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Abstract

Tunisia is facing a hard time with its transition to democracy partly due to the reluctance on the part of young people to participate in elections. This poster discusses why the Tunisian government must engage youth and encourage their participation in the election process by using fun simulations of this process in Virtual Reality.

Introduction

it is very hard to maintain democracy, especially if the future generation of voters are giving up on it. Tunisia became a democratic country in 2011 after a revolution that ended the system of dictatorship. Since 2011, the election turnout kept decreasing because of a lack of interest, especially among the younger generation, in the voting process. That is why the idea for a different and fun tool to encourage youth to vote was born. The right tool for that is Virtual Reality (VR), which can be used to offer a fun voting simulation experience that can show young people that elections are not a boring process. By convincing the younger generation to participate in the voting process, Tunisia can increase the percentage of turnout in elections and strengthen its democracy.

Democracy in Tunisia

After sparking the “Arab spring” in 2011, Tunisia became a successful model of democracy that no other Arab country has yet been able to copy. “Tunisia’s smooth and peaceful transition to democracy is remarkable” (Safwan M. Masri, 2017, P.88). Despite this amazing initial success of democracy, the gap between the large base of young voters and the old candidates has widened. Monica Marks explains, “It is Jurassic Park politicians. Many Tunisian politicians are old, and I don’t know if they have been able to connect with the young.” This disconnect is obvious given the decline in turnout between 2014 and 2018, from 69% to 35.6%.

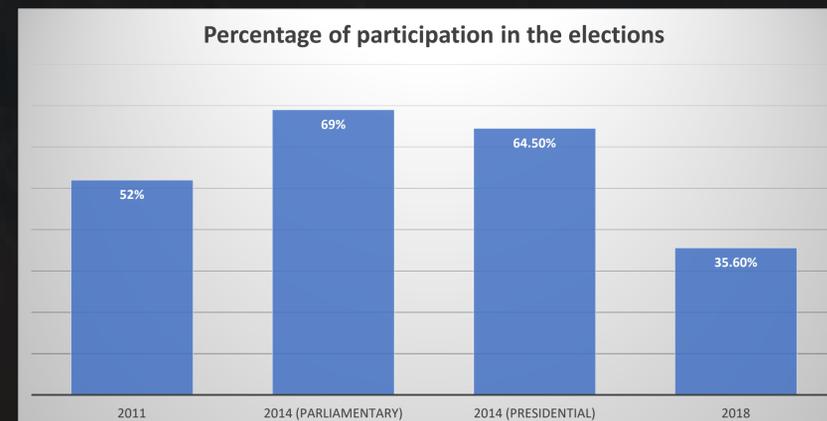


Figure2. “turnout percentage throughout the Tunisian elections after 2011”. Data retrieved from <http://www.isie.tn/>

Engaging Youth through VR to Maintain Democracy

In order to make youth care more about and engage in the democratic electoral process, their experience must be more fun and more modern than it has been up until now. There is no technology better suited to playing that role than Virtual Reality, which most young Tunisians know and like as a means for entertainment. VR technology can be employed to simulate the voting experience and make it engaging and interactive. An experimental case study has already been done to test its effectiveness. When young people put on their headsets, they can find themselves in a virtual voting center, where they can safely vote multiple times and learn more about the candidates through pop up screens. During an experiment conducted on two groups of young Tunisians who had never voted before, the group that tested the VR enjoyed and easily remembered all of the candidates participating in voting process, unlike those in the other group who had to read about the steps to follow in the voting process in document and then watch videos of politicians seeking their votes. Eight out of ten persons from the first group decided to participate in the next election after doing the VR simulation, while none of ten persons from the second group decided to vote.

Conclusion

From this case study experiment, we learned that VR is a more effective tool to engage young voters than traditional means to get out the vote. Therefore, the Tunisian government must change its old methods and start implementing attractive technological tools in order to save the democratic transition that we were blessed to have.

References:

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The Impact of VR on the Young

Virtual reality technology is a tool that allows the user to see generated surroundings using a wearable headset. This technology has been used in different ways, such as a therapy tool in the medical field, but VR is mostly used for entertainment and gaming, thereby attracting a youthful audience. According to Samuel Greengard, “These technologies produce new ways of thinking by rewiring sensory processing.” (Virtual reality, 2019, P.120) As we will discuss below, VR can be a way to rewire the sensory processing in the minds of youthful voters to encourage them to vote.



Figure1. a man using the VR voting simulation on an Oculus headset in Tunis, Tunisia. November 29, 2019.