# THE ROLE OF FACEBOOK IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IN MOROCCO

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**Abstract.**  The study investigates the factors that inspire Moroccans to engage in both online and offline civic efforts. The inquiry targeted demographics, frequency of Facebook use, the influence of online engagement on participation in real life and the main motivations behind Moroccan civic engagement online. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were adopted to collect and analyze both primary and secondary data. An online survey was administered to (n=277) participants through Facebook targeting the general public of Moroccan Facebook users to collect primary data. Secondary data was collected via semi-structured interviews with (n=3) social activists to provide a comprehensive view of both normal citizens and people who can be considered specialists in the field. The findings revealed the extent to which Moroccans' usage of Facebook influences their engagement both online and offline, indicating that social media use for civic purposes is significantly related to offline participation. Despite that, higher levels of the so-called "slacktivism" behaviors dominate Moroccans' civic activities performed on Facebook. Findings in general support the fact that Facebook plays a significant role in the development of civic engagement in Morocco.

*Keywords:* engagement, civic engagement, online engagement, slacktivism, social media

## 1. Introduction

With more than 6 million users, Facebook is classified number one in the top ten most visited websites in Morocco (Alexa). It is the most active social network in Morocco and holds the third rank in the Arab world after Egypt and Saudi Arabia (Facebakers). Facebook has become an alternative, independent space whereby Moroccans can raise a plethora of issues such as democracy, human rights, and social change. The Platform transcends its primary function to become a margin where people's need for action and involvement is enticed. This ascending usage of Facebook in Morocco has drawn the interest of researchers and has been inquired from a wide range of perspectives namely how it is used Euler (2013), the influence of Facebook on religion (Al-Rawi, 2016), the community motivation in using Facebook (El Haouta & Idelhadj, 2018), and the role digital spaces play in shaping the youth' civic identities and engagement (Cho, 2020).

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Although Facebook was originally conceived for communication purposes, many academic inquiries in Morocco demonstrate that this social networking website is also utilized for social purposes, such as community building tasks and political engagement. Past research has revealed that Facebook has played a major role in political engagement during the Arab spring and the 20th of February movement in Morocco (Rahman, 2012). Almost all available research studies link civic engagement with political engagement in Morocco (Harraki, 2017; Haitani, 2017).

While these last examples constitute promising evidence that people are adopting social media for social causes, research on purely social engagement per se remains absent in the Moroccan context. Civic engagement and social media as a domain in the Moroccan context need to be further explored because of the opportunities it offers with respect to fostering civic engagement. This study aims to increase the understanding of the role of Facebook in the development of civic engagement and participation in Morocco as a response to the gaps identified earlier and the need for further research in this area.

Investigating the role of Facebook in mobilizing people and in developing their sense of social engagement and participation is still in its infancy. So, the importance of the study derives itself from the fact that no similar studies (at least to our knowledge) have

been conducted in the field in Morocco. Such inquiry will pave the way for further studies that will add other variables to the inquiry and thus contribute to the accumulation of more research on civic engagement in particular and its relationship with social media in general. Also, this inquiry can be helpful for activists, researchers, and organizations that are interested in knowing how Facebook can be leveraged to promote civic engagement, raise pro-social awareness, build social capital, and promote collaboration within society.

The major rationale behind this study is to develop a deeper understanding of online civic engagement. Civic engagement has developed from a traditional one to a virtual one, yet there are minimal attempts to examine the new occurring form of civic activism, particularly from a non-political point of view.

Due to the scarcity of research aiming at understanding the link between civic engagement and social media in general and Facebook in particular from a non-political standpoint, this study is interested in both "normal" citizens and "social activists" to build a rather comprehensive understanding of the modes that govern online civic engagement in Morocco as well as the different factors and relationships that govern this civic engagement transition in order to expand the understanding of this online phenomenon.

This article reports the findings of the study which tries to answer the main question:
To what extent does Facebook contribute to the development of Moroccan civic engagement?

The study uses both quantitative and qualitative methods to address the objectives and research questions. The study adopts 'Positivism' and 'Interpretivism', the two basic approaches to research methods in social research. The research consists of two different data collection methods: an online questionnaire to detect Moroccans online and offline civic engagement patterns, and face-to-face interviews to further explore the phenomenon from other perspectives.

The major results were the identification of the main social issues and the modes of civic engagement for the social activists both online and offline and the three ubiquitous social problems in Morocco are education, poverty and unemployment in addition to the three main civic modes of activism on Facebook mainly Publication of civic information, civic dialogue and coordination of civic action. The results also revealed an increasing interest and usage of online activism that is eventually translated to offline participation in the case of social activists.

The article is organized as follows: in Section II, the review of the literature addresses Social media and civic engagement. In Section III, the conceptual framework is presented in terms of Social capital, individual social responsibility and social exchange theory. In Section IV, the present study and its results are discussed; finally, in Section V the results of the study are viewed in terms of implications, limitations and future research.

## 2. Review of the literature

The review of the literature is divided into two parts. The first part begins by reviewing the literature of major concepts related to social media and civic engagement, namely: social media, Facebook, online and offline civic engagement. It also presents offline and online formats of civic engagement as measured in the different trends especially the utopian and the dystopian point of view concerning the relationship between social media or Internet use and civic engagement with a short reference to slacktivism and clicktivism.

The second part examines the theories covering prosocial behavior, namely social capital, individual social responsibility and social exchange theory. The interest in covering such theories is to understand and identify the major motivations of civic engagement. It focuses on examining the existing studies, conceptual frameworks and motivations of online civic engagement such as: trust, reciprocity, social networks, responsibility, reputation, satisfaction, etc.

### 2.1. Social Media

Social media is considered a social instrument with which users can communicate, create and exchange information at different levels (Merriam-webster.com), it is "... a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allows the creation and exchange of User Generated Content" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). With the advent of Web 2.0, social media transformed the static nature of media into a very dynamic one. Social media today can be described as a dual channel that allows its users to interact and share information with other social media users.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) highlighted six distinct categories of social media, including: Blogs, Social Networking Sites, Collaboration Projects, Content Communities, Virtual Social Worlds, and Virtual Game Worlds.

## 2.2. Facebook

Facebook is the largest social networking site in the world today and the most popular site overall in Morocco (Alexa, 2019). Facebook has had a gigantic success since its establishment in 2004. Many statistics about the platform show that it has collected more than 2.32 billion monthly users in 2018, 1.49 billion daily active users, 47% of them access the platform through mobile devices and the average number of friends is 338 (Brandwatch, 2019).

Facebook offers tools and possibilities that make it not only the perfect tool for online communication, but also a platform for a wide range of other possibilities. The platform hosts more than 900 features; an average Facebook user joins 80 groups, events, communities. This colossal number of features, in a way or another, supports the creation of new social networks and generates discussions based on social issues. The Facebook users interact and share their social or political information and points of view with ease and speed. This exchange of opinions builds ties and provides a common space for people to engage civically in the virtual realm. In civic engagement literature, several studies have supported the claim that Facebook is predominately used for civic purposes (Ellison et al. 2007; Valenzuela et al. 2009).

## 2.3. Civic Engagement
## 2.3.1. Offline Civic Engagement

There are many definitions of civic engagement to the extent that the term is described as an "elusive concept" (Boland, 2011, p. 103). Civic engagement refers to individuals' involvement in addressing social issues, the individual or collective behaviors aimed at resolving social problems in the community (Zukin et. al., 2006, p. 7). It is linked with promoting the quality of life in a given community. In other words, a civic citizen is a morally and civically responsible individual who recognizes himself as part of a larger social fabric and thus considers social issues to be partly his and such an individual is ready to make an effort and take action when appropriate.

Civic engagement comprises a myriad of forms of both political and non-political activities. Since this study is interested in the social dimension, the most commonly known forms of civic engagement are: donating, Fundraising, boycotting, participating in community meetings, cleaning the environment, contributing ideas and resources for social causes, contacting officials, attending protests, signing petitions, serving or joining local organization or associations, writing articles concerning community issues, etc. In fact, Putnam (1993) stated that in order to be a good citizen, one should take part in community activities, either political or non-political. From another perspective, some scholars consider the previous definitions as outdated, traditional and unrepresentative of new ranges and means of action and behaviors that emerged in the wake of Internet and social media.

Thus, there is evidence in the literature that highlights the huge role that the Internet and social media play in providing new avenues for social participation, and the potential it has to resuscitate civic engagement among those who are marginalized from the mainstream civic sphere such as the less-educated or minorities. In their study, Wellman and Gulia (1999) concluded that the Internet is increasing social capital, civic engagement, and developing a sense of belonging to online communities and that the new social media websites are becoming the new vanguards for social engagement because of their potential in creating communities of similar interests which results in galvanizing people around common causes (Wellman & Gulia, 1999).

## 2.3.2. Online Civic Engagement

Online platforms offer users new opportunities to express their views and insights, consider others' views, and encourage engagement on political and social issues. New platforms such as Blogs, online forums and social networking sites have created a sphere for and through which individuals can engage in raising social issues. Online civic participation has been recognized by many scholars as an important form of civic life (Banaji & Buckingham, 2010; Livingstone et al., 2007; Mossberger et al., 2007).

Scholars are divided into three main

streams in the study of the relationship between Internet/social media use and civic engagement. The first stream considers this relationship as a positive one and that any increase in Internet or social media use will be translated into an increase in civic engagement (Shah et al., 2002, Charman, 2010). The second stream considers that this relationship will relate to a decrease in social participation (Quanhasse et al., 2002). The third stream asserts that social media offer a possibility for symbolic civic engagement or "slacktivism" that has no real impact on social change and might even ruin future civic action (Lee, 2013, McCafferty, 2011).

## 2.4. Conceptual Framework
## 2.4.1. Social Capital

The concept of social capital was initially used to describe those benefits of personal ties and their role in the development of interaction and relationships as resources for social engagement. Social capital is a collective asset shared by members of a certain network (Bourdieu,1986) and it "... consists of some aspect of social structure, that facilitates certain actions of actors, whether persons or corporate actors-within the structure" (Coleman, 1988, p. 98). Social capital emanates from serious and genuine investment in social relations with expected returns and implies that the benefits will arise from such investment, referring to the enormous access to and use of such resources embedded in social networks (Lin,1999)

In order for social capital to be productive as any other type of capital, the latter should be developed through three processes. First, "Obligations and expectations" where trust is very necessary to build social resources (Coleman, 1988). Trust plays an enormous role in maintaining expectations within a community highlighting that the level of trust greatly affects the economic success of any community (Fokuyama,1995). Second, "information-flow" with information flow, if individuals in a community have accurate information, they will act accordingly (Coleman (1988). Even in cases where community members are not interested in current events happening in their communities, information flow is still important because there is a possibility that these disinterested individuals could still pass on the information to other friends and family who might choose to attend civic or political events (Dasgupta & Serageldin, 2014). Third, "Norms of reciprocity accompanied by sanctions", Norms are necessary in a society because they serve to encourage positive behavior and limit negative behaviors, and effective norms can only be implemented because individuals know that sanctions may be imposed if norms are violated (Coleman, 1988).

Social capital is "…features of social organizations, such as trust, norms and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions" (Putnam, 1993, p. 67), and "…features of social life—networks, norms, and trust that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives" (Putnam, 1995, p. 664), and "…connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Putnam, 2000, p. 19). Social capital is closely related to "civic virtue." that allows people to socialize, work together and create networks in which they live together as communities.

## 2.4.2. Individual Social Responsibility

Individual social responsibility is the responsible behavior of the individual in society (Ecimovic et al., 2008). Individual social responsibility characterizes a society in which individuals know their rights and their responsibilities and act for the benefit of their own and of others and in a spirit of personal independence (Păceșilă, 2018). It is an act of an activist or volunteer who is always connected to and preoccupied with community problems and concerned with their solving. ISR also refers to each person's commitment to the community they live in, an interest in what is happening in the community as well as in the form of active participation in finding solutions to the local issues (Isrworld.org, 2008).

Social responsibility takes many forms such organizing an event related to the history or culture of the city, supporting causes such as animal mistreatment, child mistreatment, social inclusion, discrimination, migration, human rights, addiction, elderly care, education, environmental protection, family violence, urban rubbish, suicide prevention, clean energy, citizen security, recycling, illiteracy, cancer, etc. (Omoto & Snyder, 1995)

Other forms of social responsibility include making donations in money or goods

for social, cultural, or environmental causes (Păceşilă, 2017), as well as through the consumption of organic products (Benabou & Tirole, 2010). However, these behaviors are not always the result of intrinsic altruism, many studies suggest that such actions are hugely motivated by social pressure and image concerns (Ellingsen & Johannesson, 2011; Dellavigna et al., 2012).

## 2.4.3. Social Exchange Theory: Reputation

The theory of social exchange is a major theory that covered the concept of reputation and its relationship with social interaction (Blau, 1968). This theory holds that individuals engage in social matters based on an expectation that will somehow lead to some social rewards referred to as individualistic benefits such as social approval, reputation, respect, satisfaction, honor and relationships which can be referred to as "the currencies of civic engagement."

In order to arrive to some form of online engagement, individuals must think that their contributions will be worth the time and effort and that some form of value is created for them too. In this respect, the results from prior research in participatory behavior provide evidence that building reputation is a strong motivator for active participation (Donath, 1999). In organizational electronic networks, the chance for improving one's reputation provided a major motivation for offering advice to others. Moreover, there is some evidence that an individual's reputation in online settings extends to one's profession. As stated by Wasko (2005), "the perception that contributing knowledge will enhance one's reputation and status in the profession may motivate individuals to contribute their valuable, personal knowledge to others in the network" (p. 40). This emphasizes the importance of individual motivations and stresses the fact that reputation plays an important role in motivating individuals to leverage and maintain their status within a community.

Based on the aforementioned discussion, the following subordinate research questions and hypotheses are thus stated:

Is there a relationship between demographic variables (Gender/ age/ education) and civic engagement?

Hypothesis 1: One of the sexes is associated with higher levels of both online and offline civic engagement.

Hypothesis 2: Higher levels of education are associated with higher levels of both online and offline civic engagement.

Hypothesis 3: Older age groups are associated with higher levels of both online and offline civic engagement.

How does Moroccans' Facebook usage relate to their online civic engagement?

Hypothesis 4: Higher frequencies of Facebook use are associated with higher levels of online civic engagement.

Is there a relationship between online civic engagement and offline civic engagement?

Hypothesis 5: The higher the level of online civic engagement, the higher the level of offline civic engagement

What are the main motivations behind Moroccans' civic engagement online?

Hypothesis 6: Moroccans' online civic engagement is motivated by trust.

Hypothesis 7: Moroccans' online civic engagement is motivated by reciprocity.

Hypothesis 8: Moroccans' online civic engagement is motivated by social networks.

Hypothesis 9: Moroccans' online civic engagement is motivated by reputation.

Hypothesis 10: Moroccans' online civic engagement is motivated by social responsibility.

## 3. Methodology
## 3.1. Research Design

Based on the nature of the data, this study uses both quantitative and qualitative methods because of the advantage that plurality of methodology offers. The study adopts 'Positivism' and 'Interpretivism' which are the two basic approaches to research methods in social research. Following this design, the research consists of two different data collection methods: an online questionnaire and face-to-face interviews.

The questionnaire design was created following the twelve guidelines for developing a questionnaire suggested by Leedy & Ormrod (2013).

## 3.2. The Questionnaire

A pilot test was run and questions were tested and a thorough revision of the questionnaire was applied. The final instrument was designed in Google Forms

which is a professional platform; it is based on an attractive layout and what makes it perfect for this study is its availability for different electronic devices (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013).

The study uses an online survey even though it is known by lower response rates (Bryman, 2011) for a number of reasons. First, it is cost and time effective and the existence of logic jumps make it easy to handle. Second, respondents are directed to other questions based on their answers. Third, the online survey option of making the question mandatory prevented a large amount of missing data to occur because the respondents cannot move to the next question without answering the previous one. Thus, the questions were made mandatory so that the respondent can submit only if they answer all the questions. Ethical standards when using the Internet-based questionnaire should be as rigorous as face-to-face surveys. Hence, participants were assured that their contribution will remain completely confidential. The use of an online survey is, therefore, relevant to this study because it is mainly investigating Moroccan Facebook users both online and offline civic engagement.

### 3.3. The Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used in collecting the social activists' data. It is a qualitative method that grants the respondents enough time to freely discuss their opinions on a particular subject (Alshenqeeti, 2014). The advantage of semi-structured interviews is that they enable the respondents to "speak in their own voice and express their own thoughts and feelings" (Berg, 2007, p. 96). One of the strengths of semi-structured interviews is that it can generate a large amount of detail. It is reliable and easy to analyze. This qualitative research method involved using a set of already prepared questions to guide the interview, yet it allowed flexibility for the interviewees to guide the conversation. Open-ended questions were used to seek responses that were descriptive in nature.

The social activists were digitally recorded using a smartphone. It is worth mentioning that the interviews were conducted in Darija (Moroccan dialect) and translated to English. The participants were chosen on a voluntary basis and were offered an extensive explanation of the nature of the research. The participants were interviewed once over two afternoons. The interviews took place in public places, mainly in coffee shops. The

participants who took part in these interviews were informed beforehand orally and by a consent form, of their ability to stop the recording or withdraw from the interview at any time.

### 3.4. Sampling
### 3.4.1. Questionnaire

This study adopts a purposive sampling strategy (criterion-based sampling) as stated by Palys (2008). The questionnaire is the best strategy that responds to the research objective which is to understand the role of Facebook in the development of civic engagement in Morocco, it is highly relevant to opt for online questionnaires distributed via Facebook. The online survey specifically targeted a sample of Moroccan Facebook users, aged (13+) , 13 being the minimum age allowed for users to create a Facebook account.

### 3.4.2. Interviews

Criterion sampling is used to make sure that the interviews will meet the criteria of experts in social engagement. Snowball sampling is used to identify activists that other activists know, since there is no available list of all Facebook activists in Morocco.

### 3.4.3. Reliability

The reliability and internal consistency of the questionnaire are calculated utilizing Cronbach's Alpha's reliability test to assess the internal consistency reliability of several items (Morgan et al.,2004). The data were also checked for consistency.

### 3.4.4. Data Analysis

The Google sheet was coded in Microsoft Excel and imported to SPSS for analysis. The majority of the data is analyzed using an ordinal scale because of the categorical nature of the questions.

A series of univariate analysis procedures were used to examine the frequency and distribution of the study variables. Cross tabulations and correlations were used to examine the relationships between variables of interest to the study.

Thematic content analysis was adopted to analyze the data of the semi structured

interviews. Regularities and patterns were highlighted and particularly relevant ideas were extracted and compared to each other.

## 3.4.5. Participants
## 3.4.5.1. Interviews

Three social activists between the ages of 24 and 36 from the city of Fkih Ben Salah were interviewed for this study: two members of the association (ريغن يديب) and a social activist member of the association (ةيعمج قلوب ريخلا لامعألل ةيعامتجالا).

## 3.4.5.2. Questionnaire

The sample consisted of 277 Moroccan Facebook users, 69.3% (n= 192) males 30.7% and (n= 85) females from more than 50 Moroccan cities with few from foreign countries as well. Respondents aged between 13-21 represent the smallest category with 4.3% (n= 12), while respondents aged between 21 and 31 represent the most dominant category with a percentage of 71.8% (n= 199). The age category between 32 and 42 years old represents 17.3% (n= 48). Respondents older than 43 years old represent 6.5% (n= 18) of the totality of the sample. The majority of the respondents, 88.4% (n= 245) have a university level while 9.3% (n= 26) have a high school degree and 1.8% (n= 5) of the respondents hold a secondary education degree and only one respondent 0.4% (n= 1) has a primary school degree.

Table 3.1: Socio - demographic characteristics

| | | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 192 | 69.3 |
| | Female | 85 | 30.7 |
| Age | 13 – 20 | 12 | 4.3 |
| | 21 – 31 | 199 | 71.8 |
| | 32 – 42 | 48 | 17.3 |
| | 43 + | 18 | 6.5 |
| Education level | Primary | 1 | .4 |
| | Secondary | 5 | 1.8 |
| | High school | 26 | 9.4 |
| | University | 245 | 88.4 |

## 4. Results

The reliability and internal consistency of the questionnaire are calculated utilizing Cronbach's Alpha's reliability test. As Table 4.1 shows, the Alpha Coefficient for the entire questionnaire is at 0.913, which is regarded as a high level of reliability.

Table 4.1: Reliability test

| Cronbach's Alpha | Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items | N of Items |
|---|---|---|
| .913 | .901 | 49 |

## 4.1. Univariate Analysis

The analysis divulged a high frequency of usage of Facebook among the respondents: checking their account (83%; n= 230), commenting on posts and videos (42%; n= 118), sharing or liking content created by others (46.2%; n= 128), talking to friends or family using video chat or instant messaging (36.8%; n= 102).

The respondents mostly engaged in posting links/ images/videos surrounding social issues, with 39.4% (n= 104). Similarly, a majority of 32.5% (n= 90) use Facebook to "like" or "share" someone else's link, photo, or status dealing with a social issue. Respondents "Sometimes" join a Facebook group dedicated to social issues (26.4%; n= 73) while 23.5% (n= 65) exchange opinions on social issues with others on Facebook, and (31%; n= 86) friend or follow social activists on Facebook.

As for sharing experiences on social issues, 33.9% (n= 94) "Rarely," do. The majority 35.7% (n=99) "Never" used Facebook for an activist hashtag. The major part of the respondents, 45.1% (n= 125) "Never" signed an online petition or encouraged friends to sign one. The majority of respondents, 37.9% (n=105) reported that they never shared their experiences about participating or supporting a social cause on Facebook. Almost identically, 38.3% (n= 106) of the respondents indicated that they never changed their profile picture surrounding social causes. Also, 32.1% (n=89) of the respondents claimed that they never planned any activities on social issues with others via Facebook.

The least frequent online civic engagement activity in this section was "creating social issue related event invitations" 54.2% (n= 150) of the respondents reported "Never," and 3.6% reported "often" and "Very often."

The respondents were also asked about their attitudes towards the reasons that motivate people to participate civically on Facebook.

## 4.2. Bivariate Analysis

Since the data involves nominal and ordinal data various tests and statistical measures are adopted. Descriptive statistics, mainly Crosstabs are used to analyze the relationships between nominal and ordinal data of interest to the study. Correlations, mainly non-parametric, are used to analyze ordinal by ordinal data relationships of interest to the study because the majority of the data is gathered using Likert-type items. Chi square, Cramer's V, Spearman Rho and Kendall's tau-b are used to analyze the relationships of interest to the study.

Results show that there is no significant difference between males and female online engagement. (Table 4.1)

Table 4.2: Crosstabs Analysis:  Gender / online civic engagement

| | | Gender | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Male | Female | |
| Online civic engagement | Never | 39 | 31 | 70 |
| | | 20.3% | 36.5% | 25.3% |
| | Rarely | 66 | 25 | 91 |
| | | 34.4% | 29.4% | 32.9% |
| | Sometimes | 58 | 22 | 80 |
| | | 30.2% | 25.9% | 28.9% |
| | Often | 19 | 3 | 22 |
| | | 9.9% | 3.5% | 7.9% |
| | Very often | 10 | 4 | 14 |
| | | 5.2% | 4.7% | 5.1% |
| Total | | 192 | 85 | 277 |
| | | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |
| a. Chi(df)= 9.947(4), p = 0.041, Cramer's V = 0.18 | | | | |

The Pearson chi-square results indicate a weak correlation between gender and offline civic engagement ($\chi2$ = 6.06, df = 4, N = 277, p =0.19).

To investigate the relationship between age and online civic engagement, Kendall's tau-b was used because it is more suitable for larger cross tabulation like (3 × 3) or more. Moreover, since we deal with both ordinal and nominal data, the best measure remains Kendall's tau-b because its primary assumption is that data are at least ordinal (Morgan et al., 2004).

The Kendall's tau-b correlation indicated a weak positive association (to no association) between age and online civic engagement, τ = .104, n = 277, p = .051. To a very small scale, the older people, (32-42) are slightly more involved socially yet this doesn't change the weak relationship between the two variables.

Similar results are highlighted in offline engagement where Kendall's tau-b correlation indicated a weak positive association between age and online civic engagement, τ = .113, n = 277, p = .033.

Results also show that people with higher education levels are not likely to be more civically engaged online which rejects the predicted hypothesis.

Analogous to online engagement, the correlation indicates a very weak positive (or no) association between educational level and offline civic engagement. The Spearman rho statistic reports, rs = .048, n = 277, p = .429.

A Spearman's correlation was run to determine the relationship between Facebook frequency of usage and online civic engagement.

There was a strong monotonic positive correlation between the two variables, rs = 0.522, n = 277, p = 0.001. A scatter plot summarizes the results Overall; this positive correlation means that increases in online civic participation were correlated with increases in offline civic participation.

## 4.3. Findings – Qualitative research

Interviews with social activists were conducted to: 1) identify the prevalent social problems, according to the social activists, 2) identify how social activists are using social media to address social issues, and 3) identify the influence of Facebook on offline civic engagement. Two of the respondents are members of 'بيدي نغير', an association that started as a Facebook page. It was founded by young people from the city to mobilize the youth of Fkih Ben Salah to act for the benefit of their city. It started with activities such as volunteering for cleaning mosques, cemeteries, painting public schools, organizing reading clubs in open air for the youth.

It became an association, developed its field of work, reached a considerable number of members and provided new civic actions such as charity in Ramadan and Eid al Adha and also providing help for people in distant places such as the mountains during winter. The second is الخير قلوب جمعية, a young association in Fkih Ben Salah. Its main field of action is taking care of people in difficulty : the homeless, abandoned, poor, beggars, etc., their activities include providing food, blankets, shelter and also basic services such as bathing, cleaning, hair cutting, nursing for those people in need. The interviewees are: Hicham, 28 years old, member in the association (بيدي نغير), employee in a company, Imane, 25

years old, university student and member in the association (بيدي نغير), and Youssef 36 years old, co-founded the association (الخير قلوب جمعية) with a group of friends in 2018.

Three main themes emerged from the interview data on social problems, mainly: education, corruption, and poverty. The three social activists expressed their disappointment with the decreasing quality of education in Morocco, narrated their beliefs that corruption is a plague that prevents this nation from moving forward, and agreed upon unemployment to be the major social problem in Fkih Ben Salah, a small city where job opportunities are very rare.

Facebook activities are important to their work because they generate awareness and contribute to spread their word. Their interaction on Facebook pages is mostly with videos and sometimes photos, less with written material. The frequency of posting content is related most of the time to their civic activities.

Their Facebook pages were fostered to post messages asking for all sorts of donations (money, food, clothes, wheel chairs, medicine, etc.). They assert that Facebook has been very effective in reaching out to the public for contributions that eventually fuel their civic efforts on the ground. Activists especially from the association (بيدي نغير) stated that they get back to Facebook to launch volunteers recruiting posts which most of the time are successful.

They also interact and converse with their Facebook members as potential association members/ "Virtual members." The creation of this dialogue aims to keep the community informed and involved in the work of the association, and to strengthen the ties with the online community by involving them in discussions that foster diversity of views and generate new ideas.

The arrangements for their events and work are mostly coordinated using Facebook instant messaging and posts on the wall. They also referred to using the "Tag" option in Facebook, so that "… the post could be visible to the audience … selected plus friends of the tagged person" (Facebook.com, 2019).

# 5. Discussion

The study investigated the factors that inspire Moroccans to engage in online civic effort and   the potential role of Facebook in developing civic engagement in the Moroccan context. To our knowledge, it is the first study

that demonstrates the relationship between online and offline engagement from a non-political standpoint.

With respect to the relationship between the variables of gender, age, the analyses of the data did not, on the whole, reveal statistically significant differences regarding online and offline civic engagement. In fact, percentages highlight low levels of engagement among both sexes. The slight difference between participants' age groups, on the other hand, might be due to the unequal distribution of each age group which is mainly caused by the online survey, since the researchers do not control the representativeness of each age group.

Consistent with recent research (Kavanaugh et al., 2014), our findings indicate that people who use Facebook or who are engaged civically in real life do not necessarily need to have a high level of education.

Quantitative results reveal a moderate relationship between higher frequencies of Facebook use and higher levels of online civic engagement, since not every frequent Facebook user is automatically civically engaged. Social media is known for its reduced costs (time, effort) of accessing social information and the convenient ways of engaging in civic life it offers, which can be attractive to people who are interested, knowledgeable, and can be easily activated in civic efforts.

Our findings are also congruent with Valenzuela's (2013) findings that Facebook usage helps activate those predisposed or interested in social work. Our findings are also aligned with Norris' (2000) virtuous circle theory, which posits that media use will serve to activate the engaged rather than mobilize new participants to become involved in social issues. However, our findings cannot conclude that Facebook activates every user but only those who are concerned by social issues.

The results of this study also highlight a strong positive relationship between online and offline civic engagement. This relationship does not necessarily mean that Moroccans are strongly involved in social issues both online and offline. In fact, this means that similar low levels of engagement are highlighted in both online and offline stances. The respondents show very low levels of tangible online activism especially activities that require substantial effort and ownership from the individual. The level of participation varies depending on the activity, most of the time leaning towards lower levels of participation. This finding is consistent with recent studies

showing that online civic engagement has more appeal than offline activism and that an increased awareness of issues occurs on social media but not as much actual action. (Auger, 2013; Meyer & Bray, 2013).

This study provides strong empirical support that Moroccans engage in slacktivist activities that are mainly "clicktivist", impulsive gestures which are characterized by spontaneity and non-commitment (Halupka, 2014). This tendency to opt for low-risk activities as clicktivism arises from the fact that it is an easy way for Moroccans to engage in a form of participation that does not require any prior knowledge about the social issue at hand, while it allows them to show symbolic online support. This result is congruent with findings of research that show that such slacker activities may show support of a social issue online, yet they may occur only one time and do not affect or guarantee further engagement in future. When important social issues become salient to social media users, it becomes easy for them to replicate what their social media friends do (sharing, liking or commenting on a social issue and that's enough) (Halupka, 2014).

The strong positive association between offline and online civic engagement might signify that Moroccans are highly involved in civic activities on the ground, the findings, unfortunately, reveal that Moroccans are characterized by low levels of engagement in the real world as well, which doesn't exceed what we can label traditional philanthropic behavior, similar to their inclination to engage in clicktivism-based activities. The example of the 2018 boycott is a clear indication that Moroccans are not familiar with advanced forms of civic engagement and confirms that it is their first time engaging in such form of civic engagement. Their low level of engagement in other activities indicates they have never or have very rarely engaged in much elaborated forms of activism.

Overall results reveal that Moroccans are motivated by a multitude of factors to varying degrees. The ease of use represents the highest motivation with almost 90% and even qualitative research supports this motive, "Because Facebook is easy to use and inexpensive". This can be explained by the technology acceptance model (TAM) which suggests that the user's motivation is considered to be influenced by two beliefs, perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use and that these beliefs act as mediators between external variables and intention to use. TAM observes that an individual's intention to use a system is determined by PU (perceived usefulness) and PEOU (perceived ease of use) (Amadu et al., 2019). In our case, the perceived ease of use or the extent to which a user believes that using a given system (Facebook) would be free of effort is an important factor for civic participation.

The results regarding trust and social networks are congruent with findings of a recent study (Păceşilă, 2018) about the responsible behavior of the individual in his society where individuals know their rights and their responsibilities and act for the benefit of their own and of others and in a spirit of personal independence. Our results clearly show that Moroccans trust media as a means for change and that social networks are major motivations for online civic engagement. Moroccans engage in online prosocial behavior because they want to feel a sense of belonging to a certain social network, connect with people who share the same points of view and exchange opinions and ideas on social matters.

Our results also indicate that social responsibility is indeed a real motivation for people to engage online. It is worth noting that when the respondents were asked if they think people engage in social causes on Facebook because it is their religious responsibility, more than half the respondents disagreed with the statement, and a quarter chose the "I don't know" option indicating that religion is not necessarily associated with social work.

Reputation, on the other hand, received low levels of agreement, which supports the literature reviewed on the role of reputation in encouraging social participation.

The table below shows the order of the major motivations covered in the third section of the questionnaire according to the percentages:

Table 5.1: Summary of the major online civic engagement motivations

| Order | Motivation | Item in the questionnaire | Percentages | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Agree | Disagree | I don't know |
| 1 | Ease of use | • Facebook is easy to use. | 89.9 | 8.3 | 1.8 |
| 2 | Social networks | • they want to exchange ideas on social issues. | 88.4 | 9.7 | 1.8 |
| | | • they want to connect with people who share the same views. | 81.9 | 12.6 | 5.4 |
| | | • they want to feel a sense of belonging | 77.3 | 15.2 | 7.6 |
| 3 | Trust | • they trust social media as a means for change. | 71.5 | 20.6 | 7.9 |
| | | • they don't trust politicians anymore | 81.6 | 13 | 5.4 |
| 4 | Social responsibility | • it is a must if we want to find solutions to social problems in our country | 56.3 | 36.8 | 6.9 |
| | | • it is their social responsibility. | 48.4 | 40.1 | 11.6 |
| 5 | Reputation | • they want to earn respect of their Facebook friends | 55.2 | 33.6 | 11 |
| | | • they want to have a good reputation among their Facebook friends. | 48.7 | 38.3 | 13 |
| 6 | "Herd mentality" | • others do the same things. | 51.3 | 37.2 | 11.6 |
| 7 | Religious responsibility | • it is their religious responsibility | 32.9 | 50.9 | 16.2 |

*Note*: The percentages displayed in this table were created through the recoding into different variables option in SPSS transforming the 5 Likert scale items into 3 Likert scale items and then calculated frequency and percentage for ease of interpretation

Moreover, our study provides strong empirical support for Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of needs, which stresses the strong need for people to belong. Our results highlight the 'herd mentality' governing Moroccans' civic engagement on Facebook. This means that people engage when their friends, siblings, people they respect engage. We cannot deny that this sort of behavior is very recurrent, especially supported from a slacktivist point of view. When someone shares or posts a socially related content, the majority of his or her friends on Facebook do the same as a form of solidarity and goodwill or just for the sake of showing that they care about the same issues, which really proves and supports the "Herd Mentality."

While Facebook is a potential tool for civic engagement, normal individuals are using it extensively for such purposes. These findings also suggest that while Facebook offers many promising features and possibilities that can be harnessed for social interaction and civic purposes, the majority of Facebook users in Morocco are just passers-by, lacking interest, motivation or just engaging in the easiest symbolic ways possible.

This lack of online engagement among Moroccans can be rooted in their lack of social participation in real life. The findings already discussed, reveal that Moroccans are mostly engaged in traditional civic activities (altruism) and meagerly engaged in complicated tangible civic activities. Facebook must not be viewed as a force that will charm people to engage, but a tool that can be exploited for the well-being of society by people who are engaged, interested and preoccupied by the issues of society, "Just as a box of tools and a pile of lumber do not inspire passers-by to build a house, yet when put into the hands of a motivated carpenter there is no limit as to what those tools can be

used to construct." (Purdy, 2013, p. 95).

The social activist, from the interviews, displayed a great awareness and mastery of the potentials of Facebook as a tool, and they managed to exploit it. They leveraged the platform for the publication of information, maintaining civic dialogue, recruiting volunteers and members, and coordinating civic action that is ultimately translated to offline civic action. There are people who don't just pass by, instead they stop and adopt the tool to their best civic interests which supports the Utopian point of view which maintains that the Internet allows for access to vast amounts of information, and tools with which to communicate and organize with others; thus increasing the potential for organized and informed democratic participation (Shah et al., 2002).

## 5.1. Limitations

As with any research study, the current study has its limitations. The first limitation is concerned with the scarcity of literature that investigates civic engagement from a purely social standpoint, especially when comparing the study findings to previous or similar ones. Another potential shortcoming is the choice of an online survey as a method of data collection. Given the relevant nature of this study to the experiences of online users, the low response rates presented a problem that was hard to overcome, especially that a much higher response rate and a larger sample were expected.

## 5.2. Recommendations for future research

Delving deeper in understanding the factors that encourage Slacktivist behavior instead of real online civic engagement is very relevant in the future since social media is gaining more popularity each day. In fact, providing insight into the intricacies that encourage social media users to engage symbolically can offer a major contribution to the field especially in Morocco. Moreover, future research into online and offline civic engagement in Morocco may also benefit from narrowing down the scope of study by comparing different populations with different demographic backgrounds, including socioeconomic or even cultural differences. Such comparative inquiry may help increase

our understanding of the social factors that may play a role in influencing civic engagement. Research covering other social media platforms can, without doubt, add more insight and provide a valuable contribution to the accumulation of literature on civic participation in Morocco. Last, the utilization of other methods of data collection (case studies, web analysis, focus groups, etc.) can clearly provide new perspectives that weren't already covered with more classical data collection methods.

## 6. Conclusion

Considering the fact that Facebook and social media in general continue to become an integrated part of our contemporary society, researchers also continue to examine the field from various standpoints, and this particular study aimed to investigate the role of Facebook in sustaining civic engagement in Morocco and add a step further to the accumulation of research in this direction. Overall, the lack of scientific inquiry exploring the relationship between social media and civic participation, together with the focus on the political aspect of engagement within the amount of studies available represented the main motivation on which this study resolved to explore this topic in depth.

The study highlights both interesting and surprising findings. First, the findings suggest that there is no significant difference in online/offline civic engagement among age, gender and education. Second, although the findings are consistent with the utopian claim that internet use increases the potential of civic engagement, this study delivered a contrasting, yet not necessarily a conflicting conclusion. The general perception conveyed is that online tangible civic activities lag behind symbolic civic activities, suggesting that these symbolic civic attempts are considered incapable of furthering real civic engagement effectively as they are considered mere Slacktivism. In fact, the majority of the respondents from the online survey tend to prefer not to engage in tangible online activism which is supported by a lack of offline engagement in real life as well. By way of comparison, social activists displayed high levels of engagement and full understanding of Facebook's potential in developing and sustaining civic participation by exploiting this online tool to its maximum.

All things considered, the findings of this study show that indeed Facebook has

a significant impact on the development of civic engagement in Morocco, and despite the limitations of this research, the results bring a contribution to existing research in social media and civic engagement. Still, Facebook and social media remains a relatively new unexplored domain in Morocco, there is an unmet need for more research on its implication for civic purposes.

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