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The American University in Cairo
School of Global Affairs and Public Policy

**Use of Social Media by Governments to Enhance Online Civic Engagement:
The Case of Egypt**

A thesis submitted to
Department of Public Policy and Administration
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Public Policy

by Ayman Hany Elsherbiny

under the supervision of Dr. Hamid E. Ali

Fall 15

“The central task of education is to implant a will and facility for learning; it should produce not learned but learning people. The truly human society is a learning society, where grandparents, parents, and children are students together.” —Eric Hoffer (1898–1983)

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USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY GOVERNMENTS TO ENHANCE ONLINE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT:
THE CASE OF EGYPT

Ayman Hany Elsherbiny

Supervised by Dr. Hamid E. Ali

ABSTRACT

This research examines the extent to which the use of social media by the Egyptian government in its communication with the public enhances online civic engagement. Its importance lies in the fact that several studies highlighted the benefits of the utilization of social media by governments in engaging with the public. This thesis defines civic engagement as the involvement of citizens in online activities that seek to address public issues through the social media platforms of the Egyptian government. It focuses on the five types of online civic engagement behavior as described by Denning (2001), i.e. collection of information, publication of information, dialogue, coordination of action, and lobbying decision makers. This study employs content analysis. Over a period of 15 months, a probability, simple random sample of 491 posts by three Facebook pages of Egyptian ministries and 2287 comments by the public on these Pages was analyzed. It reached four main conclusions. First, the Egyptian ministries use of social media contributes poorly to the strengthening of online civic engagement. Second, a linear, one-way model characterizes the type of communication conducted by the Egyptian ministries. Third, the content of the interaction of the public with the government provides evidence that citizens are active in exploiting the ministries' social media to voice their opinions, lobby decision makers, and raise questions. Finally, though there is marginal interaction between the ministries and the public, citizens are more engaged into dialogue amongst themselves. Thus, this research concludes that social media is an untapped communication resource in the context of its utilization by the Egyptian government. Consequently, this study fills a gap in the literature and could encourage other researchers to tackle that topic from its different aspects.

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List of Acronyms

Mol: Ministry of Interior

MFA: Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MoA: Ministry of Awqaf (Religious Endowment)

MCIT: Ministry of Communications and Information Technology

ICTs: Information and Communication Technologies

SCAF: Supreme Council of Armed Forces

ANHRI: Arab Network for Human Rights Information

NGOs: Non-Governmental Organizations

CDCP: Centers of Disease Control and Prevention

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Chapter One: Introduction

Communication plays an important role in our daily lives. It witnessed considerable development over the years. With the evolution of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), sophisticated types of communication emerged. Following the invention of the Internet and its adoption by the media, several terms came into existence such as 'new media', 'citizen media' and 'social media'. McClure (2010) explains the different types of social media sites. These include: blogs, microblogs (Twitter), social networking platforms (Facebook), video and photo sharing (YouTube and Instagram), wikis (Wikipedia) and others.

Though social media sites such as Facebook were originally networks for private contacts and social interaction, businesses, governments, NGOs and public figures have increasingly used it. The reasons behind that vary. Some institutions use social media to enhance their images and communicate with their audiences. Other agencies exploit these platforms for the sake of influencing their audience. Facebook, for example, can be used for several purposes such as: Networking (personal and professional), finding and sharing news and information, offering a look behind the scenes at an organization, initiating debates, surveying opinions, soliciting feedback, enhancing citizen participation, and promoting and publicizing events.

Coulson (2013) contended that the proliferation of social media sites offer powerful communication tools that could influence policy decisions. Profound societal changes have occurred since the introduction of the social media. Their use in the uprisings that are popularly known as the 'Arab Spring' was evident to the extent that scientists and analysts debated their contribution to the form and outcomes of these events (Iskander, 2011). In fact, the call for the

25th of January demonstrations that turned into a revolution that ousted former Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak began on Facebook.

The use of social media sites in different countries by several state and non-state actors revealed their high potential for advocacy and raising awareness. In Egypt, videos of police corruption and violations against citizens and activists that were uploaded on social media before the January 2011 revolution, contributed to shedding light on the misconduct of police officers (Abdulla, 2013).

Following the January 2011 revolution in Egypt, several ministries and government agencies tried to exploit social media sites and to integrate them in their communication efforts. The Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) that ruled the country for about one year and a half had its own Facebook page. Several ministries also created Facebook pages and less created Twitter accounts. Shortly after the revolution, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs created its Facebook page to connect with whom it serves, the Ministry of Interior followed in 2012.

The instant reason of using social media by the government was to reach the revolutionary youth through the medium they use the most. This was evident in the statements issued by the Supreme Council of Armed Forces when it created its official Facebook page right after the revolution. Another example is the Ministry of Interior which states in the 'About' section of its Facebook page that "this page was created upon the decision of Mr. Mahmoud Wagdy, Minister of Interior, upon his belief that that the continuous fruitful cooperation and communication between the Ministry of Interior and the citizens of our beloved Egypt will lead to the security, safety and stability for our beloved nation," (see Appendix C for original Arabic

text). Yet, the literature and the findings of this study cast doubt on the fulfillment of the announced goals of the two aforementioned government institutions.

Interestingly, the adoption of social media by the Egyptian government in its communication with the public led, in a way or another, to increasing access to government information and services. The question remains, however, whether or not this contributed to facilitating online civic engagement, which encompasses five modes: collection of information, publication of information, dialogue, coordinating actions and lobbying decision makers (Denning, 2001). To give some examples, the government in Iceland used several social media platforms to solicit the feedback of its citizens with regard to revising the country's constitution (Zavattaro, 2013). Cogburn and Espinoza-Vasquez (2011) offer another example from the United States. They argued that the 2008 Obama presidential campaign used social media tools to go beyond raising funds and influencing public opinion to strengthening political participation and civic engagement (Cogburn & Espinoza-Vasquez, 2011). Following Obama's election and his directives to federal agencies requiring them to take measures to ensure their transparency, participation, and collaboration, social media tools were diffused in the government institutions (Cogburn & Espinoza-Vasquez, 2011; Mergel, 2013b).

Research Problem

The importance of this research lies in the fact that several studies highlighted the benefits of the utilization of social media by governments in their efforts to communicate with their citizens and to engage them in formulation of public policies and other public issues (Nabatchi & Mergel, 2010; Cogburn & Espinoza-Vasquez, 2011; Shah & Lim, 2011; Jaeger, Bertot, & Shilton, 2012; Linders, 2012; Mergel, 2013a; Mergel, 2013b, Warren, Sulaiman, &

Jaafar, 2014a; Warren, Sulaiman, & Jaafar, 2014b; Zavattaro & Sementelli, 2014; Boulianne, 2015; Kenawy 2015). For example, Jaeger et al., (2012) contended that one of the main characteristics of social media platforms is that they offer innovative and new ways for prompt and ongoing interaction between citizens and their governments. This interaction can have an impact on the formulation and evaluation of public policies. It can also help building a healthy democratic society by enhancing the participation and collaboration of citizens in public affairs.

It is, however, unfortunate that many researchers concluded that social media platforms used by some government agencies function as top-down, one-way communication tools instead of enhancing dialogue and engaging citizens in decision-making (Brainard & McNutt, 2010; Hand & Ching, 2011; Abdelsalam, Reddick, Gamal, & Al-Shaar, 2013; Coulson, 2013; El-Khalili, 2013; Mergel, 2013b). In this regard, Mergel (2013a) demonstrated that opening social media platforms to inform the public without responding to their feedback could harm the reputation of the government.

Additionally, this thesis argues that no research aimed at examining the extent to which the Egyptian government's use of social media affects online civic engagement. Consequently, this study fills a gap in the literature and could encourage other researchers to tackle that topic from its different aspects.

Research Objectives

The opportunities offered by social media to both citizens and governments are immense. Their impacts are diverse and interdisciplinary. The emergence of social media sites and how state and non-state actors use them provide an incentive for researchers to study them seeking to find answers to the questions that revolve around their utility.

Having said that, this research aims at examining the extent to which the use of social media by the Egyptian government in its communication with the public enhances online civic engagement. This is especially relevant considering that Kenawy (2015) interviewed for her research social media officials in different Egyptian ministries. These officials were quoted stating that they value the comments, questions and complaints of the public (Kenawy, 2015). So, it would be of interest to investigate the validity of such claims. This thesis also studies how the public interacts with the government through the latter's social media sites.

With these two aforementioned objectives in mind, this research intends to propose a model for government-citizen engagement on social media.

Research Questions

Our study focuses on the type of communication conducted by the Egyptian government through its social media sites; whether or not it is a linear, one-way communication. This would consequently lead to answering the extent to which the adoption of social media by the government enhances online civic engagement.

Exploratory questions are at the center of this paper's investigation. The two main research questions are:

- To what extent the use of social media by the Egyptian government strengthens online civic engagement?
- To what extent are citizens active in engaging with the government through its social media platforms?

Several investigative questions are driven from the main ones:

- Does the current use of social media by the Egyptian government create a platform for interaction with the public? Is the communication participatory, dialogic or one-way, monologic?
- What kind of messaging on social media does the government adopt? Are the messages concerned mainly with promoting government work and views?
- What types of online civic engagement exist on the social media platforms of the government?
- Is there interaction among the public?

Furthermore, this study investigates the definition and types of online civic engagement as explained in the literature. It also draws from the literature on international successful examples of governments that exploit social media to engage citizens.

The scope of the research is limited to the top three official Facebook pages of Egyptian ministries in terms of the number of fans (people who like the page)¹. Table 1 below lists the official Facebook pages of the Egyptian ministries. As of October 7, 2015, the top three pages belonged to the following ministries: Ministry of Interior (Moi) (<https://www.facebook.com/MoiEgy>), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) (<https://www.facebook.com/MFAEgypt>), and the Ministry of Awqaf (MoA) (Religious Endowment) (<https://www.facebook.com/AwkafOnline>). The first is a ministry that offers many services to the citizens, from security and law enforcement to issuing legal documents such as passports and birth certificates. The second is a ministry that reflects the image of the country

¹ Liking a Facebook page, and thus becoming a 'fan' of it, allows fans to follow the page and receive its updates on the newsfeed of their personal accounts. It is also an indication of support of or interest in the entity that owns the Facebook page.

abroad, defends its interests in the international arena, builds bilateral and multilateral relations, promotes the Egyptian culture, plays a role in attracting foreign investments, and offers services to its citizens who live or work abroad (“Role of the Ministry,” n.d.). The latter is responsible for religious guidance and is in charge of religious endowments. Its mandate incorporates running Islamic centers and mosques. The three ministries play an essential role for citizens.

Table 1: Ministries Official Facebook Pages, as of October 7, 2015

Ministry	URL	Fans (<i>n</i>)
Ministry of Interior	https://www.facebook.com/MoiEgy Verified Page! ²	5,319,715
Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Arabic)	https://www.facebook.com/MFAEgypt Verified Page!	777,997
Ministry of Awqaf	https://www.facebook.com/AwkafOnline	764,565
Ministry of Education	https://www.facebook.com/egypt.moe Inactive from Oct. 2013 to July 2015!	510,754
Ministry of Supply & Internal Trade	https://www.facebook.com/msitegypt	275,272
Ministry of Finance	https://www.facebook.com/MOF.Egypt	248,344
Ministry of Planning	https://www.facebook.com/planning.egy	122,508
Ministry of Transport	https://www.facebook.com/MinistryTransportation	100,037
Ministry of Water Resources & Irrigation	https://www.facebook.com/mwri fb	74,282
Ministry of Youth	https://www.facebook.com/EGMoYouth	69,119
Ministry of Planning & Administrative Reform	https://www.facebook.com/ad.gov.eg	36,462
Ministry of Health	https://www.facebook.com/mohp.gov.eg	35,092
Ministry of Higher Education	https://www.facebook.com/MOHEEGYPT	25,338
Ministry of Sports	https://www.facebook.com/EMSS.Egypt	21,062

² A verified Page means that Facebook confirms its authenticity, thus it belongs to the public figure, company, or in the case of this research the ministry that runs it.

EGYPTIAN GOVERNMENT'S SOCIAL MEDIA

Ministry	URL	Fans (<i>n</i>)
Ministry of Environment	https://www.facebook.com/egy.environment	17,520
Ministry of Electricity & Renewable Energy	https://www.facebook.com/moee.gov.eg	16,044
Ministry of Culture	https://www.facebook.com/EgyptianMOC	15,596
Ministry of Communications & IT	https://www.facebook.com/MCITEgypt	14,049
Ministry of Foreign Affairs (English)	https://www.facebook.com/MFAEgyptEnglish	6,505
Ministry of Petroleum	https://www.facebook.com/theMOPofficial Inactive since 2013!	925

Despite the importance of the Ministry of Education, its Facebook page, which is ranked fourth, was inactive from October 27, 2013 to July 16, 2015. When the researcher tried to interact with the administrators of its Facebook page to find out the reason behind the inactivity, he was struck by the fact that the Ministry does not allow citizens not only to post stand-alone comments³, but also to send a private message to the Page (see Appendix C). Thus, the researcher finds that the top three Facebook pages of Egyptian ministries are sufficient for the purpose of this study.

The reason for selecting Facebook is that it is one of the most widely used social media sites worldwide. According to Facebook, there were 1.49 billion monthly active users as of June 30, 2015 ("Company Info," n.d.). When it comes to Egypt, the Arab Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI) states that 24 million people are on Facebook constituting 50% of the total number of Internet users in the country, while around 8% only are using Twitter (Eid,

³ A stand-alone comment is what the users post on the ministry's wall. Facebook pages that allow stand-alone comments have a comment box at the top reading "Write something . . ." thus permitting users who are "fans" of the Page to publish posts on it.

Abdelrady, Al-Taher, & Abdelaziz, 2015). Furthermore, Kenawy (2015) quotes government officials responsible for managing social media accounts of Egyptian ministries stating that "Facebook is the most significant and the most commonly used social media site," (p. 55).

Through using content analysis, the researcher analyzed a probability, simple random sample of 491 Facebook posts by the selected ministries, and 2287 comments by the public covering the period of the second Ibrahim Mahlab cabinet from June 17, 2014 to September 12, 2015. The reason for choosing that timeframe lies in the assumption that each cabinet should have its own mandate and policy framework. Thus, to properly evaluate the use of social media by the Egyptian government to be able to answer the research questions, the period of the second Ibrahim Mahlab cabinet was selected. This is especially relevant because at the time of conducting this research it was early to examine the utilization of social media by the newly appointed cabinet.

The study reached four main conclusions that are outlined in detail in chapter seven. However, the overall outcome of this thesis is that social media is an untapped communication resource in the context of its utilization by the Egyptian government. On the other hand, the public has been active in engaging with the government through the latter's social media sites.

Outline of the Study

This thesis is organized as follows; chapter one offers an introductory overview about the topic. Chapter two presents the conceptual framework of the study. Chapter three reviews the literature. Chapter four explains the methodology used for collecting and analyzing the data. The findings of this thesis are listed in chapter five. Chapter six discusses the results of the

study and their implications. Finally, chapter seven states the conclusions of the study, its limitations, ideas for future research and recommendations.

Chapter Two: Conceptual Framework

This chapter goes through several definitions of the two main terms used in this study, i.e. social media and online civic engagement. It also explains how these terms are employed in this research paper.

Social Media: An Evolution to Traditional Media

The evolution of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) contributed to the emergence of sophisticated types of communication. Following the use of the Internet by media organizations and practitioners, several terms came into existence, such as 'new media', 'citizen media' and 'social media'. But what is social media? With the evolution of the ICTs, social media definition evolved as well. However, there are basic characteristics that can be traced in the different definitions of social media.

David (2014) quoted several scholars who defined social media as a form of electronic communication through which users establish online communities to share information, thoughts, ideas, photos, videos, news and messages. It allows peer-to-peer communication and is a medium for many-to-many discussions. Boyd and Ellison (2007) viewed social network sites as web-based services that allow users to "construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system," (p. 211). Coulson (2013) argued that social media are online tools for social interaction through using communication techniques to turn the process into dialogic. These tools can vary in many aspects, but the commonality between them is that they share an emphasis on enabling users to communicate, interact, produce, edit and share content in an interactive, social atmosphere

(Bertot et al., 2012). Uimonen (2012) pointed out that social media are not revolutionary in terms of networking tools, since they build on the social and cultural characteristics of the Internet. However, social media do make these tools more accessible. Both social media and the Internet have similarities in that they are decentralized, interactive and boundary-crossing media (Uimonen, 2012).

In the same context, but from a historical perspective, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) viewed social media as Internet-based applications that are founded on the basis of 'web 2.0' and that permit creating and exchanging 'user-generated content'. In this definition, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) put forward two concepts that are attached to social media, i.e. Web 2.0 and User-Generated Content. As for Web 2.0, the term was first used in 2004 to differentiate between the static web pages of the first generation of the World Wide Web, and the participatory, interactive and collaborative second generation of the web that is based on dynamic applications which engage users to create, publish and share various kinds of content (Chang & Kannan, 2008; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). User-generated content on the other hand refers to what Internet users develop and share on social media platforms whether text, video, photo or audio (Cha, Kwak, Rodriguez, Ahn, & Moon, 2007; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Having said that, social media is different from the traditional old media such as radio, TV and newspapers in that it generally refers to the digital mediums that are interactive; incorporating two-way communication, and involve some form of computing. They permit more participation of their users who are no longer passive recipients, but also active producers of content (Logan, 2010). Moreover, Porter (2008) differentiated between traditional and social media in that the later is developed for the aim of dialogue through many-to-many interactions,

while traditional media is designed mainly to be a broadcast medium with one-to-many dissemination of information (as cited in Bertot et al., 2012, p. 30).

This research defines social media as online platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, which are utilized by the Egyptian ministries to engage with the citizens in a two-way communication process. It, however, focuses only on Facebook since it is widely used by government agencies more than any other social media platform (Abdelsalam et al., 2013; Kenawy, 2015). Furthermore, Facebook allows for a better analysis of the different types of online civic engagement, which will be covered in the following sub-section. The platform presents a lot of material (text, photo, video) that provide depth and richness to the collected data, and consequently the results.

Online Civic Engagement

The early communication theories and models lacked the participatory elements (Tufte & Mefalopulos, 2009). For example, Lasswell's model of communication is linear in how it understands communication. According to Lasswell, describing an act of communication can be done by answering the following questions: Who?, Says What?, In Which Channel?, To Whom?, With what effect?. These questions do not include the feedback of the audience; making the model linear ("Lasswell's model," n.d.). Despite the fact that Lasswell's model is old, it is of interest to see if the current use of social media by the Egyptian government complies with it.

Civic engagement in the context of social media use is against the concept of linear, one-way communication. To begin with, civic engagement has to be defined as a term. Warren et al. (2014b) reported that there are different definitions and civic forms when it comes to civic engagement. They added that many scholars have defined civic engagement as individual or

collective action seeking to resolve and address social problems in the community. Civic engagement could encompass political and non-political actions, such as signing petitions, contacting public officials, publishing articles that tackle community issues, and voting (Warren et al., 2014b). On the other hand, Denning (2001) explained that activism is about "...the use of the Internet in support of an agenda or cause," (p. 241). She identified five modes of Internet activism that include: collecting information, publishing information, dialogue, coordinating actions, and lobbying decision makers (see Figure 1). Denning (2001) clarified what is meant by each one of them:

1. Collection of information: The Internet is a massive digital library. Activists could succeed in finding legislative and public policy documents, deliberations and analyses concerning public matters, and other material that could help them in their mission. They could also locate information on decision makers that they are trying to influence, in addition to identifying groups or individuals that share their interests as a way of gathering potential supporters and collaborators.
2. Publication of information: Advocacy groups and individuals can use several channels on the Internet to publish information that can further policy objectives.
3. Dialogue: The Internet offers different channels for discussion and debate on public policy issues. Civil servants may be brought in to work as catalysts for discussion, debate issues, or respond to inquiries.

4. Coordination of action: Advocacy groups and individuals can exploit the Internet to coordinate action among members, fellow citizens and other organizations. The constraints of geography and time are eliminated.
5. Lobbying decision makers: Activists and individuals can use the Internet to lobby decision makers, even if government agencies do not solicit their input. Before social media, this was mainly done through email campaigns that seek to influence government policies.

Figure 1: Types of Online Civic Engagement as Identified by Denning (2001)



Based on the above-mentioned explanations, this study defines civic engagement as the involvement of citizens in online activities that seek to address public issues through the social media platforms of the Egyptian government. This research focuses on the five types of online civic engagement behavior as described by Denning (2001). Comments of the public that fit under each type are determined based on criteria that are explained in chapter four and that are mentioned in the content analysis coding scheme (Appendix A).

Chapter Three: Literature Review

Several studies on the use of social media by governments were published, mostly to explore the various aspects associated with it. Some of the research addressed the regulatory and implementation challenges connected to it, with the aim of offering government officials guidance on how to best deal with the most pressing issues related to the adoption of social media (Gharawi, Helbig, Hrdinová, & Werthmuller, 2010; Bertot, Jaeger, & Hansen, 2012; Jaeger, Bertot, & Shilton, 2012). Other studies found a positive relation between governments use of social media and strengthening transparency (Bertot, Jaeger, & Grimes, 2010; Shah & Lim, 2011; Bonson, Torres, Royo, & Flores 2012). Further research explored governments' social media practices and effectiveness revealing that the content shared with the public was mostly dominated by outreach and self-promotion messages, in addition to the one-way type of communication conducted (Davidson, 2011; Al-Khalifa, Al-Razgan, Al-Rajebah, and Almasoud (2012); Kavanaugh et al., 2012; Abdelsalam et al., 2013; El-Khalili, 2013; David, 2014). Additionally, a study by Mergel (2013b) examined through qualitative interviews the factors that influence government agencies in the US to adopt social media. On the other hand, Coulson (2013) explained the dynamics of social media, politics and public policy in the MENA region, concluding that that social media have been used in the region to provide an alternative medium for information and to enhance political activism. He added, however, that some MENA governments utilized social media more as a way to appear modern and to seek and demonstrate support.

More papers were published discussing explicitly the association between social media and political and social civic engagement, and highlighting the opportunities for agencies and

citizens offered by governments utilization of social media (Nabatchi & Mergel, 2010; Cogburn & Espinoza-Vasquez, 2011; Hand & Ching, 2011; Linders, 2012; Mergel, 2013a; Zuniga, Copeland, & Bimber, 2013; Loader, Vromen, & Xenos, 2014; Warren, Sulaiman, & Jaafar, 2014a; Warren, Sulaiman, & Jaafar, 2014b; Zavattaro & Sementelli, 2014; Boulianne, 2015). Linders (2012) even took that association to a new level proposing a transition from e-Government (citizen as customer) to We-Government (citizen as partner), so that politics and governance become participatory.

This chapter provides a contextual review of the literature written about the subject of this thesis. First, it discusses how social media sites contribute to enhancing online civic engagement, shedding light on the opportunities that are made available to both citizens and governments through the use of social media. Then, it debates the idea of the governments' use of social media as an end in itself and not as a mean to strengthen the participation and collaboration of citizens in public affairs. Afterwards, it draws on international successful examples of governments that exploit social media to engage citizens. Later, to put things in perspective, it reviews social media and Internet services in the Egyptian context. Finally, it presents what is found in the literature about how the Egyptian government uses social media.

Opportunities for Citizens and Governments

Social media offer its users an interactive platform that contributes to a greater extent to increasing the space through which they can voice their opinions to their governments, in addition to lobbying decision makers locally and internationally. Golbeck, Grimes and Rogers (2010) pointed out that the capabilities of social media had an impact on facilitating interaction between groups. They added that this can provide new opportunities for governments not just

to be more transparent by disseminating information on different public matters, but also to listen to their citizens and to engage with them (as cited in Kavanaugh et al., 2012, p. 480). On the other hand, Bertot et al. (2010) highlighted the role social media plays in strengthening transparency of government and consequently contributing to the fight against corruption. This is especially of high importance for a country such as Egypt, which revolted in 2011 against corruption and social injustice.

Social media platforms with user-generated content such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube have made available an unprecedented amount of information online. Government officials can exploit this information for improved services (Kavanaugh et al., 2012). On the other hand, Chun and Reyes (2012) tackled the importance of data generated by social media for governments. They argued that the engagement of citizens in public matters through social media produces enormous amounts of data that is unstructured and can be categorized as “big social data”. The data overload constitutes a difficult challenge for governments to manage and examine the generated data, in the process of understanding their constituents and reflecting their views in designing and evaluating public policies. Chun and Reyes (2012) indicated that governments must possess data models and plans “to manage and mine the important nuggets of information in a rapid manner and share these insights with the citizens,” (p.443).

Egypt should join the discussions about the necessity of developing strategies to filter the unprecedented amount of data available on social media. During the process of collecting data for this research, the researcher found on the Facebook page of MoI several comments by

citizens who report criminal activities in specific areas and neighborhoods. MoI could benefit from this information.

Lee and Kwak (2012) noted that social media made available many unique possibilities of engaging the public in government work. It also changed the expectations of the public with regard to the work of their governments (p. 492). In fact, Linders (2012) wrote an interesting paper in which he stated that in the age of social media there is a transition from e-Government (citizen as customer) to We-Government (citizen as partner), so that politics and governance become participatory. He concluded that in the transition from e-Government to We-Government, "an emergence of 'a new kind of social contract', in which society empowers the public to play a far more active role in the functioning of their government, may be witnessed," (Linders, 2012, p. 453).

Others agree that social media have become a primary tool not only to share government information, but also to engage with the public and provide access to services and policy-related documents (Jaeger et al., 2012). Bertot, Jaeger, Munson, and Glaisyer (2010) demonstrated opportunities for agencies and citizens offered by a government utilization of social media. First, social media foster democratic participation and engagement of the public in government and in policy formulation, implementation and evaluation. The second opportunity is allowing co-production, in which civil servants and the public jointly develop public services to ensure their quality and relevance. Finally, social media provide the benefit of crowdsourcing innovative solutions to substantial societal issues. In order to facilitate crowdsourcing, governments should make available necessary data so that citizens have a foundation on which they can innovate (as cited in Bertot et al., 2012).

The above-mentioned opportunities are, however, difficult in Egypt. The country is still in a struggle towards achieving a democratic, participatory form of government. Public policies continue to be formulated without taking into account the feedback of citizens. Moreover, Egypt still lacks effective laws that enable the public and the media to access government information. Merrill (2009) eloquently articulated how important it is to provide citizens with access to government information arguing, "any meaningful democracy must be based on sound, verifiable information," (pp. 12–13).

Nabatchi and Mergel (2010) demonstrated key opportunities through which governments can engage citizens on social media. These include informing, consulting, incorporating, collaborating and empowering. They concluded that direct interaction between citizens and a public institution, especially on the local level, is more likely to push for and expand distributed democracy (Nabatchi & Mergel, 2010). This is of special relevance to Egypt in its transition towards democracy after decades of autocratic rule.

Benefits of the use of social media extends not only to enhancing political engagement, but could have a potential as well in stemming, or even reversing political inequality (Loader et al., 2014). Gharawi et al. (2010) also referred to other benefits. For example, some of the values government agencies seek through adopting social media include improving service delivery and saving costs.

On the other hand, Zuniga et al. (2013) stressed that those who use social media are more likely to articulate their political preferences through exercising purchasing power, such as in the case of creating Facebook pages to boycott a company. Thus, they linked social media

use with political consumerism, which they conceptualized as a type of civic engagement (Zuniga et al., 2013).

More importantly, governments can build citizen trust by fostering social capital through online civic engagement (Warren et al., 2014b). This is especially needed in a country, such as Egypt, where trust between citizens and the government is weaker. In contrast, opening social media platforms to inform the public without reacting to their feedback could harm the reputation of the government (Mergel, 2013a).

To successfully benefit from the opportunities social media offer to both governments and citizens, there should be interactive communication between government agencies and their constituents. Jaeger et al. (2012) argued that the reason for the uniqueness of social media technologies lies in their ability to enable an immediate, ongoing and interactive exchange. This is also the basis of their strength and appeal as a government tool. However, social media cannot enhance access to government information and services or to facilitate civic engagement without the ability of the public to access and utilize social media technologies (Jaeger et al., 2012).

Ironically, Coulson (2013) mentioned that none of the social media sites were originally intended for collecting or disseminating information on political and public affairs. He stated that the importance of social media in public communication is growing.

Usage: An End in itself?

Social media platforms were initially tools for personal interaction between friends, acquaintances and families. Nevertheless, companies, NGOs, government institutions and others began exploiting social media sites as part of their communication strategies to reach

their target audiences. Hrdinová et al. (2010) reported that civil servants in government agencies have called for the utilization of social networking sites to perform their duties (as cited in Kenawy, 2015). This led to a move towards more engagement between citizens and government representatives on social media. Mergel (2012; 2013) viewed this development as a shift from e-Government to Government 2.0⁴. Meijer, Koops, Pieterse, Overman, and Tije (2012) explained the difference between e-Government and Government 2.0 in that the latter is “a more open, social, communicative, interactive and user-centered version of e-Government,” adding that it can offer the possibility of integrating citizens and civil society in policy formulation and the designing of government services. Mergel (2012; 2013) supported this explanation contending that there is only one factor that differentiates social media tools from e-Government applications, which is that the first allows governments to interact with the diverse audience “in a bi-directional manner.” If these arguments are taken on board, it can be contended that Egypt has not yet transitioned from e-Government to Government 2.0. The government adopted social media, but only as a one-way, monologic communication tool. Engaging citizens in formulation and evaluation of policies is still to come, if the will and capacity exist.

Having reviewed the transformation for e-Government to Government 2.0 with what it entails regarding treating citizens as active users of websites and social media platforms of public agencies, it has to be noted that there are several studies which asserted that governments are still behind in utilizing the benefits of social media. Viewing social media-based public engagement as an unexplored territory, Lee and Kwak (2012) argued that the

⁴ Mergel (2012; 2013) points out that William Eggers was the first to coin the term Government 2.0 focusing on how technology can be utilized to strengthen participation and transparency in government.

general case in government institutions is that they do not have experience and knowledge required for implementing successful social media practices.

Interestingly, even when governments recognize the need to reach out to their constituents and engage them proactively, they fail to achieve this. Coleman and Shane (2012) put forward an interesting point stating that governments use the Internet as a broadcasting, one-way communication platform; ignoring its potential for interactive feedback.

The findings of the study conducted by David (2014) on the social media practices of the Canadian government are in agreement with the hypothesis of Coleman and Shane (2012). David (2014) unveiled that the government of Canada used social media as a one-to-many broadcasting channel with no active engagement in online dialogue. Davidson (2011) shared the same outcome with regard to the American context. His study focused on the websites and social media platforms of several American government agencies. He concluded that in both mediums outreach and self-promotional practices were mostly dominant (Davidson, 2011).

In line with that, Hand and Ching (2011) discovered in their study on how local authorities in the US use Facebook that the communication is top-down. The data of their study indicated that creating a Facebook page by a government institution does not necessarily result in having meaningful citizen engagement (Hand & Ching, 2011). Analyzing how the EU local governments use social media, Bonson et al. (2012) revealed that their examined sample utilized social media extensively, but as a way to enhance transparency rather than a tool for promoting what they called "e-participation".

With regard to the MENA region, Coulson (2013) contended that some governments in the region used social media more as a way to appear modern and to obtain and demonstrate

support rather than as a tool of engagement and dialogue. This could explain the reason why leaders in the region are not very much involved on Twitter, which is a medium where the norm is to have immediate, ongoing interaction (Coulson, 2013). Supporting Coulson's (2013) hypothesis, Al-Khalifa et al. (2012) concluded in their analysis of the social media usage by the Saudi government that they were utilized as one-way communication platforms.

The case of Egypt is not that different. In their investigation of the effectiveness of the adoption of social media by the Egyptian government, Abdelsalam et al. (2013) found that these platforms were mainly used to disseminate information with minimal interaction between the public and government representatives. El-Khalilj (2013) added another function revealing that the Egyptian authorities managed social media as propaganda tools.

The above-mentioned studies are intriguing as they give an indication that the potentials of social media in engaging citizens in public affairs is unexploited not only in developing countries, but in developed countries as well.

Successful Implementations

Though social media are, to some extent, untapped communication resources in the context of how governments use them, there are some examples from around the world of governments that successfully exploited social media to enhance civic engagement. The four cases presented in this sub-section are from the United States, Italy and Iceland. Even though some might argue that these examples drawn from the literature are from countries that do not share the same characteristics of Egypt, the researcher finds them valid. The utilization of social media by governments does not require funds, technologies or human resources that do

not exist in Egypt. It only demands the will to interact with citizens and the belief in the benefits of the public engagement in decision-making.

The American president Barack Obama is believed to have successfully used social media to engage and mobilize people not only during his presidential campaign, but following his election as well (Jaeger, Paquette, & Simmons, 2010; Cogburn & Espinoza-Vasquez, 2011; Mergel, 2013b). The Obama administration clearly marked information as an asset that requires sharing with the public (Mergel, 2013b). Cogburn and Espinoza-Vasquez (2011) stressed that the use of social media by the Obama administration contributed to strengthening political participation and civic engagement to the extent that it exploited these platforms to mobilize support for its public policy agenda. Jaeger et al. (2010) explained that immediately after Obama got elected, he launched a website, <http://www.change.gov>, devoted to soliciting feedback of citizens, in addition to implementing a new approach of uploading his official speeches on YouTube. Furthermore, on his first day in the office, Obama issued "The Presidential Memorandum on Transparency and Open Government" and "The Executive Order on Presidential Records." Both of these directives aimed at intensifying transparency and access to government information both in print and online (Jaeger et al., 2010).

Another example from the US concerns the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDCP), which used its official Twitter account to publish in real time certified information on the global transmission of the H1N1 pandemic in 2009 (Nakki et al., 2011). Followers of CDPC received the information and shared them with others, amplifying the reach. They also posted their observations about the pandemic. CDPC would then examine and validate such observations, incorporate them in its records, and finally publish the new information and make

it available to the public (Nakki et al., 2011). This is an interesting case of engaging citizens in a public health matter.

Italy was also successful in utilizing social media to actively engage citizens in public issues. The Italian Ministry of Economic Development started an online initiative called Kubali enabling the public to participate in the progress of their communities by generating entrepreneurial ideas and developing them into feasible projects (Cottica & Bianchi, 2010). The Kubali initiative enhanced transparency and trust between citizens and the concerned Ministry. Cottica and Bianchi (2010) concluded, "Many public sector goals can be effectively pursued by appropriately shaping web 2.0 dynamics. That is, by creating platforms that catalyze the action of numerous private individuals and enable them to act freely in ways that, as a system, amount to the net creation of public value," (p. 88).

Iceland, however, provide a more interesting example. Bani (2012) explained that the process of drafting a new constitution for the country in 2010 by an assigned body (Constitutional Assembly Council) was characterized by the strong use of social media platforms to encourage participation and promote transparency. Public deliberations took place on the official sites of the Council including its website and social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Citizens posted proposals, comments, ideas and suggestions on the different online platforms of the Council, which were then discussed in subcommittees (Bani, 2012).

In conclusion, the efficient use of social media by governments and realizing the potentials they offer could lead to strengthening civic engagement, public participation, democratization and transparency. Having said that, the usage of social media would not be an end in itself, but a means to an end.

Social Media: Egyptian Context

Analyzing the use of social media by the Egyptian government requires first providing context on their utilization in the country in general.

Internet services started in Egypt in late 1993. Since then, the number of Internet users increased steadily. The Egyptian government undertook several projects and launched initiatives to advance its use. However, it was not until the January 2011 revolution that the rates of Internet use and mobile penetration have increased remarkably (Abdulla, 2013). The Egyptian Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT) estimated in January 2015 there were a total of 49.27 million Internet users with a penetration rate of 57.24% compared to 38.48 million users in January 2014 with a penetration rate of 45.54% (Egypt, MCIT, 2015). MCIT showed growth in Internet access via mobile phones with a total of 22.40 million users by January 2015 compared to 14.12 in the same period of the previous year (Egypt, MCIT, 2015). Furthermore, Internet penetration has made an enormous increase not only in terms of the numbers of users, but also in the quality of access. Broadband penetration rose from 0.1% in 2005 to 1.8% in 2010, and reached 2.9% in May 2013 (Abdulla, 2013).

When it comes to social media, profound societal changes have occurred since their introduction. Their use in the uprisings that are popularly known as the 'Arab Spring' was evident to the extent that scientists and analysts debated their contribution to the form and outcomes of these events (Iskander, 2011). The call for the January 25th, 2011 demonstrations that turned into a revolution resulting in ousting former president Hosni Mubarak began on Facebook.

It has to be noted, though, that online political activism in Egypt preceded the 2011 revolution. According to Eaton (2013), there was a political movement against the rule of

former president Mubarak, which had online activism at the forefront. The initial platforms of the online political activism were blogs, followed by YouTube, Facebook and Twitter (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012).

Since 2005, there has been a lively, growing blogosphere of dedicated individuals and groups who commented on political affairs and raised questions regarding the official accounts of events (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012; Eaton, 2013). Abdulla (2013) mentioned the example of the renowned blogger Wael Abbas who uploaded a video in 2007 documenting brutality of police resulting in the trial of the two policemen involved and their imprisonment. This marked the first conviction in an Egyptian court against police brutality (Abdulla, 2013).

The growing trend of political activism on social media, especially since 2007, contributed to the beginning of a new phase of online civic engagement in Egypt (Eaton, 2013). Tufekci and Wilson (2012) argued that the introduction of Facebook in the Arabic language in 2009 intensified this movement. They explained that online political content increased and activists launched several online campaigns revealing corruption, human rights violations and poverty (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012).

The January 2011 revolution uncovered the potential of social media in the creation of a vibrant civil society, especially that mainstream media outlets have been subjected to direct and indirect forms of government control (Khamis, 2011). In fact, social media played an important role before, during and after the January 2011 revolution through enabling online political activism, strengthening civic engagement, and promoting citizen journalism (Khamis & Vaughn, 2011).

During the 2011 revolution, demonstrators created news, photos and videos about the events they witnessed and shared them instantly with the world. This extensive use of social media and its impact on mobilizing protesters and exposing the crimes committed by Mubarak's regime triggered the government to try restrict access to key social media platforms on January, 25th, 2011, before it cut Internet services completely (Abdelsalam et al., 2013). Though Internet services were blocked between January 25th and February 2nd, a group of activists managed to continue spreading videos, photos and news (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012).

Since the January 2011 revolution, the use of social media sites has witnessed a drastic increase. According to a poll conducted in 2014 by the Egyptian Center for Public Opinion Research 'Baseera' & UNESCO, 42% of the Egyptian youth (18-35 years) use social networking tools on a daily basis. This percentage increases from 33% in rural areas to 46% in urban areas.

The popularity of Facebook, in particular, has risen significantly after the 2011 revolution. For example, the number of Facebook users from Egypt was 4.2 million by the beginning of 2011. This figure had increased to 5.7 million only two months after the January 25th revolution. It rose again to 8.55 million users by September 2011. By May 2013, the number of users reached 13.83 million (Abdulla, 2013). Recently, the Arab Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI) estimated that around 24 million Facebook users are from Egypt (Eid, Abdelrady, Al-Taher, & Abdelaziz, 2015).

Social Media in the Egyptian Government

Egypt witnessed a historical event in 2011 with the rise of Egyptians against Mubarak's 30-year-rule of the country. Social media played an important role during and after the January 2011 revolution through enabling online political activism, strengthening civic engagement, and

promoting citizen journalism (Khamis & Vaughn, 2011). However, this role was also played during the years that preceded the revolution (Farag, 2010; Khamis & Vaughn, 2011). Farag (2010) concluded in the study she conducted before the revolution that social networking sites such as Facebook had an impact on public policies and the country's political life. Though the findings of her study revealed that the government paid attention to social networking sites (Farag, 2010), the Egyptian officials lagged behind in using these platforms to communicate with the citizens and engage them in public issues (Abdelsalam et al., 2013; El-Khalili, 2013). In fact, only one government agency launched a Facebook page before the revolution, which is the Information Technology Institute; a national organization affiliated to the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (Abdelsalam et al., 2013).

Following the January 2011 revolution, the Egyptian government began to realize the importance of social media. Consequently, several public agencies tried to exploit social media sites and to integrate them in their communication efforts. The Supreme Council of Armed Forces that ruled the country until mid 2013 had its own Facebook page. Several ministries also created Facebook pages and less created Twitter and YouTube accounts. Abdelsalam et al. (2013) conducted a study through which they found that Facebook is the platform used the most by government agencies in Egypt. Kenawy (2015) reached a similar outcome as she quoted government officials responsible for managing social media accounts of Egyptian ministries stating that "Facebook is the most significant and the most commonly used social media site," (p. 55).

Recent studies showed that the Egyptian government utilization of social media sites had been mainly focused on disseminating information (Abdelsalam et al., 2013), propagating

and promoting government work and views (El-Khalili, 2013), and providing citizens with government news and services, in addition to receiving public's questions and complaints (Kenawy, 2015). It is, however, debated whether or not the Egyptian government uses social media as a one-way communication platform, or as a two-way, dialogic medium.

In their investigation of the effectiveness of the utilization of social media by the Egyptian government, Abdelsalam et al. (2013) found that these platforms were mainly used to disseminate information with minimal engagement between the public and government representatives. El-Khalili (2013) pointed out that SCAF created its Facebook page after the revolution to build bridges of communication with the youth and to respond to comments and questions of the citizens. The same applies to the Egyptian Cabinet. Nonetheless, when the researcher tried to follow the links to the pages of SCAF and the Cabinet provided in the study of El-Khalili (2013), these pages were not found. This does not give the impression that the government has a clear vision with regard to interacting with the citizens and engaging them through social media. It could also indicate the lack of clear policies concerning the use of social media by the government. Kenawy (2015) supported this hypothesis pointing out that the Egyptian ministries do not have social media policies and guidelines, in spite of the integration of these sites in their communication efforts. Nevertheless, Kenawy (2015) quoted government officials responsible for managing social media accounts of some ministries stressing that they value the feedback of the citizens and their comments. According to them, they prepare weekly reports to their ministers with the complaints they receive from the public through the official Facebook pages so that the ministers can review and address these issues (Kenawy, 2015). This thesis tests these claims through analyzing the content posted on the Facebook pages of the

government, in addition to examining the existence or lack thereof of interaction on these pages between the citizens and the government representatives.

Despite the role social media played in the political and social transformation in Egypt, little has been written on the Egyptian government adoption of social media. Additionally, this thesis argues that no research was done concerning the study of the extent to which the Egyptian government's use of social media enhances online civic engagement. Consequently, this research fills a gap in the literature by examining the utilization of social media by the Egyptian ministries and how the public interacts with the ministries through their official platforms.

Chapter Four: Methodology

Tackling the questions of this exploratory study is done through employing content analysis as the research technique.

Baxter and Babbie (2003) defined content analysis as “a research technique for the systematic, replicable, and quantitative description of the manifest or latent features of communication texts,” (p. 240). Though there has been an intense debate concerning the classification of content analysis as a qualitative or quantitative technique, this study employed a blend of both quantitative and qualitative analysis; thus agreeing with the approach of both Smith (1975) and Berg (2001). The reason for that is to go beyond the mere quantification of the observations for the sake of adding depth to the answers to the inquiries of this research.

As explained in the introduction, the scope of this thesis is limited to Facebook as a social media site. More precisely, this research analyzed the top three official Facebook pages of Egyptian ministries in terms of the number of ‘fans’ who like these pages.

As of October 7, 2015, the top three pages belonged to the following ministries: Ministry of Interior (Moi) (<http://www.facebook.com/MoiEgy>), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) (<https://www.facebook.com/MFAEgypt>), and the Ministry of Awqaf (MoA) (Religious Endowment) (<https://www.facebook.com/AwkafOnline>). The first is a ministry that offers many services to the citizens, from security and law enforcement to issuing legal documents such as passports and birth certificates. The second is a ministry that reflects the image of the country abroad, defends its interests in the international arena, builds bilateral and multilateral relations, promotes the Egyptian culture, plays a role in attracting foreign investments, and offers services to its citizens who live or work abroad (“Role of the Ministry,” n.d.). The latter is

responsible for religious guidance and is in charge of religious endowments. Its mandate incorporates running Islamic centers and mosques. The three ministries play an essential role for citizens.

Despite the importance of the Ministry of Education, its Facebook page, which is ranked number four in terms of the number of fans, was inactive from October 27, 2013 to July 16, 2015. When the researcher tried to interact with the administrators of its Facebook page to find out the reason behind the inactivity, he was struck by the fact that the Ministry does not allow citizens not only to post stand-alone comments⁵, but also to send a private message to the Page (see Appendix C). Having said that, the researcher finds that the top three Facebook pages of Egyptian ministries are sufficient for the purpose of this research.

The reasoning behind employing this targeted sampling technique lies in the hypothesis that pages with the most likes would more likely have greater activity in connection with posts by the pages and comments by the citizens. Furthermore, Facebook pages with the most likes would more likely represent ministries that are of importance to citizens.

The timeframe of the study covered the period of the second Ibrahim Mahlab cabinet from June 17, 2014 to September 12, 2015. The reason for choosing that timeframe lies in the assumption that each cabinet should have its own mandate and policy framework. Thus, to properly evaluate the use of social media by the Egyptian government to be able to answer the research questions, the researcher selected the second Ibrahim Mahlab cabinet. This is

⁵ A stand-alone comment is what the users post on the ministry's wall. Facebook pages that allow stand-alone comments have a comment box at the top reading "Write something . . ." thus permitting users who are "fans" of the Page to publish posts on it.

especially relevant because at the time of conducting this research it was early to examine the utilization of social media by the newly appointed cabinet.

The main units of analysis are the posts by the sampled ministries and the comments of citizens on these posts. Since the selected three Facebook pages were active almost on a daily basis, and because of the extended timeframe of this research, the researcher sampled from within that time period to obtain a representative group of posts by the three Pages and comments by the public. Thus, a probability, simple random sample of the calendar dates involved was employed (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000).

As for the posts by the Pages, the researcher started collecting all posts published on September 12, 2015. Then posts published in the following five 'active days'⁶ were left, while all posts on the 6th 'active day' were selected for the sample. The sample includes 491 posts (MoI: n= 161, MFA: n= 180, MoA: n= 150).

Regarding the comments by the public, the same sampling technique was employed with minor changes. The interval of 6 was also used. However, the researcher selected the comments of the first post published on the 6th day, in case several posts were published that day, with a maximum of 20 comments per each post (the first 20). The sample contains 2287 comments on 174 posts (MoI: n= 1013 in 55 posts, MFA: n= 434 in 57 posts, MoA: n= 840 in 62 posts).

Realizing the target of this study, the researcher determined three categories for the content analysis. In doing so, he benefited from the work of Davidson (2011). The first part of

⁶ Facebook pages sometimes do not post content every single day. Thus, by active days it is meant that if, for example, a page posted content on September 12, 13, 15, 17, 18 and 19, the posts selected for sample on the 6th active day would be the ones posted on September 19.

the content analysis catalogued the features present or absent on the sampled Facebook pages, while the second measured sociability and interaction. The third category examined the purpose of the posts by the administrators of the Pages and the comments by the citizens.

These three categories, with the questions that revolve around them, are compiled in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Categories and Questions of Content Analysis

Present or absent features	Sociability & interaction	Type of posts & comments
Does the Facebook page of the ministry like other Facebook pages? What are their types (governmental, NGOs, etc.)?	Does the ministry use 'hashtags', 'mentions', or links in its posts? What is the percentage of these posts to the total number of sampled posts?	What is the purpose of the posts by the ministry (outreach, transparency, collaboration, participation, or service delivery)?
Does the ministry provide its mission and description about itself on its Facebook page?	What is the total number of likes, shares and comments on the posts?	What is the type of the comments by the citizens (publication of info, collection of info, dialogue, lobbying decision makers, collaborating actions)?
Does the ministry provide its contact details and a link to its website?	Does the ministry respond to citizens' comments on its posts or like their remarks? What is the percentage of these 'interaction posts' to the total number of posts?	
Does the ministry allow fans to post stand-alone comments on its Facebook page?	Is there interaction among the citizens?	
Does the ministry have disclaimer or guidelines?	Does the ministry moderate the comments through deleting spam remarks or content that contains threats, coarse or vulgar language, defamation, and other contributions of that sort?	
Is the Facebook page verified (Facebook confirms it is an authentic Page)?		

The questions under each category are important. For example, the use of hashtags⁷, mentions⁸, or hyperlinks increases the reach of posts, and thus the potential engagement of the Facebook users. Moreover, it could be possible to measure the extent of engagement with posts by the sampled Facebook pages through the number of likes, shares and comments on these posts. On the other hand, examining whether or not the Pages respond to the comments of the users is an important indicator of the existence of dialogue and interaction between the ministries and the citizens. Checking whether the Facebook pages open the floor to citizens to post stand-alone comments gives an indication about the type of communication conducted: top-down or participatory.

Regarding the purpose of posts by the administrators of the studied Pages, it was determined from the literature and during the collection of data for this research, i.e. through an inductive and deductive process. Adapted from the work of Davidson (2011), the researcher categorized the purposes into four types. These types are: outreach, transparency, participation, and service-related data. Here is what is meant by each of these types:

1. *Outreach*: Content that mainly facilitates self-promotion of ministry work and officials (press releases, press statements, videos of interviews or press conferences, photos).

⁷ According to Facebook, a hashtag turns topics and phrases into clickable links in the posts. This helps people find posts about topics they're interested in.

⁸ To mention a Facebook user or a Page is to tag them in the post you created. When you tag them, you create a link to their profile. The post you tag the person or another Page in may also be added to their Timeline. Thus, the post could be visible to the audience you selected in addition to friends or fans of those tagged.

2. *Participation*: Soliciting feedback of the public on the work of the ministry, its Facebook page, or specific ministry policies and initiatives. This could be also content that seeks the active participation of citizens in the work of the ministry.
3. *Transparency*: Providing general information about the policies and internal operations of the ministry (internal directives, information meant for civil servants, internal documents about the work of the ministry and its mission).
4. *Service-related Data*: Providing a platform for citizens to receive ministry services or data related to such services.

When it comes to the comments by citizens, they were categorized into the five types of online civic engagement behavior as described by Denning (2001), i.e. collection of information, publication of information, dialogue, coordinating actions, and lobbying decision makers. The researcher also added a 6th classification in which spam comments would best fit (its criteria is explained in the coding scheme - Appendix A). Each type of the online civic engagement behaviors is identified upon the following criteria:

1. *Collection of Information*: Questions, specific inquiries or requests for specific information.
2. *Publication of Information*: Opinions, rhetoric questions, statements of support, and criticism (all should not seek specific action, otherwise become lobbying, OR solicit feedback on an issue, thus becoming dialogue). Variables also include links to articles or websites about an issue, and tagging friends in comments.
3. *Dialogue*: Participatory comments that solicit feedback on an issue.

4. *Coordination of Action*: Comments that seek coordinating actions among the public (protest, meeting, gathering support for a public figure or organization, seeking support for Facebook pages and groups that are not business-related, etc.).
5. *Lobbying Decision Makers*: Comments that seek certain actions by the government (complaints, suggestions with specific matters, demanding the change of an unprofessional civil servant, amending or enacting a policy, asking personal or public requests (employment), etc.).

Since content analysis is achieved through employing coding frames to organize data and identify results (Berg, 2001), the researcher used a multi-level coding frame that is adapted from the work of Davidson (2011), and Hand and Ching (2011). First, a summary of the activity of the examined three Facebook pages during the covered period was provided: total number of posts, likes, shares, comments, 'interaction posts', posts without comments, posts where dialogue occurred among citizens, and posts with hashtags, mentions or hyperlinks. Their percentages to the total number of posts sampled were checked. Second, the purpose of posts published by the Pages and the percentage of each type to the total number of posts were examined. Then the type of the comments by the public was analyzed. In doing so, their percentage to the total number of comments sampled was presented. Third, the existence or lack thereof of the features identified in Table 2 was reviewed.

In analyzing the posts by the three Facebook pages and the comments by the public, this thesis took advantage of the Facebook metrics through which the number of comments, shares and likes are counted automatically. According to Davidson (2011), examining the basic

Facebook analytics can be of benefit in measuring the extent to which the sampled Facebook pages interact with the Facebook users.

Two coders, both are graduate students of social sciences at the American University in Cairo, were trained on the coding scheme (Appendix A) before analyzing a sub-sample of 60 posts and 323 comments. Both coders also analyzed the present or absent features at the three selected Facebook pages. All variables scored more than 0.9 using Holsti's formula as a measurement of the intercoder reliability (Appendix B). This result is considered acceptable (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000). Nevertheless, during the coding process of the sub-sample, it was decided to add further explanation to the coding scheme of what is meant by comments that fit under 'spam' and 'collection of information' to ease classification and make it more accurate.

It has to be noted that content analysis as a technique has its advantages and limitations. The main advantage of this technique is that it compresses big data into few content categories that are based on explicit and well-defined rules of coding (Stemler, 2001). Its main limitation as experienced in this study is its inability to answer the 'why' question, which is important in understanding the reasons behind the observations. Nonetheless, the researcher believes that interviewing social media officials of the three ministries to try to reach some answers beyond the mere observations would not have added more depth to this thesis. Kenawy (2015) already interviewed communication directors responsible for running Facebook pages of Egyptian ministries. The interviewees repeated how much they value the comments of citizens on the ministries' social media platforms without providing solid examples that support their argument. The limitations of this study are explained in a more detail in chapter seven.

Chapter Five: Findings

This research examines the extent to which the use of social media by the Egyptian government in its communication with the public enhances online civic engagement. To be able to do so, it focuses, among other things, on the level of interaction in the Egyptian government's use of social media; whether or not it is a linear, one-way communication model.

Through the use of content analysis, two units of analysis were examined, i.e. the posts by the top three ministries in terms of the number of fans (MoI, MFA and MoA), and the comments of citizens on the ministries' posts. In total, the sample contains 491 posts (MoI: n= 161, MFA: n= 180, MoA: n= 150), and 2287 comments (MoI: n= 1013 in 55 posts, MFA: n= 434 in 57 posts, MoA: n= 840 in 62 posts).

As indicated in the methodology, this thesis determined three categories for the content analysis. In doing so, it benefited from the work of Davidson (2011). The first part of the content analysis catalogued the features present or absent on the sampled Facebook pages, while the second measured sociability and interaction. The third category examined the type of the posts by the administrators of the Pages and the comments by the citizens.

Present or Absent Features

The three Facebook pages scores badly in the present features, particularly MoA. Below is a table that summarizes the results.

Table 3: Present or Absent Features on the Facebook Pages

Verified? ⁹	Likes other Pages?	Likes NGOs?	Mission & description?	Contacts & link to website?	Stand-alone comments?	Disclaimer & guidelines?
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⁹ A verified Page means that Facebook confirms its authenticity.

	Verified? ⁹	Likes other Pages?	Likes NGOs?	Mission & description?	Contacts & link to website?	Stand-alone comments?	Disclaimer & guidelines?
Mol	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
MFA	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
MoA	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No

Checking whether the sampled Facebook pages open the floor to their audience to post stand-alone comments¹⁰ gives an indication about the type of communication conducted: top-down or participatory. When it comes to the existence of disclaimers or guidelines, these are important because usually when Pages are interacting with their audience, they should have disclaimers clarifying the terms of use concerning member conduct, privacy, copyright, and questions and comments. If Facebook pages lack this, it could be attributed to the absence of interest in the views of their audience, or simply the absence of strategy on soliciting feedback and managing it.

As for the verification, it implies the level of professionalism of those who manage the Facebook pages. Verification is important in times when every Facebook user can create a Facebook page and impersonate a public figure or institution.

Liking other Pages, especially those that are non-governmental, indicates an interest in following the posts of these Pages and in interacting with them. Finally, the mission and description of a Page are essential. Though Mol is the only one that states the reason behind

¹⁰ A stand-alone comment is what the users post on the ministry's wall. Facebook pages that allow stand-alone comments have a comment box at the top reading "Write something . . ." thus permitting users who are "fans" of the Page to publish posts on it.

creating its Facebook page, its social media practices contradict the written purpose. As indicated in Appendix C, MoI says it launched its Facebook page upon the belief that that the continuous, fruitful cooperation and communication between the Ministry and the public will lead to security, safety and stability of the country.

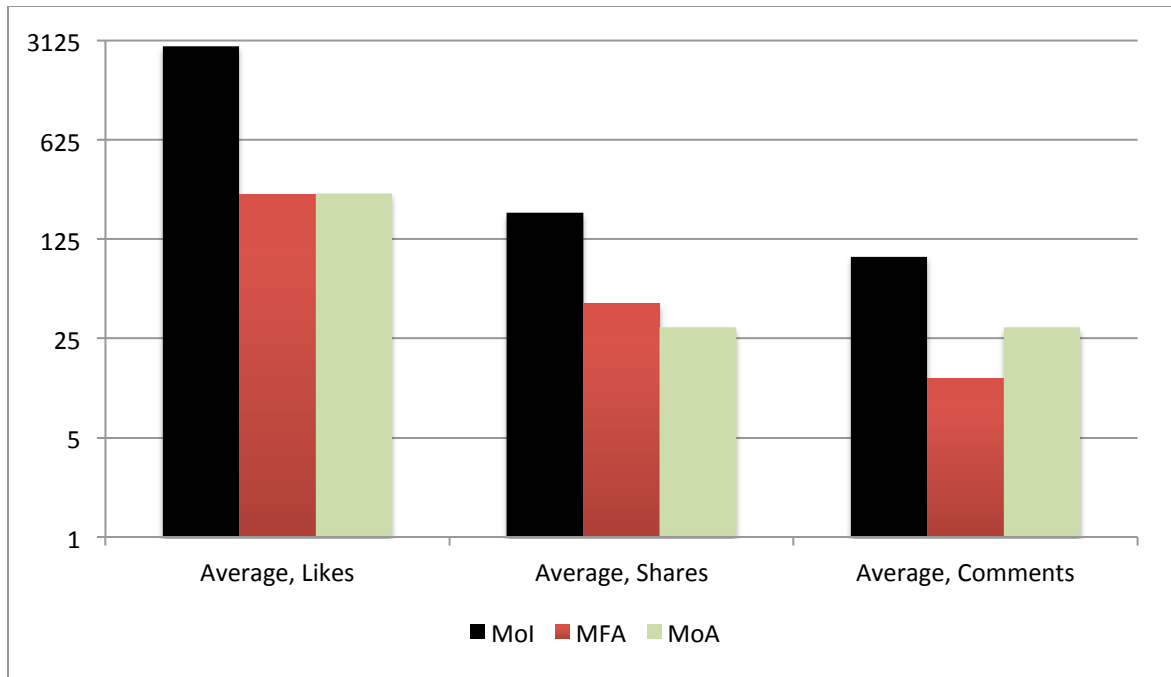
Sociability and Interaction

This category measures the level of engagement with the three Facebook pages and the extent to which the communication conducted by the ministries is monologic or dialogic.

Since examining the extent of engagement of the public with the three ministries could be done through the number of likes, shares and comments on the posts of the ministries on their Facebook pages, it could be stated that the three ministries performed well in that aspect. The average number of likes, shares and comments on the sampled posts by MoI is 2845 (TN= 457,960), 192 (TN= 30,831) and 94 (TN= 15,068) respectively. On average, MFA has 260 likes (TN= 46,732), 44 shares (TN= 7,960) and 13 comments (TN= 2,367), while MoA has 263 likes (TN= 39,427), 30 shares (TN= 4,433) and 30 comments (TN= 4,430).

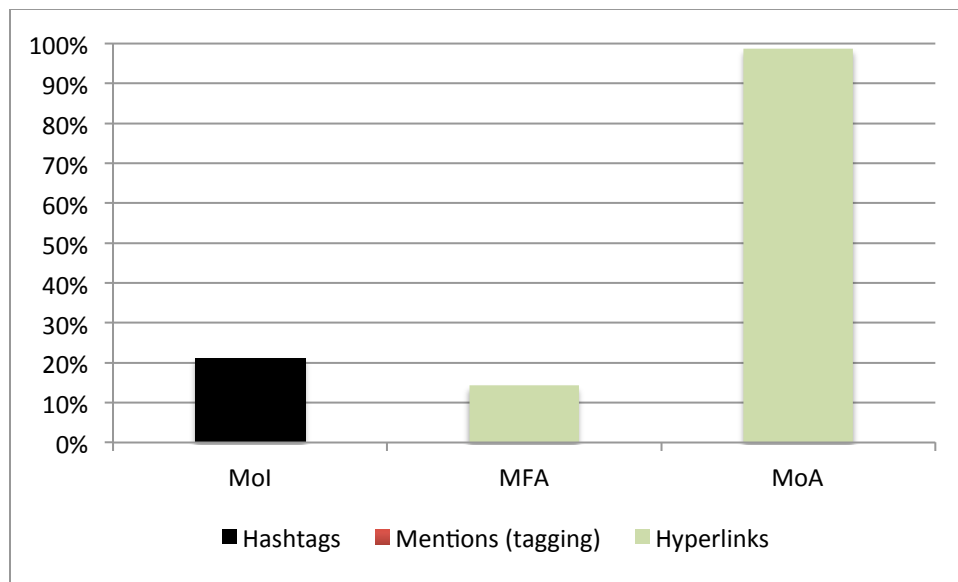
On the other hand, the mode and the median provide different results from the average. The discrepancies are more evident in the number of shares and comments. This variance in the collected data cannot be explained easily. For example, 11.1% (n= 20) of the MFA sampled posts has zero comments. This cannot be attributed to the type of these posts, since 94.4% (n= 170) of the posts are coded as outreach, and all the posts that have no comments are also under the outreach category. When examining the topic of these posts, one cannot find considerable difference compared to the overall posts.

Figure 2: Level of Engagement of the Public with the Posts of the Ministries



The use of hashtags, mentions, or links to the websites of the ministries or other webpages is poor. This has some effect on the reach of posts to as many Facebook users as possible, and thus their potential engagement with the Pages. MoA is an exception since it uses links to its own website in 98.7% (n= 148) of its posts. Nevertheless, it does not use hashtags, mentions or links to websites other than its own. MFA uses links to its Twitter account and to other websites in only 14.4% of its posts (n= 26). There is no use of hashtags or mentions. MoI is the only one that uses hashtags in its posts with a frequency of 21.1% (n= 34). But it only adopts one hashtag in its posts, which reads, “#Ministry_of_Interior_Egypt” (translated from Arabic). This is not of great benefit since the hashtag is simply the name of the Ministry. MoI does not include mentions or hyperlinks in its Facebook posts.

Figure 3: Posts that Include Hyperlinks, Mentions (Tagging), or Hashtags



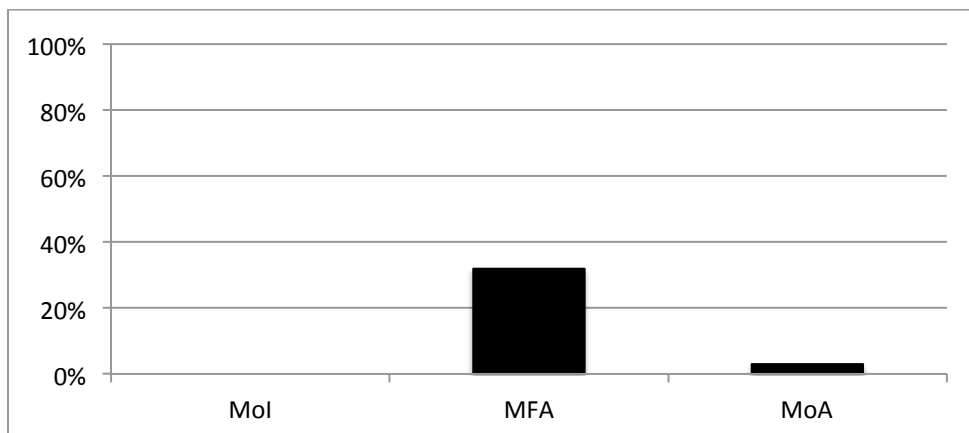
The three Facebook pages perform poorly in the interaction between them and the citizens. The overall percentage of ‘interaction posts’ in the three ministries is 12.4% (n= 61). MoI scores zero in the ‘interaction posts’. MFA interacts with its audience through liking comments and responding to inquiries in 32% of the posts (n= 57), while the percentage of MoA is only 3% (n= 4). There are examples of comments from the public that show the complete disregard of the ministries towards citizens’ feedback. For example, a citizen commented on a post by MoI on September 3, 2014 stating, “The least from the respected admin that understands Arabic is to show the citizen that he/she is responsive. The man wrote a complaint. At least like his comment and show him that the message has been received and that the Ministry will review it. That is in case your rank does not allow you to respond to him. Or are you a machine that memorizes without any brains!!! These people are your eyes. I hope we understand,” (translated from Arabic). This concerned citizen wrote such a comment as a response to a complaint by another citizen on the Page of MoI, which received no response from the admin. It is interesting to note that both comments were ignored. A relatively recent

example from MoI shows how it is indifferent to what the people write. A Facebook user by the name Hassan Shaalan wrote to MoI on February 23, 2015 stating, “Respond to me. I have a complaint and no one is answering me from the official Facebook page of the Ministry of Interior,” (translated from Arabic).

Another example comes from MoA. A Facebook user started a thread on June 18, 2015 commenting that the Ministry only responds to the inquiries written by women. The Ministry then replied to the comment stating, “Thank you for this accusation. May Allah forgive you,” (translated from Arabic). Several other citizens then replied to the original comment concurring with its statement. One of them even wrote, “Men, women, inanimate... they will never respond,” (translated from Arabic).

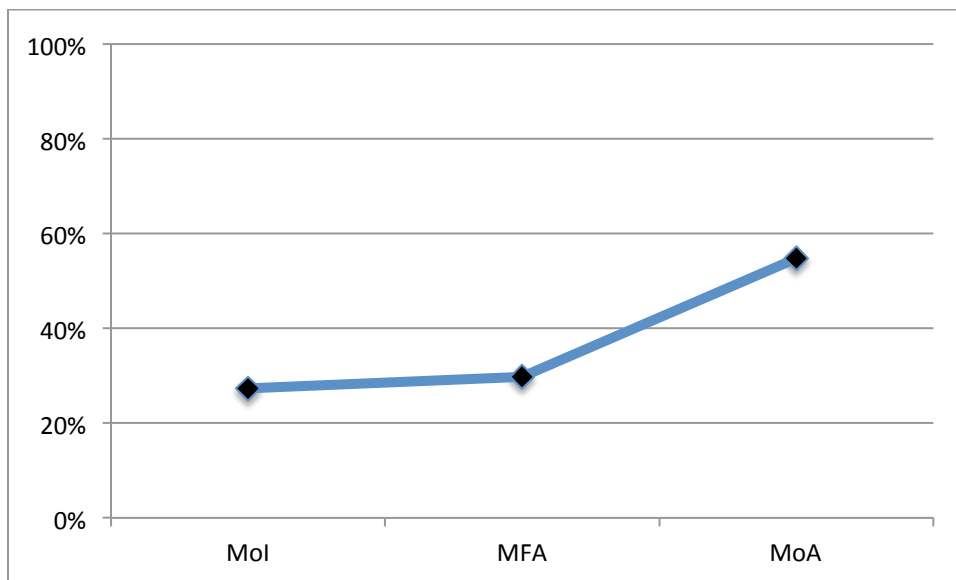
Though MFA performs better than the other two ministries in terms of interacting with the public, all three of them never replied to policy-related comments. This includes, for example, the demands by several Egyptian families who have students following their basic education in Saudi Arabia to change some policies related to admitting their children to universities in Egypt upon the conclusion of their basic education.

Figure 4: Level of Interaction of the Ministries with the Public



As for the existence of dialogue among citizens on the Facebook pages of the ministries, the researcher studied the comments of the public in 174 posts by the three Pages (MoI: n= 55, MFA: n= 57, and MoA: n= 62). In 27,3% of the posts of MoI, the public interacts with each other (n= 15). The percentage is not that different in the Page of MFA with 29.8% (n= 17), while MoA has interaction among citizens in 54.8% of the posts (n= 34). These results demonstrate that the public are not only interested in engaging with the ministries, but are also communicating with each other and exchanging views and information. Discussions among them are mainly about political issues that are of public interest, such as the position towards the Muslim Brotherhood, the current regime in Egypt, the performance of the ministries, or the officials heading public agencies. The dialogue among citizens transcends local topics to include debates on the position of Egypt regarding Gaza during the Israeli aggression against the Hamas-ruled area in July 2014.

Figure 5: Level of Interaction among the Public on the Ministries' Pages



Finally, it has to be noted that the three Facebook pages do not moderate the comments posted on them. In all three of them, there are comments that are considered spam or contain threats, coarse or vulgar language, defamation of a person or a group, and other contributions of that sort. MFA, however, has the least of this type of comments.

It could be contended that the lack of moderation of comments is healthy since it does not only keep the defamatory remarks, but also the criticism against the ministry, government, or regime. The researcher believes that this argument is not strong. The absence of moderation could indicate the indifference of the ministries with regard to the feedback of the public. It could also push citizens away from the Pages when they see the coarse, vulgar language used by some of their fellow citizens.

Type of Posts and Comments

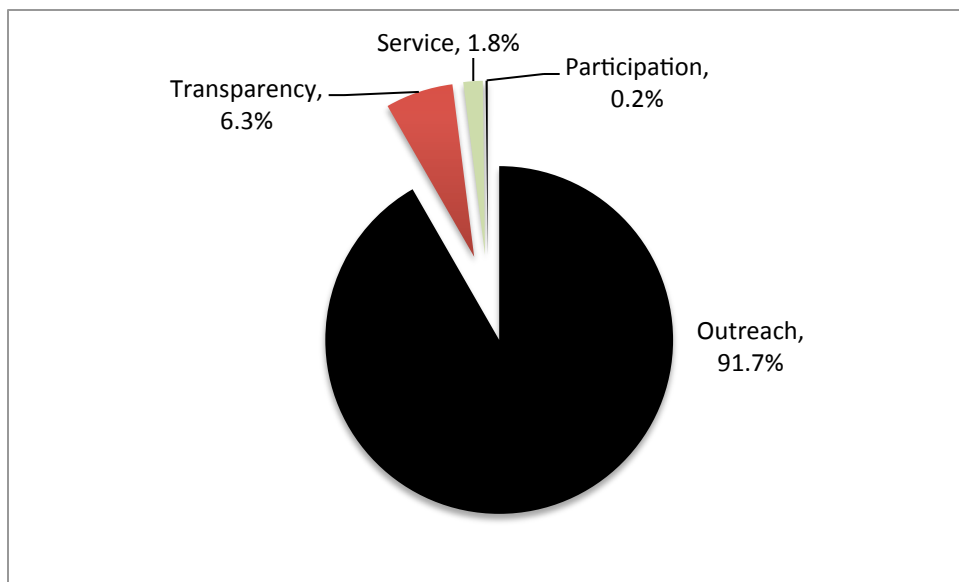
This category sheds light on the type and purpose of posts by the ministries and comments by the public. The first would be of benefit in identifying the reason why the ministries communicate with the public through social media. Do they basically promote their work and the officials that hold high position? Or do they try to provide information on their policies, internal operations and services, in addition to soliciting the feedback of the public? The second is important since it offers an insight on the types of online civic engagement that exist on the Egyptian government's social media.

We examined 491 posts by the three Facebook pages and found that 91.7% of the posts (n= 450) are merely outreach in the form of press releases, press statements, videos of interviews or press conferences and other posts of that sort. The transparency posts constitute 6.3% of the total number of posts (n= 31), while 1.8% of the posts are coded as providing

service-related data (n=9). Only one post out of the 491 is considered participatory. Ironically, MoI which has posts that are almost entirely coded as outreach (99.4%, n= 160) is the ministry that published that participatory post seeking information from the public about criminals at large.

The majority of the posts by MFA are also outreach (94.4%, n=170), while 5% are service-related data (n= 9) and 0.6% are identified as transparency (n= 1). MoA is the most transparent with 20% of the posts providing information on internal operations of the Ministry or its policies. However, 80% of its posts are merely outreach.

Figure 6: Purpose of Ministries' Posts

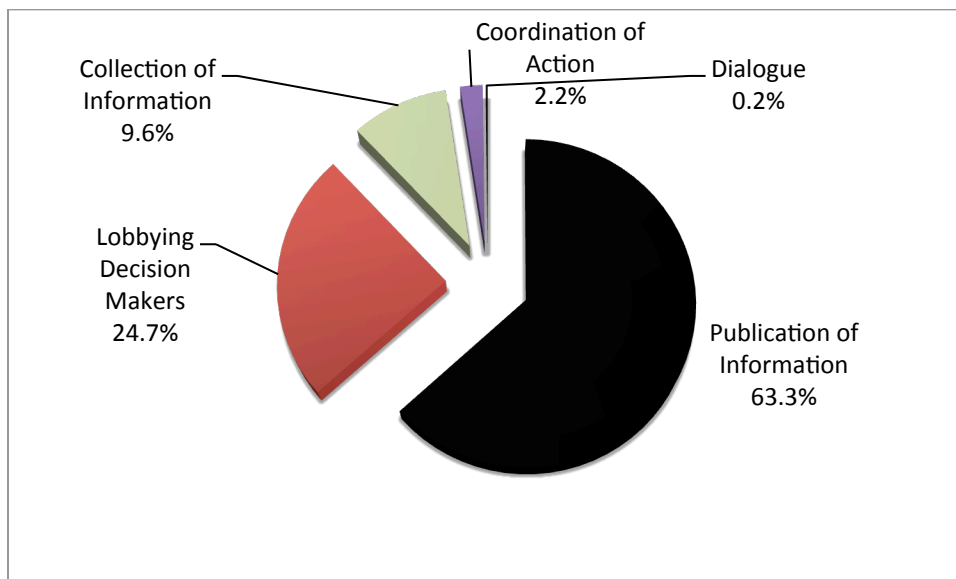


When it comes to the comments of the citizens, 2287 comments in 174 posts were analyzed (MoI: n= 1013 in 55 posts, MFA: n= 434 in 57 posts, MoA: n= 840 in 62 posts). The comments were categorized into five types of online civic engagement: publication of information, collection of information, dialogue, coordination of action, and lobbying decision makers. During the process of coding, spam comments were identified and counted. They were

selected on the basis of being for purposes that are business-related or irrelevant to the work of the ministries or to the public concerns. For example, when a comment by an account with a real name such as Ahmed Elghohry writes on the Page of MoA on August 3, 2014, “Change your photo to a cartoon: <https://mbasic.facebook.com/318434571668749?>” would be considered as spam. The percentage of spam comments to the total number of citizens’ remarks is 3.8% (n= 88 / MoI: n= 54, MFA: n= 14, MoA: n= 20). Thus, in the findings the researcher excluded that number and considered that the data contains a total of 2199 valid comments.

Comments that fall under publication of information are the majority with 63.3% (n= 1392). Lobbying decision makers comes second with 24.7% (n= 543), while 9.6% of the comments are aiming to collect information (n= 210). The last two are collaboration of action with 2.2% (n= 49), and dialogue, which constitutes only 0.2% (n= 5).

Figure 7: Types of Online Civic Engagement on the Ministries’ Pages



These results demonstrate that the public has a great interest in publishing their opinions, sharing information, seeking certain actions by government agencies, and requesting

information and answers on their inquiries. They are, however, less concerned with coordinating actions or soliciting the feedback of their fellow-citizens.

Despite the activism exhibited by the public in their interaction with the government through the latter's social media, they did not really delve much into policy-related issues. Several comments that were coded as publication of information are merely statements of support and in some instances opposition. Such statements include: 'long live Egypt' (Tahya Masr), 'many thanks' (Teslam El Ayady), 'may God help you', 'no comment', and 'hypocrisy has no religion'.

On the other hand, lobbying decision makers does not only incorporate comments about personal matters such as seeking employment, but also remarks about the issues of public interest. Some comments requested the dismissal of unprofessional civil servants, the release of detainees, more security in neighborhoods where criminals operate, and the change of a policy with regard to Egyptian students who follow their basic education in Arab countries, especially in the Gulf where their parents work and live.

Chapter Six: Discussion

Taking the research questions as the departure point, this chapter discusses how the findings relate to the research inquiries of this thesis.

The findings of this study reveal that the use of social media by the Egyptian government contributes poorly to the strengthening of online civic engagement. Numbers demonstrate that citizens are interested in engaging with the ministries through liking their posts, sharing them on their personal Facebook accounts and commenting on them. The content of the interaction of the public with the government provides another evidence that citizens are active in exploiting the ministries' social media to voice their opinions, raise questions and lobby decision makers. This activism, however, is not met with corresponding care from the ministries, which hamper the public from the opportunity of full engagement.

The results of this study manifest the marginal interaction between the ministries and the citizens through their official Facebook pages. The overall percentage of 'interaction posts' in the three ministries is 12.4% (n= 61). The actual percentage could be even worse, because the researcher coded posts as interactive if he found at least one incident of communication between the ministries and the commentators. This means that if a post had 20 questions from the public and the Page answered only one, this post would be considered interactive.

The purpose of the posts by the ministries is another indicator of the one-way, monologic type of communication conducted by the Egyptian government. The researcher studied 491 posts by the three Facebook pages and discovered that 91.7% of the posts (n= 450) are merely outreach in the form of press releases, press statements, videos of interviews or press conferences and other posts of that sort. Only one post out of the 491 is coded as

participatory, aiming at soliciting the feedback of the public on the work of the ministry and seeking their input.

In fact, the ministries contradict themselves. MoI states in the 'About' section of its Facebook page, "This page was created upon the decision of Mr. Mahmoud Wagdy, Minister of Interior, upon his belief that that the continuous fruitful cooperation and communication between the Ministry of Interior and the citizens of our beloved Egypt will lead to the security, safety and stability for our beloved nation," (see Appendix C for original Arabic text). The same Ministry has 0% of interaction with the public. Moreover, 99.4% of its posts are outreach (n= 160).

Additionally, the absence of the moderation of comments posted on the Facebook pages of the ministries could be attributed to the indifference of the ministries with regard to the feedback of the public. If the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands is taken as an example, it will be realized that it takes a very good care of the views of the Facebook users who engage with the Facebook pages affiliated to it. The first paragraph in the introduction of the [terms of use](#) for the Facebook pages of the Dutch Ministry (<https://www.facebook.com/nlembassyegypt/app/279125022197113/>) reads, "We want to hear from you! The Ministry of Foreign Affairs uses Facebook not only to talk about what it stands for and what it does; the Ministry's Facebook pages are also an open forum for people to share their opinions. Your comments and questions are important to us, but we do have a number of rules." This example does not only show the professionalism in handling the feedback of the public, but also implies the existence of an overarching strategy at the Dutch Ministry concerning the use of social media. The reason behind this argument lies in the fact

that the aforementioned terms of use are unified across all the Facebook pages affiliated to the Dutch Ministry. They can be located on the Facebook pages of the Dutch embassies. As a matter of fact, the hyperlink that leads to the terms of use is from the Facebook page of the Embassy of the Netherlands in Egypt. It is understood that the Netherlands is a developed country with a tradition of participatory democracy. Nonetheless, it is still a valid example since social media policies and practices do not require major funds that are only available to rich, developed countries.

Contrary to the marginal interaction between the ministries and the public, the citizens are more engaged into dialogue amongst themselves. The overall percentage in the three Facebook pages is 37.9% (n= 66), which is more than triple the engagement between the ministries and the citizens.

The monologic type of communication conducted by the Egyptian government through the official Facebook pages of its ministries indicates that social media is an untapped communication resource. It also reveals ignorance as the widespread use of social media demonstrates that these tools have a great potential to be important components of interactions between governments and their constituents (Jaeger et al., 2012). More importantly, Mergel (2013a) argued that opening social media platforms to inform the public without responding to their feedback could harm the reputation of the government. This comes at a time of internal and external challenges faced by the Egyptian regime, in addition to constraints that affect its performance.

Interestingly, the marginal interaction between the ministries and the public is not in full agreement with some results reached by Kenawy (2015) who quoted social media officials in

different Egyptian ministries stating that they value the comments, questions and complaints of the public. Kenawy (2015) reported that the officials she interviewed in her study submitted weekly reports to the ministers with the complaints and suggestions posted by the citizens on the official Facebook accounts of the sampled ministries. But even if they did that, this does not imply that any action was taken to address the issues raised by the public. Furthermore, some complaints and suggestions require prompt action, which cannot happen if reports to the ministers are submitted on a weekly basis. Furthermore, the main outcome of Kenawy's study (2015) is that no concrete written policies that monitor and regulate public employees' usage of social media are in place.

In conclusion, the Egyptian government needs to develop a strategy for the use of social media that corresponds to the online civic engagement that exists on social media in general, or with regard to the interaction with the government's social media in particular. Otherwise, the social media platforms affiliated to the government would be merely tools to promote its work and to show that it looks contemporary and up to date.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

This chapter includes the conclusions of the study, its limitations, ideas for future research, and recommendations for a better use of social media by the government.

The study reached four main conclusions. First, the Egyptian government use of social media contributes poorly to the strengthening of online civic engagement. It is indeed true that the adoption of social media by the government in its communication with the public led, in a way or another, to increasing access to government information and services. Nevertheless, the public has been active in exploiting the ministries Facebook pages to voice their concerns and lobby decision makers. The government, on the other hand, kept its communication rigid without benefiting from the features offered by social media. It did not use social media as a way to engage citizens in the decision making process, or in the evaluation of public policies. Only one post out of the 491 analyzed in this thesis is considered participatory, while 91.7% of the posts are merely outreach, self-promotion. It is as if the Egyptian ministries adopted social media as a medium through which it can lecture the audience in a top-down, authoritative setup.

Second, a monologic, one-way model characterizes the type of communication conducted by the Egyptian ministries. The overall percentage of posts where interaction between the ministries and the public occurred is 12.4%. Thus, there is no engagement in 87.6% of the posts, which is quite a lot in a medium that is known of its innovative and new ways for prompt and ongoing interaction between citizens and their governments.

Third, the content of the interaction of the public with the government provides evidence that citizens have a great interest in publishing their opinions, sharing information,

seeking certain actions by government agencies, and requesting information and answers to their inquiries. They are, however, less concerned with coordinating actions or soliciting the feedback of their fellow-citizens.

Finally, though there is marginal interaction between the ministries and the public, citizens are more engaged into dialogue amongst themselves. The overall percentage in the three Facebook pages is 37.9%, which is more than triple the engagement between the ministries and the citizens.

In conclusion, this thesis argues that social media is an untapped communication resource in the context of its utilization by the Egyptian government. This is in conformity with the results of recent studies that showed that the Egyptian government use of social media sites has been mainly focused on disseminating information (Abdelsalam et al., 2013), and propagating and promoting government work and views (El-Khalili, 2013). Nevertheless, it is not in full agreement with some results reached by Kenawy (2015) who interviewed for her research social media officials in different Egyptian ministries. These officials were quoted stating that they value the comments, questions and complaints of the public (Kenawy, 2015).

Limitations

The results of this study are limited to the research technique employed, the government agencies sampled and the time period specified. Results are not generalizable beyond these boundaries.

The study analyzed posts and comments without interviewing the sampled government agencies (ministries) to learn their feedback on the findings, and to try to find answers to the reasons behind their observed social media practices. Nevertheless, the researcher believes

that interviewing social media officials of the three ministries would not have added more depth to this thesis. Kenawy (2015) already interviewed communication directors responsible for running Facebook pages of Egyptian ministries. The interviewees kept repeating how much they valued the comments of citizens on the ministries' social media platforms without providing solid examples that support their argument.

It is also limited to the time period of the second Ibrahim Mahlab cabinet from June 17, 2014 to September 12, 2015. Though the study analyzed relatively recent posts, the researcher realized during the coding process that MFA was more interactive with the public from June to September 2015, while less engaging before that. Thus, if the time period covered was more limited, results could have differed in that specific respect.

The study is also limited to the government agencies sampled. This research analyzed the top three official Facebook pages of Egyptian ministries in terms of the number of 'fans' who like these Pages. The researcher argues that this targeted sampling is sufficient to generalize the results on the performance of the Egyptian ministries and possibly the central government of Egypt. This lies in the fact that the analyzed Pages were the most active among different ministries during the period covered by this research. It has to be stated, however, that generalizing the findings to local government agencies would be difficult since there are so many Facebook pages affiliated to national and local public agencies that could have added more depth to this study.

Future Research

This study examined, among other things, the types of online civic engagement that exist on the Egyptian government's social media. Nonetheless, it would be interesting for future

research to focus more on this area providing more insights than just stating the percentage of each type of online civic engagement. For example, future studies could analyze the topics that are of interest to the public, the stance of the comments; whether supportive, opposing or neutral, and the gender balance or lack thereof.

Another area that could be of interest to researchers would be to study the reasons why the public interacts with the government while the latter seems to be indifferent to their feedback, and how does that affect their perception of the government.

Further research should cover social media accounts affiliated to the government other than that of ministries and national agencies, and to crosscheck the results with the findings of this study. It could be that local government agencies that are more connected to the daily lives of the citizens act differently than those that are more concerned with policy-related issues and long-term strategies.

Another suggested area of research is to conduct a comparative study between the use of social media by the Egyptian government and other governments in the MENA region and see the similarities and differences, in addition to analyzing the reasons behind the observations.

Lastly, it is important to compare the use of social media by the Egyptian government between two different time periods. This would be interesting in finding out if the performance of the government on social media differs from one regime to the other, and the implications of that change if exists. For example, MFA had two different heads of its communication department during the time period covered by this study. The appointment of the current one, who is also responsible for the different communication platforms of the Ministry, was in July

2015. One of the observations during the coding process is that the Ministry was more interactive with the public from June to September 2015, and less engaging before that.

Recommendations

Upon the conclusions of this study, several recommendations are presented for a better use of social media by the Egyptian government in its communication and engagement with citizens. Government agencies should develop strategies with regard to their use of social media platforms. Choosing Facebook as part of the communication strategy of a ministry or government agency requires bearing in mind various issues. These include:

- **Mission:** Ministries and public agencies have to state clearly to the audience their mission and the reasons behind using social media in their interaction with the public. It is also of value to provide a description about their work and mandates.
- **Objectives:** Who is the target audience and what are the goals to be achieved? Specific measurable objectives should be formulated. Ongoing monitoring of Facebook pages is important. Strategies can be adjusted according to the results of the monitoring process.
- **Identity:** There should be guidelines with regard to the central government corporate identity. The Facebook pages affiliated to it have to comply with these guidelines. For example, the emblem of Egypt can be included in the profile pictures of all social media platforms of the government.
- **Interaction:** Citizens usually comment and expect to receive immediate responses. Criteria on how and when to respond should be drawn up. A team or

one person could be assigned to speak on Facebook for the ministry or government agency. Mol has to do more in that regard, but other ministries as well.

- Capacity: Filling and managing a Facebook page require time and the necessary authority to respond to citizens on behalf of a government agency. Directors of communication at public institutions should consider that social media require tailor-made content that is not necessarily similar to the content posted on their websites or other mediums of communication.
- Legal: Privacy and copyright of the public that interacts with the Facebook pages of the government should be respected. The security of their personal data is to be guaranteed. This is of special importance in Egypt where citizens could be arrested for what they write on social media.
- Verification: Pages affiliated to the government have to request from the Facebook administration to be verified as authentic. This is especially crucial in times when every Facebook user can create a Facebook page and impersonate a public figure or institution. So far, the Egyptian government does not seem to give that matter the necessary care since only two ministries have verified Pages.

As for the content of the Facebook pages, there are several things to be considered:

- It is always important to share relevant and stimulating content.
- The administrators of a Page have to interact with citizens and answer their inquiries or refer those with complex questions to an email address of the relevant department at a ministry or government agency. Even at times when

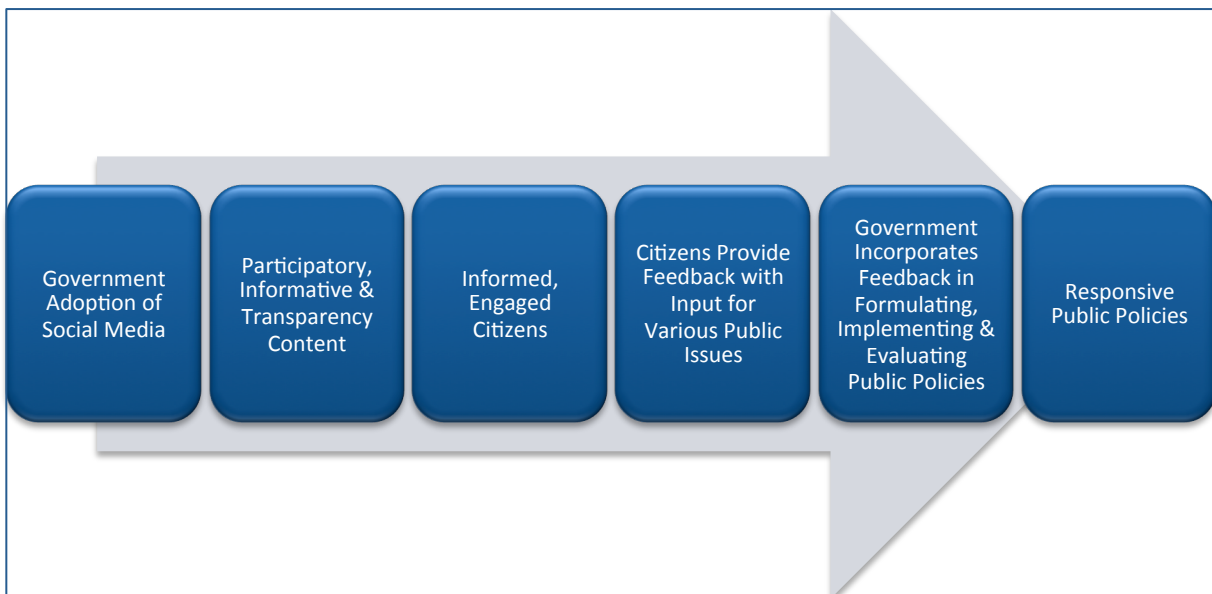
the administrators of a Page cannot respond to a comment, a simple 'like' can make a difference. For example, MFA liked several comments by the public.

- Being personal on a Facebook page of a ministry or government agency is recommended. When responding to a citizen, it is good to mention his/her name in the answer.
- It is of value to provide exclusive content on a Page and show every now and then what happens behind the scenes and the internal operations of a ministry or public institution.
- Text should be always kept short. Posting long press releases and press statements on a Page as done by MoI, MFA and MoA violates the essence of social media.
- A Page has to be updated regularly, but it is not recommended to share content too often in order not to cause irritation and thus push citizens away from a Page. In some instances, MoI posted more than six stories per day. MFA and MoA are not an exception.
- It is always advised to start dialogues on Pages through questions and other types of engaging posts. This shows that a ministry or government agency has interest in the citizens who follow its Page.
- Moderation of comments by the public is important. However, their comments should not be deleted except in cases of offensive, coarse, or vulgar language. In that regard, clear guidelines have to be written and made available to the citizens.

- A Page should not be filled only with feeds (Twitter, hyperlinks to websites without text along with them), since Facebook should add value over and above websites, blogs and Twitter accounts. This is specifically important for MoA which usually updates its Page with links to press releases on its website without even adding anything further to those links.
- It is recommended to publish visually engaging posts and to use a clearly branded profile picture and cover photo.
- Posts should contain, whenever necessary, links, hashtags or mentions (tagging other Pages or Facebook users). This increases the reach of the posts to as many Facebook users as possible. It also facilitates finding posts about topics that are of interest to Facebook users.

Based on the literature, the findings and the recommendations, this thesis proposes the below model for government-citizen engagement on social media.

Figure 8: Model for Government-Citizen Engagement on Social Media



The above-mentioned model suggests that the government adoption of social media through participatory, informative and transparency content would lead to having informed citizens who would be interested to share their feedback with the government regarding various public matters. The government in its formulation, implementation and evaluation of public policies would then take citizen's feedback on board. Consequently, public policies would be more responsive to the needs and views of citizens.

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Appendix A: Content Analysis Coding Scheme

(adapted from Davidson, 2011; Hand & Ching, 2011)

- Analyze all posts by the selected Facebook pages (MoI, MFA, MoA) published on September 12, 2015. Then leave posts published in the following five 'active days'¹¹, and select all posts on the 6th 'active day' for the sample. Continue with the same interval until you reach June 17, 2014.
- Regarding comments by the public, in case there are several posts published on the same day, analyze comments on the first post published on that day, with a maximum of 20 comments per post (the first 20). Start with the comments on the first post on September 12, 2015. Leave posts published in the following five 'active days', and select all comments on the first post on the 6th 'active day' for the sample. Continue with the same interval until you reach June 17, 2014.
- Create an Excel workbook with six different sheets: three sheets for the posts by each Facebook page, and three sheets for the comments of the public on posts by each Facebook page. Thus, each ministry would have two sheets: one for posts, and the other one for comments on posts.
- Copy all sampled posts and comments in the relevant sheet.
- Beside each post and comments on a post, include the date of its publication (day/month/year). In the case of comments, the date of the post from which comments were sampled is to be included and not the different dates of each comment.
- For each post, include the number of likes, shares, and comments as provided by Facebook.

Questions:

1. Does the post include hashtags, mentions (tagging), or hyperlinks?
 - a. Yes.
 - b. No.
2. Does the ministry respond to fans' comments on its posts or like their remarks? Is it 'interaction post'?
 - a. Yes.
 - b. No.
3. What is the purpose of the post?
 - a. Outreach.

¹¹ By active days it is meant that if, for example, a Page posted content on nonconsecutive days such as September 12, 13, 15, 17, 18 and 19, the posts selected for sample on the 6th active day would be the ones posted on September 19.

- i. Content that mainly facilitates self-promotion of ministry work and officials (press releases, press statements, videos of interviews or press conferences, photos).
 - b. Participation.
 - i. Soliciting feedback of the public on the work of the ministry, its Facebook page, or specific ministry policies and initiatives. This could be also content that seeks the active participation of citizens in the work of the ministry.
 - c. Transparency.
 - i. Providing general information about the policies and internal operations of the ministry (internal directives, information meant for civil servants, internal documents about the work of the ministry and its mission).
 - d. Service-related Data.
 - i. Providing a platform for citizens to receive ministry services or data related to such services.
- 4. Is there interaction among the public in at least one comment per post?
 - a. Yes. (Check if people are replying to a specific comment, or mentioning one of the commentators)
 - b. No.
- 5. Under which type of online civic engagement does the comment best fits?
 - a. Collection of Information.
 - i. Questions, specific inquiries or requests for specific information.
 - b. Publication of Information.
 - i. Opinions, rhetoric questions, statements of support, and criticism (all should not seek specific action, otherwise become lobbying, or solicit feedback, thus becoming dialogue). Variables also include links to articles or websites about an issue, and tagging friends in comments.
 - c. Dialogue.
 - i. Participatory comments that solicit feedback on an issue.
 - d. Coordination of Action.
 - i. Comments that seek coordinating actions among the public (protest, meeting, gathering support for a public figure or organization, seeking support for Facebook pages and groups that are not business-related, etc.).
 - e. Lobbying Decision Makers.
 - i. Comments that seek certain actions by the government (complaints, suggestions with specific matters, demanding the change of an

unprofessional civil servant, changing or enacting a policy, asking personal (petition) or public requests (employment), etc.).

- f. OR Spam?
 - i. Irrelevant comments to the work of the ministries or to the public concerns. Also business-related comments. For example, when a comment by an account with a real name such as Ahmed Elghohry writes on the Page of MoA on August 3, 2014, "Change your photo to a cartoon: <https://mbasic.facebook.com/318434571668749?>" it would be considered spam.
6. Does the ministry moderate the comments through deleting spam remarks or content that contains threats, coarse or vulgar language, defamation, and other contributions of that sort?
 - a. Yes.
 - b. No.
7. Does the Facebook page of the ministry like other Facebook pages? What are their types (governmental, NGOs, etc.)?
8. Does the ministry provide its mission and description about itself on its Facebook page?
 - a. Yes.
 - b. No.
9. Does the ministry provide its contact details and a link to its website?
 - a. Yes.
 - b. No.
10. Does the ministry allow fans to post stand-alone comments¹² on its Facebook page?
 - a. Yes.
 - b. No.
11. Does the ministry have disclaimer or guidelines?
 - a. Yes.
 - b. No.
12. Is the Facebook page verified (Facebook confirms it is an authentic Page)?
 - a. Yes.
 - b. No.

¹² A stand-alone comment is what the users post on the ministry's wall. Facebook pages that permit stand-alone comments have a comment box at the top reading "Write something . . ." thus allowing users who are "fans" of the page to publish posts on the page.

Appendix B: Intercoder Reliability

N cases: 386: (60 Posts), (323 Comments), (3 Facebook pages, for present or absent features)

N variables: 13

N coders per variable: 2

#	Variable Name	% Agreement (Holsti's Formula)
1	Purpose of posts	96.7%
2	Interaction between ministries & citizens	100%
3	Posts with hashtags, mentions or hyperlinks	100%
4	Number of likes, shares & comments per post	N/A (Based on Facebook metrics)
5	Type of comments	92%
6	Interaction among public	100%
7	Moderation of comments	100%
8	Verified Page	100%
9	Ministry Facebook page likes other Pages	100%
10	Mission & Description	100%
11	Contact details & link to websites	100%
12	Stand-alone comments	100%
13	Disclaimer & guidelines	100%

Appendix C

Print Screen of the Description of the MoI Facebook Page

The screenshot shows the 'About' section of the Facebook page for the Ministry of Education in Egypt. The page is titled 'Government Organization' and has a cover image featuring the Egyptian flag and the ministry's emblem. The 'About' section is divided into two columns: 'Page Info' and 'PAGE INFO'.

Page Info	PAGE INFO
	Start Date: Founded in 2012
	Address: وزارة الداخلية شارع الشيخ ريحان, 11641
	Short Description: وزارة الداخلية
	Long Description: تهدي وزارة الداخلية تلك الصفحة إلى أبناء مصر الشرفاء مفجري ثورة 25 يناير وإلى شهدائها الأبرار من الشعب والشرطة .. داعين الله عز وجل أن يتغمدهم برحمته ويسكنهم فسيح جناته. لقد تم إنشاء تلك الصفحة بقرار من السيد محمود وجدي وزير الداخلية إيماناً من سيادته بأن التواصل والتعاون الدائم والمثمر بين وزارة الداخلية وأبناء مصرنا الحبيبة سيؤدي إلى تحقيق الأمن والسلام والاستقرار لوطننا الحبيب.

Additional elements visible include 'Timeline', 'About', 'Notes', 'Likes', and 'More' tabs, and a 'Chat' button at the bottom right.

Print Screen of the Facebook Page of the Ministry of Education

The screenshot shows the main Facebook page for the Ministry of Education in Egypt. The page features a large cover image with the Egyptian flag and the ministry's emblem. The page name is 'وزارة التربية والتعليم المصرية' (Egypt Ministry of Education) and it is categorized as a 'Government Organization'. The page has 522,583 likes and is liked by Samar Ali Osman and 21 other friends. A 'Timeline' tab is selected, showing a post from September 30, 2015, by 'Egypt Ministry of Education' with 2 other users. A context menu is open over the page name, showing options like 'Save', 'Suggest Edits', 'Like As Your Page', 'Report Page', 'Block Page', and 'Create a Page'. The page also includes a 'Create Page' button, a 'Recent' list, and a 'Chat' button.