

**Laughter in the Social Network:
Tracking Political Humor in Egypt during the 2014 President Campaign**

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Abstract

Humor, parody and satire are powerfully subversive forces against oppressive and out-of-date societal traditions and conventions. Egyptians' affinity for wit has been identified in relics that date back to ancient times. In contemporary times, these subversive forces of renewal—humor, parody and satire—can be employed through the medium of social networks and serve as counter-valence to traditional mores and power. The evidence of humor's potential to influence was demonstrated when Egypt overthrew Hosni Mubarak in 2011—popularly referred to as the 'Facebook Revolution'. Since the fall of Mubarak, Facebook has become even more popular within Egypt and user generated content—especially cartoons—has proliferated exponentially. However, the esteem afforded to Egyptian military has traditionally placed this sector of Egyptian society off limits to humorous criticism. Thus, former Minister of Defense El-Sisi's blurring of the lines between Egyptian military and political life provides an ideal litmus test to determine how far freedom of expression has come in post-uprising Egypt. Research into Egyptian political cartoons on Facebook provides such an insight by employing quantitative analysis to a purposive sample of Cartoons selected from Facebook. Significant dates within the Presidential campaign have been selected for study and two theories are employed to interpret findings: Bakhtin's Carnavalesque and the SPIN (Segmentation, Polycentrism, Integration and Networking) Model. The utilization of two theories is done under the pretext of blending a subjective approach (Carnavalesque) with a more objective approach (SPIN) in order to provide a full spectrum depiction of the level of freedom of expression exhibited by Egyptians on Facebook.

Keywords: Humor, Comics, Facebook, Egypt, Election, President, El Sisi, Mansour, Hamdeen, Carnavalesque, SPIN Theory

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Throughout history, humor has been a subversive force that undermined state power. George Orwell wrote, “A thing is funny when...it upsets the established order. Every joke is a tiny revolution.” The proliferation of social media has potentially amplified this reality.

The intersection of social media, humor, and politics yields insight into Egyptians’ perception of presidential candidates and the reverence they place for political leaders. This is especially true for ex-Minister of Defense Abdul-Fattah El-Sisi who resigned his military post as head of the Supreme Council of Armed Forces on March 26, 2014. The resignation coincided with his announcement as a candidate for President. Egypt traditionally holds a strong redline against criticism of its military and leaders. Therefore, examining Egyptian political cartoons provides an ideal litmus test for exploring the political transition occurring in Egypt.

The History of Humor in Egypt

Throughout history, Egyptians have employed humor to speak to power. The earliest pictorial cartoons have been traced back to ancient Egypt and are currently on display in a Cairo museum (Harutyunyan, 2012). Additionally, numerous examples of visual humor from Ancient Egypt has been identified (Houlihan, 2001). Harutyunyan (2012) indicates that humor in ancient Egypt was directly “linked to criticism of oppressive political figures.” The long-standing affinity for laughter is evidenced by the phrase other Arabs employ to describe Egyptians, *ibn nukta*, which literally translates to ‘son of the jokes’ (Shehata, 1992). Famous Egyptian actor Kamal al-Shennawi further noted how Egyptians have historically used humor:

“The joke is the devastating weapon which the Egyptians used against the invaders and occupiers. It was the valiant guerrilla that penetrated the palaces of the rulers” (Amrani, 2011).

Egypt's media apparatus—print, radio and television—were placed under strict state control after the fall of British rule in Egypt in 1952. The subsequent state censorship was overt and heavy-handed. Egyptian media parroted “the regime’s message and asserting its regional role” (el Issawy, 2014). Although restrictions were somewhat gradually eased during the Sadat and Mubarak rule, these restrictions were re-enforced in 1996 by Press Law No. 96, which legalized the imprisonment of journalists for a myriad of ostensibly vague reasons.

More recently, Harutyunyan (2012) examined the popularity of political cartoons within contemporary Egypt and the subsequent placing of these modes of media into a "grey area between being entirely censored and entirely permitted" under Mubarak. Thus, cartoonists were subject to self-censorship and potential imprisonment by the government. Such overt and heavy-handed government tactics played a role in stoking the fires of change within Egypt, and humor was an influential force throughout. Harutyunyan (2012) considers political cartoons—and focuses on those available via the Internet—to be an accessory to the revolution in Egypt.

Protesters chanting Ahmad Fouad Negm poems exemplify the popular deployment of humor: “...the [Tahrir] Square had turned the tables...the terror of the regime was countered with humor” (Helmy & Frerichs, 2013, p. 465). More specifically, political cartoons were at the locus of Tahrir Square protests. Anwar and Andeel—two young Egyptian political cartoonists with large online followings—saw their cartoons “as graffiti in Tahrir Square and [...] on placards at protests” (Hills, 2014). Anwar and Andeel represent the modern incarnation of Egyptians using humor that is aimed “against the old guard in every institution” (Hills, 2014).

Why Social Media

Social media—specifically Facebook—is widely considered instrumental in the success of overthrowing Hosni Mubarak. Dr. Abeer Bassiouny Radwan, who has been a member of the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs since 1995, clearly elucidates this contention:

“...in the final analysis the Egyptian revolution has validated the powerful role of social media in the political arena. Indeed, Egypt is now pregnant with the first successful Facebook revolution” (Radwan, 2011, p. 1).

Copious research has investigated social media’s effect on the Egyptian uprising, specifically focusing on Facebook (Gaworecki, 2011; Lesch, 2011 & Attia et al., 2011).

Its contemporary explosion of popularity in Egypt provides additional justification for focusing solely on Facebook. According to the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, the population of Egypt reached 91 million inhabitants (Ahrām Online, 2012). Meanwhile, access to the Internet reached 36 million (Ahrām Online, 2012) in 2013 and grew to 44.5 million users in July 2014, with an expected increase to 46.2 million by the end of August 2014 (El Din, 2014). The 40 % of the Egyptian population with Internet access love Facebook. According to a report issued in 2013, the 17 million Egyptian Facebook users rank the nation as seventeenth worldwide and first in Arab region countries (EMarketing Egypt, 2013). According to a report conducted by France-based market researcher Ipsos and published in Daily News Egypt, Facebook was the most popular website within Egypt in 2013 (El-Behary, 2013).

A Pew Research Center study (Smith, 2014) stated, “Women and men often have varying reasons for why they use Facebook—but everything starts with sharing and laughs.” The study indicated that 39 % of respondents specified they use Facebook to view funny or entertaining posts (Smith, 2014). Accordingly, Facebook is fertile ground to examine humor and candidates within the Egyptian presidential election are bound to be prime targets.

Why Political Cartoons

There are two distinct reasons why political cartoons may exert tremendous influence on this election. First, according to Egypt's Central Agency for Publication Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS), one-fourth of the population of Egypt that is over the age of 10 years old is illiterate (Youssef, 2014). Thus, cartoons would be a form of written communication that can be understood by the entire populace. Therefore, image-based cartoons act universally and expediently as a digestible form of media, which are easily and quickly transmittable throughout social media. France-based market research company Ipsos identified that pictures are the most popular content shared throughout social media (Ipsos, 2013). Additionally, multiple studies have been conducted to determine the potential effects of political cartoons via social networks on viewers' political perceptions (Baumgartner, 2008; Reilly, 2011; Rill & Cardiel, 2013)

Secondly, modern living moves at an increasingly faster pace and individuals do not have an abundance of time to research and investigate politics. In lieu, people may rely on bite-sized information—i.e., political cartoons—for insight into the world of politics. The popularity of print cartoons in Egypt is evidenced by the ubiquitous presence in almost all published newspapers (Kazarian, 2011). Additionally, the popularity of cartoons—predominantly political—is exemplified by the founding of the annual 'Cairo Comix Festival' in 2015 by Magdy El Shafee, who was arrested in 2008 for publishing a graphic novel with political undercurrents (O'Neill, 2017). Further, Harutyunyan (2012) identified a loosening of the government strictures against political criticism directly after Mubarak stepped down. Thus, political cartoons are fertile ground for academic examination. For the sake of this research, political cartoons are considered artistic images that involve a political theme that is specifically examining Egypt's presidential elections.

Theoretical Framework

This research utilizes two theories, which share overlapping similarities, under the pretext of blending a subjective with a more objective approach. The first theory is the SPIN Model, which shares similarities to the second theory, Bakhtin's Carnavalesque, which will be examined in subsequent paragraphs. The SPIN model is utilized to explore organizational structures—often involving political or social movements—within a society and determine its level of ability to organize and potentially initiate change, which makes it an effective tool to examine political cartoons on social media. The SPIN model “helps explain and contextualize the circumstances that lead to political change” (el-Nawawy & Khamis, 2012). The model was introduced by Gerlach and Hine in 1968 and later re-examined and modernized by Gerlach in 2001. There are four categories within the SPIN Model: segmentation, polycentrism, integration, and networking.

Segmentation refers to a relaxation or opening of divisions and boundaries between diverse societal factions. Segmentation denotes, “fluid boundaries that distinguish formal organizations, informal groups, and single activists that may join and separate over different actions, yet remain available to future coordination” (Bennett, 2003, p. 22).

Polycentrism is defined as a group that does not have one hegemonic organizer but instead has multiple leaders. Further, polycentrism “refers to the presence of multiple hubs or centers of coordination in a network of segmented organization,” where there is a specific “avoidance of formal leadership, and a preference for personal ties among activists that enable each to speak for the organization, and to hold multiple organizational affiliations – hence, the shift to the term polycentric” (Bennett, 2003, p. 22).

Integration refers to groups that normally would not connect or coalesce but subsequently form a united force in the face of a common enemy. Integration means, “the horizontal structure

of distributed activism...The integrative function is provided by personal ties, recognition of common threats, pragmatism about achieving goals, and the ease of finding associations and information through the Internet” (Bennett, 2003, p. 22). It is important to note that a key factor in determining integration’s success is “horizontalism, which has become the default method of organizing...[however]...technology makes non-hierarchical organizing easy” (Mason, 2011).

The final step and result of societal segmentation, integration, and polycentrism coalescing into an organized form often lead to networks. The networks are fluid in nature and can exhibit a long shelf life. “Since the social network linkages are nonhierarchical, information exchange is relatively open. And the redundancy of links in segmented polycentric networks enables them to continue to function even when important organizations leave or change their roles.” (Bennett, 2003, p. 22)

Russian writer and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin devised the second theory this research utilizes, Carnavalesque. This theory has been employed throughout different academic areas of mass communication that investigated the cross-section of humor and activism (Achter, 2008; Riegert, & Ramsay, 2012; and Kang, 2017). The content focuses on the weeks of festivities that occurred throughout medieval Europe prior to Lent, popularly referred to as the Feast of Fools. During this feast, citizens were encouraged to partake in temporary lapses in societal norms and laws. It was through this massive unyoking of personal containment that allowed for a collective release of pressure from the harsh realities and restrictive roles of daily medieval life. More importantly, Bakhtin described how these carnivals broke apart stale conventions and oppressive forms of thinking through imagination, which held the potential to move toward emancipation. The repercussions of such role-playing could often elicit ripples of lasting effect.

The lack of release from the pressures exerted by an authoritarian regime led to the lively atmosphere in Tahrir Square during the 2011 Egyptian uprising. The atmosphere, when jubilant, exhibited similar demarcations of a collective festival as all sectors of society joined together in a common endeavor:

“The humor of the Square was clearly distinct...it was not a sign of weakness but of strength, as it broke taboo to ridicule the leader—in public, the Square becoming a festival of resistance” (Helmy & Frerichs, 2011, p. 452).

The 2014 presidential election is vital to Egypt’s quest toward democracy. Therefore, all citizens of Egypt were at least aware of the election, and often involved in events surrounding the campaign. Subsequently, the campaign cycle can be viewed as a contemporary form of the medieval carnival, as a result of every Egyptian being heavily encouraged to participate. The 2014 Egyptian Presidential election is a newer and supposedly more democratic version than those of the past. However, as the embers of changes still remain, post-revolutionary Egypt exhibits potential for societal roles to be blurred—or inverted outright—and new ideas created and potentially hatched. Thus, Bakhtin’s work is resonant within the context of contemporary Egypt and attempts to ascertain how far Egypt has come in the drive toward free expression and democracy. Similar to the SPIN theory, Bakhtin deconstructs Carnavalesque into four primary categories:

Free interaction and exchange among all citizens no matter their differences. The exchange often brings together unlikely groupings, which in turn encourage interaction and free expression. Hopefully this grouping coalesces in unity. No one is off limits to being the target of humor and anyone is able to freely craft and lob the joke. Free interaction and exchange will be evident based on a profusion of comments, shares and likes on each cartoon. (This category overlaps with and shares similarities to the segmentation category within the SPIN theory)

Eccentric behavior is typified by what is deemed unacceptable under normal circumstances. The true behavior of a human being can be revealed under the experience of Carnavalesque, as there are no consequences. Further, eccentric behavior is associated with humor and its ability to exaggerate in order to generate laughter.

Carnivalistic misalliances is exhibited when groups that would not be unified under normal circumstances freely unite, albeit temporarily, during carnival. The humor groups on Facebook allow subscribers who would not normally ally, to do so under a specific group. (This category overlaps with and shares similarities to the integration category within the SPIN theory)

Sacrilege can occur during carnival without expectations of retribution or punishment. The exhibition of sacrilege is the willful violation or misuse of what society normally regards as sacred. The subversion of authority or mocking of the sacred typifies sacrilege. Regarding presidential candidates, sacrilege could be applied to any cartoon altering the candidates' physiques or aiming obscenities towards candidates.

The present study investigates the portrayal of presidential candidates within popular humor pages on Facebook. The research on these Facebook humor pages seeks to answer the following research questions based on the literature review, the theory of Carnavalesque and the SPIN Model:

1. How are presidential candidates portrayed on popular humor pages on Facebook?
2. How far are these pages pushing the boundaries of freedom of expression?

Methodology

The research of political cartoons on Facebook employed a quantitative analysis and purposive sample. The sample includes 504 cartoon pictures.

Research content was obtained through the quantitative content analysis of three Egyptian Facebook pages: Asa7be Sarcasm Society, Egypt's Sarcasm Society, and Egyptian's Troll Politics. The Facebook pages were selected based on popularity as well each page's reference to neutrality within each respective *About Us* sections. There are other Facebook pages that employ political humor based in Egypt. However, many of these Facebook pages engage in severe partiality. Accordingly, only impartial Facebook pages were considered and the most popular pages selected. The first, Asa7be Sarcasm Society, was initially created on March 25, 2012, and currently has over 13 million likes. The second, Egypt's Sarcasm Society, was

established in March 2009 and currently has 3.7 million likes. The final Facebook page, *Egyptian Troll Politics*, was founded on June 30, 2013, and is rapidly growing with 104,672 likes. The researchers created and agreed upon the coding book employed within the investigation prior to coding. The level of measurement is nominal and the unit of analysis is cartoon pictures.

The time frames chosen by researchers was based on the fluidity of the political process. The seven dates were chosen to correspond with vital events within the campaign.

Table 1

Selected dates within the campaign

Date	Corresponding campaign event
March 26, 2014 + two following days	Minister of Defense El-Sisi resigned his position within Egypt's military and announced his candidacy for president.
March 31, 2014 + two following days	Egyptian presidential nomination window opened.
April 7, 2014 + two following days	Mortada Mansour announced his candidacy for president.
April 20, 2014 + two following days	Egyptian presidential nomination window closed and Mortada Mansour resigned from campaign.
May 2, 2014 + two following days	Official presidential nominees are announced.
May 15, 2014 + two following days	Egyptian expats began voting.
May 26, 2014 + two following days	Egypt began voting.

The purposive sample affords the luxury of locating the most relevant, poignant, and potentially influential cartoons during the presidential campaign. Two different theories were

utilized to interpret findings. The selection of two theories provides a full spectrum depiction of the level of freedom of expression exhibited by Egyptians via Facebook. The two theories were selected under the pretext of utilizing a conceptual macro and a more precise micro-approach. A total of 504 pictures were chosen from the three Facebook pages.

Two independent coders were selected and trained for a total of five hours prior to a pretest. The justification for employing two coders is a result of identifying two exceedingly qualified candidates, who hold Master's degrees in Mass Communication. The coders were selected from a pool of individuals the authors cultivated via online and in-person solicitations. Both of the selected coders have (or currently) work within the American University in Cairo School of Global Affairs and Public Policy. The authors attempted to identify other qualified candidates, but none were nearly as adept or well trained within the academic realm of mass communication. Thus, the authors selected two coders, instead of three, to ensure the integrity of the coding. The coders were trained for three hours and then did the coding at home. The operational definitions were agreed upon prior to coding. The pretest was conducted prior to final coding to ensure coding accuracy, which was 83.3%. Finally, inter-coder reliability was conducted, which was a 76.84% agreement and a Krippendorff's Alpha of -0.127.

Independent identification numbers were ascribed to each picture cartoon. The coding identified features, themes and cultural references within each sample picture cartoon. The coding of a picture cartoon was completed only if the theme of the cartoon included the presidential elections and a presidential candidate was portrayed. If the theme utilized within the cartoon picture did not cover the Egyptian presidential election, then coders discontinued coding.

Findings

The total sample of 504 picture cartoons includes a coded sample of 130 images. Each image within the coded sample contains the 2014 Egyptian presidential election theme and feature one of the candidates [El-Sisi, Hamdeen and/or Mansour], which equates to 25.8 % of the total sample.

The 504 cartoons satirizing the elections are distributed across the three Facebook pages as follows. The sample from *Asa7be Sarcasm Society* is 209 picture cartoons or 41.5 % of the total sample. The sample from *Egypt's Sarcasm Society* includes 169 picture cartoons or 33.5% of the total sample. The sample from *Egyptian Troll Politics* is 126 picture cartoons or 25.0% of the total sample. This corresponds to the average output of picture cartoons by each page.

The presence of the Egyptian presidential election occurs within a majority of the total sample of 504 picture cartoons. The presidential elections were noted in 271 picture cartoons or 53.8% of the total sample. Six themes were operationally defined and agreed upon prior to coding. The remaining themes include: Politics (other than elections) 10.3 %, Social 9.3%, Sports 9.1%, Religion 0.6 % and Other 16.9%.

The cross-section of themes points to a few interesting conclusions. First, presidential election picture cartoons are overwhelmingly popular within the three Facebook pages. Further, politics is the second most popular theme. Thus a logical conclusion is Egyptians were politically engaged with the campaign and election process. However, this contradicts the previous data regarding the steady erosion of frequency of political picture cartoons appearing since the initial date range starting on March 26. The combination of the two pieces of data points directly to the potential of Egyptian society experiencing political fatigue after a long period of political engagement and societal instability. A hypothesis could be made pointing to Egyptians'

dissatisfaction with the prospective presidential candidates. However, more rigorous research would need to be conducted to determine the validity of this hypothesis.

The coded sample of 130 picture cartoons includes the presidential election campaign theme. The appearance of presidential candidates 151 times within 130* picture cartoons is due to instances of multiple candidates appearing in a single respective picture cartoon. The breakdown of candidate appearance frequency within the coded sample:

Table 2

Candidate Frequency Within Coded Sample

Candidate	Frequency within coded sample	Appearance Percentage in coded sample
El-Sisi	89	68.46%
Hamdeen	52	40.00%
Mansour	10	7.69%
<i>Total coded cartoons</i>	<i>130*</i>	<i>N/A</i>

Ostensibly, the candidate frequency does point to Egyptian political engagement with the election. More importantly, El-Sisi made the overwhelming majority of appearances, which may support his status within the media as the presumptive presidential winner. Additionally, El-Sisi's frequency does illuminate a strong potential for Carnavalesque behavior due to his previous rank within the Egyptian military. The high esteem Egypt holds for its military traditionally does not allow humor to be directed at El-Sisi or the military. Additionally, the coded sample of 130 had a total 1,256,961 likes and 527,078 shares. The large numbers illustrate a strong potential for Carnavalesque free interaction and exchange as well as SPIN model

segmentation. Further, the number of likes and shares combined with a high volume of interaction via the comments sections does illustrate a strong prospective for Carnavalesque misalliances and SPIN model integration.

The coded sample includes 89 depictions of former Minister of Defense El-Sisi for a total appearance within 68.5 % of the coded sample. The portrayal of El-Sisi within these 89 picture cartoons was spread across all eight-portrayal categories.

Table 3

El-Sisi Portrayal and Frequency Within Coded Sample

Portrayal	Frequency	%
Not Featured	41	31.30%
Foolish	21	16.00%
Authoritative	21	16.00%
Deceitful	15	11.50%
Other	15	11.50%
Romantic	8	6.10%
Eager	6	4.60%
Coward	3	2.30%
Noble	1	0.80%
<i>Total</i>	<i>130</i>	<i>100%</i>

The portrayal of El-Sisi within the 130 coded samples where he is featured points to a broadly varying view of this particular candidate. The strongest portrayal was tied between authoritative and foolish, which each respectively encompassed 16% of the total coded sample.

The next largest portrayal was that of a deceitful and other, which encompassed 11.5% of the total coded sample respectively. Accordingly, there is a strong prevalence of Carnavalesque eccentric behavior that is illustrated by the frequency of critical humor directed at the former Defense Minister of Egypt. The picture cartoons featuring El-Sisi have 761,057 likes and 274,421 shares. Subsequently, SPIN Model polycentrism is detected and determined by the wide variance of the tone exhibited—there is no specific voicing but there is an overwhelming amount of picture cartoons with a high number of likes, shares and varying comments. Subsequently, a Carnavalesque misalliance is detected via the large number of people unified under the attraction of picture cartoons depicting El-Sisi, which supports the strong potential for SPIN Model integration.

The cartoon depicting the three presidential candidates were additionally coded to determine positive, negative and neutral representation.

Table 4

The Representation of the Three Candidates Within Coded Sample

Representation	<i>El-Sisi</i>		<i>Hamdeen</i>		<i>Mansour</i>	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Positive	8	8.98%	3	5.66%	0	0%
Negative	66	74.16%	40	75.49%	6	60%
Other/Neutral	15	16.85%	10	18.87%	4	40%
<i>Total</i>	<i>89</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>53</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>100%</i>

The frequency of positive and other/neutral depictions of El-Sisi was almost evenly split with approximately one-tenth respectively. The high frequency, well-over half, of negative depictions of El-Sisi strongly supports the appearance of Carnavalesque eccentric behavior and

sacrilege. Subsequently, this finding supports the presence of SPIN Model polycentrism as determined by the wide variance of the portrayal exhibited. Additionally, the detection of Carnavalesque free interaction and exchange, as well as Carnavalesque misalliances along with SPIN Model integration and segmentation are supported due to the large volume of likes, shares, varying comments and fluctuating portrayals of El-Sisi.

The coded sample comprises 53 depictions of Hamdeen Sabahi for a total appearance in 40.8% of the coded sample. The portrayal of Hamdeen within these 53 picture cartoons was spread across all eight of the portrayal categories.

Table 5

Hamdeen Portrayal and Frequency Within Coded Sample

Portrayal	Frequency	%
Not Featured	77	15.30%
Coward	14	2.80%
Foolish	13	2.60%
Other	10	2.00%
Eager	7	1.40%
Deceitful	5	1.00%
Romantic	2	0.40%
Noble	1	0.20%
Authoritative	1	0.20%
<i>Total</i>	<i>130</i>	<i>100%</i>

The portrayal of Hamdeen within 53 picture cartoons of the total coded sample points to a somewhat varied view of this candidate. The strongest portrayal was that of coward, which encompassed 10.8% of the coded sample. The second largest portrayal was foolish, which captured 10% of the coded sample. The third largest portrayal of Hamdeen was essentially tied between eager and deceitful, which encompassed 5.4 % and 3.8 % of the coded sample respectively.

The picture cartoons featuring Hamdeen accumulated (at the time of coding) 456,646 likes, which represents the second largest amount among candidates examined. Additionally, the Hamdeen picture cartoons have 241,453 shares, which constitute the second largest amount of shares between the three candidates. However, Hamdeen picture cartoon depictions have a fraction of the likes and shares compared to El-Sisi. Subsequently, it is determined that El-Sisi is the most popular candidate within the coded sample. The finding is important as it strongly supports the presence of Carnavalesque sacrilege. The Hamdeen picture cartoons also exhibit SPIN Model polycentrism that is determined by the wide variance of the portrayal exhibited—there is no specific voicing but there is a large amount likes, shares and varying comments. Subsequently, a Carnavalesque misalliance is detected via the large number of people unified under the attraction of picture cartoons depicting Hamdeen, which supports strong potential for SPIN Model integration. The coded sample depicting Hamdeen was additionally coded to determine positive, negative and neutral representation.

According to Table 4, the depictions of Hamdeen were overwhelmingly negative in tone with 75.49%. Accordingly, the higher frequency of negative depictions of Hamdeen does lend support to the potential of Carnavalesque eccentric behavior and sacrilege due to Hamdeen's high profile within Egyptian society. The presence of SPIN Model polycentrism is also potentiated by

the fairly wide variance in portrayal of Hamdeen. Additionally, the detection of Carnavalesque free interaction and exchange and Carnavalesque misalliances along with SPIN Model integration and segmentation are supported due to the large volume of likes, shares, varying comments and fluctuating portrayals of Hamdeen.

The portrayal of Mansour within 10 cartoons of the total coded sample indicates a negative depiction of the candidate. Additionally, the lack of a positive portrayal indicates that Mansour is not believed to be a viable candidate. The portrayal of Mansour was spread across five of eight potential categories.

Table 6

Mansour Portrayal and Frequency Within Coded Sample

Portrayal	Frequency	%
Not Featured	120	92.30%
Other	4	3.10%
Foolish	2	1.50%
Deceitful	2	1.50%
Coward	1	0.80%
Authoritative	1	0.80%
<i>Total</i>	<i>130</i>	<i>100%</i>

The highest occurring portrayal was that of foolish and deceitful, which encompassed 1.5% of the total coded sample. The second highest portrayal involved Mansour depicted as a coward or authoritative, which consisted of 0.8 % of the coded sample respectively. The third

largest portrayal was other. The large presence of obscene language that was detected is indicative of Carnavalesque eccentric behavior.

The picture cartoons featuring Mansour accumulated a total 116,947 likes and 7,274 shares, which constitutes the third largest amount of likes and shares. Subsequently, El-Sisi as the most popular candidate within presidential election picture cartoons on Egypt's Facebook humor pages is reinforced. The finding is important as it emphasizes the presence of Carnavalesque sacrilege. The Mansour picture cartoons also exhibit SPIN Model polycentrism that is determined by the wide variance of the portrayals exhibited. The representations of Mansour do not exhibit a specific voicing, although they are all disparately negative representations. Additionally, there is a large amount of likes and shares featuring Mansour. Subsequently, a Carnavalesque misalliance is detected via the large number of people unified under the attraction of picture cartoons depicting Mansour, which supports strong potential for SPIN Model integration.

The coded sample depicting Mansour was additionally coded to determine positive, negative and neutral representation.

The depictions of Mansour were overwhelmingly negative in tone with 60.0%. Additionally, there were no positive portrayals of Mansour detected. The data show a strong presence of SPIN Model integration regarding the universal dislike of Mansour. Accordingly, the high frequency of negative depictions of Mansour lends support to the potential of Carnavalesque eccentric behavior and sacrilege due to Mansour's high profile within Egyptian society. The presence of SPIN Model polycentrism is not potentiated—this is determined by the lack of variance in portrayal of Mansour. However, Mansour was considered a marginal candidate within the campaign and resigned shortly after announcing his candidacy. Accordingly, the

findings regarding Mansour must be taken into account within this frame of context.

Additionally, the detection of Carnavalesque free interaction and exchange, Carnavalesque misalliances, as well as SPIN Model integration and segmentation are supported due to the large volume of likes, shares, varying comments and fluctuating portrayals of Mansour.

The coded sample of 130 picture cartoons exhibited a high rate of Carnavalesque eccentric behavior, occurring 91 times for a frequency of 70.0 %. The identification of Carnavalesque eccentric behavior in previous findings is upheld by the overwhelming amount identified throughout the coded sample. Additionally, this finding points to a strong potential for Carnavalesque sacrilege.

The coded sample of 130 picture cartoons exhibited a high rate of Carnavalesque sacrilege, occurring 90 times for a frequency of 69.2%. The high frequency of sacrilege in combination with the previous identification of the three other Carnavalesque categories does illustrate Carnavalesque behavior within the presidential elections on Egypt's most popular Facebook humor pages. The finding is important because Carnavalesque behavior does overlap and therefore lends potential for the occurrence of multiple categories of the SPIN model.

Conclusion

The study identified a strong level of discontent with all available presidential candidates, which is evidenced by high percentage of negative portrayals for each individual candidate: El-Sisi 74%, Hamdeen 75% and Mansour 60% negative. The level of discontent could point to a few different realities that are occurring in Egyptian society. First, political apathy could be setting in after a long period of social and political upheaval following two popular uprisings in the span of a few years. However, political apathy seems to contradict the fairly high level of engagement this study identified on Facebook regarding the elections. Although engagement did ebb and

flow throughout the campaign, it remained fairly strong throughout the process. Further, the level of discontent noted by the study could be the result of the examined population, which on social media tends to skew toward a predominantly younger and digitally literate demographic.

The recent creation of the ‘Cairo Comix Festival’ in 2015 demonstrates a continued level of engagement by Egyptians with political and social issues via political cartoons, which does not illustrate apathy. Thus, the research findings point to dissatisfaction with the current political options, which could point to the potential for further change within the Egyptian political landscape. This contention is re-enforced by the high occurrence this study identified of all four categories of Carnavalesque. The presence of Carnavalesque behavior points to an increased level of freedom of expression on social media via political cartoons. The augmented freedom of expression will most likely encounter tremendous stresses as evidenced by the curtailing of freedom of expression via recent government crackdowns on dissent within the media. Ultimately, few Egyptians may be willing to venture outside of the seemingly anonymous confines of social media to exercise their freedom of expression. The high incidence of Carnavalesque behavior also overlaps with many similar tenets of the SPIN Model. Subsequently, this overlap provides indications of the presence of three of the categories of the SPIN model. The large occurrence and commonality between these two theoretical models point to a potential for change within Egypt.

The only category within the two theoretical models that was not identified within the coded sample was the SPIN model networking. If solid networks are founded, then there will be a strong potential for the SPIN model to be identified. However, due to the abbreviated duration of this study, it is too early to confirm if the category of networking has or will ever occur. While the threshold for segmentation, polycentrism and integration seem to have been

met, whether this will generate a strong and fluid network remains to be seen. The recent government crackdown on dissent establishes a strong impediment against the potential foundation of networking. There is a need for continued observation to confirm if and when networking will occur. If networking does transpire, then Egypt may enter into another pre-revolutionary condition, which could illuminate one of the motivations for the government to heavily re-establish censorship within Egyptian media.

There is a great deal of evidence to support the argument that social media played a central role in shaping the 2011 so-called “Facebook Revolution,” however, it would be imprudent to attribute social media as the root cause of the revolution. The same could be said for political cartoons within Egypt. As this study has shown, Egyptians have demonstrated dissatisfaction with the 2014 presidential candidates; however, they have remained engaged to varying degrees with the presidential election process. While political cartoons on social media may provide an indicator that Egyptians may be moving towards social or political change, other factors must not be discounted. Traditional media still play a significant role in Egyptian society. Further, while many heralded social media for its ability to appropriate and universalize power among the populace as a result of the ‘Arab Spring,’ the post-revolution reality within Egypt—elucidated by a renewed government crackdown on public dissent and criticism—has in many respects proven otherwise. The recently released Committee to Protect Journalists report regarding the jailing of journalists illustrates the re-established strict censorship of the media in Egypt (Beiser, 2017). This crackdown has equally targeted traditional and new media actors.

The amount of free expression within the presidential campaign via Egypt’s Facebook humor pages does point to Egypt attempting to unshackle from its authoritarian past while taking advantage of the opportunity to express a newly achieved level of freedom of expression. The

findings point to a seemingly widespread level of dissatisfaction with all political candidates, which may be the onset of political apathy after years of political upheaval or possibly point to the potential for continued change. Although the Egyptian popular uprisings of 2011 and 2013 may be in the recent past, it seems apparent that the embers of the Arab Spring remain. These cinders are seemingly evident within the identification of all four categories of Carnavalesque combined with the identification of three categories of the SPIN model. Therefore, if the research findings are any indication, a small spark could hold the potential to reignite the currently latent uprisings of Egypt's recent past.

Limitations

The shortcomings of employing content analysis within research is a result of simply being a descriptive tool rather than affording researchers ability to determine potential effects of what is measured. The utilization of a purposive non-random sample inhibits the sample's ability to be representative or generalized to population. The three Facebook pages selected for investigation possess a vast amount of content—including videos and other material—however, the research narrowed its focus to analyze only cartoon images.

Recommendations

The recommendation for future research would be the utilization of a triangulation method employing qualitative and quantitative approaches. The utilization of this combination of methods would allow researchers to determine potential influence or effect on viewers. The recommendation for such research would include a longer duration of time and a greater selection of content.

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