

Journal



of
P **R** **esearch**

Middle East

Journal of Public Relations Research Middle East

Scientific Refereed Journal - Supervision by Egyptian Public Relations Association - Fourteenth Year - Sixty-Second Issue – April/June 2026

IF of the Supreme Council of Universities 2025 = 7

Arcif Impact Factor 2025 = 1.3738

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(ISSN 2314-8721)

Egyptian Public Relations Association
(EPRA)

Egyptian National Scientific & Technical Information Network
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ISSN for the printed copy

(ISSN 2314-8721)

ISSN of the electronic version

(ISSN 2314-873X)

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(ENSTINET)

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Deposit Number: 24380 /2019

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Egyptian Public Relations Association

Arab Republic of Egypt,

Giza, Dokki, Ben Elsarayat -1 Mohamed Alzoghpy St.

Email: jpr@epra.org.eg - ceo@apr.agency

Web: www.apr.agency - www.jpr.epra.org.eg

Phone: (+2) 0114 -15 -14 -157 - (+2) 0114 -15 -14 -151 - (+2) 02-376-20 -818

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The Ethics of Communication Discourse of the Egyptian Ministry of Health via Facebook during the COVID-19 Pandemic: An Analytical Study in the Light of Responsible Defense Theory (*)

Ahmed Khairy Asran

akhairy@hivestudio.net

PhD researcher in communication,
Public Relations & Advertising Department,
Faculty of Mass Communication,
Cairo University

Supervision by:

Prof. Dr. Aly Agwa

alyagwa@yahoo.com

Part-time Professor of Public Relations,
former Dean of the Faculty of Mass Communication,
Cairo University

Dr. Mosaad El-Saeed Saleh

drmosaadsaleh@gmail.com

Assistant Professor of Public Relations and Advertising,
Faculty of Mass Communication,
Cairo University

Abstract

This study seeks to analyze the ethics of the communicative discourse of the Egyptian Ministry of Health through its official Facebook page during the COVID-19 pandemic, in the light of Responsible Advocacy Theory, which views the public relations practitioner as a professional actor who balances advocacy for the institution with service to the public interest. The study proceeds from the importance of ethical communication in health crises, where the role of the official institution is not limited to transmitting information, but extends to building trust, guiding behavior, combating rumors, and reducing the informational and psychological harms associated with the crisis.

The study relied on a quantitative and qualitative content analysis of a sample of posts published by the Egyptian Ministry of Health on Facebook during the COVID-19 pandemic. It aimed to identify the ethical values present in the discourse, the nature of the communication strategies used, the level of transparency, the mechanisms for addressing rumors, and the extent of institutional interaction with the public. The analysis was based on a set of categories measuring the nature of the published topics, the indication of general ethics, the type of media used, visual content, rumor handling, the presence of replies, level of transparency, nature of language, communication strategy, and the dominant ethical standard.

The findings revealed a clear presence of ethical values in the Ministry of Health's communicative discourse, foremost among them responsibility,

(*)The Paper was received on March 04, 2026, and accepted for publication on May 16, 2026.

The Paper is extracted from a doctoral dissertation registered at the Faculty of Mass Communication, Cairo University, under the supervision of Professor Ali Agwa, a part-time professor in the Department of Public Relations and the former Dean of the Faculty of Mass Communication, Cairo University, and with the co-supervision of Dr. Mosaad Saleh, Assistant Professor in the department.

transparency, and guidance. However, this ethical presence took on an informational/instructional character more than a dialogic/participatory one. The findings also showed the dominance of a formal and informational tone in the posts, with a high reliance on reassurance and informational strategies, compared with a relative limitation in direct replies and institutional interaction with the public. The study also found that rumor handling was present in the official discourse, but was mostly reactive rather than proactive.

The study concludes that the Ministry of Health's discourse on Facebook reflected an ethical pattern based more on message control and information management than on building interactive dialogue with the public. Accordingly, the study offers a critical reading of the ethics of official health communication in the digital environment and emphasizes the need to develop practices that strike a better balance between informational responsibility, interpretive transparency, and dialogic interaction during health crises.

Key words: Communication Ethics - Crisis Communication – Egyptian Ministry of Health - COVID-19 – Facebook – Responsible Advocacy Theory - Content Analysis – Transparency – Rumors.