



Facebook credibility: Evidence from Online and Offline Political Participation, Political Contribution, and Platform Efficacy

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Abstract

This study seeks to explore how Egyptian adult users assess Facebook credibility and to test political and non-political factors that predict such credibility, using survey data (N=590). Exploratory factor analysis generated four categories of 16 attributes of Facebook credibility; timeliness, transparency, social impact, and independency. Findings show that both the use of political content of Facebook and reliance on it for political information were limited predictors of some categories of Facebook credibility. In addition, users' evaluation of Facebook as an independent medium was only conditioned to their online political participation. On the other hand, users' views on both the efficacy of Facebook and its positive contribution to the community in addition to their active participation of political content on that platform were strong predictors for the four categories of Facebook credibility. Findings also deliberated the underlying causes of predicting demographic variables for some kinds of Facebook credibility.

Keywords: Facebook credibility; Interactivity: Political participation; Media efficacy; Media dependency; Political contribution

Received: April 08, 2019; **Accepted:** April 25, 2019; **Published:** May 03, 2019

Introduction

Facebook (FB) which became the most widely used social network site in the world [1] is now the most popular one in Egypt that 37 million Egyptians access FB every month with over 22 million or 59% of monthly active people return every day [2]. This is a high percentage compared to the number of users of the rest of social media in Egypt, as Instagram is becoming the 2nd popular social network for Egyptians with 2.7 million while the average for active Twitter users in Egypt accounts for 1.7 million [3]. These data indicate the growing role that FB can play politically, socially, economically, and humanly, because it attracts large segments of society, requiring its users to investigate the credibility and proper planning of information and news exchange. FB has official accounts that broadcast real news, as well as accounts of well-known businesses that are interested in spreading their products to their audiences and potential consumers. There are also individuals and public figures who recognize the importance of credibility in publishing content through FB and other social media sites. However, there are many actors on this platform who lack the professional foundation and are focusing on the sensational news which lack original and reliable sources to win more followers. Such uncertainty aspects affect the credibility of FB at times of the emergence and circulation of important events in community contexts. The management of FB and other social

media individually is a complicated issue because of its greater freedom, and it reflects the user's point of view and individual credibility. This freedom may give credibility to FB more than traditional media, which may be directed by authorities or interest groups, but it remains the questions about the extent of social responsibility and the credibility resulting from that freedom. Also, when touching upon the digital democracy, questions are raised about the feasibility of FB in the political movement, either through the political activity of users on this platform or through their political activity outside of it, resulting from their belief in the credibility of Facebook.

Study Problem

Looking at the pivotal role of FB for communities and users, FB can be an ideal tool for exceeding government media barriers, especially in less fortunate societies in democracy. In addition, FB can contribute positively to social mobility in its various forms. But FB users are often exposed to deceptive operations of fake and false news which are anonymous and unreliable. This leads to FB being a fertile breeding ground for rumors and misinformation and thus spreading the hypnotic awareness. Since FB as a social medium contains abundant political messages [4], this type of

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Citation: Elhadidi MAF. Facebook credibility: Evidence from Online and Offline Political Participation, Political Contribution, and Platform Efficacy. Global Media Journal 2019, 17:32.

serious topics may create political confusion, especially if they contain misinformation or unknowing sources. Therefore, it is important to identify how users are evaluating Facebook's credibility when tackling political topics and discussions.

While there were rare studies about media credibility in Arab world including Egypt, some of them have focused on the relationship between the viewership or listening to regional or international media such as Radio and Television and public trust in the information provided by this kind of media [5,6] and another study has focused on the comparison of public assessment of credibility in television, radio, newspapers, and Internet including online newspapers and social media [7]. Hence, the current study attempts to explore the public assessment of FB credibility, which has become the most widely used in Egypt through which political information is circulated. Also, while previous research concerned the study of the credibility of social media and blogs or the impact of their usage on the political awareness and political participation, the question as to what factors influence the FB credibility when related to political arena still remains unclear. Therefore, the current study is not only aimed at exploring elements of FB credibility but testing the factors predicting it including political elements.

Literature Review

Through many mass communication research to study the credibility of different types of media (audio, video, print and electronic), some define credibility that "it refers to the objective and subjective components of the believability of a source or message" [8] (pg: 156). The credibility of social media is more complex when compared to that of traditional media. This is due to the information revolution and the flow of news on social media and new media platforms faster and diversifying their sources, which creates a state of uncertainty about this engagement and confusion about the adoption of the credibility of that flood of information besides casting doubt on them.

Under previous research on the credibility of old and new media, I can discuss FB credibility in three dimensions: source, medium, and content/ message credibility [9-12].

Source Credibility

The traditional evaluations of source credibility when, for example, are related to representatives of the government or to expertise would be believed to provide reliable information especially when there is a limited number of sources accompanied by the presence of gatekeepers who filter much of information and have the incentive to uphold credibility standards [13]. The dependency of traditional media to authorities or other institutions as sources of information and news leads to the adoption of classical idea associated with the criterion of credibility when followed by the scarcity of information. In the social media environment, there is an independence of the source which is often the user himself who takes an individual behavior of posting and sharing of information. In addition, the source's perceived communication characteristics such as competence, credibility, and attractiveness can be made by the users themselves [14]. As in Twitter, for instance, the source is the person who posts the content [15-17]

and the trustworthiness and merit of tweeted information are determined when the source credibility is taken into account. Also, the more explicit author information available on Twitter leads users to be more trusting [18]. FB source can post text, video, a picture, or avatar of the poster/sender and their name. As the post includes comments, likes, and shares they will be sources of a new information set. This property to connect users to one another via FB gives the opportunity to determine the credibility of information and undermine traditional authorities.

Overall, FB source credibility can be considered in two main perspectives. The first is related to information and news from news organizations or official organizations that are posted or shared via FB. The prevailing with regard to social media is that users tend to trust organizations when they perceive a greater level of interactivity in social media [19]. A previous study has shown that peripheral characteristics of FB news posts may not necessarily serve as strong credibility cues but participants rated higher the credibility of a journalist vs. that of the news brand or the expertise cue [20] while another study found that two-fifths of social networking users receive news from people they follow on services like FB and a fifth get news from news organizations and individual journalists they follow [21]. The other perspective is related to the user-generated content that the user is the source of the message. This kind of sources is viewed with skepticism because sometimes readers do not consider it as a reliable source of information [10] but there are some factors elaborate the user to be a more credible source when he is perceived to have too many friends [22] or when his posts get more likes, shares, and comments [20].

Medium Credibility

This dimension refers to the assessment of credibility that users have of FB as one of the social media sites. It is worthwhile to differentiate between the user who posts or shares the content and FB as a medium. In addition, the impact of FB messages will depend on it as a medium because when individuals have more experience with gaining knowledge through FB, they will develop more trust in the medium [23] (pg: 43).

It should not be limited to measure social media credibility on their design features because FB pages have almost the same layouts. Lee and Ahn [24] indicated that when users get the gratification of using FB as a new medium they will assess it more credible. Then, credibility judgments will be based on user's perception of FB itself such as authenticity, timeliness, and popularity [25] or the judgments grounded on medium dependency, interactivity, and medium transparency [10]. In addition, FB affords some direct application of credibility due to the self-selective nature because users of the platform only get content from self-selected sources or those selected by algorithms to match their self-selected preferences [20] (pg: 6).

FB as a medium to promote a specific social cause was tested in the study by Lee and Ahn [24] who found that when students trusted FB, they were more likely to participate in the binge drinking prevention FB page.

Content Credibility

This dimension states the perceived credibility of the loaded

message on the FB platform. Messages via FB are often repeated by multiple sources (reposting or resharing), leading to user confusion about the source of the content. This source confusion leads users to be unaware of the original source of the information and highlights the need to examine perceptions of the message credibility, regardless of the source or medium of transmission [9]. Giving news feeding via social media, Domingo et al., [26] found that because social media feed is a self-curated collection of content; the users tend more to engage with information when it comes to them via social media. Users' actions of liking or sharing news posts on FB are key indicators of their engagement with the content and determining it credible [21,24]. With the tremendous accumulation of information generated by users [27] it is important to know how readers assess FB content that Keib and Wojdyski [20] found that "users' willingness to like, share or click through to a story are critical actions to the person or brand who posted the content" (pg: 16).

FB lacks quality assurance mechanisms and offers unfiltered information with different levels of quality as a result of the existence of diverse and open sources [28]. Some previous studies have explored factors influencing FB content credibility, for example, Li and Suh [10], found that interactivity, medium dependency, and argument strength were the main dimensions of information credibility via FB. Another study in advertising on FB found that interactivity, advertising avoidance, and privacy were the key factors which influenced consumers' attitudes towards advertising on FB, while credibility was not a significant factor predicting consumer' attitudes towards advertising on FB [8].

Methodology and Hypotheses

A survey method was conducted to collect data within a questionnaire on a sample of adults in Egypt. The questionnaire was evaluated by academics in the Egyptian universities' media departments to measure its validity and then improve its structure and content.

Sample: The interviews were conducted during October 2018 with 590 adults (18 years of age and older) who lived in Egypt and who used the Facebook platform. A simple random sample was used on the basis that each of the members of the community was given an equal opportunity to be selected within the sample. Trained interviewers conducted face-to-face interviews in two different geographical areas in Egypt; Greater Cairo which represents urban regions as it is the capital of Egypt and embraces three big governorates (Cairo, Giza, and Qaliubiya), and Damietta which represents a regional governorate and it also includes rural areas. Differences in socioeconomic status among the respondents were considered by conducting the interviews in three levels of neighborhoods in each governorate. All non-users, refusals, incomplete answers, partial answers, and missing answers were excluded to get the final sample which had 590 complete answers (See demographic variables).

Variables and Measurements

The questionnaire items included dependent and independent variables as follows:

Dependent variable

The questionnaire measured one main dependent variable associated with the respondents' assessments of FB credibility:

Facebook credibility: In this study, I relied on measuring two categories of credibility; FB medium credibility and FB content credibility. The source credibility can be reduced and considered among medium credibility as the study does not deal with specific content and issues with certain sources that are evaluated for credibility. In addition, Li and Suh [10] (pg: 316) reveal that users do not care about "source information credibility when they give a like to a FB page". In other words, the measurements in this study do not deal with comments, likes, and shares of users to evaluate their assessments of the sources. Based on the previous studies [7,10,19,25,29-33] I measured respondents' evaluating of 16 attributes of FB credibility which were categorized in two theoretical dimensions:

- Facebook medium credibility, and
- Facebook content credibility,

Modifying the measurements and attributes to be relevant to this platform as follows:

Facebook medium credibility: Six items were sited to express this variable including; knowledgeable, influential, passionate, independent, transparent, and reliable.

Facebook content credibility: Ten items were sited to express this variable including; authentic, insightful, informative, fair, focused, accurate, timely, popular, In-depth and consistent.

All of the sixteen items of both medium and content credibility were measured on a five-point scale: never=1, little=2, sometimes=3, much=4, and all the time=5. And an exploratory factor analysis was conducted to extract the types of FB credibility.

Independent variables

The questionnaire contained levels of predictors as shown in the following section:

Facebook political content usage: Respondents were asked two questions about the degree of their interest and use of political content in FB:

- The number of days to access per week. The answers ranged from every day, 4-6 days per week, 1-3 days per week to whenever the time is available.
- The number of hours it takes to use political content per day. The answers ranged from 4 hours or more per day, 2-3 hours, 1-2 hours, to one hour or less per day.

Answers of the two questions were grouped in four levels to estimate the extent of political content usage; low=1, middle=2, high=3, and very high=4 ($M=3.66$, $SD=1.07$).

Hypothesis 1: The credibility of Facebook will be significantly predicted by users' usage of political content.

Facebook political content dependency: Based on "media dependency theory", individuals have oriented goals which are conditional upon the resources media afford [34] and may form

dependencies with the media as a means of achieving these goals [35]. Hence, it is vital to raise the value of trust in the media especially when people have no alternative sources to mass media. This trust will lead the audience to be more dependent on the media [36-38]. With regard to those variables of the theory, the users' perception of FB as an exclusive information system will influence their considering FB as more dependent on them [39].

The users were asked about how much they rely on FB if they want to get information on important political issues. This item was measured on a five-point scale: never=1, little=2, sometimes=3, much=4, and all the time=5 ($M=3.66$, $SD=1.43$).

Hypothesis 2: The credibility of Facebook will be significantly predicted by users' reliance on it for political information seeking.

Political participation: Political participation was defined as "activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action— either directly by affecting the making of implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the people's selection of those policies" [40]. Some of the previous studies had linked between political participation as dependent variable predicted by traditional media use [41,42], and by internet and blogs use [43-46]. Also, a study by Lane et al. [47] tested the effects of specific motivations for using social media (i.e., political engagement, relationship maintenance, and self-promotion) on users' sharing of political information when engaged in conversations involving political disagreement. All these studies did not indicate evidence about political participation as an independent variable to alternatively predict media effects. But in this study, I'll try to test it as an independent variable to predict some of FB properties such as its credibility and political contributions.

The questionnaire included eighteen phrases representing activities which respondents answered if they did or engaged in during the past twelve months. The items were classified into two categories:

Offline political participation: This variable included conventional and unconventional political activities that the respondents may have been engaged in throughout the past year. They answered eleven questions about

1. Attending political, cultural or social seminars or discussions,
2. Participation in city, district or county council activities,
3. Communicating with a local official or a member of parliament,
4. Participation in the political marketing of a candidate,
5. Talking to an official about a community matter,
6. Attending a political meeting either with a party or with a candidate for elections,
7. Participating in demonstrations or sit-ins,
8. Voting in parliamentary or political elections,
9. Contacting one of the media institutions,
10. Participation with a group with political or social activity,
11. Participation in political clubs or party committees.

The responses were scaled: yes=1, never=0. These items were calculated ($M=1.32$, $SD=1.45$).

Online political participation: In the era of "digital democracy" previous studies debated that the Web has opened space for political reengagement presenting a potentially more equalitarian chance and the use of Internet has increased by users to convey political messages and express their political views [48-51]. In addition, The Internet lowers the costs of participating given that many of the participatory activities undertaken via the Internet-forwarding emails, watching campaign videos- are low-intensity activities [52] (pg: 10). Such online political activities were measured in the current study through seven items;

- Sending a political message by e-mail,
- Commenting on political issues published on newspaper websites,
- Launching a political or social campaign on the Internet,
- Launching or participating in Hashtag on the Internet,
- Communicating with a politician or an official on the Internet,
- Advertising for a political candidate through the Internet,
- Forming or participating in a group on social media to call for an action or take a certain position. The responses were scaled: yes=1, never=0. These items were calculated ($M=2.14$, $SD=2.01$).

Hypothesis 3: The credibility of Facebook will be significantly predicted by users' political participation.

Interactivity with political topics on FB: One of the interactive capacities of FB is its ability to attract users to use text, images, videos, and links as interactive content [8] (pg: 155) and since offline content such as newspapers, television, and radio are different than online content which would include social media like FB, it is needed to analyze how users' interactivity with political content will influence their attitudes towards FB credibility. This variable was measured through five items to which respondents were exposed in order to determine how they were participating, sharing and interacting with political topics via FB platform: "I usually post my views and thoughts about political issues", "I'm interested in sharing political materials on FB", "I comment on posts bearing political topics", "I'm interested in replying or reacting on comments about political topics", and "I participate in or create Hashtags and pages on FB related to political issues".

For each item, the response options were measured on a five-point scale that included: never=1, few=2, on average=3, very often=4, and always=5. The total scores of the five terms were calculated ($M=14.8$, $SD=4.34$).

Hypothesis 4: The credibility of Facebook will be significantly predicted by users' interactivity with political content.

Facebook efficacy: Previous studies related to media efficacy had focused on individuals' perceptions of how much traditional and online news media help them to understand and solve complex issues [53-55]. A recent study by Hocevar, Flanagan and Metzger [56] measured the efficacy of social media and its relationship to the trustworthy of information shared via them. Politically, Facebook efficacy refers to the extent to which users perceive FB

content to be helpful to understand political issues and to solve problems related to complex political topics and social affairs.

Guided by previous research [57], respondents evaluated the usefulness of four types of actions through four items: "FB can highlight an issue to attract more attention to it", "Through FB, complaints can be presented and communicated to the relevant officials or authorities", "FB helps solve many common problems and issues", and "FB can be used to advertise or market an idea or topic". The items were measured on a five-point scale: never useful=1, little=2, sometimes=3, much=4, and useful all the time=5 ($M=14.44$, $SD=2.95$).

Hypothesis 5: The extent of perceived Facebook efficacy by users will significantly predict the credibility of this platform.

Political contributions of Facebook: Previous studies [58,59] showed that social media played a key role in the Egyptian uprisings of January and February 2011, and Abdulla [58] revealed that "this platform has provided new avenues for expressing critical views, challenging established media entities, and organizing against the government" (pg: 1). Since the revolution, the Egyptian use of social networking has increased. Gad [60] (pg: 6) reveals that:

Egyptians used Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to send millions of internet links, news, articles, videos, and free campaigns to people all over the world and news quickly spread because Twitter allowed Egyptians to upload information in as it happened and write comments about their government. Social media allowed the free speech that wasn't allowed by the government.

These roles played by social media for political mobility and democracy in Egypt are not always seen as the prevailing situation as there are many negatives and concerns associated with their contributions to the political process, such as increased political tension, the spread of hate speech, incitement, distorting the reputation of others and the spread of anonymous rumors.

The questionnaire included ten items about the respondents' views of how FB contributed to the political sphere in Egypt. Six items were related to positive contributions; "FB has contributed to marketing politicians for their programs and activities", "FB has contributed to the formation of public opinion towards political and social issues and events", "FB has contributed to clarifying the actual reality of political and social issues", "FB has provided opportunities for interaction with politicians and candidates", "FB has contributed to the creation of a public political sphere that promotes democratic practice", and "FB has provided opportunities for oversight of the performance of government, politicians and political elites". These items were measured on a five-point scale: never=1, little=2, sometimes=3, much=4, and all the time=5 to express the positive political contributions ($M=20.97$, $SD=5.34$).

The other four items were related to negative contributions; "FB is concerned only with controversial matters and increases conflict between users", "FB has increased the conflict between political parties and political forces", "FB has contributed to the increase of political tension in the country", and "FB has played a role in promoting rumors and discrediting others". and were reversed in the same scale ($M=10.07$, $SD=3.349$).

Hypothesis 6: The credibility of Facebook will be significantly predicted by users' believe in its political contributions.

Demographic variables: The study used four independent demographic variables: age, measured with a four-group scale; 18-29=1, 30-less than 40=2, 40-less than 50=3, and 50 years old and above=4 ($M=1.80$, $SD=.91$); gender, male coded=1; female coded=0 ($M=.36$, $SD=.48$); education level, measured with a four-point scale; less than high school=1, high school or some college=2, college degree=3, postgraduate, master or PhD degree=4 ($M=2.78$, $SD=.61$); and income, measured with a six-point scale; less than 2000 Egyptian Pounds=1, 2000- less than 4000 EGP=2, 4000- less than 6000 EGP=3, 6000- less than 8000 EGP=4, 8000-less than 10000 EGP=5, and 10000 Pounds or more =6 ($M=2.62$, $SD=1.44$).

Hypothesis 7: The credibility of Facebook will be significantly predicted by users' demographic variables (age, gender, education, and income).

Statistical treatments: The exploratory factor analysis was conducted with the use of principal components procedure on factors selected for having an Eigenvalue of greater than 1 for extraction and the Varimax method of rotation with suppressing the absolute values less than .60, and all reliability measures were 0.7 or higher. To test the hypotheses, the study conducted a linear regression analysis by using "Enter Model" to test how all kinds of FB credibility were regressed on the independent predictors.

Results of Factor Analysis on FB Credibility

The analysis explored the following factors:

As shown in **Table 1**, four factors of FB credibility were extracted through exploratory factor analysis and they all altogether explained 67.14% of the total variance. The four factors were built through 12 qualities of credibility for Facebook. Four qualities were removed because of their low loading values; "FB provides insightful opinions and views", "FB highlights negative and positive aspects of society without prejudice", "FB is characterized by the depth of its handling of subjects and provision of sufficient evidence" and "FB contributes to reaching a consensus opinion or trend representing the general majority". The loading factors were:

- Timeliness ($M=15.21$, $SD=2.999$) was loaded with four qualities of FB content credibility which express how this content is timing in and keeping path with the latest events and social activities.
- Transparency ($M=11.63$, $SD=3.45$) was loaded with mixed four qualities, two of them represent FB credibility as a medium; "FB is transparent and includes all opinions in addressing issues and events" and "FB is trustworthy and reliable", while the others represent FB content credibility; "FB content conveys the true picture of issues and events" and "The content of FB is usually accurate". This factor reveals that users acknowledge Facebook's limpidity as a platform as they see it in its content.
- Social Impact ($M=12.31$, $SD=1.97$) was loaded with three qualities of FB credibility as a medium that show how FB affects

the community when users believe in its ability to create empathy for issues as well as an important source of information.

- Independency ($M=3.17$, $SD=1.24$) was loaded with one quality which distinguishes FB as an independent médium (**Table 1**).

Testing Hypotheses and Discussions

As shown in **Table 2**, there is some support to the first and second hypotheses by indicating positive regressed correlations. For the first hypothesis, Egyptian users' perception of FB as an independent medium was positively predicted by the extent of their political usage of FB. This result is consistent with what Johnson and Kaye [31] has produced that the greater the public's use of a medium, the more credible they are to judge it. Since FB became a new medium which creates aspirations for more using, the users will apply the credibility of that medium [10] and because FB is characterized as independent of official and non-official authorities and as independent of the media controlled by corporates and authorities, it provides more credibility to the political information that is sought and shared by users. The features of the FB platform allow users to choose the content they receive from friends or sources that they have already identified to match their self-selected preferences, therefore, this platform is characterized by a high degree of credibility due to this self-

selective nature [20]. All these factors were related to Egyptian users' evaluation of Facebook as an independent medium in its content and sources (**Table 2**).

In the second hypothesis, users' reliance on FB for using and seeking political content positively predicted only their assessment of Facebook's social impact in society. Therefore, Egyptian users who rely on FB for political content are likely to consider it a more credible source than other media and non-media sources. This finding is consistent with the findings of the study by Johnson and Kaye [31] who found that "the more politically interested users rely on social network sites for political information the more likely they are to deem these venues as credible" (pg: 965). Whereas the peer review process can lead to an increase in the medium credibility [31], FB users will rely more on the political content than other traditional and online media because it allows them to read and write in-depth and transparent messages [61]. Such transparency which was perceived by the reliance on the FB political content would become effective in integrating Egyptian users with either the content or with each other to reflect the effectiveness and the influential role of FB on individuals and communities when arising the debate on political issues. From the functional alternative paradigm which was confirmed in previous studies [62-64], my findings reveal that Facebook

Table 1. Factor loading for Facebook credibility.

Factors Descriptive	Mean	SD	Factors loading			
			1	2	3	4
F1: Timeliness						
FB content is always provided with the latest news and events	3.99	0.86	0.696	0.242	0.274	-0.031
The content of FB always keeps pace with important events	3.88	0.936	0.728	0.195	0.322	0.097
FB content takes an interest in mainstream issues and public opinion	3.8	0.916	0.805	0.217	0.078	0.091
The content of FB is very much related to the general culture of society	3.54	0.949	0.719	0.052	0.27	0.07
F2: Transparency						
FB is transparent and includes all opinions in addressing issues and events	3.04	1.06	0.232	0.688	0.118	0.345
FB content conveys the true picture of issues and events	3	1.004	0.323	0.738	0.279	0.086
The content of FB is usually accurate	2.94	1.018	0.268	0.756	0.135	-0.028
FB is trustworthy and reliable	2.66	1.023	0.016	0.888	0.122	0.124
F3: Social Impact						
FB has an influential role in individuals and communities	4.13	0.795	0.252	0.102	0.825	0.163
FB has the ability to create empathy with different issues and events	4.13	0.794	0.321	0.069	0.686	0.179
FB is characterized as a broad source of information and knowledge	4.05	0.851	0.044	0.313	0.742	-0.379
F4: Independency						
FB is independent and not subject to the control of the Authority	3.17	1.243	0.076	0.228	0.11	0.87
Eigenvalue			6.816	1.64	1.209	1.076
% of variance explained			42.602	10.25	7.557	6.726
Cronbach’s Alpha (Reliability scores)			0.836	0.861	0.732	----
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy			0.882			

Table 2. OLS Regression Analysis Results Examining Predictors of FB Credibility.

Predictors	Credibility factors							
	Timeliness		Transparency		Social Impact		Independency	
	Beta	t-score	Beta	t-score	Beta	t-score	Beta	t-score
FB political content usage	0.046	1.217	-0.014	-0.382	-0.046	-1.22	0.127	2.90**
FB political content dependency	0.015	0.415	0.062	1.66	0.091	2.41*	0.065	1.493
Political participations								
Online participation	-.004-	-0.087	-0.074	-1.7	0.046	1.06	0.209	3.93***
Offline Participation	-0.058	-1.28	0.022	0.481	-0.053	-1.16	-0.002	-0.039
FB interactivity	0.173	4.06***	0.217	5.04***	0.205	4.74***	0.151	3.01**
FB efficacy	281	6.74***	0.161	3.83***	0.455	10.74***	0.049	1.01
Political contributions								
Positive contributions	0.316	7.61***	0.419	9.99***	0.076	2.03*	0.238	4.90***
Negative contributions	0.028	0.838	0.052	1.56	0.004	0.129	0.074	1.909
Demographic variables								
Age	-0.058	-1.54	0.063	1.67	0.044	1.15	0.127	2.90**
Gender (male)	-0.068	-1.85	-0.006	-0.164	-0.078	-2.08*	0.003	0.076
Education			-0.01	-0.293	-0.03	-0.837	0.009	0.232
Income	0.099	2.71**	0.035	0.945	0.027	0.728	-0.147	-3.44***
R	0.634		0.626		0.619		0.422	
R square	0.402		0.392		0.384		0.178	
Adjusted R square	0.39		0.38		0.371		0.161	
F change	32.35***		31.06***		29.94***		10.44***	
Degrees of freedom=12, *p ≤ .05, **p ≤ .01, ***p ≤ .001., N=590								

platform can displace other traditional and new media to satisfy Egyptian users' needs to political content when they consider it more credible and influential in society.

With regard to the third hypothesis, there was no support for offline respondents' political participation to predict FB credibility. Only online political participation have predicted the perception of FB as an independent medium. This finding is not consistent with previous studies who found that users who consider social media as a credible source of political news are those who engage in offline political activities such as participating in or interesting in an election campaign, voting, performing civic duties, and volunteering behavior [65-69]. But my finding can be foreseen by what the Internet and social media, in particular, have made available of "digital democracy" that the space has become more open to users to reintegrate politically [48,51] and technologically participate and engage in public affairs if they are aware of the independence of their new medium. This sense of independence of the FB platform generates what Yilmaz [70] has acknowledged as "the optimistic viewpoint" that the Internet has given way to mass mobilization with low cost leading to more levels of political participation. Through Facebook, Egyptian users could present their ideas without any restrictions from the ruling authority that there is no kind of privilege and monopoly of some people, groups, and dominant ideological and intellectual tendencies.

Table 2 shows full support to the fourth hypothesis that interactivity with political content predicted the four types of credibility and considerable support to the fifth hypothesis which produced a positive regressed relationship between respondents' perception of Facebook efficacy and their assessments of all timeliness, transparency, and social impact of

FB. These correlations mean that the high level of interactivity and efficiency of FB users leads them to further embrace the credibility of FB as both a medium and its content.

Regarding interactivity with political content, previous studies have shown that users of social media tend to trust information on these tools when they are at higher levels of interactivity [10,61]. Since FB is characterized as a social platform which depends on the use of smart technology devices, it allows users to share and interact with topics and events and participate in the discussion and modify the content that users create [71] where they became producers and consumers of political content [72] to create what Bruns [73] terms "produsage" that there are no boundaries between producer (sender) and consumer (receiver) because users create the content for each other. In addition, while FB users are always looking to ensure the delivery of their messages to others and have an impact on humanitarian causes including political debates [74], all these effects are conditional on the achievement of an appropriate amount of credibility both for the political content and the source.

Regarding FB efficacy, my findings are compatible with the study by Hocevar, et al. [57] who found that the shared content of social media was assessed to be more trustworthy by users with higher social media self-efficacy than those with a lower level. In the current study, Egyptian users with a higher rating for the efficacy of FB will consider uploaded political information and opinions on this platform more credible and thus are more vulnerable to what others publish via FB. Such consumption of the political content via FB may provide users with new information or views on political affairs so as to support and market attitudes, reinforce current values, or perhaps ignore information that conflicts with their political views [65,72,75]. Some studies have

suggested that the users can better recall the content of the website when it is considered to be more credible than others [76] that their impression about that medium will, in turn, affect their cognitive processing of the content [48]. Therefore, users' awareness of the adequacy of FB in explaining and simplifying complex political issues is crucial to understanding the positive relationship between FB efficacy and its credibility.

There was full support to the sixth hypothesis with significant positive regressed relations between users' believe in the positive role of FB in political contributions and the four categories of FB credibility. These positive relationships denied the existence of a relationship between users' perception of the negative role of FB in political contributions and FB credibility as shown in **Table 2**. The positive political role of FB from Egyptian users' views reflects their belief in the availability of this platform to introduce democratic communication between them by turning it into an arena for free expression of all opinions and trends and to allow the public to express their views on the intellectual and political projects, and to express their problems online.

There was some support to the seventh hypothesis with achieving some regressed relations between demographic variables of the respondents and some kinds of FB credibility as shown in **Table 2**. Older respondents considered FB to be more independent than the younger ones. This result may be due to the fact that younger users rarely verify information [56] while older users tend to express their opinions and trends or share posts about various issues, believing that FB is a suitable platform for such media practices and its sources are independent of media institutions. Although previous studies have shown that younger users rely more on the Internet and social media to obtain information on public affairs and political campaigns [77,78], the result of the current study indicates that there is an increase in FB usage and its political content among older Egyptian users.

Females were more assessing the social impact of FB than males. This result is due to the fact that females tend to use social media more than males for social activities such as communication, posting, sharing photos and information [79,80], and engaging in the interpersonal discussion online [81] and they tend to more social activities with the aim of expressing them on social media [82,83]. Doing such activities stems from the appreciation of the social effectiveness of Facebook by female users who believe in the role of this platform in creating friends' interaction and sympathy towards the political content they publish.

The timeliness of FB was adopted more by respondents with lower educational level than the highest ones. Shariff et al. [18] explain this result that the more educated respondents may have a higher level of experience that enables them to be more careful in making credibility judgments. As the current study shows, the most educated users have been appreciative of Facebook's credibility based on timeliness attribution of content which requires users to be more sensitive to this content and its requirements to keep up with the issues, ideas, and general culture prevailing in society. The same positive relationship was found by users with the higher income who also rated the timeliness of FB more than the highest level but they evaluated FB less independent than users with lower income. This last finding

can be clarified with my viewpoint that users with fewer income levels feel the traditional media are not achieving their interests and priorities because they are not independent of government, political or economic control, therefore, they do not trust them and consider alternative media, such as social media, as more independent and remote from those types of control.

Conclusion

This study relied on a survey on a sample of Egyptian adults of FB users to examine the political and non-political factors which predict FB credibility. The study extends the findings of previous research on the credibility of social networks sites and FB in particular. Exploratory factor analysis extracted four factors (timeliness, transparency, social impact, independency) reducing 16 qualities related to FB credibility. As predicted, some of these four factors were predicted by various variables. Although some predictors such as the use of political content, the dependency on FB for gathering and using political information, and users' online political participation were predicting some of the credibility factors, the effects have grown with other three indicators: users' interaction with political content, their appreciation of FB efficacy, and their assessment of Facebook's positive contribution to the political life in Egypt.

These high evaluations of Egyptian users for the credibility of Facebook based on those last three factors illuminate that Facebook has become a major determinant of what formats public opinion in Egypt, and provides users with a lot of information through which they get acquainted with public affairs and the knowledge of political figures as well as its role in public debates and the electoral process as a whole. Through this platform, the political truth is built with the participation of users who have roles in controlling the content.

Facebook credibility has been proven by some demographic variables of Egyptian users. These influential relationships confirm the diversity of user adoption models for Facebook's credibility, which reveals the increasing importance of political message producers and organizers of the political campaign taking into account the individual, social and physical differences among users.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The study showed that the Facebook platform is capable of mobilizing Egyptian users for electronic political participation which is manifested in the broadening of the expression of their political views and beliefs, participation in political and social activities and joining electronic campaigns. The fact that Egyptians have accounts and opportunities to participate in groups formed through Facebook has opened the door to political practice in cyberspace. This means that the political aspect has become a fundamental variable for the practices of Egyptian users via FB, which contributed to the oscillation of political interactions between the virtual and the real world.

The independency of FB which was assessed by users highlights the need for further exploration of the credibility of the source,

particularly as it relates to specific issues and topics raised on this platform. This also extends to measuring the credibility of the groups' creators that mobilize users to engage in and investigating how groups' sources are managing the campaigns they launch and how users engage and respond to them as a predictor of these sources credibility. As the independency of the media is closely related to democracy and its principles, the transition of this independency to FB guarantees the freedom of opinion and expression at this platform to achieve a real role for the performance of its social functions, including self-censorship of the society, representation of all communities and non-alignment of other communities. All these factors help Facebook users to participate effectively in public life.

The results provide an instructive field for politicians, political candidates, and political campaigners when using social media, especially FB to introduce themselves to the masses. They must build a sufficient amount of interactivity with users to ensure that they are attracted to what is being disseminated in this platform and to learn about the reaction feedback of the masses towards those campaigns and content. This interactivity also requires the

creation of content that audiences feel is credible, reliable and useful to them.

Future research can be geared toward studying the effects of FB users and groups on the political and social agenda of the government by imposing specific events and issues that may be marginalized or beyond the authorities' concerns. Social media have become platforms that are free to convey information, interact with issues and events and thus have the ability to influence decision-makers.

There are some political variables needed to be discovered in Egypt and Arab world such as partisan and political affiliation, political information, political interest, and political efficacy to test their relationships with political use of social media.

As a result of the current work, Facebook poses on Arab governments with a great challenge to develop their media, free it from the rigid language and gain more credibility and free it from excessive publicity. With alternatives such as Facebook, governments will not only find themselves isolated from the media, but they may find themselves the target of attacks that may come from good intentions and national motives.

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