which addresses this criticism and can provide a better understanding of the conditions that make connective action unsustainable (as noted by Bondes and Schucher 2015). Revealing the nature of action participants also enables an understanding of the type of political action in which they might engage (Shehata 2016). Hence, this article mainly argues that a deeper understanding of the type of political action as collective or connective requires an equivalent understanding of the nature of the people who participate in that action.

The article is structured in six sections, including this Introduction. Section 'Post-revolution political actions in Egypt' provides a brief background on the Egyptian political actions that occurred after the 25J, with a special focus on the two years between mid-2013 and mid-2015. Section 'Methodology' presents the methodological procedures of the study. Section 'Results' explains the results with a specific focus on the nature of both the political actions and the Egyptian youth. Section 'Discussion' discusses the significance of the results in relation to the literature of connective and collective action. Finally, section 'Conclusion' concludes with a summary of the main points and the preceding discussion.

## **Post-revolution political actions in Egypt**

On 25 January 2011, a mass of Egyptians demonstrated against the authoritarian president Hosni Mubarak and managed to oust him on 11 February, drawing his 30 years of rule to an end. Since then, a significant number of political actions have occurred and negatively affected the democratic transition. Mubarak was succeeded by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) as a transitional authority (Ghonim 2012). The protest actions did not stop after Mubarak's removal, because the SCAF's reign was, as described by Brownlee et al. (2015: 187), 'an attempt to continue the practices of Mubarak's era'. The protests ultimately forced the SCAF to schedule a presidential election (Arjomand 2014), which was held in May and June 2012. The election was won by Mohammed Morsi, the candidate of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) (Egypt's Presidential Elections Committee 2012).

Morsi was inaugurated on 30 June 2012, and he conflicted with several actors in his attempts to stabilize power. One of the most important events that occurred at the end of Morsi's short reign was the formation of the Rebel movement (Tamarrod), which started a petition in March 2013 to force Morsi to call an early presidential election. In order to achieve this goal, the movement organized massive protests on 30 June 2013. These protests received the support of the army, which overthrew and detained Morsi on 3 July 2013 (Brownlee et al. 2015). Morsi was succeeded by the chief of the Supreme Constitutional Court, Adly Mansour, as an interim president, until an elected president took power in mid-2014 (Egypt's Official Gazette 2013a). These dramatic changes and their aftermath largely obstructed the nascent democratic experiment that began after 25J (Khalifa 2015).

Morsi's removal brought about numerous demonstrations – most notably at the Republican Guard headquarters, Al-menasa and Ramsees – as well as two sit-ins at Rabea Al-adaweya and Al-nahda Square. In addition, a large number of protests broke out at many Egyptian universities, especially at the universities of Cairo, Ain Shams and Al-Azhar. The government responded to these protests with a massive wave of repression and detention, particularly in the months following Morsi's removal. This way of dealing with protests after 3 July 2013 made the gains of 25J, according to Al-Arian (2014: 123), 'to be very much in doubt'.

After Morsi was deposed, the country's constitution was suspended, and some of its articles were later amended (Egypt's Official Gazette 2013a). The amendments, which were presented for a referendum on 14–15 January 2014, were approved by 98.1% of the electorate,

though the participation rate was only 38.6% of eligible voters (Egypt's High Elections Committee 2014). On 26–28 May 2014, a presidential election was held between two candidates: the former defence minister, Abd Al-fattah Al-sisi, and the leader of the Egyptian Popular Current, Hamdeen Sabahi. Al-sisi won the election by a landslide of 96.9% of the vote, with a participation rate of 47.5% (Egypt's Presidential Elections Committee 2014).

One of the important actions that occurred after Al-sisi's inauguration was the killing of the activist Shaimaa Alsabagh on 24 January 2015. Alsabagh was shot dead when the police interrupted a peaceful march that was heading to Liberation Square (Maidan Al-tahrir) in commemoration of the protesters who were killed during 25J. The photos of her killing went viral, and this sparked the fourth anniversary of the revolution (Malsin and Laurent 2015). On the following day, protests against the regime's repression broke out in many cities. Some clashes erupted between protesters and security forces, leaving 25 dead (Emara 2015; Egyptian Association for Freedom of Thought and Expression 2015).

In brief, these were the most important events that occurred in Egypt after 25J. Although the revolution achieved some goals of democracy, it ultimately failed to maintain gains due to the autocratic policies of the army that seized power on 3 July 2013. These policies were very obvious in the 2015 parliamentary election for example, in which the General Intelligence Agency, according to Bahgat (2016), intervened by forming an electoral list called 'For the Love of Egypt', which won all of the seats specified for lists in the election. Such autocratic policies have fundamentally undermined the chances of a democratic transition in Egypt.

Based on a number of political actions discussed in this section, I explain in the next section some empirical implications of how connective action in Egypt was examined and how the concept of political action participants was developed to test participants' collectivity and connectivity. Taken together, this article examines the relationship between the nature of political actions and their participants as collective or connective, in order to better understand the organizational structure of recent political action.

## **Methodology**

The empirical data of this article were drawn from both descriptive and analytical surveys (Wimmer and Dominick 2011). The descriptive survey material addressed aspects of the youth's participation in Egyptian political actions and the analytical survey material

examined the nature of those actions and their participants as collective or connective. A face-to-face questionnaire was administered in September and October 2015 with 527 respondents of Egyptian youth aged 18 to 35. Only 400 questionnaires<sup>1</sup> were subjected to an analysis.

For various reasons (e.g. security risks, lack of time and the absence of the sample frame), respondents were selected intentionally, rather than randomly, from three Egyptian governorates (Cairo, Menoufia and Beni Suef), which represent three different cultural and geographical aspects. Based on a proportional allocation considering gender and place of residence, the required number of respondents was identified (Foreman 1991). In this method, the more populous governorate was given greater representation in the sample than the other governorates, and within each governorate, the ratio of genders was considered (see Table 1). Prior knowledge of respondents' media use and political participation was avoided in order to prevent selection bias.

		Males		Females		Total	
		F	%	F	%	F	%
Place of residence	Cairo	117	50.65	114	49.35	231	57.75
	Menoufia	50	51.02	48	48.98	98	24.5
	Beni Suef	36	50.70	35	49.30	71	17.75
Total		203	50.75	197	49.25	400	100

F = frequency

*Table 1: Distribution of the sample by gender and place of residence.*

<sup>1</sup> Out of 527 questionnaires, 54 questionnaires were eliminated because they were incomplete and 73 were removed because they either did not meet the sample criteria or exceeded the targeted number of questionnaires (400). The sample size was calculated by the statistical formula  $n = N / [1 + N(e)]^2$ , wherein  $n$  was the sample size,  $N$  was the population size and  $e$  was the margin of error (Israel 1992: 3). As the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS; the official source of data and statistical information in Egypt) did not have a specific estimation of the targeted age category (18–35), another category (18–29) was used to calculate the sample size. Based on the percentage of that category (23.7%) provided by CAPMAS (2014) and the total population number (88,163,371) revealed in the latest census (CAPMAS 2015), a population size of 20,900,000 was calculated. A sample size of 399.99 respondents was then calculated on the basis of a 5% margin of error. In order to ensure the feasibility of this method, the published tables method was also used to calculate the sample size, based on population size and margin of error. According to this method, the sample size for any population over 100,000 with a 5% margin of error should be 400 (Israel 1992: 2). This meant that if we even had maximized the population size in the mentioned formula to cover the unrepresented age category (30–35), the sample size would have remained the same (400).

The questionnaire design considered the logical sequence of questions, which required consistency between questions, a combination of related questions in each part and a transition from broad to definite questions (Gillham 2011; Wimmer and Dominick 2011). The questionnaire consisted of four major consecutive sections: exposure to mobilization and information channels, the nature of political actions between mid-2013 and mid-2015, the nature of actions participants and personal data.

In order to increase the clarity of the questionnaire, the Question Understanding Aid (QUAID) tool was used to provide feedback on the formulation of the questionnaire items and to increase the reliability and validity of respondents' replies (Graesser et al. 2000). Furthermore, an online pretest was conducted through a web-based survey software (Google Forms) on a small sample of Egyptian youth to ensure that questions were clear and understandable. Subsequently, some questions were modified and others were excluded in accordance with the study objectives. The final version of the questionnaire included two major scales – type of political action and type of action participants – which were developed to examine the nature of political actions and participants as collective or connective.

Type of political action: In this scale, six major political actions that occurred between June 2013 and June 2015 were examined as collective or connective: the 30 June 2013 demonstrations, the Muslim Brotherhood demonstrations after 3 July 2013, university students' demonstrations after 3 July 2013, the 2014 constitutional referendum, the 2014 presidential election and the January 2015 demonstrations. This scale, which was guided by other studies (e.g. Bennett and Segerberg 2012, 2013; Anduiza et al. 2014; Cristancho and Anduiza 2013), consisted of the following three sub-scales:

- 1– Mobilization channels: in this sub-scale, respondents were asked to sort in ascending order eight items (channels) through which they had been mobilized to participate in political actions. Only the first four sorted channels were considered in respondents who selected more than four. All items were rated on eight points using two methods: first, traditional mobilization channels (e.g. Egyptian newspapers, radio, television and hierarchical organizations) were rated on a one-point format, wherein 0 = no and 1 = yes; and second, new and individual channels (e.g. Egyptian news websites, weblogs, SNS and face-to-face communication) were rated on a two-point format, wherein 0 = no and 2 = yes.
- 2– Information channels: in this sub-scale, the same channels of the previous sub-scale were used as information channels, and respondents were asked to sort these in ascending order. The procedures of the previous sub-scale were repeated in this sub-scale.



3– Respondents’ characteristics: this sub-scale included two items. First, age was rated on a three-point response format, wherein 1 = 31–35 years old, 2 = 26–30 years old and 3 = 18–25 years old. Second, political affiliation was rated on a three-point format, wherein 0 = not applicable, 1 = member in a hierarchical organization, 2 = politically active online with new groups and 3 = politically active online as an individual.

The total score<sup>2</sup> ( $s$ ) of this scale ranged from 1 to 19 and formed the basis on which political actions were classified into three categories: collective actions ( $s < 8.48$ ), collective and connective ( $8.48 \leq s \leq 11.44$ ) and connective ( $s > 11.44$ ). In addition, Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  coefficient, which was used to test the internal consistency reliability of the scale, was 0.641.

Type of action participants: Based on the two indicators mentioned in the Introduction (political orientation shared on SNS and political participation activities) and guided by the comparison between collective and connective actions described by Bennett and Segerberg (2012: 756), a twelve-item Likert scale was developed to examine political action participants’ tendency to adhere to a logic of collective or connective action in their acts of participation.

The first six items were prepared to reflect a connective trend and were rated on a three-point response format, wherein 1 = disagree, 2 = neutral and 3 = agree.<sup>3</sup> The latter six items were prepared to reflect a collective trend, and they were also rated on a three-point response format, wherein 1 = agree, 2 = neutral and 3 = disagree. The items were as follows:

1. I shared my ideas about political actions mainly through SNS.
2. I discussed my political views mainly through SNS.
3. I made friends or acquaintances in a political context mainly through SNS.

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<sup>2</sup> Because the three sub-scales used different metrics to examine the type of political actions, a direct calculation of the total score of the scale would have been statistically inaccurate. In order to solve this problem, three statistical procedures were used. First, I standardized the scores of each sub-scale before computing the total score of the scale by converting the sub-scale scores to a Z-score with a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1 (Morgan et al. 2011: 190). Second, I computed the composite Z scores of the three sub-scales (Anglim 2009; Ackerman and Cianciolo 2000: 263–64). And third, I converted the composite score to a scaled score with a mean of 10 and a standard deviation of 3, using the formula  $(z)3 + 10$  (Brock 2014: 35–36). This conversion was applied because a scaled score is both more common and easier to use in correlations with other variables (Smith et al. 2009: 109).

<sup>3</sup> A long controversy has been raised on the validity of a three-point Likert scale relative to a five-point scale. I agree with scholars such as Jacoby and Matell (1971), who support the validity of a three-point scale on the basis that it is easier for respondents to place themselves on a three-point scale than a five-point scale.

4. My political discussion and interaction on SNS were self-motivated processes.
5. My political discussion and interaction on SNS were based mainly on my personal views.
6. My political use of SNS was based on my personal access to the Internet.
7. My voting in (or intentional boycott of) elections or referendums was mainly an organizational-based decision.
8. My participation in, or intentional boycott of, electoral campaigns depended mainly on organizational arrangements.
9. My involvement in, or intentional avoiding of, political mobilization was driven by an organization.
10. My participation in (or intentional boycott of) protests, sit-ins or strikes was an organizationally-based process.
11. I contacted government officials for political reasons based on an organizational coordination.
12. I tended to involve myself in politics as much as possible through existing organizations.

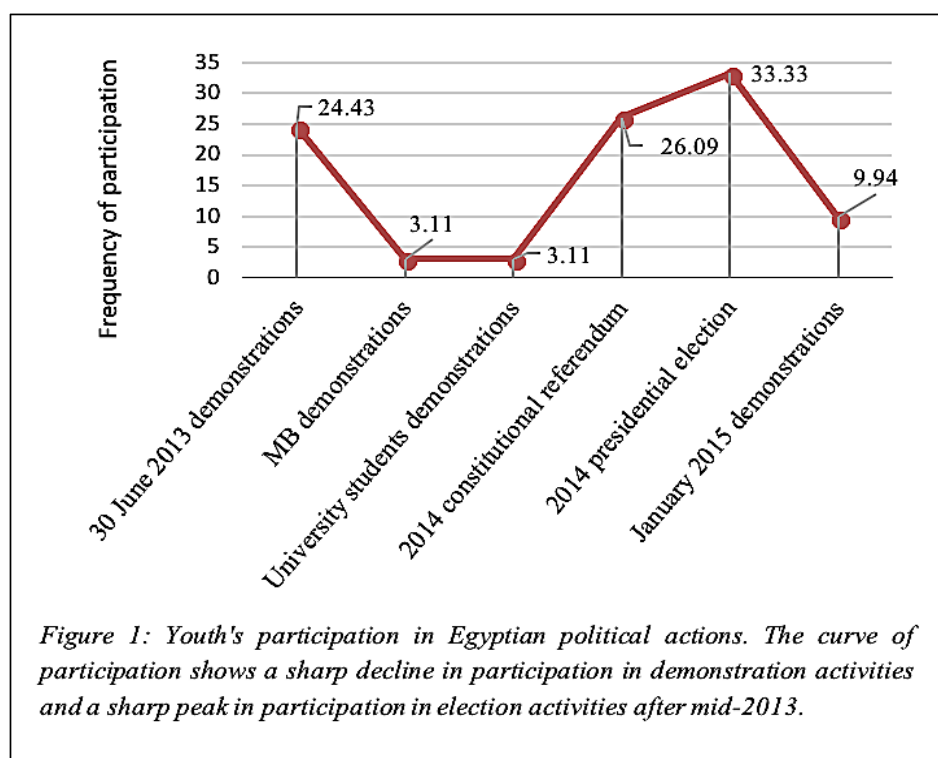
The total score of this scale ranged from 12 to 36, and respondents were classified into three categories: collective participants ( $s < 20$ ), mixed (collective and connective) ( $20 \leq s \leq 28$ ) and connective ( $s > 28$ ). In addition, the internal consistency reliability of the scale using Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient was 0.598.

## Results

In recent years, Egypt has witnessed a large number of important political actions as a result of the extremely high political polarization triggered by the 2011 revolution. This study focused on six major actions that occurred between June 2013 and June 2015, which were the most recent actions at the time at which the questionnaire was conducted. In general, the results indicated that degree of participation in political actions significantly varied, and conventional actions received higher participation than did unconventional actions.

As shown in Figure 1, two conventional actions (voting in the 2014 presidential election and voting in the constitutional referendum) accounted for the highest participation rates, with 33.33% and 26.09%, respectively. The only unconventional action that received remarkably high participation was the June 30 demonstrations with 24.43%. The larger participation in that action can be attributed to the extensive mobilization campaigns that preceded it, as well as the support given to it by the country's institutions. All other unconventional political

actions registered low participation: the January 2015 demonstrations had 9.94%, followed by the MB demonstrations and university students' demonstrations following 3 July 2013, which both had 3.11% participation. The low participation in these three actions can be clearly ascribed to the unwillingness of youth to participate in MB-related actions and to the government's repressive handling of the demonstrations following 3 July 2013. This repression was somehow protected and legalized in 2013 by new protest legislation (Egypt's Official Gazette 2013b), which has been widely considered anti-protest law. It is also noteworthy that the relative rise in participation in the January 2015 demonstrations enhanced the likelihood of greater participation in future events. The most significant actions that initially confirmed this trend were the April 2016 demonstrations, which broke out against the transfer of two Egyptian islands to Saudi Arabia. Those demonstrations received larger participation perhaps than did most demonstrations that broke out after 3 July 2013.



With respect to the nature of political actions as collective or connective, the results showed that the actions were more likely to be connective (24%) than collective (20%). In addition, the likelihood of actions to be both connective and collective at the same time was 56%. These results support Bennett and Segerberg's claims (2012, 2013) about the increase of the connective nature of political action. However, the results disagree with the findings of Wright (2015), who found no connective action in e-petitions published on an American website. The increased probability of actions to be connective clearly reflects the rise of the

Internet as an effective platform for organizing political action and the declining influence of hierarchical organizations in this respect.

However, it is important to explain why the likelihood of collective actions was relatively higher than initially expected. It is my view that this finding relates to the examined period (June 2013–June 2015), during which many significant actions – in particular the 30 June demonstrations – depended considerably on offline mobilization, organizational entities and traditional media outlets, which increased the likelihood of collective actions. In contrast, the majority of political actions that occurred before 30 June 2013 were not initially driven by organizations. Thus, it can be theorized that the likelihood of connective actions would have increased if the examined period had been expanded beyond mid-2013.

The criteria for categorizing political actions as collective or connective – as partly described in the Methods section – included the following three indicators.

### **Mobilization channels**

Undoubtedly, participation in political actions significantly depends on the mobilization channels that motivate participation. In this context, the results found that online mobilization channels were more effective than offline channels in encouraging people to participate in political actions. Most notably, SNS were the most effective (at 21.85%), followed by Egyptian news websites (19.51%) and Egyptian television (18.69%), while hierarchical organizations were the least effective (2.45%). These results show that SNS are still crucial platforms for political mobilization, despite the censorship that has been imposed on them since 3 July 2013.

More significantly, the relationships between mobilization channels (as independent variables) and participation in various political actions (as dependent variables) were examined. The independent variables included eight channels: offline Egyptian newspapers, radio, television, hierarchical organizations, news websites, SNS, weblogs and face-to-face communication. The dependent variables included six actions: the 30 June 2013 demonstrations, the MB demonstrations following 3 July 2013, university students' demonstrations after 3 July, the 2014 constitutional referendum, the 2014 presidential election and the January 2015 demonstrations. As the data were non-normally distributed (Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk,  $p = 0.000$ ), the relationships were tested using non-parametric chi-square and Fisher's exact tests. The results showed no statistically significant relationships between most mobilization channels (offline newspapers, news

websites, radio, television and weblogs) and participation in the various political actions. However, significant relationships were found between three channels and some actions as follows:

1. SNS related with the 2014 constitutional referendum ( $\chi^2[1, N = 288] = 8.752, p = 0.003$ ) and the January 2015 demonstrations ( $\chi^2[1, N = 288] = 4.138, p = 0.042$ )
2. face-to-face communication related with university students' demonstrations ( $\chi^2[1, N = 288] = 10.171, p = 0.001$ )
3. hierarchical organizations related with the January 2015 demonstrations, Fisher's exact test  $p = 0.031$ .

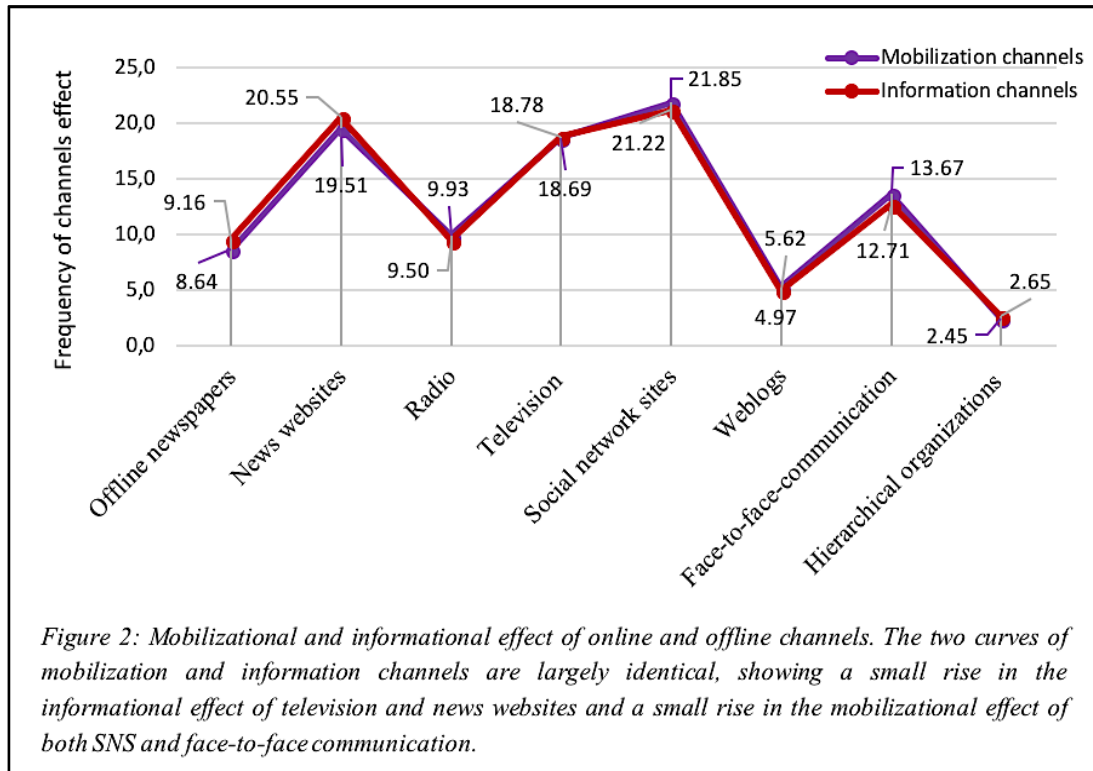
Unexpectedly, although Egyptian traditional media (offline newspapers, radio and television) were intensively used after 3 July 2013 to mobilize participation in pro-regime actions, the results rejected their direct effect on youth's participation. This suggests that the category of youth was largely resistant to the mobilizational effect of traditional media. Similarly, two new mobilization channels (news websites and weblogs) had no direct effect on any of the examined political actions; this can be attributed to the increased dependence on SNS as an effective mobilizational channel.

### **Information channels**

The eight mobilization channels mentioned in the previous point were examined as information channels in relation to youth's participation in political actions. The results found that the information channels exhibited a similar ranking as that of the mobilization channels. Most notably, SNS were the most widely used channel (21.22%), followed by news websites (20.55%) and Egyptian television (18.78%), while organizations were the least used (2.65%).

In addition, the relationships between obtaining information from the eight channels and participating in various political actions were examined. As the data were shown to be non-normally distributed (Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk,  $p = 0.000$ ), chi-square and Fisher's exact tests were used to examine these relationships. The results showed statistically insignificant relationships between receiving information from most channels and participating in most political actions. However, statistically significant relationships were found between two information channels and participation in some political actions, as follows:

1. face-to-face communication related with participation in the 30 June 2013 demonstrations ( $\chi^2[1, N = 287] = 4.327, p = 0.038$ ) and university students' demonstrations ( $\chi^2[1, N = 287] = 7.468, p = 0.006$ )
2. Egyptian television related with participation in the MB demonstrations ( $\chi^2[1, N = 287] = 4.268, p = 0.039$ ), university students' demonstrations ( $\chi^2[1, N = 287] = 6.786, p = 0.009$ ) and the 2014 presidential election ( $\chi^2[1, N = 287] = 7.324, p = 0.007$ ).



These results reflect the importance of both television and face-to-face communication in informing youth about political actions. Unexpectedly, none of the new information channels – even SNS – was found to have affected the youth's participation in political actions. One of the reasons that SNS were less effective as information channels following 3 July 2013 is the censorship imposed on them, which made people cautious about using SNS to publish political content.

A comparison of the effects of both mobilization and information channels (see Figure 2) reveals that the ability of various channels to inform youth about political actions was greater than their ability to stimulate engagement in those actions. This result is logical, as providing information about a given political action is much easier than convincing people to participate in that action.

## **Respondents' characteristics**

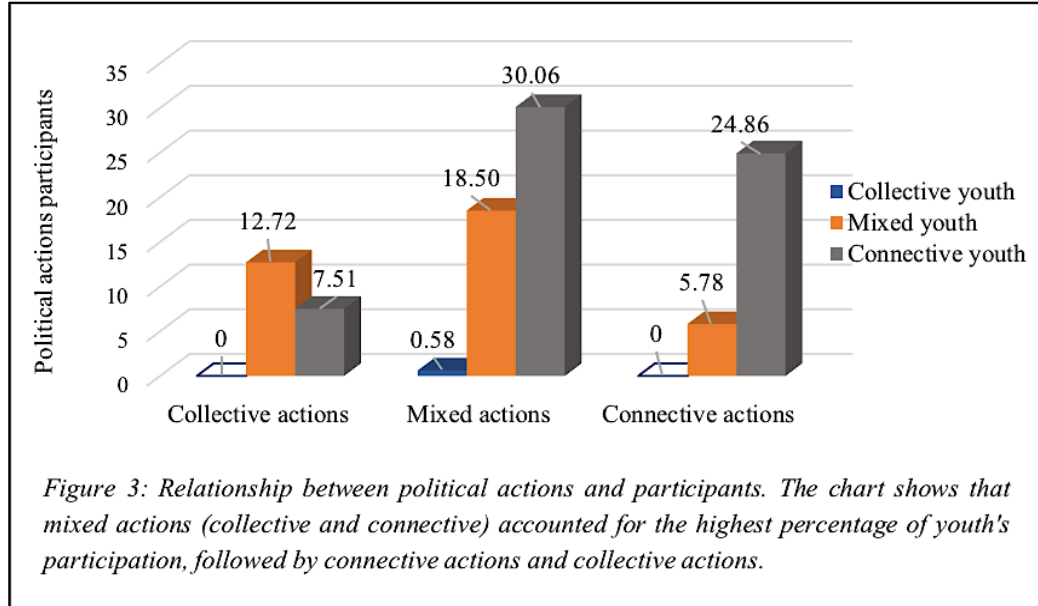
This indicator included two benchmarks. First, political affiliation was used to quantify the number of youth who were related to organizational entities at the time at which the questionnaire was administrated. The results indicated that more than three-quarters of respondents (75.8%) had no political affiliation, and only 2.5% were members of political parties or movement organizations. In addition, 2.8% of the respondents were active online with new political groups and 19% were active online as individuals. The youth's lack of involvement in political organizations supports the findings of Bennett's and Segerberg's study (2013: 2), which claimed that 'political identification of younger generations [has shifted] away from the broad group and institutional affiliations of unions, parties, churches, social class, established movement organizations, and the press'. A second benchmark of respondents' age was used to examine the engagement of different age categories in political actions. Three age categories were surveyed and considered: young (aged 18 to 25), middle (aged 26 to 30) and old (aged 31 to 35). The results found that the young category ( $n = 267$ ) was most interested in participating in political actions with 65.6%, followed by the middle category ( $n = 88$ ) with 23.3% and the old category ( $n = 45$ ) with 11.1%. It is also noteworthy that the young and middle categories were more interested in participating in unconventional actions (protests), while the old category was more interested in participating in conventional actions (elections).

In addition to exploring the nature of political actions, this study also examined the nature of actions participants as collective or connective. In this respect, the results found that about two-thirds (62.4%) of the respondents who participated in political actions were connective, while only 0.6% of them were collective and 37% were equally collective and connective. The high level of connectivity among the Egyptian youth can be attributed in the first place to intensive use of SNS, in addition to restrictions imposed on existing hierarchical organizations, which have been largely ineffective.

A comparison of the nature of the political actions with the nature of the youth participants shows that the Egyptian youth were largely more connective than the actions. As shown in Figure 3, the comparison also reveals important aspects of youth's preferences of collective or connective actions, as follows:

1. Collective youth, who were very rare in this study, participated only in mixed actions (collective and connective).

2. Mixed youth (collective and connective) participated predominantly in mixed actions, followed by collective and connective actions, respectively.
3. Connective youth participated predominantly in mixed actions, followed by connective and collective actions, respectively.



On the basis of this comparison, it can be claimed that the tendency of youth to be connective/collective enhanced the opportunity of political actions to be also connective/collective. This claim was statistically validated by an examination of the correlation between the nature of the youth and the nature of the political actions. A non-parametric test (Spearman rho) was used to examine this correlation, because the data were non-normally distributed (Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk,  $p = 0.000$ ). The results found a highly statistically significant positive relationship between the two variables of interest ( $r_s [173] = 0.315$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ): as the nature of participants increased, the nature of actions also increased. Namely, the more people became connective, the more the actions became connective; the less people became collective, the less the actions became collective. This result represents a new empirical dimension of LCA and proves the study argument that a better understanding of the type of action as collective or connective is significantly associated with an understanding of the nature of the action participants.



## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the nature of political actions in Egypt following the 2011 revolution and to develop an empirical basis for testing the nature of action participants based on orientations and behaviours. I have argued that understanding the nature of action participants is central for a deeper understanding of the actions, themselves. The results found a significant positive correlation between participants and actions as collective or connective, supporting the central argument here. These results emphasize the importance of considering participants' orientations and behaviours to obtain a better understanding of the nature of political actions (King 2014; Shehata 2016), and they are also consistent with the findings of Mercea and Funk (2014), who linked connective action to participants' motives and incentives.

Political actions were found to be more connective than collective. This is consistent with the findings of several studies that have addressed connective action in different societies (e.g. Anduiza et al. 2014; Cristancho and Anduiza 2013; Lim 2013; Vromen et al. 2015; Boler et al. 2014). These findings, together with the results of the action participants – who were found to be also more connective than collective – suggest one possible explanation for why the movement of Egyptian youth that peaked in 2011 did not last beyond 2013. It is both easy and correct to ascribe the decline of youth's political activities to government repression and media censorship. However, it is very important to also relate this decline to the connective nature of both actions and youth. Internet-based social movements and actions have been criticized for being unsustainable (Tilly 2004; Tarrow 2005, 2011). Connectivity has also been criticized for this same reason (Bondes and Schucher 2015). Thus, the unsustainability of the 2011 movement in Egypt can be ascribed to the connective nature of its actions, in addition to the youth's lack of involvement in political entities and inability to construct new entities.

A lack of political thought among youth also undermined the success of Egypt's movement. Results indicated that most respondents (68.37%) did not have (or did not identify with) a specific political thought, and only a small proportion (31.63%) had an Islamic, liberal or communist thoughts. These factors made the political scene after Mubarak's removal very chaotic and allowed anti-revolution actors to restore power in mid-2013. However, as the mobilization channels of hierarchical organizations and face-to-face communication were found to affect the youth's participation, there is still a chance that oppositional connective

action in Egypt might be sustained. Boler et al. (2014) claimed that connective action can be sustained even via SNS that provide three organizational roles: administration, documentation and connection.

It is also important to note that the study found the relationships between mobilization and information channels and participation in collective/connective actions to be insignificant. This indicates that the youth's participation in political actions was unlikely to have been affected by the media as reasons or sometimes even as tools; rather, it was affected by political, social and economic factors. Nevertheless, it is my position that the lack of significant relationships between most mobilization and information channels and participation in political actions does not indicate a negation of the channels' effect on the essence of political actions as collective or connective.

In brief, it can be said that the Egyptian political sphere provides opportunities and obstacles for collective and connective actions at the same time. On the one hand, collective action is expected to grow for two major reasons: hierarchical organizations affect participation in political actions and the interest of Egyptian activists in establishing political entities has risen as an endeavour aimed at facing anti-revolution actors. On the other hand, connective action is also expected to grow, due to the connective nature of action participants, the lack of effective political organizations and the growth of SNS. This means that both types of actions are likely to exist and integrate in the future. Although the need for organized collective action is perceived by individuals and political actors, it is intuitive and reasonable to expect that connective action will remain dominant in the future. What is difficult to predict is the extent to which collective action can grow and/or integrate with connective action in the future.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the logic of connective action theory, this article has argued that a deeper understanding of the nature of political action as collective or connective requires an equivalent understanding of action participants. In order to empirically validate this two-variable argument, a quantitative survey was conducted on a sample of Egyptian youth. In the survey, six major political actions and their participants were examined, through two developed scales, as collective or connective. The correlation between actions and participants was tested in order to validate the study argument.

The results found that Egyptian political actions were more connective than collective, and the actions participants were also more connective than collective. In addition, a significant relationship was found between the nature of actions and participants as collective and connective. These results suggest that identifying the nature of political action participants as collective or connective is central for obtaining a better understanding of recent contentious action. Thus, it can be expected that the connective nature of Egyptian youth will make any political action in the near future more connective. Finally, the connective nature of both contentious action and action participants will, to some extent, limit the range and depth of the effect of the Egyptian movement, because connectivity has been considered an unsustainable process with a short-term effect.

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