

Chapter 52

Utilizing Facebook by the Arab World Governments: The Communication Success Factor

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the importance of social media as a communication channel, and the reasons that lead governments to adopt such channel in their communication. Twelve Arab governments out of all twenty-two Arab countries adopted such strategy and were included in the authors' sample. Governments who adopted such a channel successfully communicated with citizens utilizing commonly used post properties (i.e. Likes, Comments and Shares). This study found that Arab governments posted news and information on Facebook with an average of 102.58 posts per year, which indicates that posting over Facebook is very poor. Also, it is found that using multimedia with different types lead to more communication from the stakeholders compared with posts that didn't use it. Such richness in media improved the communication intensity and lead to communication success. The second major contribution of this study is to build the TPCC index for measuring communication success. Such composite index is an integrated measure from four major indices; transparency, participation, collaboration, and comfort. Detailed results, conclusions, limitations, and future work are explained further.

1. INTRODUCTION

Government in the Arab Region are suffering from the lack of trust between them and their citizens, where corruption, limited accountability, lack of transparency, and poor public service, are all major issues that need to be resolved (Arab Social Media Report, 2014). Hofmann, Beverungen, Räckers and Becker (2013) argued that many governments have problems in their communications with their stakeholders due to the low budget and because they consider the communication with stakeholders as minor priority.

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Governments used the traditional ways of communication such as newspapers, radio, and television to promote their policies and services. Such channels are one-way and miss the feedback of stakeholders, which leads to low participation from stakeholder's side.

In the Arab world, the relationship between governments and citizens was strict and harsh, where the autocratic leadership dominates most countries (Attia, Aziz, Friedman & Elhusseiny, 2011). Diamond (2010) stated that Arab governments have deficiencies in their democracy and sometimes they have no democracy at all. However, Islam as a religion adapted democracy through "Shura" and ignored the autocratic style of governance (Klischewski, 2014).

The Arab world is perceived as a group of rich countries who depend on the income generated from oil and gas exporting. On the other hand, more than half of Arab countries have financial pressures. Finally, most of Arab countries have issues in accountability and higher rates of taxes (Diamond, 2010; Salih, 2013). However, strong intelligence and sophisticated penetration systems are shaping the relationship between citizens and their governments. Frangonikolopoulos and Chapsos (2012) proclaimed that Arab governments have few civil societies with political oppositions because of the massive violation of human rights. The basics of human liberties in the Arab world, such as freedom of expression, freedom of press, and freedom of organization and association, are all tightly controlled.

Based on previous research, we can conclude that there is a communication problem between Arab world governments and their stakeholders. Such problems come from the autocratic systems prevailing in these countries that neglected such attraction for communication from both sides; citizens and government. This paper is organized as follows: the following section will review the literature related to social media, e-government and social media, and communication success. The third section describes the method used to conduct research, followed by the analysis and discussion. Finally, conclusions, limitations, and future work are explained also.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

It is important to utilize all communication channels available for governments to reach out for citizens and understand their needs. The utilization of social media is one of the options open for governments in the Arab region. Social media or Web 2.0 applications are spreading widely among young citizens and even all categories of ages. Based on that, we will try to understand the contribution of such applications to the communication process between citizens and governments.

2.1 Web 2.0 and Social Media

Web 2.0 technologies enabled organizations to search for employees to determine resources effectively, link employees with customers, author content through employees and customers collaboration, tag to facilitate the process of organizing and filtering content, and finally, enable the extensions by sharing complex multi-media content and signals for change deployment (Chun & Reyes, 2012). Web 2.0 is defined as "a networked platform, spanning all connected devices that encourage collaboration in terms of the creation, organization, linking and sharing of content" (Picazo-Vela, Gutiérrez-Martínez & Luna-Reyes, 2012, p. 5).

The social media concepts are engaged with Web 2.0 and emerged as an application that attracts consultants, experts, and researchers, where they can gain benefits from using it in their fields (Kaplan &

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