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## Exploring the content factors contributing to boosting user engagement on Press TV's Facebook page

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### ABSTRACT

User engagement as one of the main concerns of media organizations has already taken on more significance with social media networks including Facebook updating their visibility algorithms by the level of engagement. This challenges media corporations, especially Iranian media including PressTV, given the nature of the content they create. The present study aimed to identify content factors contributing to boosting user engagement on PressTV's Facebook page and increasing its organic reach. The researchers analyzed 119 most viewed posts within 12 months (2019-2020) through a thematic analysis. The identified factors were later sent to experts to elicit their opinions about the impact on engaging the audience. Information, identity, novelty, practical use, curiosity, surprise, entertainment, and negative sentiment were the 8 factors boosting user engagement on PressTV's Facebook page. Unlike similar studies which mainly focus on content format and components, this research highlights content characteristics contributing to user engagement on Facebook.

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## **Introduction**

Social media have been deemed pivotal in interaction among people. These media develop a basis on which people's communications can be observed regardless of geographical or chronological boundaries. (Liu et al, 2014). According to a 2021 report by Datareportal, 4.2 billion people or more than half of the global population use social media platforms. Facebook is the most popular platform with 2.740 billion monthly active users ( Datareportal.com, 2021). Facebook is expected to remain the most widely used social media which has already acquired other major social media platforms including Instagram and WhatsApp. ( Datareportal.com, 2021).

User engagement and participation in content generation on social media including Facebook is a key issue that can be traced back to the Uses and Gratification theory based on which the audience is viewed as active and motivated in the use of media. This theory is mainly focused on what people do with the media than how the media impacts people (Katz et al., 1974). Accordingly, the audience is engaged and uses the content they find gratifying. The significance of user engagement is increasingly coming to light with leading scholars shifting focus toward the issue amid growing interest in social media. According to O'Brien (2011), user engagement is a quality of user experience with technology that enables users to interact, create content, and share it with others. O'Brien et al (2008) believe user engagement focuses on the attractiveness of the content and the user's gratification... The issue has already grabbed the attention of researchers with a growing number of studies emerging in recent years. Still, content factors and their impact on user engagement need more in-depth focus. What is less clear is the nature of the content that can trigger more user engagement.

The importance of user engagement on Facebook is further appreciated given the fact that the Facebook algorithm improves the visibility of more engaging posts. Facebook has slashed users' organic reach from 16% in 2012 to 6.5% in 2014 (techcrunch.com, April 2019), further cutting the figure to as low as 2% in 2018 (Falcon.IO, May 2021). Facebook has already declared that its updated algorithm conditions the amount of exposure to the interaction and engagement a post creates. "Today we use signals like how many people react to, comment on, or share posts to determine how high they appear in News Feed. With this update, we will also prioritize posts that spark conversations and meaningful interactions between people," Facebook announced in a 2018 statement.

Media organizations seek to enhance user engagement on their Facebook pages to get a closer reach to their audience and PressTV, as Iran's leading 24/7 English language news network, is no exception. Founded in 2010, PressTV's Facebook page has nearly 3.9 million followers. It feeds news stories on Iran and world developments regularly through various formats including text, video, and info clips. PressTV has encountered obstacles in reaching its target audience on Facebook amid restrictions imposed by the social media platform. Identification of the content factors contributing to the improvement of user engagement on PressTV's Facebook page can help it enhance its organic reach and give insight into creating more engaging content.

To this end, the authors picked 119 most-viewed posts on PressTV's Facebook page within 12 months (2019-2020) to analyze them and identify the engaging factors. By doing so, the researchers aimed to find out how content can help boost user engagement on PressTV's Facebook page. Identifying such content factors will provide media activists and researchers with invaluable insight into creating content that can garner more likes, shares, views, and comments and boost user engagement as a result.

## **Literature Review**

### **User Engagement**

Thanks to the ubiquity of social media, content can be widely spread and even go viral once the users get engaged enough to share it. It can be assumed that social media platforms hinge on user engagement. Given the importance of user engagement, a growing body of related literature has been emerging in recent years. User engagement has been defined as a "heightened mental state" in which involvement is a key concept and prompts an individual to participate in an activity. Di Gangi & Wasko (2016) contend social and technical factors affect user engagement on social media which ultimately impacts media usage. It has also been described as interactivity, connectivity, or interaction of users with webpages, media products, or content creators (Bartlett, 2013; Gade & Lowrey, 2011; Ksiazek, Peer, & Lessard, 2014; Napoli, 2011, cited in Yousuf et al. 2019). Di Chama et al (2019)

described engagement as the quality of user experience characterized by “the depth of the cognitive, temporal, behavioral, and affective investment in interacting with a digital system.” O’Brien (2011) defines user engagement as users’ experience in working with web-based technologies that enable them to interact with other people, create content, and share it with others on social media

### **User engagement on Facebook**

Given the growing academic interest in engagement on social media, there have already been efforts to identify factors boosting user engagement on platforms such as Facebook over several years. User engagement is associated with online activities such as likes, comments, and shares (Srivastava et al, 2018). Chama et al (2019) believe 3 criteria including cognitive, affective, and behavioral factors are behind user engagement. Le (2018) highlights the importance of the entertainment factor and contends informational and entertainment content are important factors contributing to online engagement. Research shows engagement is further improved when the content is related to the needs of the users. A study by Srivastava et al (2018) indicated content can best contribute to user engagement when it is relevant to the needs of the users. A research study by Yousuf et al (2019) analyzed posts published on the Facebook pages of the five most circulated English newspapers in Bangladesh. Entertainment was found to be one of the most engaging topics, which was rightly focused on. Other studies show user engagement levels can be optimized if the content is relevant to the needs of Facebook users. Chama et al (2019) believe the content will be more persuasive via the engagement of users which relies on the extent to which their needs are met. Some researchers including Rodríguez et al, 2020; Burke & Marlow, 2010; Baek et al, 2011; Lee et al, 2015; Yousuf et al, 2019; Hancock, 2015; Bazarova & Choi, 2014) have employed the Uses and Gratification theory to explore ways of engaging users on social media. Also, Gamage et al., (2022) in exploratory research which is based on the Uses and Gratifications Theory, studied how social, process, and content gratifications impact Chinese online users’ decisions regarding the hotel selection process.

### **Factors impacting user engagement**

Research shows factors including type, timing length and the mood of posts can also affect user engagement on Facebook. Shahbaznezhad et al (2021) found out that the format of content has a remarkable effect on different types of engagement behavior on Facebook and Instagram. They concluded that video-format posts encourage users to actively engage on fan pages by sharing their opinions and comments, while photo-format content stimulates passive users’ engagement through liking behavior. Other factors such as the length of posts and frequency of postings can contribute to user engagement. Gerbaudo et al (2019) analyzed posts and comments on the official Facebook pages of the Labour Party and the Conservatives and their leaders. They concluded that the “positive posting” strategy contributed to more user engagement. Overall, posts related to positive topics triggered more user engagement than negative and controversial issues.

Heiss et al (2018) argue that reasoning, post length, and giving references to competitive political actors have the potential to boost user engagement with political actors’ Facebook posts. Also, humorous posts and negative ones helped increase user engagement. Mariani et al (2017) note posting visual content such as photos as well as the time of publishing posts (namely weekends) positively affects user engagement on Facebook. Gálvez-Rodríguez et al (2020) use the Media Richness theory to clarify the impact of the type of Facebook post format on user engagement. The theory also known as Information Richness seeks to explain what type of format should be used to reduce uncertainty and facilitate communication. They cite other studies (Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013; Hoffman et al., 2013; Su et al., 2015) to propose that the format type of the content provided on social media posts is crucial to the quality of the resulting communication. In their study on best practices for online engagement via Facebook with local destination management organizations in Europe, they conclude that “careful attention to the content, format, and timing of posts and the expression of sentiments” is key to online engagement on Facebook and the success of social networking sites. Lappas et al (2021) examined the impact of social media content posted by Greek municipalities to engage citizens online. Their findings show dialogic posts and those triggering offline participatory activities played a key role in boosting user engagement.

Engaging users on social media can also positively affect the performance of companies. A study by Tajpour & Hosseini (2021) revealed that the components of entrepreneurial intention including knowledge sharing, reputation, social relations, and identity have a positive effect on the performance of digital start-ups mediated by social media. Their research also indicated that successful companies are constantly creating and distributing new knowledge and rapidly applying it to new technologies and products.

Moran et al (2019) tried to highlight the content components and formats most effective in engaging consumers with certain brands on Facebook and explore the users' behavioral responses in the form of clicks, likes, shares, and comments. Their studies revealed that both interactivity cues and media richness content components contribute to increasing consumer-brand engagement. However, the main question which remains unanswered to the best of the authors' knowledge is which content elements can best engage the users on social media. Despite the increasing number of studies on user engagement, the features of content boosting engagement on Facebook have not been given due attention. Much of the literature on user engagement has fallen short of scrutinizing the role of the content and its features which can help further engage users on Facebook. The present study was carried out to shed some light on the impact of content on boosting user engagement. The question to raise here is what are the characteristics of the content most engaging the users on Press TV's Facebook page? The significance of the present study is that it explores the factors that, if taken into account while producing the content, can result in a higher level of engagement.

## **Methodology**

A qualitative methodology was employed in this study. It was decided that the best method to adopt for exploring the content factors contributing to user engagement on Press TV's Facebook page was the thematic analysis of top-hit posts. Data for this study were collected using a thematic analysis of the posts that sparked the highest number of views. The researchers had to collect the data by analyzing the top hit posts as Facebook had restricted the admins' access to the statistics of the page. The authors decided to further explore the role of the elicited content factors in boosting user engagement in separate interviews with a group of experts who had already been working at PressTV's social media department. The respondents included 12 social media producers publishing content on PressTV's Facebook page around the clock. They had been already briefed on the purpose of the study and voluntarily participated in the survey.

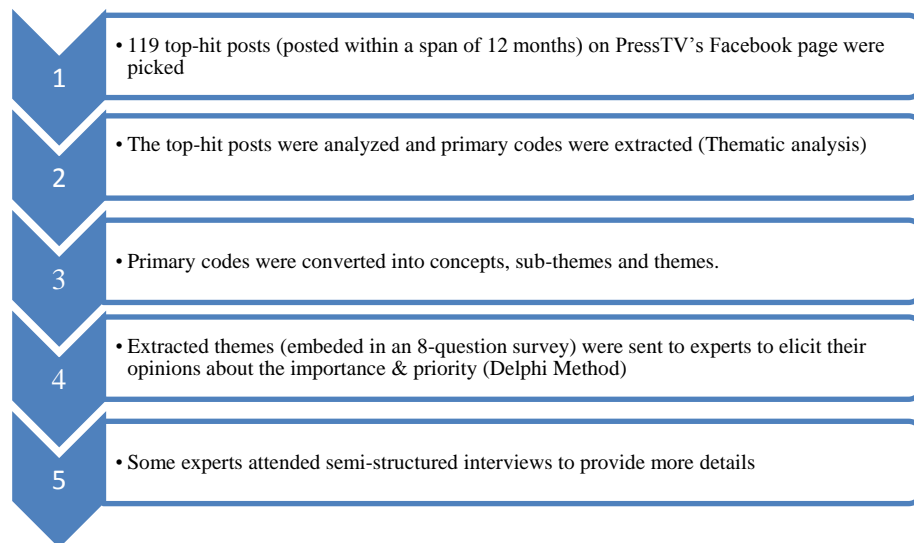
In the first phase, the researchers collected the most viewed posts including text, picture, and video content from PressTV's Facebook page to find out which content factors contribute to boosting organic reach and user engagement. To this end, they picked 119 top hits on PressTV's Facebook page within 12 months (Feb.2019-Feb.2020). The most-viewed posts (sorted out by Facebook) were categorized into 12 tables (every month) featuring the number of views, reach, content format, content type, and title of the post. The following sample shows 10 top-hit posts that were published on PressTV's Facebook page in February 2019.

According to Facebook, post engagements are the total number of actions that people take on Facebook. "Post engagements can include actions such as reacting to, commenting on or sharing the ad, claiming an offer, viewing a photo or video, or clicking on a link." This is what Facebook says about the user engagement its sponsored advertisements garner. Facebook has the same metric for the engagement of other user-generated posts spark which is available for the admins of the pages. Given the fact that our access to the number of likes, shares, and comments as well as the engagement of the top hit posts garnered was restricted due to the Facebook ban on the PressTV's page in 2019 (when this research was underway), we had to use the number of views that had already been calculated and saved beforehand. It should be noted that On Facebook, engagement metrics are calculated based on the number of likes, comments, shares, and clicks your posts are generating. Generally speaking, the top hit posts garner more likes, shares, and comments, which technically could amount to a high engagement rate.

After extracting the main themes via thematic analysis of the most viewed posts on PressTV's Facebook page, the researchers decided to seek experts' opinions to measure the amount of their agreement on the content factors contributing to user engagement. One of the most well-known tools for doing so is the Delphi Method, a process utilized to arrive at a group opinion by surveying a panel

of experts. The technique seeks the ideas of a group of experts to establish consensus on a range of issues via assessing the extent of agreement on them (Rowe G, Wright G, 1999).

The diagram below illustrates the steps taken in doing the present study.



**Diagram 1.** Steps taken in carrying out the present study

### Participants

The participants were members of the PressTV social media team, including chief editors and social media producers. They were chosen from over twenty people working in Press TV's social media department. The 12 selected participants had worked as social media experts at Press TV for nearly five years on average. Half of them were seen as veterans who had set up the PressTV's pages on social media in 2010 and had been posting content on them ever since. They provided informed consent to participate at the beginning of the process.

All participants were asked whether they agreed that the content factors elicited via thematic analysis of the most viewed posts on PressTV's Facebook page contributed to user engagement. They were asked to complete eight-question surveys about the importance, and priority of such factors. Also, the participants were asked to take part in semi-structured interviews to provide further feedback. five of the experts accepted to give interviews.

### Data Analysis

The researchers used the thematic analysis method to analyze the 119 top-hit posts published on PressTV's Facebook page. Using theme analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006), 430 primary codes were extracted from the posts (up to 4 key codes were extracted from each post) and were grouped into separate tables. The table below is a sample in which primary codes have been elicited from the most-viewed Facebook posts.

**Table 1.** Monthly top-hit posts on PressTV's Facebook page (Feb. 2019)

	Title	Format	Views	Reach	Topic
1	Why didn't Imran Khan ask Bin Salman about Khashoggi's	Video	136,714	317,595	Politics
2	Indian Air Force planes collide in air show rehearsal, one pilot dead	Video	115,426	406,290	Military
3	Indian-controlled Kashmir observes shutdown as India celebrates its Republic Day.	Video	107,315	529,050	Security
4	Watch The sad story of a child's murder in Medina.	Video	103,962	386,375	Social
5	WATCH: Mudslide sweeps people away after days of heavy rain in Bolivia's Sucre.	Video	101,387	307,727	Nature

**Table 2.** A sample table showing how primary codes have been elicited from the top-hit posts published on PressTV's Facebook page in Feb. 2019

Post	Primary Codes
1 Why didn't Imran Khan ask Bin Salman about Khashoggi's death	Imran Khan has met with the Saudi Crown Prince MBS is involved in Khashoggi's murder Khashoggi has been murdered Imran Khan failed to ask MBS about Khashoggi's murder
2 Indian Air Force planes collide in air show rehearsal, one pilot dead	Indian pilot was killed A deadly incident during an air show in India Indian pilot killed during the air show
3 Watch: Indian-controlled Kashmir observes shutdown as India celebrates its Republic Day.	National Day commemoration in India Kashmiris protest on India National Day Public shutdown in Kashmir Kashmiris are angry with Indian government policies
4 Watch The sad story of a child's murder in Medina.	Shia child murdered in Saudi Arabia People in shock over the brutal murder of a Shia child Hate crime against Shias in Saudi Arabia
5 WATCH: Mudslide sweeps people away after days of heavy rain in Bolivia's Sucre.	Heavy rainfall in Sri Lanka Flash floods caused by torrential rain People washed away by floods Sri Lanka gripped by deadly floods

In the next stage, the researchers converted the primary codes first into concepts then sub-themes, and finally themes. They raised the abstraction level in each phase to come up with more general items in each phase. The first elicited concepts out of primary codes and then generated 178 sub-themes based on the extracted primary codes. The sub-themes were finally combined into main themes. The following table is a sample showing the process.

**Table 3.** Primary codes elicited from top-hit posts on PressTV's Facebook page (in Feb. 2019) were converted to concepts, sub-themes, and themes by raising the abstraction level.

	Primary codes	Concepts	Sub-themes	Main themes
1	Imran Khan has met with the Saudi Crown Prince MBS is involved in Khashoggi's murder  Khashoggi has been murdered  Imran Khan failed to ask MBS about Khashoggi's murder	Diplomatic ties, bilateral relations between Pakistan and KSA, silence on murdering a journalist	Politics, Security    Diplomacy, politics	Information
2	Pakistan, India tensions are escalating  There is animosity between Pakistan and India  India and Pakistan are engaged in tensions	Sour relations, diplomatic disputes, widening gap		
3	Indian pilot was killed The deadly incident during an air show in India Indian pilot killed during air show	Aviation crash, air show risks, deadly flight	Sudden crash, air safety, tragic accident	Surprise
4	National Day commemoration in India Kashmiris protest on India National Day Public shutdown in Kashmir Kashmiris are angry with Indian government policies	Mass protest, Kashmiris against India, anti-India protest	Kashmiris feel oppressed, Kashmiris want independence from India	Identity

**Table 3.**

	Primary codes	Concepts	Sub-themes	Main themes
5	Shia child murdered in Saudi Arabia  People in shock over the brutal murder of a Shia child  Hate crime against Shias in Saudi Arabia	Violence against the Shia minority in Saudi Arabia, Persecution of Shias in Saudi Arabia, Ordeal of Shias in Saudi Arabia, Sympathy with Shias	Shiaphobia, Oppression against Shias, solidarity with Shias	Negative sentiment
6	Violence is raging on in Kashmir  Indian police are killed in Kashmir  Kashmiris don't like Indian police  Anti-India sentiment is rising in Kashmir	Kashmir tension, Anti-India sentiment, Deadly attack	Violence, tensions, escalation	
7	Heavy rainfall in Sri Lanka Flash floods caused by torrential rain  People washed away by floods Sri Lanka gripped by deadly floods	Power of nature, weakness of people, power of floods	Act of God, Natural disaster,	Surprise
8	Indian father builds rickshaw for his kids Kids enjoy playing with rickshaw built by their father An Indian man is a creative It's possible to build rickshaws for kids	Entertainment for kids, how to build a rickshaw, How to be creative	Creativity, entertainment	Practical use

### Delphi Method

A Delphi method was used to develop consensus among the selected experts in the second phase of the study.

The participants were asked to contribute their opinions concerning the significance and priority of the content factors which were supposed to help boost user engagement on PressTV's Facebook page. They were also asked whether they agreed the listed factors can contribute to the engagement of the users visiting PressTV's Facebook page. This was carried out in two rounds of Delphi.

### Round 1

The Delphi process comprised two rounds. In Round 1, the participants were asked to independently rank statements on the content factors that may contribute to user engagement, using a 5-point Likert scale (A) Strongly disagree; (B) Disagree; (C) Neither agree nor disagree; (D) Agree; (E) Strongly agree. The statements of the survey capitalized on the findings of the themes extracted through thematic analysis of the most viewed posts on PressTV's Facebook page. The content factors included *information, negative sentiment, novelty, identity, entertainment, emotional content, nationalism, relevance, negative news, surprise, curiosity, and practical use.*

The 5-point scale was used to measure the level of agreement among the experts. The consensus index was calculated via the following formula:

$$\frac{A \text{ answers} \times -2 + B \text{ answers} \times -1 + C \text{ answers} + D \text{ answers} \times +1 + E \text{ answers} \times 2}{\text{Total number of answers (A to E)}} = \text{Consensus Index}$$

Azad Barmaki et al. (2012)

In this study, the Consensus Index value was displayed on a continuum between the values -2 and +2.

The closer the Consistency value was to zero, it was indicative of less consensus among the experts concerning the role of a certain content factor in boosting user engagement on PressTV's Facebook page.

From experts' perspectives, *negative sentiments, novelty, identity, entertainment, sparking curiosity, practical use, information, and surprise* were the 8 content factors contributing to user engagement on PressTV's Facebook page. Negative Sentiments as a content factor contributing to user engagement on PressTV's Facebook page gained the lowest level of consensus among the experts while there was the highest level of agreement on *sparking curiosity*.

## Round 2

In Round 2, the content factors on which experts reached a consensus were sorted out and incorporated into another survey. Accordingly, the experts were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with the listed content factors' role in boosting user engagement on PressTV's Facebook page.

The participants were then asked to independently rank the content factors they think can help boost user engagement on PressTV's Facebook page. This was conducted in a bid to examine the level of consensus on each item.

Each participant was also asked to rank the importance of each content factor in boosting user engagement. (From A not important to D very important). The following formula was devised to calculate the importance index:

$$\frac{D \text{ answers} \times 100 + \text{number of answers to C} \times 50 + B \text{ answers} \times 25 + A \text{ answers} \times 0}{\text{Total number of answers (A to D)}} = \text{Importance Index}$$

Azad Barmaki et al. (2012)

The importance index ranges between 0 and 100. The closer the index of a user engagement factor is to 100, indicating its significance, whereas the index value inclining toward zero shows a lower level of significance in the case of a given factor based on the elicited expert opinions. Experts ranked *entertainment* and *surprise* as the most important content factors contributing to user engagement (81.25%) and Practical use (41.66%) as the least important factors.

The participants were also asked to rank the priority of each factor in enhancing user engagement on PressTV's Facebook page. The following formula was devised to calculate the priority index:

$$\frac{C \text{ answers} \times 100 + \text{answers to B} \times 50 + A \text{ answers} \times 25}{\text{Total number of answers (A to C)}} = \text{Priority Index}$$

Azad Barmaki et al. (2012)

The priority value ranges between 0 and 100. The closer the index of a user engagement factor is to 100, indicating its priority, whereas the index value inclining toward zero shows a lower level of priority in the case of a given factor based on the elicited expert opinions. Experts gave the highest priority to *sparking curiosity* (79.16%) and the lowest priority to Practical use (45.83%) as content factors contributing to user engagement.

**Table 4.** shows the consensus level among experts and how they rated the importance and priority of the content factors elicited from thematic analysis of the top-hit posts on Press TV's Facebook page believed to be contributing to the engagement of the users.

Content Factor	Importance	Consensus	Priority
Information	60.41%	.83	75%
Negative sentiment	45.83%	.33	70.83%
Surprise	81.25%	.83	77.08%
Entertainment	81.25%	.75	70.83%
Practical Use	41.66%	.58	45.83%
Identity	56.25%	.75	52.08%
Novelty	70.83%	.92	52.08%
Sparking curiosity	66.66%	1.33	79.16%



## Results

*Negative sentiments, novelty, identity, entertainment, curiosity, practical use, information, and surprise* were the 8 content factors found to be contributing to user engagement on PressTV's Facebook page following a thematic analysis of the top hit posts and two rounds of Delphi which examined indexes of consensus, importance, and priority among experts. Also, researchers found out that almost all of the top-hit posts (115 out of 119 most-viewed posts) on the Facebook page were videos. The content format included text, pictures, and videos. In this section, each content factor is discussed in more detail.

### Information

*Information* was found as one of the contentment factors contributing to user engagement on PressTV's Facebook page. It means to engage the users on Facebook, the contents need to contain useful information. This has already been pointed out in studies by Porter, et al (2011), Smock, Andrew D., et al (2011), Park, J., & Cho, K. (2009), Whiting & Williams (2013), Bronner & Neijens (2006). 111 out of 430 primary codes elicited from the most viewed posts included this factor. In two rounds of Delphi, experts determined Information as a content factor contributing to user engagement on PressTV's Facebook page. The consensus index stood at .83 and the importance and priority indexes were 60.41% and 75% respectively.

### Negative sentiment

Content containing violence and clashes that trigger *negative sentiment* were among the top-hit posts on PressTV's Facebook page. 73 primary codes somehow contained negative sentiments, including posts such as "Israeli forces harass reporters", and "Muslim woman attacked for wearing Hijab"

Still, the consensus index is the lowest among the 8 content factors found to contribute to user engagement on PressTV's Facebook page. This shows from experts' perspective negative sentiment is not as important as other factors. However, O'Brien (2011) in his study on exploring user engagement in online news interactions (CBS News website) has already suggested that negative news can boost user engagement with the content. Also, a recently published article by Salud María Jiménez-Zafra et al.(2021) shows that negative sentiment in tweets increases their chances of getting viral among Twitter users in the context of the Catalan referendum, whereas positivity decreases it.

The following are the results of 2 rounds of Delphi aimed at building consensus among experts on the role of negative sentiment as a content factor in boosting user engagement on PressTV's Facebook page. The consensus index stood at .33 and the importance and priority indexes were 45.83% and 70.83% respectively.

### Surprise

22 out of 430 primary codes elicited from 119 top-hit posts on PressTV's Facebook page via thematic analysis contained surprising content. Codes such as "3-year-old child falls from several store buildings", and "Deadly incident during aviation show" contain surprising content that can help engage users.

The following table shows the importance, consensus, and priority indexes of *surprise* as a content engagement factor, Which were gained from experts through two rounds of Delphi. The consensus index stood at .83 and the importance and priority indexes were 81.25% and 77.08% respectively.

### Entertainment

56 out of 430 primary codes elicited from top-hit posts on PressTV's Facebook page contained entertaining content such as "Indian military cyclists show their skills". The importance, consensus, and priority indexes of *entertainment* as a content engagement factor, were gained from experts through two rounds of Delphi. The consensus index stood at .75 and the importance and priority indexes were 81.25% and 70.83% respectively.

### Practical use

33 out of 430 primary codes elicited from 119 top-hit posts on PressTV's Facebook page via thematic analysis were related to *practical use*. Posts like "learn how to build a tricycle" fall into this category.

The importance, consensus, and priority indexes of *practical use* as a content engagement factor were gained from experts through two rounds of Delphi. The consensus index stood at .58 and the importance and priority indexes were 41.66% and 58% respectively.

### **Identity**

83 out of 430 primary codes elicited via thematic analysis of 119 top-hit posts on PressTV's Facebook page were related to *identity*. These include codes elicited from posts like "Islam promotes peace" that triggered a sense of belonging in the users who mainly come from Muslim countries.

The following are the results of 2 rounds of Delphi aimed at building consensus among experts on the role of identity as a content factor in boosting user engagement on PressTV's Facebook page. The consensus index stood at .75 and the importance and priority indexes were 56.25% and 52.08% respectively.

### **Novelty**

31 out of 430 primary codes elicited via thematic analysis of top-hit posts on PressTV's Facebook page contained *novelty* factors such as "Putin and Erdogan have ice cream" which was released for the first time.

The following are the results of 2 rounds of Delphi aimed at building consensus among experts on the role of novelty as a content factor in boosting user engagement on PressTV's Facebook page. The consensus index stood at .92 and the importance and priority indexes were 70.83% and 52.08% respectively.

### **Sparking Curiosity**

21 out of 430 codes elicited from posts such as "Watch how this Indian man worships Trump" which contained content arousing the curiosity of the users.

The following are the results of 2 rounds of Delphi aimed at building consensus among experts on the role of *sparkling curiosity* as a content factor in boosting user engagement on PressTV's Facebook page. The consensus index stood at 1.33 and the importance and priority indexes were 66.66% and 79.16% respectively.

## **Finding and Discussion**

This study proposed to identify the content factors contributing to user engagement on Press TV's Facebook page. The findings of this study shed some light on the factors which if used while producing content, can boost user engagement on PressTV's Facebook page. Our thematic analysis of monthly top-hit posts published on PressTV's Facebook page which was coupled with two rounds of Delphi to elicit opinions of experts indicated that some content factors can help boost user engagement on Facebook. These factors include *information, identity, novelty, practical use, curiosity, surprise, entertainment, and negative sentiment*.

Grounded in Uses and Gratifications Theory, this study shows users even on the Facebook page of a political TV news network seek to meet basic needs such as entertainment and a satisfying sense of curiosity. For example, *sparkling curiosity* and *novelty* were found as the most significant content factors contributing to user engagement following thematic analysis of top hit posts on PressTV's Facebook page, each respectively with 1.33 and .92 consensus index, gaining the highest level of agreement from the experts. *Novelty* and *sparkling curiosity* were also ranked as the most important content factors contributing to user engagement with 70.83 and 66.66% indexes respectively. Entertainment (Importance: 81.25%, Consensus: .75, Priority: 70.83%) along with *surprise* (Importance: 81.25%, Consensus: .83, Priority: 77.08%) also topped the list of factors ranked by experts as the most important in boosting user engagement. *Information* was also ranked as an important content factor contributing to user engagement on PressTV's Facebook page (Importance: 60.41%, Consensus: .83, Priority: 75%). *Negative sentiment* (Importance: 45.83%, Consensus: .33, Priority: 70.83%) gained the lowest level of consensus among the experts. Identity (Importance: 56.25%, Consensus: .75, Priority: 52.08) was one of the content factors with high frequency in primary codes elicited from thematic analysis of posts published on PressTV's Facebook page.

The above-mentioned content factors such as *information*, and *negative* which are somehow related to political topics on average gained less consensus from experts despite outnumbering other factors including *surprise*, *curiosity*, *novelty*, and *entertainment*. This can be yet another indication that people on social media get engaged with the content that entertains them. This is even true in the case of PressTV which is a news network mainly covering political news with a special focus on developments in Iran and the Middle East and its posts on Facebook mainly reflect such issues. Posts containing *entertainment*, *surprise*, *novelty* and *curiosity*, and *practical use* are outnumbered by those related to *information*, *negative sentiment*, and *identity* as a result but they are ranked as more important content factors in terms of user engagement by experts. *Practical use* (Importance: 41.66%, Consensus: .58, Priority: 45.83) was ranked as the least important content factor contributing to user engagement after *negative information*. This can also be attributed to the nature of PressTV's Facebook page. It can be asserted that users go to the page to satisfy their needs including seeking relevant information and more basic and general needs such as entertainment. *Practical use* however falls short of meeting their needs as the users of PressTV's Facebook page may not be after such topics. This comes in line with the theory of Uses and Gratifications, which proclaims people use media to satisfy their needs. These needs include both specific ones like *information*, *identity*, and *negative sentiment* (need for visibility) and more general and basic ones such as *sparkling curiosity*, *novelty*, *entertainment*, and *surprise*. *Practical use* however is found to be the least important content factor contributing to user engagement on PressTV's Facebook page may be because it is not relevant to the needs of the followers of the page. That's to say, those seeking such content naturally cannot find it on PressTV's Facebook page and as a result, don't follow the page.

Also, researchers found out that almost all of the top-hit posts (115 out of 119 most-viewed posts) on PressTV's Facebook page were videos. The content format included text, pictures, and videos. This can be clarified via the theory of Media richness according to which the format type of the content provided on social media posts is crucial to the quality of the resulting communication. It can be concluded that video content can be more engaging on PressTV's Facebook page compared to other types of formats including pictures and text.

The authors believe the findings of the present research provide practical guidelines for content providers actively working on Facebook all over the world, particularly those working in Iran. Our study has important implications for media corporations, and news networks, seeking to communicate their message to their audience on Facebook. The results of the study show how the content factors can engage the audience. Bearing this in mind, media organizations can choose from among the factors which if taken into account in the content production process, can lead to more user engagement. This can particularly be the case for media organizations facing restrictions due to the Facebook algorithm. More research is needed to specify the role of content factors and their contribution to user engagement on other social media platforms.

This study is only a minor step toward understanding the role of content in boosting user engagement on Facebook. We believe the findings of the present study, to some extent, can also be true for other organizations including advertising companies and marketing agencies as well as ordinary people creating content on Facebook and even possibly on other social media platforms. However, further research is required to see whether the findings of this study can be generalized to other social media platforms. Similar studies can be carried out to explore how the above-mentioned factors can affect user engagement on other social media platforms including Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram. The findings of this research may offer useful insights into the scholarly debate on other social media platforms and guide interested researchers into exploring other content factors contributing to boosting user engagement on Facebook and other social media platforms. Also, more studies are needed to clarify how different content factors can impact user engagement on diverse social media platforms among different age and sex groups.

Despite its contributions, the present study faced several limitations which can be circumvented in future studies. This study was conducted on PressTV's Facebook page as the researchers had access to the experts working at PressTV's social media desk. Also, PressTV is one of the few news channels working on social media with an international audience given the fact that Facebook and other social media outlets such as Twitter and YouTube are legally banned in Iran. The researchers had to use top-hit posts which were sorted out based on the number of views, as a measure to find the most engaging

content as they had no access to the number of likes, shares, and comments of the posts. Taking these items into account can give a better and more accurate understanding of engagement on Facebook. Future studies can use such metrics to measure user engagement on other social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube. Also, this study analyzed top-hit posts on PressTV's Facebook page which is a political news channel. Moreover, the impact of the content factors identified in this study on other content providers including non-political media networks can be an important issue for future research.

## Conclusion

Despite the growing number of studies on user engagement, more research is required to explore the features of content-boosting engagement on Facebook and other social media platforms. To the best knowledge of the researchers, the issue has not been given due attention as there is not much research on content characteristics and their impact on user engagement on Facebook. Some studies have already shed light on the role of content in boosting user engagement. Still, the issue needs more detailed and in-depth focus. Drawing on previous studies, Shahbaznezhad et al (2021) categorize main content types affecting user engagement into 3 major groups including rational (also referred to as an informational, functional, educational, or current event), interactional (e.g., experiential, personal, employee, brand community, customer relationship, cause-related), and transactional (also referred to as remunerative, brand resonance, sales promotion). A similar study by Moran et al (2019) highlighted the content components and formats most effective in engaging consumers with certain brands on Facebook. They found that both interactivity cues and media richness content components contribute to increasing consumer-brand engagement. But the main question that remained unanswered is which content elements can best engage the users on social media. Similarly, the results of the present study confirmed the findings of the previous research that video posts garner more user engagement behavior on Facebook and Instagram. The present research is different from the previous similar works as it is among the few studies delving into characteristics of content as a predictor of user engagement on Facebook. We sought to identify the factors each top-hit content has and its contribution to user engagement. Unlike the previous studies, the present research sought to highlight the impact of content factors rather than formats or types on engaging users. We conceptualized views of Facebook posts as the manifestation of user engagement. Our findings imply that posts containing certain factors including *information, negative sentiment, identity, novelty, curiosity, entertainment, surprise, and practical use* are more likely to trigger user engagement on Facebook. All the same, posts that are more entertaining and contain content factors such as *novelty, curiosity, entertainment, and surprise* can trigger more user engagement. The findings of this study can pave the way for further research on the content factors and their impact on user engagement on Facebook and other social media platforms. Also, taking such factors into account while creating and choosing content, can help the media activists and the admins of the social media platforms to get a better understanding of which content can boost user engagement.

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