

Developing Social Media Policy for Public Agencies in Egypt

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Abstract

The use of social media in governments is growing rapidly all over the world. Social media provides public agencies with diverse tools that facilitate their engagement with the public. However, social media raises different privacy, security and legal issues that need to be addressed in proper policy guidelines. In Egypt, while social media in government is relatively new, it is widely used at all levels of government. By logging on Facebook or Twitter you can follow most of Egyptian ministries' releases and news. However, the Egyptian government lacks having social media policies that regulate the use of social media. After interviewing social media officers in different Egyptian ministries, it has been found that they do not follow concrete written policies that regulate public employees' use of social media. Being interested in the power of social media in public agencies, this paper suggests a social media policy that provides guidance on how public employees can efficiently and securely use official social media to communicate with the public. To achieve this purpose, the methodology adopted includes a review of the existing research on social media policies, analysis of current social media policies in different countries, and interviews with social media officials in a sample of Egyptian Ministries to examine how they manage their use of social media. The proposed policy is flexible and can be used by any public or even private organizations willing to use social media to interact with their target audience.

Keywords: Social media, Policy, Analysis, Government, Egypt

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Introduction

Social media has redefined how people interact and communicate across geographical boundaries and exchange information. Due to its large popularity, it creates great incentive for the public sector to benefit from its potentials. Social media provides a sphere for immediate, interactive, and fast communications among different agencies and individuals (Porter, 2008; Cardenas, 2013).

In the last few years, the use of social media in governments has generated discussions among experts due to its great potential for e-government (Pirolli, Preece, & Shneiderman, 2010). Governments started to use social media to deliver services to citizens, reach out for stakeholders (Chang & Kannan, 2008; Bertot et al., 2012), disseminate information to residents, boost citizens engagement in policy development discussions (Bertot et al., 2012; Wyld, 2008, Chun et al., 2010; Hanson, 2008; Bertot, Jaeger, Munson, & Glaisyer, 2010) and achieve transparency, collaboration and service quality (Bertot, et al., 2010; Jaeger, Bertot & Grimes, 2010; Bertot et al., 2012).

Despite the great benefits and promises that social media offer to governments, several challenges are associated with its use in government. Some of these challenges relate to privacy, security, and legal issues (Bertot, et al., 2012; Bryer & Zavattaro, 2011; Dadashzadeh, 2010; Landsbergen, 2010; Sherman, 2011; vela et al., 2012). To mitigate such challenges and ensure successful use of social media, experts believe that governments should develop policies that regulate their use of social media (Vela et al., 2012; Cardenas, 2013; Hrdinova et al., 2010; Freeman & Loo, 2009).

In Egypt, social media were firstly used by Egyptians as tools for entertainment, then it has become a venue for public opinion expression and public mobilization especially during the 25th of January revolution. Before the revolution, the Egyptian government didn't pay much attention to social media. However, when the revolution took place, the government started to realize how influential and crucial social media are. Egyptian government started to have huge presence on social media. Different ministries initiated their first Facebook pages right after the revolution to reach young Egyptians (El-Khalili, 2013; Abdelsalam, Reddick & Gamal, 2013; Khodeir & Khalifa, 2014). Since the 25th of January revolution, Egyptians' use of social media surpassed all expectations. Statistical data shows that Facebook users in Egypt rose from 4.2 million in 2011 (Abdullah, 2013) to 20 million in 2014 (MCIT Research department, 2014). In addition, Facebook became the most commonly used website by government (Abdelsalam, Reddick & Gamal, 2013). While the use of social media in Egyptian government is recent, the development of relationships between government and citizens is growing fast. Yet, there is still no guideline for the use of social media in Egyptian government. Through semi-structured interviews with government officers in different Egyptian ministries, the lack of social media policies was clear, and the need for clear social media guidelines became indispensable.

The main purpose of this paper is to provide a policy guide that leads public agencies into secured and efficient use of social media. This was accomplished by reviewing the existing research to find out the key elements of social media policies, analyzing social media policies in different countries to identify their addressed policy issues,

and finally assessing the use of social media in a number of Egyptian ministries to examine how they manage their social media pages and explore challenges they face during implementation

To draw a representative sample, I have classified Egyptian ministries into three main categories: service ministries, economic ministries, and sovereign ministries. Based on this classification, I have drawn a purposive sample to represent this classification by choosing the Ministry of Supply and Internal Trade (MSIT), the Ministry of Planning, Monitoring and Administrative Reform (MPMAR), and the Ministry of Finance (MOF). These three ministries represent different levels of government in Egypt; in addition, social media plays an important role in delivering their services.

Methodology

This study is a qualitative study that includes literature review, policy analysis and semi-structured interviews with social media officials in the Ministry of Supply and Internal Trade, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Planning, Monitoring and Administrative Reform. Officials who were interviewed in my research are as follows: the director of Ministry of Finance's portal and IT manager, the manager of the publishing department and director of Ministry of Supply and Internal Trade's portal, and the electronic content officer at the Ministry of Planning, Monitoring and Administrative Reform. These officials were selected as they are the executives in charge of managing social media pages in the three ministries

Social Media Policy

Social media policies are different from other governmental policies. They are more flexible to adjust with the changing nature of social media. Social media policy can be defined as a shared policy of conduct that is set to guide employees who share content online on behalf of the agency they work at or on their personal social media pages. Social media policies offer assistance on how to regulate employees use of social media to interact with the public (Mergel & Greeves, 2013). They address managerial issues such as employee access to social media sites, account management, definition of adequate use, proper employee conduct, and citizen conduct (Mergel, 2012; Hrdinova et al., 2010). Moreover, they discuss privacy and legal issues, for instance, copy rights limitations, freedom of speech boundaries, and security measures (Newman, 2009).

Policies can be developed as a bottom-up or a top-down initiative. However, it has been found that both approaches have limitations, as social media implementation needs collaboration between all levels of government to be efficient (Mergel, 2012). Thus, multiple levels of government need to collaborate and coordinate to make the best use of social media and overcome potential risks that may occur.

Research on Social Media Policies

Studies on what social media policies should include are very limited. Research papers generally address what social media policies should consider. Most studies focus their scope on local and federal governments in United States. Zimmer (2012) and Cardenas (2013) analyzed social media policies in local governments. Zimmer

(2012) studied local public agencies in California. He found that 52% of his sample does not have formal social media policies. Among agencies that have social media policies, the elements found were: statement of purpose, account management, employee conduct, definition of social media, social media access, account monitoring, content management, citizen conduct and record retention. In addition, Cardenas (2013) examined social media policies in different local agencies in Virginia, Arizona, Minnesota, California, New Jersey and Indiana states. The elements varied from one policy to another, but most of them were: statements of purpose, security issues, institutional tasks, legal issues and acceptable use.

On the other hand, Mergel & Greeves (2013) studied federal governments in United States. They highlighted the importance of considering the hierarchal structure of the organization when designing a social media policy. Tasks and responsibilities should be clear and information should be accessible. From their interviews with federal officials, they found that social media policy should include citizen conduct and content management guidelines.

Finally, Hrdinova et al. (2010) introduced a framework of eight fundamental elements for an effective social media policy based on the analysis of 26 social media policies and interviews with 32 public officials in United States. The eight elements covers: employee's access to social media, privacy issues, legal concerns, account management procedures, public code of conduct, content production and management, employee conduct, and defines the acceptable use of social media.

Analysis of Existing Social Media Policies

Since most previous studies were focused on United States, I added to this review by analysing policies that are currently adopted by governments in different countries and were published online such as Government of Canada, Government of South Africa, Government of India, United Arab Emirates Government and Queensland government in Australia. My analysis found that almost all of them address the eight fundamental elements developed by Hrdinova et al (2010) and expanded on it adding objectives, target audience, communication strategies, communication team, risk mitigation, monitoring and evaluation. Policy details are summarized in Table 1 on the next page.

Table 1: Reviewed Social Media policies

Government	Date published	Policy elements
Queensland Government in Australia¹	December, 2010	Eight fundamental elements Added target audience, risk assessment, communication strategies and monitoring
United Arab Emirates Government²	January, 2011	Eight fundamental elements Added risk mitigation, assign communication team and monitoring
Government of South Africa³	April, 2011	Eight fundamental elements Added objectives, target audience, assign communication team, risk assessment, monitoring and evaluation.
Government of Canada⁴	November, 2011	Eight fundamental elements Added target audience, risk assessment, communication strategies and evaluation
Government of India⁵ (Department of Electronics and Information Technology, Ministry of Communications & Information Technology)	No date	Eight fundamental elements Added objectives, communication strategies, monitoring and evaluation

From this analysis, it has been concluded that the eight fundamental elements addressed by Hrdinova et al. (2010) are representing major policy elements in governments. In addition, other essential policy elements were added. Based on this

¹Retrieved from: <http://www.qgcio.qld.gov.au/products/qgea-documents/547-business/2474-official-use-of-social-media-guideline>

² Retrieved from: <http://www.fahr.gov.ae/Portal/Userfiles/Assets/Documents/884dd373.pdf>

³ Retrieved from: http://www.gcis.gov.za/resource_centre/guidelines/social_media_guidelines_final_20_april2011.pdf

⁴ Retrieved from: <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?section=text&id=24835>

⁵ http://deity.gov.in/sites/upload_files/dit/files/SocialMediaFrameworkDraftforPublicConsultation_192011.pdf

analysis, I developed a new comprehensive framework combining the eight essential elements introduced by Hrdinova et al. (2010) and the new essential elements driven from the analysis outlined in the table below. This framework has been used to evaluate the Egyptian ministries' management of social media and to create a social media policy for the Egyptian government.

Table 2: Social Media Policy Framework

Phase	Elements
Phase1 “Planning”	Objectives Target audience Communication strategy Communication team
Phase 2 “Implementation” (8 essential elements)	Employee access Account management Acceptable use Employee conduct Content Security issues Legal issues Citizen conduct
Phase 3 “Assessment”	Monitoring Evaluation

Social media management in Egyptian Ministries

Based on the social media policy framework outlined in table 2, questions for interviews were developed to cover all phases of the framework and to examine how Egyptian ministries manage their social media accounts. The next three tables summarizes the policy elements that were covered by the selected sample of Egyptian ministries

Table 3: Phase 1 “Planning” policy elements covered by MSIT, MOF and MPMAR

Ministry	Objectives	Target audience	Communication strategy	Team
MSIT	√			√
MOF	√			√
MPMAR	√		√	√

The three ministries share the same purpose of using social networks which is getting closer to citizens and encouraging a two-way communication; however, they lack having clear target audience. Government officials mentioned that they target all

Egyptians, which is not feasible since not all Egyptians are active users on social media due to lower levels of internet penetration. While the Ministry of finance and the ministry of supply and internal trade lack having clear communication strategies, the ministry of Planning and administrative reform was shown to have strategies for how to engage the audience using different kind of posts on their page that facilitate the delivery of their information using info graphics, videos and interactive posts. They three ministries have communication teams who are responsible for managing and monitoring social media accounts, but there is no official written guidelines, policies or documents that discuss how employees should manage social media pages and define their tasks and responsibilities. Yet, in the Ministry of Finance there is an online task sheet that documents employees' accomplishment of their tasks, date and time of accomplishment, and by whom it was revised, but it cannot be considered as a policy or a guideline for employees use of social media, rather it represents a follow-up measure.

Table 4: Phase 2 “Implementation” policy elements covered by MSIT, MOF and MPMAR

Ministry	Access	Account management	Acceptable use	Employee conduct	Content	Security	Legal	Citizen conduct
MSIT	√	√			√	√		
MOF	√	√			√	√		
MPMAR	√	√			√	√		

After assessing the eight essential elements in the three ministries, it has been found that almost all of them focus their regulatory scope on the mechanisms for internal control that deals with managerial issues such as who post, who access, and who manages social media while they all lack concrete written policies that deal with laws and regulations that define employees conduct, citizen conduct, personal and professional use of social media. They all have media departments which are responsible for managing social media pages; but they do not have clear measures for violations that may occur from employees or citizens. The three ministries have security measures to mitigate potential risks by using complex passwords, assigning specific employees to manage official accounts, and preventing the use of mobile phones when updating official accounts; however, they do not offer trainings to educate employees on how to act when a security breach occur. Legal issues are not addressed or considered as a high priority. There are no commenting policies on their social media pages and there isn't a clear guideline for deleting comments or a clear definition of violations that may occur on their pages. In addition, they all lack clear principles that guide employees' ethical use of social media.

Table 5: Phase 3 “Assessment” policy elements covered by MSIT, MOF and MPMAR

Ministry	Monitoring	Evaluation
MSIT		
MOF	√	
MPMAR	√	

Almost all of them monitor their pages around the clock to answer users' questions and achieve responsiveness. However, evaluation measures were not clearly applied in the three ministries.

Conclusion

The main objective of this study is to examine and provide recommendations, supported by research and field experience, to governments on how to successfully manage and regulate social media. This was accomplished by reviewing the existing literature, analyzing social media policies in different countries, examining the current situation in a sample of Egyptian ministries and using the framework in the literature and what I learned from the analysis to design a social media policy for Egyptian public agencies.

While social media is gaining acceptance at all levels of government, this paper found that Egyptian ministries lack having regulatory frameworks that govern their use of social media. After interviewing social media officials in three Egyptian ministries, it has been concluded that social media policies and guidelines do not exist or considered by the selected ministries.

The literature review in this study found that social media policies are considered as the most powerful tools agencies should adopt to regulate their social media use, particularly in how they assist governments to overcome potential legal, security and privacy risks. Policies are crucial since they set regulations and tasks and mitigate challenges. Experts believe that governments willing to use social media should firstly consider adopting social media policies before implementation.

Since there are no policies regulating the use of social media in Egyptian ministries, there are no clear guidelines on who bears liability for the published content. Therefore, the need for social media policies has become clear. Government officials and employees need guidelines in place so they can move forward with responsible and effective initiatives that harness social media power.

The next section offers the research recommendations which are represented in the social media policy found on the next page. This policy outlines issues that governments should consider when using social media. It provides a concise and flexible framework which highlights ideas that can be simply adjusted to the setting of different organizations.

Social Media Policy for Egyptian Government

Purpose of the Policy

This policy provides government agencies in Egypt with guidelines on how to achieve the best use of social media in order to communicate with their citizens and deliver their services to them in secure, responsible, and efficient ways.

Many public agencies across Egypt have already started using social media sites as tools of communication with the public, yet, most if not all of them lack guidelines or

policies that could help them reap the benefits of social media and mitigate their potential challenges and risks.

Scope of the Policy

- This policy applies to all Egyptian public agencies (ministries, authorities, and public institutions). It can also be used by private organizations or non-profit organizations willing to regulate their use of social media.
- To adapt with the speedy and changing nature of social media, this policy is flexible. It can be developed and changed as required to cope with these dynamic tools.

Importance of the Guide

Social media sites with their collaboration and engagement powers have changed the static nature of Internet services and turned out to be a new media that has redefined the way governments deliver their services to citizens (World Economic Forum, 2009).

Particularly, social media assist policy makers in boosting transparency and citizens' engagement in governments programs; consequently social media expands the chances of efficient policy results. Through this process, residents shift from being passive receivers of government services to active contributors and participants in the policy making process (UN E-government survey, 2010)

Moreover, the popularity of social media sites in Egypt has increased significantly, the number of Facebook users alone has reached 20 million users at the end of 2014 (MCIT Research department, 2014)

Besides the great benefits social media offer to governments, they also raise numerous challenges and risks that need to be cautiously considered and addressed. These challenges include:

- Causing reputational issues to citizens or public agencies
- leaking of private or critical government or personal data
- Security breaches such as malware, viruses, hacking etc...and other security risks.

Such challenges can be reduced by adopting appropriate policy controls and guidelines which are addressed in the following section.

Social Media Policy Guidelines

This section provides detailed guidelines for the use of social media by government agencies. These guidelines cover three consecutive stages for social media management:

A. Phase 1: Planning

Identify objectives

Public agencies should clearly define the purpose of using social media, is it to raise awareness about a new service, increase engagement with their public, open conversations with constituents, or change wrong image promoted by media, etc.? This will help in choosing the proper strategies that will lead to the achievement of these objectives eventually. For instance, if an agency aims at achieving engagement with its public, then developing a policy that does not allow for comments on its social media page would never be successful

Identify target audience

Dividing the audience into segments will help the agency tailor its messages to suit the target audience and select the best social media platform to reach them. Some groups will be hardly reached or stay unreached by social media, however, other groups can be major targets for social media. For example, if the agency is targeting young university graduates, then Facebook and Twitter might be the best social media tool.

Set Communication Strategies

A clear communication strategy defines how the agency acts on social media to achieve its desired objectives and goals. Since social media is based on users' engagement and interaction, public agencies should use communication strategies that boost engagement with the audience. Setting a clear communication strategy allows the agency to use the best communication tools to convey information to the public in the most efficient and engaging way. Strategies should include:

- Kind of posts to be published on social media to boost engagement and visibility
- Media formats to be used in delivering the information (animated videos, info-graphic posters, info-graphic videos,...etc)
- How many posts to be posted per day?
- How many posts to be posted per week?
- Monthly engagement analysis to assess the performance

Assign the Social Media Team

Social Media managers in various government agencies should assign employees who would suitably speak on behalf of the government on social media .The following requirements should be considered when assigning employees to manage social media accounts:

- The level of qualification and comprehension of the issues to be discussed with citizens on social media platforms.
- Communication skills and language proficiency.
- Knowledge of social media tools and expertise in harnessing their powers
- His/her willingness to stay online on the social media sites after official working hours and his/her ability to act in situations that requires immediate response.

B. Phase 2: Implementation (8 essential elements)

Access to Social Media

- The agency should decide what social media sites are appropriate to utilize to achieve its objectives. Also, it should serve to train employees on how to best utilize these sites.
- A list of recommended websites should be created and frequently updated by the Social Media department in cooperation with public employees, and IT members. This list should also consider the benefits and threats of different social media platforms.
- Authorized Employees who are selected to manage social media accounts should be given access on the pages to moderate the page.

Account Management

The social media team is responsible to manage official social media accounts and communicate with the public on behalf of the agency. The following guidelines should be considered:

- The social media department should approve the requests of establishing official accounts on a social media. However, IT unit should be consulted first to cover any security risks. This approval should consider aspects like the appropriateness of the site to the agency needs and target audience besides any technology-related issues.
- Social media managers should also develop a list of all social media sites' domain names in use, the names of all employees managing these accounts, and their related passwords.

Acceptable Use

- There is a blurry line between professional and personal use of social media which makes the idea of allowing access to one and banning it from the other very complex.
- Access to social media shouldn't be prohibited; rather they should be utilized according to this policy guideline. Prohibiting employees from using social media at work might not be efficient since they can use it via their cell phones.

Employee conduct

- Employees should be professional and consistent at all times to guarantee best representation of their ministry.
- Key principles of ethical use should include: credibility, accuracy, transparency, citizen respect, responsiveness
- Moreover, public employees should protect government's reputation on official and personal social media accounts. Employees' posts and comments on social media should not damage government's reputation by any means. Employees should not use the data acquired during their work for other non-related work reasons.
- If public employees added their official title on their social media accounts, they should include a disclaimer which clearly states that their posts on social media

profiles reflects their personal opinions only and have nothing to do with their government.

Content Management

- Social Media Departments' responsibilities are: establishing, posting, and updating social media pages. The manager of the department should approve content before posting on social media sites to ensure its compliance with the guidelines. The following guidelines should be considered when sharing content on social media:
- Content on social media should be interactive rather than informative. In contrast to traditional media, social media provides users with information and allows them to interact with it. Thus, to create a two-way communication and interactive environment, content should drive conversations, views and engagement.
- A commenting policy should be posted on social media pages. It should state the following: "The government reserves the right to delete posts that contain defamation, content that promotes discrimination, Spam, sexual contents, and links to other sites.
- If the page administrator deletes a post or comment, he should take a screenshot first of the post for documentation. In principle, users' comments should not be deleted. Whether comments are positive or negative, they should be kept on the page as long as they are relevant to the topic of discussion.

Security

Potential threats can be faced by implementing strict measures, some of these measures include:

I. Security measures:

- If authorized employees might moderate official social media pages from personal mobile phones, they must ensure protection by having a pass code.
- Employees are required to own complex passwords for their social media accounts to ensure the security of government's data.
- All files that are exchanged with social media should not be opened unless scanned to ensure safety from viruses or hacking measures.
- Employees are not allowed to use their official email addresses or passwords to log in to their social media accounts.
- Social media managers should ban access to unneeded functionalities within social media websites, such as file exchange and messages to mitigate the risk of receiving improper or unsafe documents.

II. Training measures:

- training sessions should be set to train public employees on how to use different social media tools, how to secure official accounts, and educate them about potential security risks and techniques used to mitigate them

Legal Issues

- The easiness of copying and pasting materials on social media pages frequently leads to unintentional violation of copyright laws. Therefore, social media departments are responsible for the compliance with the established law no. 82 of 2002 on the protection of intellectual property rights.
- Employees should only interact with citizens on social media pages if their responses are specific and accurate, they are also required to correct misleading information posted by citizens.
- Employees are not required to answer citizens' questions or respond to their comments. Though, a response that offers useful knowledge to all users is required.

Citizen Conduct

- Social media departments should publish commenting guidelines on their pages so that residents follow them.
- A citizen conduct that discusses suitable behavior for citizens should be created and posted on governments' social media pages. This conduct can clearly state that specific kind of posts are forbidden and will be deleted, including: comments that contain defamation, spam, sexual content, comments that promotes discrimination and illegal activity, comments that include links to other websites, and content that violates intellectual property rights.

C. Phase 3: Assessment

Monitoring

Unlike the government fixed hours, employees should monitor the agency's social media pages around the clock to:

- Answer questions, increase engagement and responsiveness
- Delete spam, ads, or any inappropriate comments
- To monitor content to ensure its adherence to the agency's policy

Evaluation

Ongoing evaluation helps public agencies know where they stand from their objectives. The page should be evaluated periodically to check if the strategies adopted has achieved the target objectives and to re-adjust strategies -if needed- to achieve greater engagement. Agencies should decide when to conduct the evaluation; it could be weekly or monthly based on the agency's objectives. Agencies can use Facebook insights and Twitter analytics since they provide analysis for the rates of engagement based on likes, shares, comments, re-tweets, etc.

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