

# A Paradigm for Employing Social Media to Achieve Sustainable Development Objectives

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This research aims at a model for employing social media to achieve the objectives of sustainable development. The researchers used a descriptive and analytical approach to survey and analyse the previous literature, to infer the results of this research. In addition, this qualitative analysis was conducted to interpret the ideas and results of partial and quantitative research related to this study, to support the information collected and thus design the model. Findings revealed that the ability of social communication to achieve the objectives of sustainable development is still limited and restricted to traditional uses. Hence, this proposed model aims to optimize the employment of social media to achieve the goals of sustainable development based on the researchers' vision.

**Key words:** *Arab region, proposed model, social media, sustainable development.*

## Introduction

Development is one of the most important challenges faced by societies in their quest for progress. In this context, the concept of sustainable development is of increasing importance, as the most recent progression in the concept of development, and coincides with the emergence of the communication revolution. The new media has created a revolution in the communication process because of its characteristics, and the unprecedented speed of its spread among human societies in general and Arabic groups in particular. Social media are the most representative of the new media, as a model for new technology, which is automatically reflected in social structures, bringing radical changes in society.

This raises questions about the contribution of these media in achieving sustainable development, and how to optimize technologies that characterize these means to achieve sustainable development. These questions posed a great problem, and a situation that was ambiguous in the light of the lack of studies dealing with presenting models that illustrate how social media can achieve sustainable development.

A communication model is needed, to show how social media can be used to achieve the goals of sustainable development in the Arab region. This research seeks to understand the best and most suitable communication model for social media, to achieve development goals. A clear picture of the employment of social media in sustainable development is sought through the following questions: a) What are the characteristics of the developmental role of the media in the Arab region? b) What are the uses of social media in the Arab region? c) What is the reality of the presence of sustainable development in the social media? d) What is the proposed model for employing social media in sustainable development?

### **Framework of the role and effects of communication in development**

Development is still one of the most important concepts that give rise to discussion and deliberation among researchers. It is multidimensional and concludes all aspects of life and its relation to human needs and basic living requirements. Nevertheless, many researchers agree that the development process is to develop and improve human life, by increasing production, expanding the scope of services, changing social patterns and prevailing values, taking into account political and social conditions (Al-Soroji, Owais & Olaiq, 2001).

In the Arab region, many studies confirm that there are the necessary elements to implement the aspects and dimensions of sustainable development in practice, yet in reality Arab countries lag in formulating clear policies for sustainable development (Ghailan, Yassin & Mohsen, 2009). Moreover, the economy in most Arab countries is affected by regional and internal situations, the continued decline in the prices of oil, and sluggish recovery in the global economy (See the Arab Monetary Fund's report, 2015, at <http://www.amf.org.ae/sites/all/libraries/pdf.js/web/viewer.html?file>). The lack of attention in most Arab countries' budgets to the goals of sustainable development was the reason for not achieving development objectives (Abdel Khader, 2015).

Media in societies is increasingly influenced by the effectiveness of multiple and diverse roles. Many theories have explained the developmental role of the media (communication) (Al-Abd, Al-Abd, 2007). The theory is based on the possibility of designing communication messages that increase the chances of individuals accepting new types of ideas, thus facilitating social change and national development. In his model of innovation, Roger has distinguished between “the adoption of innovations that concern the mental process in which

the individual moves from mere hearing for the first time to embracing them and the proliferation that signals the transmission of the new idea from its source to the individuals who eventually use it”.

Moreover, Daniel Lerner believes that communications enhance the physical and psychological movement of individuals within his vision of the system, a vision that must be applied to access to modernization, and includes several major stages of urbanization, learning and the proliferation of means of communication and political participation.

Welber Sharam argues that the means of communication are prominent in national development, because they perform three functions of media, decision-making, and teaching.

The public domain consists of a group who have common interests, and are able to participate freely to express their views and create controversy to influence decision-makers to achieve idealism for public issues (Al-Bayoumi, 2010). In this context, the electronic media create a state of controversy to influence decision-makers on public issues (Al-Musadak, 2005).

The technology of communication has contributed to overall development (Ben Barika & Ben Turki, 2010) and sustainable development in particular. Technology and the transformation of the economy from the traditional to the digital form cantered on non-linearity, speed and immediacy, and it improves business productivity (reducing paper costs). It also improves inventory and procurement management, minimizes waste and lowers transportation and pollution costs (Hamdi, Mahajbia, 2014).

Based on these theories, many media outlets included some developmental content through the pages of newspapers and magazines or within radio and television programming on their national television or radio stations (Noor, 2008). Moreover, several field and analytical studies on the reality of development media have confirmed the limited media coverage of development issues in general and sustainable development in particular, both in terms of form and substance (Abdel Kafi, 2011). Based on the above, the researchers argue that the traditional media in the Arab region failed to perform its developmental role, which resulted in a lack of real impact in the achievement of real development goals through the media.

## **Methodology**

The researchers utilised the descriptive approach; it is analytical and interpretive as follows: i) level 2 analysis method: to analyse previous literature to infer the results of this study, ii ) qualitative analysis method: to read and explain the ideas and results of partial and quantitative research associated with the study, thus supporting the information collected

within a given framework, and iii) the data and information collected from various available sources such as scientific studies, research, and reports dealing with the phenomenon.

### **Social Media Usages**

The recruitment methods employed by social media are divided into achieving the objectives according to the proposed model:

Public employment methods involving all social media. These methods are: i) advocacy campaigns for sustainable development objectives, (ii) networking between individuals and organizations, whether realistic or virtual, to mobilize, specifically to achieve the goals of sustainable development, and c) virtual declaration on the objectives of sustainable development and ways to achieve them.

Advertising through social networking sites uses a set of strategies to achieve persuasion among individuals and recipients of the most prominent (Abdel-Qader, 2012). These strategies are: a) marginalization of feedback from the future audience by giving it time to comment or evaluating its messages, as well as highlighting the consensus views in a large proportion compared to the contrasting, b) stabilize public opinion, especially when neutral, and c) improve the image of the advertising message whether it is in terms of output or technical aspects of formal or through software applications.

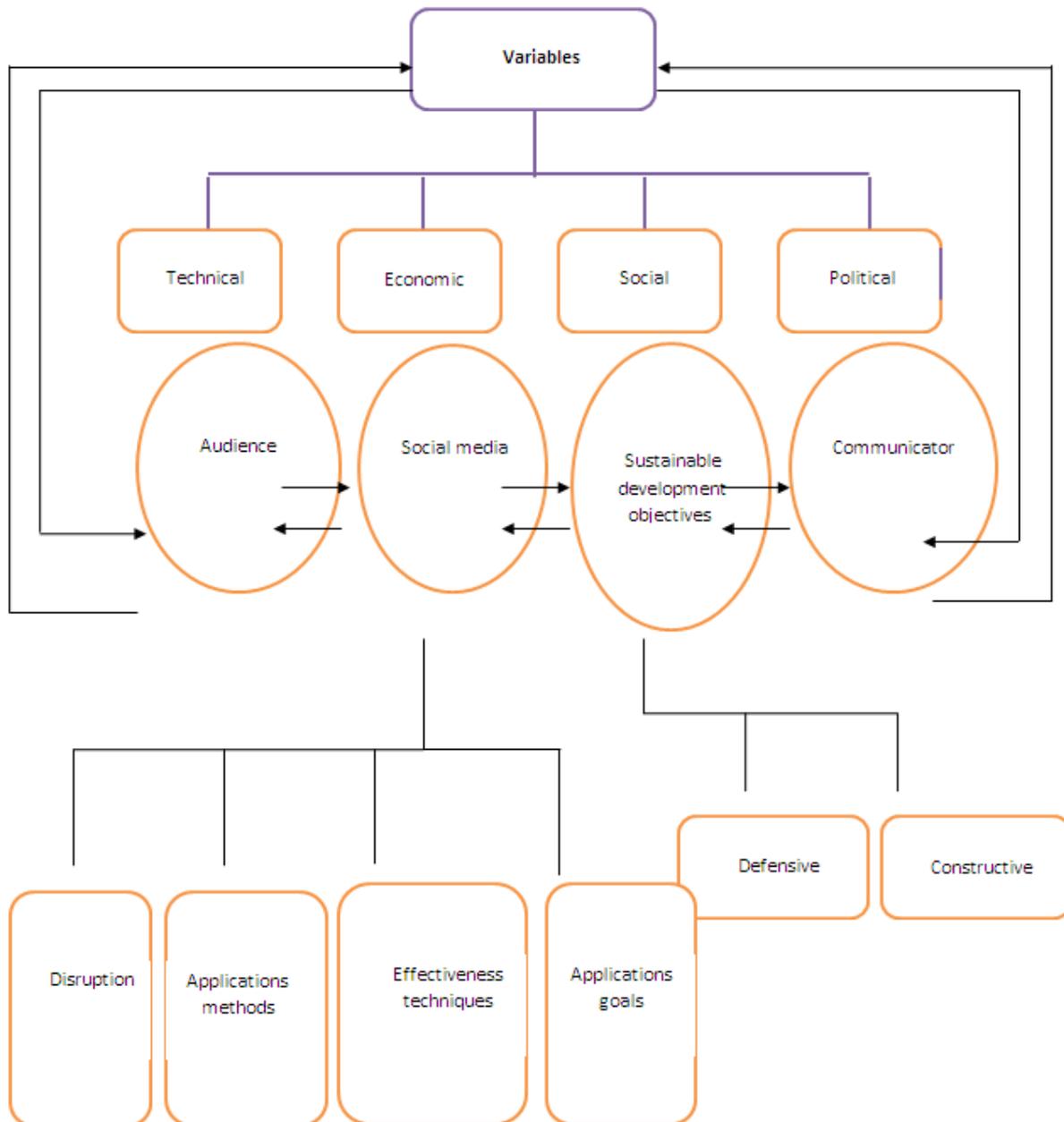
Application methods for each means of social media. The most popular application is Facebook. In Facebook the initial page for the individual, group or government agency can be used for a large variety of purposes. Those purposes include presenting news topics related to sustainable development, uploading photos and videos that support effective methods to achieve sustainable development goals, and using a tool (upload files) to download files that the SD advocates want to share with others. Facebook can also be used through the (I like) tool, to provide instant feedback on the topics raised, comment on issues of sustainable development, or express approval or opposition without comment. Further, Facebook can be used to create a document tool to write summaries of environmental topics. There is also an events tool to alert about environmental events, a tool to send messages to identify the required activities of members, and a timeline tool to start mentioning certain events and follow their timeline. A chat tool can connect with colleagues to engage in discussions on environmental issues, and another (places) tool can determine the places in which development activities are planned. Pages can also be used for forms to create a forum within Facebook to connect members engaged in environmental activities.

The second most popular application is Twitter. The applications used in Twitter are as follows: a) create a special marking or hashtag to discuss the means to achieve sustainable



development and to follow developments related to sustainable development, b) Create special tweets and interventions aimed to identify activists interested in sustainable development issues, advertising activities for activities and information, discussion and interventions on current and future issues of sustainable development, communicate with colleagues regarding future plans for sustainable development, communicate with experts and follow up their new and benefit from them in developing skills for achieving sustainable development, brainstorming and sharing ideas and information with experts and environmental activists, and documentation of feedback from colleagues and experts, and c) use the twpo.com website to create a vote on environmental issues for discussion.

The following figure illustrates the proposed model for the employment of social networks in sustainable development:



## Results

Despite the importance of the developmental role of the means of communication, the impact of these means in this area is still limited. In addition, the reality of employing social media is limited to sustainable development in traditional uses, in addition to the lack of optimal utilization of technologies. Finally, the model shows how to optimize the employment of social media in achieving the objectives of sustainable development, according to the perception of the researchers of employment.



## **Recommendations**

Some important recommendations emerge from this study. Communication can link the achievement of development goals with people's daily needs. Concerned parties achieving sustainable development goals should always be able to update their information regarding social media developments, and employ them in achieving their objectives. It is also recommended that a number of researches be conducted that deal with the effectiveness of this model and measure the degree of its components' impact in achieving the objectives of sustainable development. Finally, it is recommended that a number of studies be conducted that develop this model, and frame a more effective means for achieving the objectives of sustainable development.



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