

## ***COPTIC MEDIA ONLINE***

### **Introduction**

Copts have historically sustained a strong presence across all forms of media in Egypt. The Coptic Church and individual Coptic intellectuals were crucial actors in the development of the publishing industry in [Egypt](#) in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century when the COPTIC PRESS flourished. During this period, Atta (2007) suggests that the press acted as an influential mechanism for Coptic participation in public life.

After the first half of the twentieth century the media space shrunk as a result of political changes. This affected all types of media, including Coptic media. The nationalization of the press in 1960 by Gamal Abd al-Nasser further limited press freedoms. Nevertheless, the Coptic Church maintained a strong emphasis on the use of media to record, preserve, promote and disseminate information about Coptic religious and cultural heritage.

While many of the mainstream political publications produced by Copts declined in importance or disappeared, a process of Coptic renewal from the 1950s onward resulted in an increase in Coptic media aimed specifically at a Coptic audience. This expansion of particularistic Coptic media was not an attempt to seek isolation but it ensured that Copts had sufficient alternative forums for the expression and preservation of Coptic culture. This focus on developing Coptic media has resulted in a rich culture of Coptic audio-visual artefacts (van Doorn-Harder 2012).

### **Online Media**

Online media technology has changed the face of the media industry worldwide and this inevitably impacted Coptic media, especially online. Online media is a term that encompasses a range of media platforms and

practices and because technology is continually evolving, so is the definition of new and online media. Currently, new media tends to refer to audio and visual material communicated via the Internet but a strict definition excludes television programs. Online media includes all types of media that are disseminated and accessed via a computer. The audience can engage with online media in a direct way that it cannot accomplish with traditional mass media and can therefore support networks and communities online.

With respect to audience engagement, online media enables people to access media from any location and connect with people and information globally. Due to changes in society, including migration and a [growing](#) diaspora, the Coptic community has had to embrace new media to adapt to the needs of Coptic communities both in [Egypt](#) and worldwide (Saad and Westbrook 2017). Botros (2006: 181) has noted that it is a concern of the Coptic Church that Coptic youth in the diaspora are socialized within the Coptic community and Iskander (2012: 91) has indicated that online media has been adopted to address this goal. Copts have subsequently built up a significant presence online. Three ways it has been particularly active are in the creation of Coptic websites, the adoption of social media, and the broadcasting of Coptic television via the Internet.

## **Coptic Websites**

There are [numerous Coptic](#) websites serving a variety of purposes. They are often immediately identifiable as Coptic due to the use of imagery and symbolism (Iskander 2012: 51). Discussion forums were particularly popular before open social media platforms such as Facebook and they retain their function as specifically Coptic spaces for sharing and networking. Forums support the interactive aspect of online media by giving a space for anyone to start a conversation, to ask advice from peers or from a member of the church leadership, to arrange or publicize events, or even post [job](#) announcements. Music, sermons, and Coptic language materials are also made available to a wide audience through

Coptic websites and forums. In these ways, the Coptic websites support community structures and create a space for expressing and affirming Coptic identity (Iskander 2012: 46-55).

The Coptic Church remains a key player in Coptic media through its numerous websites. It is common for an individual church to have its own dedicated website, directed at serving its congregation, and there are a number of official overarching Coptic websites established by the Coptic Orthodox Church. These websites extend the church's concern to preserve and disseminate Coptic culture and faith which was already started via traditional media and artwork, such as books, newsletters, and icons.

This is reflected in the stated aims of CopticWorld.org, an online platform established in 2007. CopticWorld has the following three missions: first, to provide every single church in the world with its own website; second, to allow [integration](#) of these individual websites into bigger websites at the level of cities, states, country, and the whole world; and finally, to provide a rigorous system for the dissemination of information by the clergy.

## **Social Media**

Social media can refer to all types of online media that support user-based input, sharing, collaboration and the formation of networks between people. Forums and microblogging can fall under this category but it is most commonly used to mean social networking applications like Facebook and Twitter, which came into popular use in the late 2000s.

A search of the term 'Coptic' on Facebook will reveal hundreds of groups, their purposes ranging from sharing Coptic hymns, language resources, art or Bible quotes, to an invitation page for a specific event, or a page connected to a TV channel or a Bishop (Saad and Westbrook 2017). The key element of social media is sharing and the large number of groups

that identify themselves as Coptic indicates that Copts are interested in sharing and networking with other Copts via public social media platforms, in addition to the specifically Coptic websites mentioned above.

## **Satellite and Online Television**

Although satellite television programming is not always regarded in the same category as online media, television is increasingly broadcast via the Internet as well as satellite. Coptic satellite television must be mentioned because it is an enduring and [growing](#) part of the Coptic media industry. The first two major channels were Coptic TV (CTV) and Aghapy TV but the number has increased and now also includes Coptic Sat TV, Logos TV, ME Sat, and Alhorreya TV. In addition to these specifically Coptic channels there are numerous Arabic language Christian channels, many of which broadcast from [Egypt](#) or include programming in Egyptian Arabic.

The ability to broadcast and access these channels has been vastly enhanced by the Internet and this has enabled such programming to increase their reach, even though they now compete with other new and freely available forms of digital media. Satellite channels have an advantage in that can also be watched offline via television. This enables families and friends to watch together rather than always as individuals and ensures that Coptic television remains a crucial contributor to [contemporary Coptic](#) media and identity. These channels also play an important role because they broadcast live events simultaneously to Copts all over the world, whether via the Internet or television.

## **Conclusion**

Our world is more interconnected than ever due to developments in online media. Copts, like other groups, have recognized the potential of online media to support community structures, preserve and disseminate

their culture and faith, and to connect and reconnect with other members. The growth in media technology has meant that online media has become a central pillar in the media strategy of the Coptic Church, which has been a dominant actor in Coptic media since the latter part of the twentieth century.

However, online media, being interactive and focused on sharing and networking, means that Copts outside the traditional community leadership also play a role in shaping its content and expressions. A final factor affecting patterns of Coptic online media is migration and the growth of a worldwide Coptic diaspora, which has led to shifting patterns in the priorities of the media being produced online (Saad and Westbrook 2017).

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