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**The War on Public Consciousness:
Social media as a tool of influence by supporters of the Egyptian
Muslim Brotherhood**

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Since the rise of ‘Abd al-Fatah al-Sisi to power in 2013, influential social media activists opposing his regime, mainly by the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), have been conducting campaigns for the consciousness of the Egyptian public against the Egyptian regime. This propaganda is often characterized by highlighting Egypt’s social and economic ills, addressing the human rights situation in Egypt, spreading Fakenews, and calls to continue the revolution until the change of

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government. The Egyptian regime is following this phenomenon with concern and is taking various measures to curb it. However, it seems that the road to minimization is still long.

On social media there are dozens of Egyptian influencers identified with the MB opposition to al-Sisi's regime. Over the years, they have been able to recruit between several hundred thousand and millions of followers thanks to the quality of the videos, the sharp messages they distribute and the various platforms they use, especially YouTube, Twitter and Facebook. It is not for nothing that the Egyptian publicist Ibrahim 'Issa called the MB "geniuses and wizards" when it comes to the use of social media in order to incite the masses against the state by exploiting their religious feelings.¹

In January 2022, the name of **Ali Hussein Mahdi**, an Egyptian YouTuber (a quarter of a million followers) and a human rights activist living in the US with a penchant for the MB, made headlines after he posted a series of YouTube videos about torture experienced by detainees and prisoners in Egypt.² Mahdi also called on the US and British governments to immediately cut off the economic aid they provide to Egypt.³ In an interview with the Guardian newspaper, he also said that "Police stations are even worse than prisons. The revolution happened because of this, and 11 years later we see it happening again".⁴

Following the reports, his father was arrested. In response, Mahdi was quick to publish a video in which he clarified that the materials he published were taken from visible sources on the Internet. He pledged to end all ties with the US Congress, with American political circles and with the foreign press and promised not to spread the leaks coming to him.⁵

¹ "[Ibrahim Issa: The Brotherhood is Magicians in Using Social Media to Incite against the State](#)" [In Arabic], *al-Shuruq*, 17 February 2022.

² [@AlyHussinMahdy](#), *YouTube*, 27 January 2022; [@AlyHussinMahdy](#), *YouTube*, 11 February 2022.

³ [@AlyHussinMahdy](#), *YouTube*, 27 January 2022.

⁴ Ruth Michaelson, "['We're next': Prisoner's Secret Filming Appears to Show Torture in Cairo Police Station](#)", *The Guardian*, 24 January 2022.

⁵ [@AlyHussinMahdy](#), *YouTube*, 19 February 2022.

The MB alleged that the father's arrest was carried out with the aim of exerting pressure on him to cease his political activities against the Egyptian regime.⁶



Ali Hussein Mehdi in a YouTube video in which he refers to his father's arrest (@AlyHussinMahdy, YouTube, 19 February 2022, at 1:04)

Abdullah al-Sharif, a prominent Egyptian YouTuber in Qatar (4 million followers) occasionally publishes satirical programs condemning the Egyptian regime. In early December 2021, he uploaded a program that allegedly documented a leak of a conversation between two al-Sisi advisers about receiving bribes as part of development work in the country.⁷

The publication of the leak created a buzz on social media, and MB's supporters published on the subject of hashtags such as "Al-Sisi and his associates" who accused Egyptian government officials of corruption.⁸ The Egyptian Interior Ministry responded that the leak was fake and that the two had no connection at all to al-Sisi or state institutions.

⁶ [#تسريبات سجون مصر](#) [leaks of Egypt's Prisons], *Twitter*.

⁷ [@AbdullahELshrif](#), *YouTube*, 9 December 2021.

⁸ [#تسريبات مستشاري السيسي](#) [Al-Sisi advisors' Leaks]; [#جمهورية مرفت](#) [Mervat Republic]; [#السيسي وشركاه](#) [Al-Sisi and his Collaborator].

One of the Egyptian lawyers even filed a lawsuit against al-Sharif for damaging Egypt's good reputation and spreading lies and fakenews with the aim of creating chaos and undermining Egypt's national security in exchange for greed received from the MB. The Egyptian regime was not satisfied with this, and ordered the arrest of his father.⁹ Eventually, his father was released in exchange for al-Sharif's confession that he had misled his listeners about the leak and after removing another piece of video that embarrassed the Egyptian regime.¹⁰

Other Egyptian influencers on social media affiliated with the MB are also dissim incitement propaganda:

Yosef Hussein, a prominent Egyptian YouTuber (over 3 million followers), hosts a comedy show called "Joe Show" on the London-based Qatari channel "al-Arab", in which he discusses economic and social issues in Egypt. For example, he dedicated a program to the alleged corruption in Egyptian government institutions.¹¹

Yasser al-Umda, another YouTuber influencer (209,000 followers), threatened that the rising cost of living, for example, in high bread prices, was contributing to growing unrest among the lower classes in Egypt that would lead to a revolution of the poors.¹²

Imad al-Buheiri, a former Egyptian broadcaster on Al-Sharq Channel in Turkey and an active YouTuber (over 250,000 followers), posted a YouTube video on 17 February 2022 about the reasons why the time has come to overthrow al-Sisi's rule.¹³

Muataz Matar, an Egyptian journalist and prominent social media activist (on Facebook – over a million followers; on YouTube – close to 4 million; on Twitter – over 4 million; and on Instagram – over a million) resumed his propaganda

⁹ [@AbdullahElshrif](#), *Twitter*, 13 December 2021.

¹⁰ [@osgaweesh](#), *Twitter*, 2 January 2022.

¹¹ [@JoeShow](#), *YouTube*, 23 December 2021.

¹² [@YasserElomda](#), *YouTube*, 9 February 2022; [@YasserElomda](#), *YouTube*, 19 February 2022.

¹³ [@UCrW5jWwNaR_fpd-y5Yt0wJA](#), *YouTube*, 17 February 2022.

activity against the Egyptian regime after being forced to stop it by a decree of the Turkish regime because of the reconciliation process with Egypt.

Upon his move to London, Matar conducts several propaganda programs against al-Sisi's domestic and foreign policy. For example, he condemned the close ties created between al-Sisi's regime and Israel thanks to Dr. Haim Koren who served as a former ambassador to Egypt. Matar dared to call al-Sisi a spy in the Israeli service.¹⁴



Moataz Matar in a live broadcast on YouTube condemning al-Sisi's close ties to Israel (@MoatazMatar, YouTube, 23 February 2022 at 27:53)

In addition to influencers, there are also organized MB social media groups of such as the “al-Murabitun team”, which conducts online campaigns to incite Egyptian citizens to resume anti-regime protests. On 17 January 2022, the group called to participate in spreading messages to protest against the Egyptian regime under the “Freedom for Revolutionaries of January”.¹⁵

¹⁴ @MoatazMatar, YouTube, 23 February 2022.

¹⁵ @morabetooooon, Twitter, 17 January 2022.



The Murabitun team launches in twitter hashtag called “Freedom for the January Revolutionaries” (@morabetooooon, Twitter, 17 January 2022)

Along with denials and arrests designed to deter subversive activists on social media, it seems that the Egyptian regime seeks to tackle the phenomenon through monitoring, by identifying and removing inciting content and also through raising the awareness of Egypt’s civilian population of false propaganda and social media.

On 24 January, the Egyptian press broadly covered a report published by the Egyptian Center for Strategic Studies on the ways the MB uses social media against al-Sisi’s regime. The findings indicated that the MB was investing efforts to promote hashtags on social media, especially on Twitter, such as “Get away al-

Sisi”¹⁶ in order to disseminate fakenews, by taking things out of context, using fictitious photos, and impersonating innocent sites that distribute propaganda and more.¹⁷

On 29 January, the Egyptian Parliament’s Media Center of the Cabinet published a report on its activities during 2021 against the circulation of dangerous rumors and subversive ideas such as wasting huge sums on national projects that have no future, confiscating funds from citizens’ bank accounts to fund them, the release of toxic substances into the air including sulfur dioxide, etc.¹⁸ Egyptian government sources said that the MB has been blamed for a significant share in spreading such fakenews.¹⁹

In conclusion, both the MB Egyptian opposition abroad and the Egyptian regime continue to see social media as an influential and important tool in shaping consciousness. Therefore, the two players invest considerable efforts into advancing their narrative and slamming their opponent’s narrative.

However, it seems that the Egyptian regime has encountered some helplessness in dealing with influencers on social media in the face of the arrest of their relatives. Although this method succeeds in deterring subversive activists from continuing inciting political activity on social media, Egypt risks being criticized by human rights organizations that can influence Biden’s policy towards Egypt. At the same time, it is clear that the continued spread of fakenews and rumors on social media poses a real threat to the stability of the Egyptian regime and other regimes and therefore ways must be found to deal with this phenomenon.

¹⁶ [#ارحل يا سيسي](#) [Get away Sisi]; [#حشد 25 يناير 2022](#) [25 January Gathering]; [#فريق احرار ٢٥ يناير](#) [Ahrar Team 25 January].

¹⁷ “[How do the Brotherhood and their electronic committees use social media platforms to spread lies, stir up strife and incite public opinion?](#)” *AlMarsad AlMasry* (The Egyptian Center for Strategic Studies), 24 January 2022 [in Arabic].

¹⁸ Muhammad Ibrahim, “[The Year of the Lead... Harves of Countering Rumors and Clarifying the Facts during 2021 \(Infographic\)](#)” *al-Dustur*, 29 January 2022 [in Arabic].

¹⁹ “[The Brotherhood is Developing a ‘War of Rumours’... and Egypt is Responding Strongly](#)” *Sky News Arabia*, 12 February 2022 [in Arabic].

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