Egyptian women's usage of social media and its effect on feminism

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Introduction

"Social media is defined as a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technical foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content" (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). According to Romero, et.al (2011), the explosive growth of Social Media has provided millions of people the opportunity to create and share content on a scale barely imaginable a few years ago. Due to the enormous participation by people on social media networks; millions of opinions, product reviews, and news are resulted and posted on daily basis on social media platforms such as *Facebook*. *Facebook* has always been a platform where people express their views, share their photos and memories, and debate over controversial issues; alongside other uses which are shopping, businesses, and many more uses. The development of technology has made social media websites addictive to many people. It has become an essential part of a massive number of people's lives to an extent that some studies show that some people totally replaced their offline life with their online ones. Some claim it is easier to be whoever you want to be on Social media than to face reality and see judgement or disapproval from people in the offline world. People are using it for several reasons other than to just be updated and informed about the world and their friends/families.

Facebook is becoming more personalized nowadays. People choose what they want to show and hide the things they don't in a customized way blocks some people from seeing certain posts. It also has become personalized by the people more than the technical staff that works in the company. People have created groups that gathers people with common interests. These groups are no longer led by the moderators or admins; they have become a comfort and trust zone where members share their experiences and ask for advice and opinions. There are countless number of groups that involve fashion, everyday tips, cooking tips, motherhood tips, fatherhood tips,

marriage tips, travelling tips, animal related groups and many more (Zywica, and Danowski, 2008).

According to Park, Kee and Valenzuela (2009), one of the common types are the female oriented *Facebook* groups. Some groups share very personal topics that they create it as "secret groups" that no one can find unless they are invited. These groups are private and only the admin can allow people to join. These groups are usually for females to share their experiences regarding their marriages or relationships and seek advice from others. Most of these groups succeed due to the anonymity of the sharers. A person who wants to share their experience and ask for advice usually sends the admin their problem, and the admin shares it in the group as an anonymous post. Accordingly, only the admin/s know the names and faces of the people and their problems regardless of the sensitivity or the privacy of the problem.

On a parallel note, women have been calling for equality and supporting feminism for a long time now. "Feminism is a social movement whose basic goal is equality between women and men. In many times and places in the past, people have insisted that women and men have similar capabilities and have tried to better the social position of all women, as well as the status of disadvantaged men. As an organized movement, modern feminism rose in the nineteenth century in Europe, America, and Japan in response to the great inequalities between the legal statuses of women and men citizens" (Lorber, 2010). People all over the world have been calling for equality between men and women for years now. People are calling for equality in terms of payment, status, job positions, political and social rights in addition to many more aspects. Gender inequality is not only measured in terms of what the society offers women, but also how men treat women. *Facebook* is a very suitable platform for these women to support their cause and express their views on what women deserve. In the simplest form, feminism is the call for equality,

however in reality, so many different definitions of feminism are interpreted (Lorber, 2010).

Some women are with feminism in its simplest form and call for equality, some women believe feminism should mean women having more rights than men since men have always been dominating all fields. More women believe feminism is equal pay and rights; however, men should still do extra for women in support of their femininity. Moreover, there are women who are completely against feminism as a concept, and there are those who believe the feminist movement nowadays are destroying the sacred concept of equality. These types of people and these kinds of topics are very much presented on social media especially on *Facebook*. People all around the world are debating this topic with various opinions and views. It has become very debatable that there are many campaigns both supporting and denying the cause, there are hashtags, movements, and celebrity endorsements regarding this topic (Munro, 2013).

Since this is an extremely debatable topic and almost everyone has an opinion on it, it is a big part of the discussion between women on the previously mentioned *Facebook* groups. Sometimes it is directly and strictly mentioned in comments, and sometimes it shows from the way women comment on other women's personal problems.

Linking the previous points together, the excessive use of *Facebook* and the popularity of these groups shows where women stand in the movement of feminism. It also shows how these women perceive and use *Facebook* and the related groups.

The concept of feminism has always faced several rejections for different reasons. One of the reasons is the fact that feminism contradicts certain cultures and traditions. One of the countries that is still struggling with feminism is Egypt. It is Muslim/conservative/masculine country where the concept of feminism is not welcomed by everyone. However, it is a highly debated topic among people of all

ages. There are several female oriented Egyptian *Facebook* groups where women share their experiences and ask for advice. Egyptian women are raised in a conservative country where most of their traditions are relatively strict compared to western countries (Yount, and Li, 2009). *Facebook* is a very famous platform that women use on daily basis. Many Egyptian women are enrolled in female only *Facebook* groups that allows them to discuss all sorts of topics. Most of these topics are male-female related topics. In a conservative country like Egypt, personal topics are not usually discussed in public; however, several women discuss their most personal problems online. The aim of this dissertation is to find out the reasons behind women's need to discuss these issues online, and whether or not it happens offline; in addition to understanding if these female-oriented *Facebook* groups help empower women and support equality and feminism.

Research Questions

1. How do Egyptian women present their opinions regarding female issues on *Facebook* groups?
2. How is feminism presented on *Facebook* groups by Egyptian women?
3. Do Egyptian women feel more empowered on *Facebook* or in real life?
4. To what extent does *Facebook* empower Egyptian women?
5. How do Egyptian women respond to other women's personal problems on *Facebook*?
6. To what extent do women support feminism and equality on *Facebook* groups?

Literature Review

This dissertation is one with several ideas. The four main points are women, women's usage of *Facebook* groups, the reasons behind the usage, and how it is all related to feminism. There are different theories that would help understand and explain the topic. Firstly, *social learning theory* is also used to describe a little more in depth what makes women have common opinions for examples on these groups. It explains how people learn by observing each other. In this dissertation, the research provided will discuss how and what women learn from each other. Secondly, *Uses and gratifications* theory is used to explain why people use the media and what benefits do they gain from it. It thoroughly explains women's usage of the female-oriented groups on *Facebook* and the different outcomes and results they get from it. It also explains the ways of communication that occurs in these groups. The third theory used in this dissertation is the spiral of silence. This theory briefly explains how people who share the minorities' opinion are less likely to express them. The Literature review is divided into more detailed sections such as *Facebook* and *Facebook* groups, Feminism and the empowerment of women; which will all be related to the previously mentioned theories. The previous topics are all applied in this research to the Egyptian society and Egyptian women.

Uses and gratifications Theory

Uses and gratifications theory that was developed by Elihu Katz and Jay Blumer in 1979 seeks to understand and explain the reasons behind people's choice of media usage. It aims to understand the relationship between people and how they use the media. The *Uses and gratifications* theory is a long complex theory; however, the main question is why do people use certain media platforms and what benefits do they get out of it. People use the media for various reasons and have different benefits achieved. The motives and reasons vary based on every individual's situation. *Uses*

and gratifications theory follows the same school of theories that suggest that individuals have power over the media usage, in contrary to theories that assume that people are passive consumers of the media. *Uses and gratifications* Theory explores how individuals deliberately seek out media to fulfill certain needs or goals such as entertainment, relaxation, or socializing, and many other goals (Blumler, 1979).

The *Uses and gratifications* theory is used to develop effective communications programs when used in the right manner. It explains the relationships people have with the media, and names individuals as active audiences. The audience choose the media to fulfill their own needs. These individuals may use the media for a variety of reasons including, but not limited to, entertainment, the desire to learn about world events, or to divert themselves from life problems (Oliver & Nabi, n.d.). Elihu Katz and Jay Blumler developed the *Uses and gratifications* theory in 1979 to react to the traditional mass communication research that focuses on the sender and the message rather than focusing on the audience (Oliver & Nabi, n.d.). The theory has been developing over the past 40 years accommodating the development and changes that occur to media platforms and communications. The *Uses and gratifications* theory is based on the idea that media audiences are active rather than passive, meaning they do not only receive information, but also unconsciously attempt to make sense of the message in their own context (Peirce, 2007). Some of the gratifications people get from using the media are cognitive needs, affective needs, personal integrative needs, social integrative needs, and tension free needs. Instead of paying attention and focusing on media content, Blumler and Karz diverted their attention to the media audience. For decades, the Uses and Gratification (U & G) Theory has been the main theory of communication that explains what people do with the media. To many, the theory seems old. However, the emergence of social media breathes a new life into this aging theory (Musa, Azmi and Ismail, 2016).

"What mass communication scholars today refer to as the *uses and gratifications* (U&G) approach is generally recognized to be a sub-tradition of media effects research" (McQuail, 1994, p.86). "Early in the history of communications research, an approach was developed to study the gratifications that attract and hold audiences to the kinds of media and the types of content that satisfy their social and psychological needs (Cantril, 1942)" (Cited in Ruggiero, 2000, p.4). Other media effects research sought to discover motives and selection patterns of audiences for the new mass media. Examples include Cantril and Allport (1935) on the radio audience; Waples, Berelson, and Bradshaw (1940) on reading; Herzog (1942) on quiz programs and the gratifications from radio daytime serials; Suchman (1942) on the motives for listening to serious music; Wolfe and Fiske (1949) on children's interest in comics; Berelson (1949) on the functions of newspaper reading; and Lazarsfeld and Stanton (1942, 1944, 1949) on different media genres. Each of these studies formulated a list of functions served either by some specific content or by the medium itself: to match one's wits against others, to get information and advice for daily living, to provide a framework for one's day, to prepare oneself culturally for the demands of upward mobility, or to be reassured about the dignity and usefulness of one's role. (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974) (Cited in Ruggiero, 2000, P.4).

The *Uses and gratifications* theory is applicable in the case of women's usage of *Facebook* groups in Egypt, since it explains why women use social media and especially the female oriented groups on *Facebook*. One cannot generalize the reason why women use *Facebook*; however, it can be narrowed down to a number of reasons. Firstly, when discussing the uses; women use *Facebook* for entertainment, to be updated, to check on friends, for work (in different fields), and for communicating with the world. The gratifications they get from their usage of social media can be entertainment, feeling of involvement or fitting in, feeling good about themselves through compliments on their photos and posts, and in some cases, they benefit from the advice people give them. In the context of female oriented groups, especially in

Egypt, women might use it for advice about personal topics and romantic relationships. They might seek advice from other women on fashion, makeup, doctors, places to hangout, and many more tips. Some groups are mainly for sharing personal deep experiences and getting insights and advice from women who shared the same experience. Some groups allow a person to post anonymously however the comments are identified. The gratifications they would benefit from in this case is knowing there are others who went through the same situation and also getting good advice which might solve a crucial topic in an individual's life. These groups' gratifications are mostly intangible and sentimental benefits. In this case the main use of *Facebook* would be for advice and psychological benefits. Moreover, in the same case of the female oriented groups, the theory could be applicable if women use it to spread their opinions on important matters such as feminism. They might use these groups to advice women on what their rights are and how they should behave when it comes to abuse or all inequality of any sort. On a bigger scale, the usage of *Facebook* in this case is to spread ideologies which may or may not be helpful to others. Since these female oriented groups are almost like an open group discussion, there are several uses and several gratifications in one post or discussion. Therefore, this theory is important as it helped researchers to understand that there is more to a message than just the text. According to the statistics given by Park, Kee and Valenzuela in 2009, There are four needs for using *Facebook* groups; entertainment, socializing, self-status seeking, and information. People who are members of *Facebook* groups in order to satisfice socializing needs are mostly interested in getting to know and talk with people in addition to get support and sense of community. The entertainment gratification applies to people who use these *Facebook* groups for leisure and amusement needs. As for people who use *Facebook* groups for information or advice, they tend to learn similar topics to their interests and get information and details about questions they have. Some statistics show that a considerable number of people join these *Facebook* groups because of peer

pressure. If this case is applied to female groups in Egypt, some women might join these groups since they are very popular, and many people talk about them in the offline world. These groups help people fit in some societies where a large percentage are female group-members.

However, some criticized the *Uses and gratifications* theory as being individualistic. According to the researcher Ien Ang (1990), the theory is very individualistic as it gives people the idea of the psychology of a human being solely from the personal media use. Ang adds that the social context of the media use is not mentioned in the theory which makes it weak. Moreover, Ang states that the theory completely ignores the fact that some people use the media with no concerns with the pursuit of gratification or benefits of any sort. Ang also believed that this theory does not pay much attention to the media content which should be important as it represents the usage that the theory argues for. She also criticized the theory as it only tells why people use media, and that it does not explain the meanings people get out of the usage of the media (Ang, 1990).

Methodology

There are two main methodological approaches, qualitative and quantitative. Within the approaches, there are several methods. This dissertation is formulated in a qualitative research approach. The qualitative approach is a more exploratory research. It is mainly used to understand reasons, motivations, and opinions rather than counting numbers and statistics. It provides the researcher with more detailed information and insights that can later on be used for quantitative research. Qualitative research digs deep into the topics and gives detailed and sufficient explanations of how and why things happen (Kuper, A., Lingard, L., & Levinson, W., 2008). Qualitative research allows the researchers to collect in-depth data about their topic and relate them to ideas, hypotheses, and categorical definitions. According to Smith (1987, p.174), "In some approaches, one says that abstractions emerge from the data; in others, that a language is chosen and imposed on the data. In some approaches, the primary data are emic (i.e., expressed in the categories and meanings of the subject or "native")". Qualitative researchers study qualities or organizations and try to understand and justify them in a particular context. As Dabbs (1982, p.32) wrote, "Quality is the essential character or nature of something; quantity is the amount. Quality is the what; quantity is the how much. Qualitative refers to the meaning ... while quantitative assumes the meaning and refers to a measure of it". Qualitative research focuses on meanings, definitions, description, and deeper analysis rather than numbers and statistics. According to Smith (1978), what makes qualitative research different from other types of research is the idea that the specific historical, physical, material, and social environment where people interact and live has a great effect on how they think and behave. Qualitative researchers do not follow the idea of universal or generalizing concepts (Smith, 1987). The qualitative research does not count how many behave in a certain why; it rather understands why and how these people behave in this way. It takes place in contexts of human and institutional

purposes and it involves personal and interpersonal histories (Smith, 1987). Qualitative research is chosen for this topic because it aims to understand the reasons and motives behind women's engagement on social media, especially *Facebook*. It also aims to compare between women's engagement in real life versus *Facebook*, which does not involve any statistics or number, it rather focuses on giving explanations for their attitudes and behaviors. It is the better choice for this research as it is appropriate for the topic to do deeper research and understanding of women's behavior in a detailed format since it has the psychological aspect of analyzing beliefs and opinions rather than counting them.

Method of Data Collection

This research will involve two methods of data collection. The first method will be qualitative content analysis of women's comments and posts on personal and female related topics on *Facebook* groups. Content Analysis offers different advantages to the researches. Content Analysis gives direct attention to the communication through the media via texts, images, videos, audio, etc. Therefore, it focuses on the central aspect of social interaction. It also allows the researcher to study intimate and sensitive experiences of women which would be harder to obtain on individual face-to-face basis. It also helps to study how women interact together and try to come up with conclusions of how and why they choose *Facebook* groups as their comfort zone. The second method is the intensive interviews; and will help give more understanding of why they choose *Facebook* groups and what they think about sharing their experiences online. In-depth interviews are also helpful in this case as they help compare what women are comfortable expressing one-to-one in comparison to sharing anonymously online. Both methods combined will help the research by comparing the interviewees' answers with their engagement on *Facebook* to be able to come up with an objective conclusion as much as possible.

Sampling

The sampling technique will be non-probability sampling. According to (Etikan, 2016), non-probability sampling is a sampling technique where the samples are gathered in a process that does not give all the individuals in the population equal chances of being selected. Non-probability sampling is not based on random selection of samples. Subjects or samples of non-probability sampling are mostly chosen for their accessibility or by the purposive and personal judgement of the researcher. The types of non-probability sampling are: convenience sampling, consecutive sampling, quota sampling, judgmental (purposive) sampling, and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling is chosen since this topic involves specific subjects that have to be chosen in a non-random manner (Etikan, 2016). The sampling technique is used for both in-depth interviews and content analysis. In the content analysis, *confessions of a married woman* is the female-oriented *Facebook* group chosen for this dissertation and analysis. This group is specifically chosen as it is firstly organized in terms of mentioning the age and relationship status of the women who post on it. Secondly, all posts are anonymous which creates a unified pattern in terms of analysis. The unit used is the anonymous posts by women on the group that are chosen on the basis of the categories decided by the researcher. The posts that were chosen were chosen based on the number of interaction and comments they recieve since it provides in-depth material for analysis. It also shows what the women on this group are interested in the most. 15 posts were chosen from the group *confessions of a married woman*. The comments chosen for analysis are the comments on the selected posts. All comments on every post was analyzed to measure whether they are positive, negative, or neutral (further explanation in the analysis). The samples will be chosen for specific reasons; which are: gender, age, and activity on female-oriented *Facebook* groups; which makes purposive sampling the suitable technique

for the research. The sample chosen is: active women on female-oriented groups, aged from 20-50.

Regarding the interviews, the sample chosen are women aged from 20-50. Ten in-depth interviews were conducted with Egyptian women who are members of female-oriented *Facebook* groups, especially *confessions of a married woman*. The 10 interviewees were chosen based on their activity on *Facebook* and *Facebook* groups in addition to their age which is in line with the age group chosen for this dissertation. The interviews were conducted over *Facebook* messenger voice calls since the subjects are in Egypt, it was not possible to conduct face-to-face interviews. The reason for choosing the interviewees is because since they are familiar with the Egyptian female-oriented *Facebook* groups, they would provide great information and insights on why they think women post their problems on these groups, in addition to providing information on whether they post their own problems and questions or not.

Confessions of a married woman is a group that consists of almost 130,000 female members. It is a popular group in the Egyptian *Facebook* society especially among females. The group allows women to post their problem anonymously which gives them more freedom to discuss sensitive topics. Although there are similar groups on *Facebook*, this group was specifically chosen for different reasons. Firstly, the anonymous option helps women discuss their problems freely and into details which gives extra insight that is helpful to the research. Every post consists of 1. Age, 2. Relationship status, and 3. Years of being a relationship; which makes it more organized and helpful for the research. The group admin also allows a therapist or a specialist in most aspects of women's lives to do a live chat with the members to give advice on topics like marriage, sexual issues, psychological wellbeing, nutrition, and many others. This makes the group credible to many women therefore, the engagement in the group is very high. Since the engagement is very high, there are several women who are very active in this group which makes it easier for the

researcher to follow the pattern of their comments and deduct a specific behavior or pattern in commenting about their ideas.

Logo of the group's page on Instagram where women submit their confessions or questions.

In-depth Interviews

The in-depth interviews held for this dissertation were conducted with ten Egyptian women aged from 20-50, who are active/members of female oriented *Facebook* groups. The interviews were held on *Facebook* messenger voice calls since the interviewees are in Egypt. The interviews were moderated and structured by previously prepared questions. The interview guide was structured to understand the reasons why Egyptian women choose to engage on female-oriented groups regarding personal topics, also to understand if these groups empower women and help them achieve equality (feminism). *Confessions of a married woman* was the main group discussed in the interviews. Some questions were brought up within the interviews when different and new ideas came up, therefore, they were later added to the list of questions and analyzed with the rest of the interviewees. Not all interviews were identical, since some ideas that were brought up were not applicable to all interviewees. However, the main concept and theme were the same in all of them. The interviews held were average of 50-60 minutes. They were recorded and

transcribed for analysis. The interview analysis will complement the content analysis in terms of understanding and providing explanation for the reasons behind women sharing intimate topics on social media. It also allows comparison to be conducted between women's behavior on the previously mentioned female-oriented *Facebook* groups, and their behavior and opinions offline.

Interview questions:

1. Age
2. Marital status
3. How long have you been on *Facebook*?
4. How often do you use *Facebook*?
5. What kind of pages or groups do you follow the most? Why?
6. Are you a member of any female oriented *Facebook* groups?
7. Which ones, and why?
8. Do you usually comment on other people's posts or do you share your own experiences?
9. Which posts triggers you the most to comment on? Why?
10. What do you think is the trigger for you to share your experience and seek advice from women on these groups?
11. If a group can post your question or experience anonymously, to what extent would you share?
12. What is your response/reaction to posts about abused women?
13. How do you usually manage overcoming a bad day?
14. If a matter is very private and sensitive (ex: sexual problems), would you rather speak to a friend or seek advice anonymously on *Facebook*?
15. Did you ever follow an advice you were given on *Facebook*? If yes, would you please explain the nature of the problem?

16. If you ever did share your experience on a *Facebook* group, how did you feel about the comments?

17. What do you think of the concept of sharing very intimate topics on *Facebook*?

18. What do you think is the reason behind people sharing online rather than to their friends or families offline?

19. What do you think is the major problem that most women suffer from (in terms of the posts you've read)?

20. What is the thing you like the most about these female oriented groups? + What do you dislike?

1. In-depth interviews

Information about *Facebook* use were gathered prior to conducting the interviews in order to give proper and in depth ideas presented in the questions. Ten interviews were held with Egyptian women aged from 20 to 50. All ten interviewees are members of female-oriented groups on *Facebook*, especially *confessions of a married woman* which was shown to be one of the most famous *Facebook* groups among the female Egyptian society. All ten interviewees use *Facebook* on daily basis; 7 of the interviewees check *Facebook* at least once every hour, and 3 of them check *Facebook* once every 3-4 hours. The most common time spent using *Facebook* among the interviewees was at night. The following analysis of the interviews will be divided according to the topics presented in the questions.

Firstly, all interviewees followed *Facebook* groups like *miss basket, confessions of a married woman, girls love travel, the sisters, and* many other female-oriented groups. According to interviewee 1, 26 years-old, women who are not a member of at least one of these groups would be missing out on new

information and advice about products, places, relationship advice, and other benefits that arise from these groups.

Furthermore, it was common between the interviewees that the three most discussed topics in these groups are sexual problems, abuse, and cheating. Firstly, regarding sexual problems most of the interviewees mentioned that women choose posting their sexual issues online due to the pressure of the Egyptian society towards these topics. To elaborate more, the pressure in the society comes in forms of judgement as sex is a taboo in the Egyptian culture. According to interviewee 4, 24 years-old, "Talking about sex in Egypt does not lead to anything but judgement and misunderstanding". It can be understood from the information collected from the interviews that the amount of times women discuss sexual topics on social media reflects the conservative culture they live in. Interviewee 1, mentioned that women tend to blame themselves most of the time when it comes to sexual questions. It appeared to be repetitive in the posts she read that even if women are asking basic sexual questions, they tend to guilt themselves for not knowing and think they might be the cause of the issues they have with their partners. This shows that there is a lack of sex education among women which leads them to place the guilt on themselves. When interviewees were asked to mention one thing they do not like about these female-oriented *Facebook* groups, interviewee 4 related what she dislikes with the sexual topics in these groups. She mentioned that she dislikes women's comments about women who had sexual relationships before marriage. To quote, she said "I do not understand why women have to include religion and be tough on women who are obviously in need of support not judgement". According to the interviewee, women and girls who have sexual relationships before marriage usually get comments that disregards their problems and focus on where their problem falls on the scale of religion, especially Islam. According to Interviewee 4, it is not helpful when a woman posts about having a sexual relationship prior to marriage and got pregnant and she does not know how to deal with it, and women disregard it and start blaming her for

not doing the right thing by her religion. This suggests that women can be very tough when it comes to sexual topics no matter what the extent is prior to marriage.

The second most discussed topic in these groups according to the interviewees, is abuse. Abuse is discussed in these groups in all forms (psychological, verbal, physical, and sexual). Firstly, all 10 interviewees responded to the question about what topics triggers them to react, saying abuse was the most triggering topic for them. Firstly, physical abuse was mostly mentioned by the interviews more than the other types of abuse. The interviewees agreed that there should not be an excuse for physical abuse and that comment most of the time saying the abused woman should leave immediately. However, interviewee 6 believes that physical abuse is a crucial topic that should not be discussed on social media with strangers because they do not know the full story so it would be hard to give realistic advice. She claims that only professional help would be helpful at this point. Furthermore, interviewee 3's opinion on the matter of physical abuse posts is that it is the most thing she dislikes about these groups because she believes that physically abused women should not still be asking what to do, they should leave their partners no matter what the consequences are. However, interviewee 4 had a different opinion which stated that even though abuse is inexcusable, the women commenting on the posts do not know the consequences that would happen if women left their partners. There was a contradiction in interviewee 4's answers regarding physical abuse. She began by claiming that abuse is inexcusable and that women should not settle for an abusive relationship, however when asked about what she thinks about women sharing their problems online and getting advice, the answer was different. She said that she knew a case of a woman whose husband was physically abusing her and when she posted on *Facebook* everyone told her to leave him and get a divorce. However, the woman did not get a divorce; she instead stayed for his money because she had kids to raise. Interviewee 4 said this was smart instead of the comments that would have led her to leave without any benefits. This contradicts the idea of empowerment and equality

the interviewee mentioned throughout the interview. This shows that there are exceptions when it comes to abuse. Moreover, more than half of interviewees mentioned that verbal abuse is a very common topic between woman. However, they believe that most women do not acknowledge that it is a type of abuse. Interviewee 5 said "It is very common to see posts about an issue where women mention within the text that their partners verbally abuse them but that is almost never the core of the issue they are discussing". The 6 interviewees believe that verbal abuse is as hurtful and wrong as physical abuse, however, they still react and comment more on posts about physical abuse. The interviewees mentioned that the same thing applies to emotional abuse. It appears to be that women do not know that psychological or emotional abuse is a kind of abuse. When the topic of abuse was discussed with interviewee 1, the interviewee stated that part of the reasons why she does not want to be in a relationship, is reading about these posts on the groups. She mentions that reading about abused women as many times as she does, gives her the idea that all men are abusive and that having a romantic relationship leads to psychological and physical damages. She also added that it is widely mentioned in the comments about abuse that all men are abusive, which s another reason she believes marriage or being in a relationship is toxic.

The third most discussed topic in the interviews is cheating. Cheating can be either by the woman posting on the group or her partner. More than half of the interviewees said that they read many posts in the female-oriented groups about men cheating on their partners. They mentioned that the most repetitive posts they see is women who state that they knew their partners cheated on them before marriage, but they hoped they would change. Cheating is mostly mentioned after marriage, however the interviewees state that it is also sometimes mentioned prior to marriage. Interviewee 6 argued that women who knew their partners were cheating before marriage and still got involved with them are the reasons why most men cheat. "Forgiving adultery and thinking women can change men is the reason why cheating

men will never change". Most of the interviewees had something in common which is interacting with posts about cheating. The interviewees mentioned that their comment is usually to leave their partner; however, they give compromise advice when there are far more severe consequences that would result from divorce or separation. Interviewee 2 believes that giving advice and commenting on problems like cheating are hard when there are kids involved. She believes that It is not healthy to advice someone about a huge topic like cheating when they have kids and more to the story than the post they shared. On the other hand, Interviewee 4 believes that it is not appropriate to advice women on major topics and that women's comment are extremely annoying in her opinion. She believes the comments are destructive because she sees many "leave him" kind of comments which is not always suitable or appropriate for the situation. Moreover, some of the interviewees mentioned that topics about men cheating show a sexist part of the Egyptian women. The sexism appears in the comments when women neglect the fact that the person posting is being cheated on and start advising her to take care of her looks, lose weight, and have more sex with her partner. Interviewee 5 says that it is irrelevant, sexist, and hurtful to neglect a woman's pain and start body shaming or blaming her for her partner's adultery. Majority of the interviewees say that these groups show great amount of advice to women on how they should not communicate the fact that they know their partners are cheating and instead to check their phones behind their backs and stalk them. This unhealthy behavior created more struggle and puts the woman in a position of fault when she could have avoided it by communicating and trying to figure out the solution for the problem. Although some women do not encourage communication, interviewee 7 mentioned that most of the comments she reads supports women's feelings and encourages them to live a healthier life. Finally, all the interviewees said that it is a common fact between Egyptian women that all men cheat and are not loyal. They even believe that women should start finding smart

solutions for the issue of cheating because it will eventually happen to everyone at some point.

Other than the main topics discussed with the interviewees, there are different other results from the conducted interviews. Most of the interviewees believe that women empower each other through the female-oriented *Facebook* groups. They believe that it can be considered a safe space for women since it is a less condemnatory environment than the offline world. More than half of the interviewees believe that women support each other when gathered in one place. It is mostly agreed on between most the interviewees that women empower each other through these groups. However, some of the interviewees believe that empowerment does not necessarily lead to equality. The interviewees believe that equality cannot be achieved unless it is between both men and women. It is argued that women cannot reach equality by themselves in closed groups where men are not allowed to be a part of it. Moreover, the interviewees added that women feel more empowered on social media than the offline world since many women choose discussing their problems online rather than with their friends.

Surprisingly, all interviewees mentioned that they are members of the female-oriented groups and that they support the idea as it gives women space and freedom; however, none of them said they would ever post their own problems. Most of the interviewees interact by commenting on other people's problems; however, they would never post their own. The interviewees also added that the anonymity might help them post only if it is a severe topic and cannot find a solution to. According to the interviews, women prefer sharing their problems offline with their friends and families, however, according to the *Facebook* group analysis, women prefer posting online to avoid judgement.

Conclusions

According to the findings and results presented above, it can be concluded that there is a clear contradiction between the results of interviews and the content analysis. Firstly, all the interviewees stated that they would not post on the female-oriented groups unless it is a highly sensitive topic that would get them into trouble if they discussed it with friends and family. However, the same interviewees all supported the idea of the female-oriented groups and stated that these groups empower women. Most of the interviewees also mentioned that there are some problems women should not post on social media because the advice they will get will probably be unrealistic, yet they also mentioned that it is important for women to share all kinds of topics on these groups to feel the support and to rectify the conservatism of the Egyptian society.

The link between the two analysis shows that it is firstly a common idea between Egyptian women that Egyptian men are cheaters and abusive. It is clear from the posts on the *Facebook* group *confessions of a married woman*, the comments on these posts, and the interviewees' answers on top. It can also be concluded that the fear of exposing one's issues is in fact a clear problem with the Egyptian society. The previous statement is because the interviewees said they would not post on social media, and they would not be comfortable sharing sensitive topics, and on the other hand, women who post on social media also mention how it is uncomfortable it is to express their thoughts and that the anonymity is the only reason they can.

Moreover, the most common reason among women in terms of both the interviews and the content analysis to why women choose to post on social media is the fear of judgements and the conservatism of the Egyptian society. It is a common answer that sensitive topics like sex or abuse are not popular to be spoken about with people in the offline world. Hence, women choose social media to express their feelings and seek advice. Another reason that was frequently mentioned in the

Facebook group is that some women choose to communicate on social media rather than communicating with their partners out of fear. These women fear abandonment, and in the case of mothers; fear of losing their children. According to the analysis, when mothers post their problems most of the comments they get are related to their children. Therefore, some women might continue to accept abuse because it is common to let it go if children are involved.

The topic of women empowerment among both the content analysis and the interviews showed similar results. Firstly, the content analysis showed that the number of the constructive and positive comments were a lot higher than the negative or the neutral ones. These positive comments showed how women support each other and stand against abuse or any harm against women. Similarly, the interviewees mentioned that these female-oriented groups are empowering for women especially in a society that does not give space to women to express themselves. In summary, both results showed compromise when women have children.

All in all, the result show that women are supportive of each other and the ones who prefer expressing their thoughts anonymously on social media do it because of the strict Egyptian society they live in. The results also show that women do empower each other, however, they do not necessarily help each other achieve equality and support Feminism. It is clear from the analyzed posts and the interviews that women empower each other without including men in the equation. Men get extreme negative comments and accusations and they are not parts of these groups for example to defend themselves. These groups show an image of a group of women joining each other to hate men. This cannot be considered equality; however, it still helps women speak up and start demanding their rights. Women can also be hard on each other when it comes to topics where religion is relevant. For example, the most discussed topic among women in these groups are sexual topics. Therefore, the comments about religion are frequently found in the situations of sexual topics.

The topic of this dissertation could be further analyzed through different aspects. More research could be done firstly on a bigger scale of people in order to get more in-depth and meaningful results. It could also add more meaning if the same people who posted on the *Facebook* groups are the ones who get interviewed. Furthermore, a quantitative survey could be used to determine how many Egyptian women are members of the female-oriented *Facebook* groups in order to relate the number of members to the number of posts on these groups. This would help to understand how many women use these *Facebook* groups for advice and to get information which will give determine the importance of these groups among Egyptian women nowadays.

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