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Egyptian Revival Through Perseverance and  
Knowledge  
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" Egypt has a wide array of domestic problems and essentially the challenge lies in using the communication knowledge and technologies we possess and develop in the future to bring about social improvements instead of focusing on product marketing and the persuasion of people to support certain political or religious ideologies."

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As the cold winter waves of the Mediterranean Sea pound against the coastal rocks of Alexandria, and the chilling drops of a rare rainy day keep the average Egyptian at home, a peaceful stroll can become an opportunity for a reflection on these changing and turbulent times for the land that was once home to the Great Pharaohs.

It is almost inconceivable that in the earliest and longest form of human society, the hunters and gatherers, materialism and wars were virtually inexistent. At the same time, these societies were usually non-hierarchical and egalitarian, characteristics that have eroded and seem almost utopian in the modern society we live in today.

Egyptians have contributed significantly to development of the arts and sciences in the past. The Edwin Smith Papyrus from 1600 B.C. is the earliest evidence that shows the use of the scientific method in medicine, consisting of examination, diagnosis, treatment and prognosis. Other inventions include black ink, paper, the 365-day calendar and the 24-hour division of the day. Much has changed since these breakthroughs were achieved by the Ancient Egyptians. A series of political misfortunes and the failure to generate a sustainable industrial revolution around the turn of the 19th century have led Egypt astray and now the country still finds itself in a struggle to keep up with the fast pace of modernization and development.

Egypt has a wide array of domestic problems and essentially the challenge lies in using the communication knowledge and technologies we possess and develop in the future to bring about social improvements instead of focusing on product marketing and the persuasion of people to support certain political or religious ideologies.

The media plays a very salient role in our world today, and with the emergence of digital convergence it has become an even more powerful tool that necessitates erudite use. From a political standpoint, it is particularly worrying that oppression in the 21st century is not necessarily one of explicit brutality and violence. Dictatorial control can be embedded in a democratic framework through disinformation and effectively using different media to persuasively send messages supporting a given political system. This concept is reminiscent of the Orwellian term doublethink, where the natural psychological process of cognitive dissonance is taught to be ignored, and contradictory concepts become accepted and consequently the status quo. In the novel 1984 by George Orwell, doublethink in tandem with newspeak is used to direct the thought and language of the populous. As much as this may seem like a cynical

futuristic vision, it is beyond any reasonable doubt that the threat of such a dystopia exists, particularly when considering that the technological necessities for the system are available.

As an influential regional political force, Egypt has enjoyed a strong media presence in the region, producing many films and launching the first state-owned satellite in the Arab World, the Nilesat 101 in 1998. This has come to serve the recognition and presence of Egyptian culture well in the region.

The current disparity between the knowledge of Egyptians in higher socioeconomic levels and their lower counterparts has numerous notable implications. By not understanding the approaches, processes and tactics of the media, the lower social classes become vulnerable to being directly influenced by sent messages. At the same time, the vast amount of media available for advertisers means that more people can be reached than ever before. Hence there is a clear need to be better informed and educated to look at these messages skeptically.

According to the 2006 report on human development by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Egypt has an adult illiteracy rate of 28.6%, ranking 93 out of 177 surveyed countries (Human Development). Although much has been done to improve the situation, there are still several milestones to be reached. Knowing how to read and write is one thing, but the attainment of functional literacy for effective use in everyday life situations is another step, and in that regard the data may be somewhat misleading. How can we help the less privileged gain access to the wealth of knowledge and information that exists today? The burgeoning information available electronically, particularly with the rapid growth of the Internet, means that computers are becoming almost an absolute necessity. As basic computer technology becomes cheaper to manufacture, it will bolster the computer literacy programs that have been initiated by both governmental and non-governmental parties in Egypt.

In this context, access to quality education plays a pivotal role. Taha Hussein believed that “knowledge is like water and air”, and his efforts resulted in making education *ex gratia* for Egyptians. A good education, which would include access to the afore mentioned communication resources, is indispensable to helping people pursue their interests effectively and maintaining a steady stream of talent that will be beneficial to the welfare of Egyptian society. Part of educational reform should be a revision of school curricula to include courses that advocate community service and teach the ethical and moral values by practical application. Promoting the values of community service will also help preserve the wonderful historical monuments and conserve the already highly polluted environment.

Strategic development plans for changes in the educational system need to be complemented with economic reforms that will create the job opportunities that can best maximize the productivity and input from graduates. This should help close the knowledge gap, promote equal opportunity and facilitate upward social mobility.

Progress must be continuous as there are manifold uncertainties that are likely to have serious ramifications on Egyptian social dynamics. With revolutionary advances in nanotechnology, artificial intelligence, robotics and genetic studies, severe structural unemployment may threaten to further increase the knowledge and wealth gap unless effective, controlled adjustments are made on a regular basis.

Civil society, which is an “arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values” (What Is), is playing an important role in Egypt. A report by CIVICUS however points out that civil society in Egypt is hampered by poor structure, limited citizen participation and resources as well as political restrictions that constrict the impact on government. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are a part of civil society and contribute to the ongoing efforts to improve social, political and economic conditions. These non-state actors, together with the recently emerged concept of corporate social responsibility, are making a big difference in the lives of many Masriyeen.

As globalization continues, the preservation of national identity is paramount if we are to prove wrong the scholars who predict the continuation of Western cultural imperialism. This feeling of losing control, of being susceptible to the ideas and agendas of foreign cultures and societies, is continuously reflected in the Egyptian media.

Instead of simply receiving foreign media content and being indifferent to its absorption or even assimilation within the Egyptian cultural domain, we need to improve the quality of the media to make it more appealing and interesting for local and international audiences alike. Hence the proposed solution is not to limit incoming content, but to improve locally generated content and thus make the cultural information exchange more equitable.

The Egyptian media sector has been undergoing a gradual process of decentralization and privatization that is proving conducive in creating the competitive spirit needed for a qualitative overhaul. This will also help prevent the Egyptian media landscape from becoming a victim of electronic colonialism and serve as a shield from the expansionist trend of powerful Western media conglomerates.

After calls for more freedom of expression in the Egyptian media, a series of successful reforms followed. Still, freedom of expression, especially in light of the powerful influence and reach of media, needs to be within a social responsibility edifice that would grant the government limited oversight to assuage the socially deleterious effects of publications that do not engage in objective and truthful reporting. The need for social responsibility in coverage does not only apply to Egypt, but has become a persistent, global problem. Only a small number of media outlets make a conscientious effort in that regard. Global media continues to be dominated by desensitization, euphemism, exaggeration and

sensationalism that often misconstrue events and are detrimental to cross-cultural perceptions. Unfortunately, the popularity of controversy and the economic benefits that be reaped thereof often takes priority.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set by the United Nations in 2000 and signed by 191 countries including Egypt seeks to achieve eight targets by 2015. These include reducing the proportion of people who live on less than one U.S. dollar a day or suffer from hunger by half, achieving universal primary education and ensuring environment sustainability among others. Despite being on track towards the realization of these goals, tight control and progress monitoring mechanisms need be implemented to avoid the abuse of public funds as well as foreign aid.

Although quarrels between political parties and corruption remain, our focus should be on studying, learning and thus acquiring the ability to invent, innovate and inspire.

Our responsibility is to continue finding feasible ways to alleviate the destitution of the poorer segment of Egyptian society, which include transforming the structure of the Egyptian political and economic system to produce a functional, much more equal society that would serve as a role model to other nations in the region. This will pave the way for improved productivity and societal harmony to replace the widespread apathy that will allow Egypt to strengthen its voice in scientific research, technological progress, social reform, global media and world politics.

Egypt can indeed lead and live up to its potential. Let us work hand in hand to make a difference that will be felt for generations to come. In the words of Winston Churchill, "Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts".

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