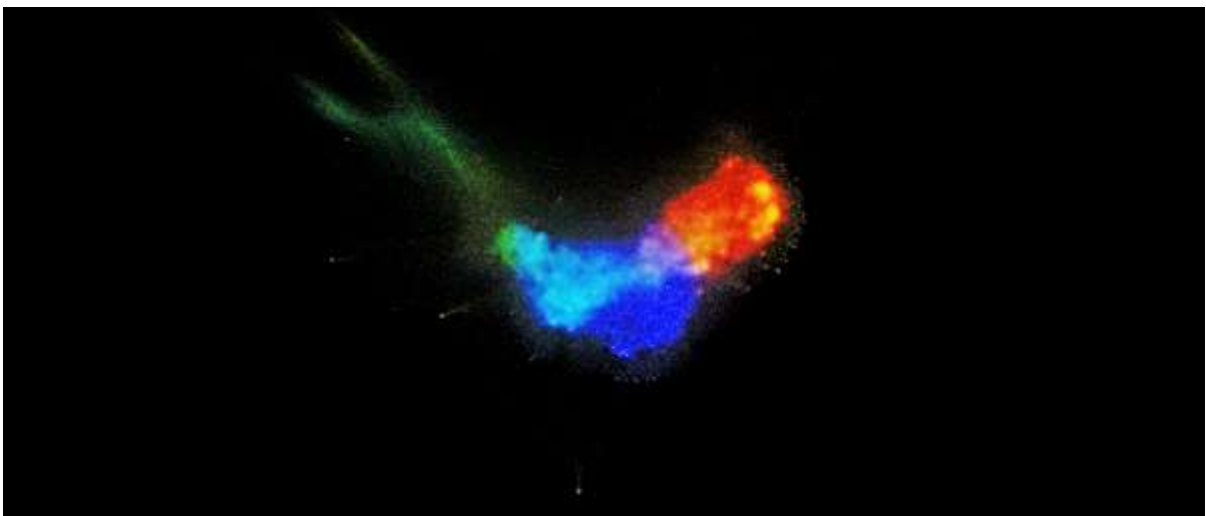


# Understanding the Cultural Value of British Council's Learn English (MENA) Facebook page

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*Abstract representation of the network of users interacting with the BC MENA Learn English Facebook page*

## Digital Data Analysis Report

*This research forms part of the evidence for the Cultural Value Project.*

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## Executive Summary of Findings:

English is, according to the British Council “a priority for UK cultural relations in MENA”.<sup>1</sup> In addition, reaching millions is one of the stated aims of British Council strategy. The British Council uses the English language as one of the key instruments of cultural relations, and “one of the most powerful attractors to our country”.<sup>2</sup> A recent British Council report, *The English Effect* concludes that “[s]ustained investment in meeting the world’s currently insatiable appetite for English is one of the best investments UK plc can make in our trading, creative and cultural future”.<sup>3</sup> The British Council anticipates the long-term, slow-burn, pay-off from investing in teaching English will be increased trust leading to economic growth and political influence in the form of soft power.<sup>4</sup> As Martin Davidson argued, “it is not an activity that turns itself around within a few years but rather something that is generational”.<sup>5</sup>

The aim of the research is to identify the elements of the page that users value and understand the value users gain from the BC MENA LE Facebook page. This will contribute to the evidence used to produce the cultural value constellation. Observing the behaviour of BC MENA LE page users allows us to identify opportunities to extend the cultural value of the page. To do so, we seek to understand whether the British Council has converted and can convert millions of views, and 2.4 million fans, into lasting interactions, or ‘engagement’, through a social media platform such as Facebook.

We found an opportunity to develop multiple pathways of engagement, which would allow BC MENA LE to build greater involvement for the more loyal users. These pathways would allow users to travel along a continuum from becoming a fan to a greater level of engagement and cultural value.

- During the period 19 December 2013 to 13 March 2014 the page had been successful in producing an attractive product receiving over 15 million views. This level of reach relies heavily on paid sources of traffic, such as advertising and sponsored stories. On average 75% of daily traffic came from paid sources and 25% was organic, meaning users who saw a post on the BC MENA LE page, in their News Feed because they are already fans, or when it appeared in a friend’s news feed because they had interacted with the BC MENA LE page. Organic traffic could be increased if MENA LE page was easier to find or to access from other British Council websites and social media. In addition, the use of striking images can support organic reach as this may attract users to share the content with Facebook friends.
- The Facebook page has successfully converted reach into an initial interaction for users that become fans of the page. Currently there are 2.4 million fans, more than any other British

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<sup>1</sup> English MENA Factsheet, British Council, p.1

<sup>2</sup> Martin Davidson, Unrevised transcript of evidence taken before The Select Committee on Soft Power and the UK’s Influence, Inquiry on Soft Power and the UK’s Influence, Monday 15 July 2013: <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/lords-committees/soft-power-uk-influence/uc150713Ev4.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> “The English Effect: The Impact of English, What It’s Worth to the UK and Why It Matters to World,” p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Davidson, Unrevised transcript of evidence taken before The Select Committee on Soft Power and the UK’s Influence, Inquiry on Soft Power and the UK’s Influence, Monday 15 July 2013

<sup>5</sup> Martin Davidson, Unrevised transcript of evidence taken before The Select Committee on Soft Power and the UK’s Influence, Inquiry on Soft Power and the UK’s Influence, Monday 15 July 2013 (p.3)

Council Facebook page. In seeking greater cultural value, in terms of reach, interaction and engagement, increasing this conversion rate from reach to initial interactions could be a focus for the future development of the page. To drive greater conversion, quirky and amusing visual images and multiple choice questions tend to be associated with high numbers of 'comments', 'likes' and 'shares'. We observed that 'popular' posts tend to combine being entertaining and requiring little effort to answer, for example multiple choice rather than questions requiring writing a longer response. This may be an opportunity for collaboration with other departments within the British Council, such as Arts, that have access to a greater range of imagery and create an opportunity for departments to develop cultural value collectively.

- There has been great success in increasing the number of page likes to 2.4 million. Social Bakers ranks BC MENA LE ahead of Cambridge English, Australia Plus Learn English, Open English and ELS Educational Services Inc in terms of Facebook fans. However, maintaining interest is a challenge for the BC MENA LE page, just fewer than 130,000 users have ever commented on a post. Of these users 54% comment only once and 86% comment five or fewer times. Similarly, the survey of BC MENA LE users found 67.5% of respondents had been a fan of the page for less than six months while 12.3% had been a fan for a year.<sup>6</sup> As a result, BC MENA LE has to continually engage new users to maintain the same level of comments. Finding ways to retain users would demonstrate greater sustainability and longer term engagement. Data archived directly from the page showed that users who engage with posts on the Facebook page fall into two groups of particularly engaged users; one group that 'comments' frequently and one that 'likes' posts frequently. Only a minority appear to do both frequently, finding ways to increase comments from those who already 'like' posts could increase longer term engagement as a driver of cultural value.
- The page has demonstrated it is attracting users at different stages of learning English. The page can achieve even greater cultural value if there is differentiation between the tasks for different types of user and the experience they are seeking. As might be expected, those at an early stage in their English language learning respond to the less demanding posts. Where posts demand more of their users, the users that respond tend to do so more thoroughly and in better English, but there tend to be fewer 'comments'. Creating a clear differentiation between different levels of questions may help provide a sense of progression, maintaining the interest of users and help users find posts they are most likely to be engaged by. In addition, the data provides evidence that it is possible to combine learning English and sharing other UK cultural assets, as shown by the relative popularity of the post about the 'GREAT' campaign when compared to the number of times it was viewed.
- Differentiating early stage and more experienced learners also creates the potential to develop a community of more experienced learners that could support each other's learning. This already happens to a small extent because on the occasion that users respond with genuine 'comments', rather than just the answer to a question, they can elicit a degree of conversation or discussion with other users. This relates to experienced learners because

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<sup>6</sup> Survey data provided by the British Council.

discussion was not observed around easier questions, when users merely offer answers, but did occur when the answer required more complex thought or knowledge. Exploiting this pre-existing tendency would shift the relationship away from a hub and spoke model where users engage predominantly with the British Council to one where the community engages with each other. By shifting the relationship, the page could facilitate international connections between users. This would allow the British Council to add greater cultural value to the language learning, for example, by promoting internationalism in addition to delivering greater engagement in language learning. The introduction of a peer assisted learning approach would need careful explanation but equally can have significant benefit for learners.<sup>7</sup>

- The greater engagement and increased cultural value from developing a greater sense of community could have other advantages including greater loyalty. Users who engage consistently (over a number of months) tend to display higher than average levels of activity during the months that they engage with the Facebook page.
- The role of the English Doctor offers a valuable contribution to the page in terms of English learning, but perhaps more importantly in setting a warm and welcoming tone which may be the key to the pages' success. However, there is a clear limitation of the current format of the English doctor, it is humanly impossible to answer all the questions if the page becomes more successful. We identify two potential avenues first, as the same questions are asked frequently an FAQ section of the most common questions might help reduce repetition. Second, if there are differentiated groups of users, the answers to some basic questions could be crowdsourced from more experienced learners, for example from the teachers who identified sharing content on BC MENA LE with their students.

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<sup>7</sup> See for example; Paula Green, A Literature Review of Peer Assisted Learning (PAL), (May 2011) <http://www.bradford.ac.uk/management/media/management/els/A-Literature-Review-of-Peer-Assisted-Learning.pdf>

## Introduction:

“Founded in 1934, the British Council is the United Kingdom's international non-profit organization for cultural relations and educational opportunities. Cultural relations are powerful, long-term international relations tools that complement diplomacy and aid by creating security, prosperity and sustainability”.<sup>8</sup>

English is, according to the British Council “a priority for UK cultural relations in MENA”.<sup>9</sup> In addition, reaching millions is one of the stated aims of British Council strategy.<sup>10</sup> The British Council uses the English language as one of the key instruments of cultural relations, and “one of the most powerful attractors to our country”.<sup>11</sup> A recent British Council report, *The English Effect* concludes that “[s]ustained investment in meeting the world’s currently insatiable appetite for English is one of the best investments UK plc can make in our trading, creative and cultural future”.<sup>12</sup> The British Council anticipates the pay-off from investing in teaching English will be increased trust leading to economic growth and political influence in the form of soft power.<sup>13</sup>

The British Council estimates that over 81 million people in the Middle East and North Africa are currently studying English.<sup>14</sup> The MENA (Middle East North Africa) Learn English Facebook page is an integral part of the British Council strategy to engage these learners and aims “...to help learners of the English language find resources and interaction opportunities to improve their language level for free”.<sup>15</sup>

The page was launched in March 2010. In November 2012 the British Council announced that the page had one million fans (‘fans’ are users who ‘like’ a specific Facebook page)<sup>16</sup>, and was revolutionising English language learning across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.<sup>17</sup> Since then it has continued to grow exceeding two million fans in January 2014. The page currently has over 2.4 million fans. This is higher than the Facebook page for English teachers (2.2 million likes) and significantly higher than most other British Council pages such as the main British Council Facebook page (630,000 likes), the main Learn English Facebook page (903,000 likes) and Learn English Teens (303,000 likes).<sup>18</sup> Social Bakers ranks BC MENA LE ahead of Cambridge English,

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/LearnEnglish.BritishCouncilMENA/info>

<sup>9</sup> English MENA Factsheet, British Council, p.1

<sup>10</sup> British Council Corporate Plan 2013 – 2015, p.8

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/britishcouncil.uk2/files/corporate-plan-2013-5.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Martin Davidson, Unrevised transcript of evidence taken before The Select Committee on Soft Power and the UK’s Influence, Inquiry on Soft Power and the UK’s Influence, Monday 15 July 2013:

<http://www.parliament.uk/documents/lords-committees/soft-power-uk-influence/uc150713Ev4.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> “The English Effect: The Impact of English, What It’s Worth to the UK and Why It Matters to World,” p. 15.

<sup>13</sup> Martin Davidson, Unrevised transcript of evidence taken before The Select Committee on Soft Power and the UK’s Influence, Inquiry on Soft Power and the UK’s Influence, Monday 15 July 2013

<sup>14</sup> English MENA Factsheet, British Council, p.1

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/LearnEnglish.BritishCouncilMENA/info>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/help/481346635279160?sr=2&sid=0i6axJMk5OMieEmTx>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.britishcouncil.org/organisation/press/facebook-page-reaches-million-english-learners>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/LearnEnglish.BritishCouncilMENA/posts/10151810326700356>

<https://www.facebook.com/britishcouncil>

<https://www.facebook.com/LearnEnglish.BritishCouncil>

<https://www.facebook.com/LearnEnglishTeens.BritishCouncil>

Fans are people who like a specific Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/help/481346635279160?sr=2&sid=0i6axJMk5OMieEmTx>

Australia Plus Learn English, Open English and ELS Educational Services Inc in terms of Facebook fans.<sup>19</sup>

## Research aims:

The aim of the research is to identify the elements of the page that users value and understand the value users gain from the BC MENA LE Facebook page. This analysis will contribute to the evidence used to produce the cultural value constellation. Observing the behaviour of BC MENA LE page users allows us to identify opportunities to extend the cultural value of the page. To do so, we seek to understand the ways in which the British Council has converted millions of views and 2.4 million fans, into lasting interactions, or 'engagement', through which to produce cultural value and support the English Language learning of users through a social media platform such as Facebook.

To develop an understanding of user behaviour and identify cultural value the research seeks to show:

- How many people the MENA Learn English Facebook page reaches.
- How many people does MENA Learn English Facebook page engage and how often do Facebook users return to MENA Learn English Facebook page.
- Types of content on the page and the type of content users find particularly engaging.
- To explore and suggest why some posts are more 'popular' than others.
- To offer practical suggestions to maximise reach and engagement, building on successes identified in the research.

## Methods:

For this analysis, we use the terms 'fans', 'reach', as they are defined by Facebook and use 'engagement' as a collective term for the different types of interaction with content on the page:

**Fans:** Those Facebook users who have 'liked' the page.

**Reach:** The number of people who see any activity from the Facebook page. This includes posts, posts by other people, page 'like' ads, mentions, and check-ins.

**Engagement:** Users who have chosen to interact with a post on the Facebook page. This includes 'liking' a post, 'commenting' on a post, or 'sharing' that post with friends on Facebook.

**Like:** Clicking the 'like' button on a page means a user becomes a fan of that page. Clicking 'like' on a post is a way of sending positive feedback to the author of the post without writing a message. A link to the page that was 'liked' is also displayed in the users' newsfeed.

**Comment:** A user writes a response to a post, which appears below the post.

**Share:** A 'share' allows the user to write something about a link and choose the audience (friends for example) you want to share it with.

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<sup>19</sup> Social Bakers category 'society' and tagged 'education': <http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-pages/society/tag/education/>

Our analyses utilise data from two time periods; firstly for the last three months and secondly for the lifetime of the page.

The data for the last three months was gathered from Facebook Insights, which is available to page administrators. This data shows the number of users reached (the traffic for the page), the way in which users came to the Facebook page, and the extent to which visitors engaged with content on the page. The specific time period of this data was 19th Dec 2013 to 13<sup>th</sup> March 2014 (the most recent download available at time of writing). We analysed this data to identify reach and engagement.

The second dataset consists of all the publicly observable data for the lifetime of the page, which goes back to March 2010. In this instance, publicly observable means anything on the Facebook page which a user with enough persistence could view. While this data does not give detail on the reach of the page, the number of people viewing it, it allows the behaviour of users to be analysed in greater detail. For example how many different users could be observed liking or commenting on the page, whether users interact with the page frequently, the type of content with which they interact frequently, and the individuals which the MENA Learn English page engages frequently. We analysed this data to look at lasting engagement.

Once we had identified the posts which were most 'liked' and most 'shared' in both sets of data, we undertook a qualitative analysis to explore what made them 'popular'. We looked at the content of posts and the comments, running to 500 comments for some posts. These findings were compared to the recent posts that had not received so much attention, using a snapshot from the 7<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> of March. For this qualitative analysis we visited the page just as any learner of English would, exploring routes through the content and reading comments.

### **The Analyses in Depth:**

The data for this section originate from Facebook Insights, the graphs are shown here as they in the Facebook Insights reports. While there have been concerns about the accuracy of some impression and reach reports due to a bug identified in 2013, it remains the most reliable source of data about traffic on the Facebook platform.<sup>20</sup> The data was accessed using admin rights provided by the British Council.

### **Page Statistics at a glance:**

This page provides an overview of the statistics for both the last three months and the lifetime of the page. These are presented here for easy reference and are discussed in detail below.

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<sup>20</sup> Facebook bug: <https://www.facebook-studio.com/news/item/important-update-to-page-insights-reporting>



### *Reach:*

- The combined reach of all posts published during the period 19 December to 13 March was 15,008,467 views<sup>21</sup>.

During the same period:

- The **users** that the MENA Learn English page currently reaches are mostly male (61%). This is consistent with the demographics of Facebook users in the Middle East, where users are at least 62% male with the exception of Jordan (58% male).
- However, the gender profile of **fans** (who have 'liked' the page) matches the gender profile for Facebook users generally (46% female, 54% male) a greater proportion of female users than in the region generally.
- The most frequent language selected by fans in their user profile is Arabic, however, English (US) and English (UK) combined account for a greater number of fans.
- Fans and users reached are most frequently from, in decreasing order, Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, and Iraq.

### *Engagement:*

Over the last three months:

- Posts on the Facebook page generated totals of 116,922 comments, 104,372 'likes'. Posts were shared 6,162 times.
- Each post generated, on average, 289 comments, 250 'likes' and 16 'shares'.
- The most popular post published during this period in terms of total likes and comments generated over 4,000 likes and 4,500 comments.<sup>22</sup>
- Once on the page, users engage with posts on average at the rate of 4.3 comments per 1,000 unique views and 7.6 'Likes' per 1,000 unique views.
- The most engaging post, in terms of likes as a proportion of visitors, achieved the equivalent of 90 'likes' per 1,000 views, but with a small number of viewers.
- The most engaging post, in terms of comments as a proportion of visitors, achieved 24 comments per 1,000 views, over five times the average, and had over 166,000 unique views.

### *Lasting Engagement:*

Over the lifetime of the page there were:

- 809,429 total post 'likes'.
- 487,454 total post 'comments'.
- 203,480 total post 'shares'.
- 129,000 users commented at least once.
- 80,000 users commented at least twice.
- 9,660 users commented 10 or more times.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> This is the combined unique users per-post, users viewing two posts will be counted twice in this calculation.

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/LearnEnglish.BritishCouncilMENA/posts/10152150078427354>

## Benchmarking:

Social Bakers ranks BC MENA LE in the top ten sites globally for sites tagged as 'education'. This is in terms of the number of Facebook fans.

#	Page	Fans
1.	 La Fábrica del Real Madrid	5 651 173
2.	 Urban Dictionary	4 181 338
3.	 IIPM	3 308 050
4.	 Harvard University	3 304 752
5.	 1001 Inventions from Muslim...	2 723 925
6.	 LearnEnglish – British Council MENA	2 708 446
7.	 Teaching English – British Council	2 478 975
8.	 Geração de Valor	2 129 162
9.	 Cambridge English	2 047 250
10.	 Wikipedia	1 968 537

Figure 1: Social Bakers top 10 sites tagged 'education'

While 'education' is broadly defined, and ranges from Real Madrid's youth football academy to Wikipedia and the Urban Dictionary, the BC MENA LE page ranks above accounts with a similar purpose such as Cambridge English (2 million fans), Australia Plus Learn English (1.8 million fans), Open English (1.7 million fans) and ELS Educational Services Inc (1.3 million), IELTS Official (1.3 million fans) Learn Real English (1.2 million fans). A similar ranking of the BC MENA LE Facebook page on a country-by-country basis is available in Appendix 1.

Few metrics are made available to sites such as Social Bakers to produce comparative benchmarking, as Facebook reveals the majority of data only to the administrator of a specific Facebook page. There is an alternative approach which requires the data mining of all publicly observable interactions with a page. While this approach was used to produce a deeper analysis of the BC MENA LE page, using the method for benchmarking would require a level of data analysis beyond the scope of this study.

## Reach

Reach is defined as the number of people who saw any activity from a page including posts, posts by other people, page 'like' ads, mentions, and check-ins.

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<sup>23</sup> This data is calculated from the publicly observable interactions on the BC MENA LE Facebook page,

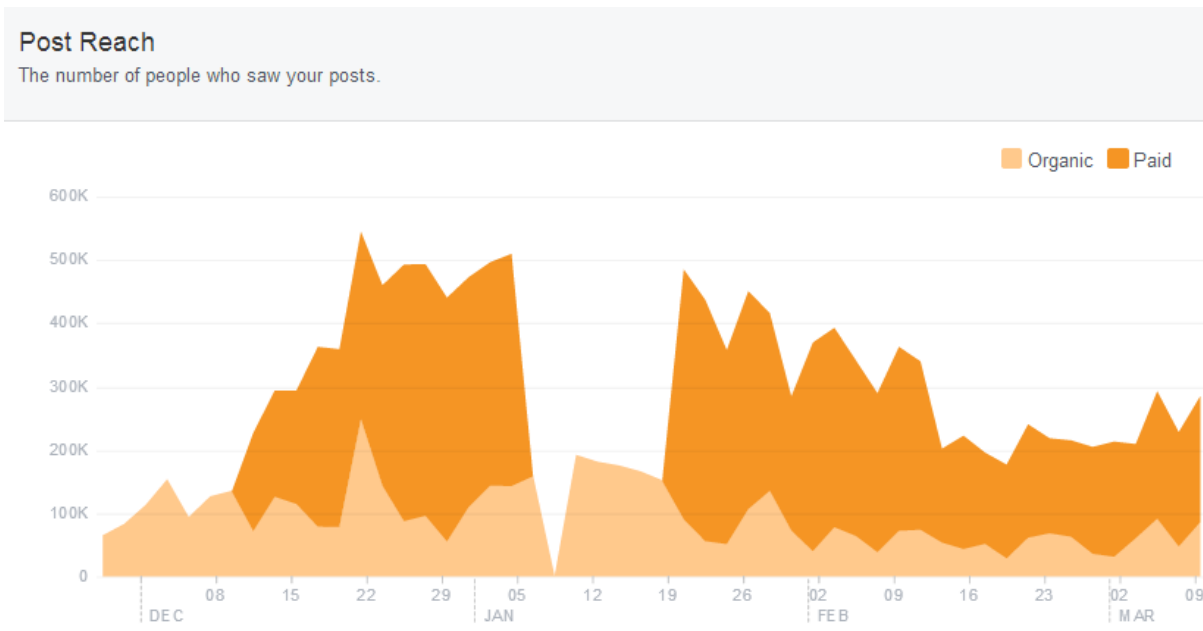


Figure 2. The reach of the MENA Learn English Facebook page across a three month period. **Defined by Facebook, Organic reach** (light orange) is “the number of unique people who saw your post in News Feed, or on your Page, including people who saw it from a story shared by a friend when they liked, commented on or shared your post, answered a question or responded to an event”. **Paid reach** (dark orange): The number of unique people who saw your post through an ad.

Figure 2, from Facebook Insights, shows the distribution of the 15m views across the three month period which defines our dataset. The graph indicates that the reach of posts is heavily dependent on paid reach, such a advertising (shown in dark orange)<sup>24</sup>. On average 75% of daily traffic came from paid sources and only 25% was organic, meaning users who saw a post on the BC MENA LE page, in their News Feed because they are already fans, or when it appeared in a friend’s news feed because they had interacted with the BC MENA LE page. The gap in paid traffic between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> of January, also has a knock-on effect on other metrics, including page likes (shown in the section on ‘engagement’). Organic traffic could be increased if BC MENA LE page was easier to find or to access from other the British Council websites and social media.

### Who are the people reached?

The largest fan group for the MENA Learn English page are men between 18 and 24, closely followed by women of the same age. The proportion of men and women who are fans of the page matches the gender profile of all Facebook users.

<sup>24</sup> Paid vs. Organic reach: <https://www.facebook.com/help/285625061456389?sr=1&sid=0Sew4rpK3O5d1r02R>

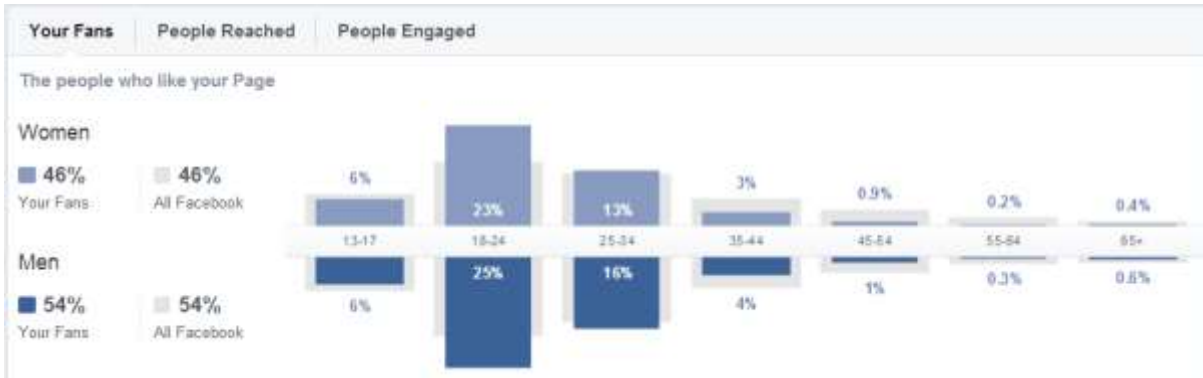


Figure 3 Age and gender make-up of BC MENA LE fans from Facebook Insights.

However, the profile for users included in 'reach' tells a different story.<sup>25</sup> A greater proportion of the users who saw content from the BC MENA LE page were male. The proportion of users reached that are male, 61%, is higher than the proportion of the page's fans that are male, or Facebook users generally but in line with the demographics of Facebook users for most countries in the Middle East. At least 62% of users are male in countries in the MENA region with the exception of Jordan (58% male).<sup>26</sup>

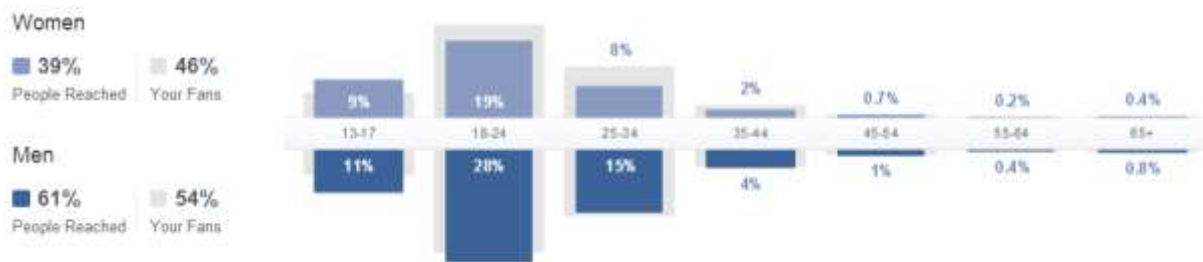


Figure 4 Age and gender make-up of BC MENA LE fans from Facebook Insights

## Where are they?

The Facebook Insights data shows the country with greatest number of fans is Egypt, specifically Cairo. Users are also able to decide the language through which they interact with and experience Facebook. As one might expect Arabic is the most frequently selected language by fans of the BC MENA LE Facebook page. However, Facebook differentiates English (UK) from English (US), if these were combined into a single value for English then it would be the most frequently used language by fans.<sup>27</sup> The same top five countries as seen in figure 5 are also the locations of the greatest number of users reached and engaged. This means the British Council is reaching users in target regions, judged by their location.

<sup>25</sup> Reach is defined as the number of people who saw any activity from your page including posts, posts by other people, Page like ads, mentions, and check-ins.

<sup>26</sup> An overview of user demographics by country can be found here: <http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-overview-statistics/>

<sup>27</sup> Language refers to the primary language selected in a user's facebook settings.

Country	Your Fans	City	Your Fans	Language	Your Fans
Egypt	731,007	Cairo, Al Qahirah, Egypt	350,970	Arabic	778,259
Algeria	362,681	Tunis, Gabès, Tunisia	95,409	English (US)	699,829
Tunisia	231,852	Alexandria, Al Iskandariya...	94,447	French (France)	687,684
Morocco	226,093	Baghdad, Iraq	76,014	English (UK)	182,897
Iraq	183,794	Amman, Irbid, Jordan	71,299	French (Canada)	7,201
Jordan	107,468	Algiers, Alger, Algeria	61,231	Turkish	6,234
Libya	95,837	Tripoli, Tarabulus, Libya	65,783	Vietnamese	6,233
Palestine	92,281	Casablanca, Morocco	63,117	Spanish	6,588
Yemen	68,306	Giza, Al Jizah, Egypt	39,205	Indonesian	5,063
Saudi Arabia	40,897	Algeri, Alger, Algeria	29,527	Spanish (Spain)	3,389

Figure 5: Top Country, location and language of BC MENA LE fans, from Facebook Insights

### How do visitors find the page?

Facebook Insights also provides information on the way users arrive at the BC MENA LE Facebook page.



Figure 6: Sites most frequently referring users to BC MENA LE, from Facebook Insights

‘External referrers’ are webpages (other than Facebook) from which users arrive at the MENA Learn English Facebook page. The top three referrers are all British Council sites. The ‘really-learn-english’ site provides English language courses and resources produced by Ola Zur. However, the Facebook Insights data shows that few users come via ‘external referrers’, less than 100 per day, compared to the thousands the page reaches via Facebook. In this case the data shows that very few of the individuals who make up the ‘reach’ numbers arrived from these websites. It is possible that visitors

from external referrers could be increased if links to the BC MENA LE page were more prominent on British Council web pages that are in English. While the Facebook page is linked to from British Council pages in Arabic, the Facebook page is in English and most traffic comes from web pages in English. In addition, if BC MENA LE took a more collaborative approach or worked in partnership with other English teaching resources, that might equally increase referred traffic to the Facebook page.

The need for adjustments to be made if it is desirable to make BC MENA LE easier to find is corroborated by other observations in our research. The Facebook Learn English MENA page is extremely difficult to access from the British Council websites.

- No link was found to access the MENA Learn English Facebook page from the general BC Learn English webpage. This webpage has a Facebook logo, which takes users to <https://www.facebook.com/LearnEnglish.BritishCouncil>. Once on the Learn English Facebook page there is no obvious link through to the MENA Learn English Facebook page.
- A Google search (from the UK) for 'English for the Future' (the parent project) returns <http://www.britishcouncil.org/me-english-english-for-the-future.htm> as the top result, but with no click through access to the BC MENA LE Facebook page. While other British Council pages link to the BC MENA LE, it could be an advantage for pages that are returned prominently by search engines to provide an easy route to the active Facebook pages.
- The BC MENA Learn English Facebook page was not clearly listed under 'online resources' on the ME Learning English webpage. The only link that was found to Facebook (and even then it was well hidden) was to the general Learn English Facebook page. Even though the web page appears to be in the process of being phased out, while it is still active it could be helpful in increasing reach.

The Facebook Insights data and our own observations show that users are finding the MENA Learn English Facebook page via other interactions on Facebook, including the actions of other users and paid sources of traffic.

## **Engagement:**

Interaction on Facebook terms comes in four forms; at a general level of interaction a user can 'like' the entire page – these are 'page likes' and define the number of 'fans' a page has.<sup>28</sup> This BC MENA LE page has more Facebook fans than any other British Council Facebook page.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Page likes vs. Post likes: <https://www.facebook.com/help/228578620490361?sr=1&sid=0jnJzrvxORjWmoVSn>

<sup>29</sup> Fan page data from British Council Digital Dashboard Q4 2013 – 2014

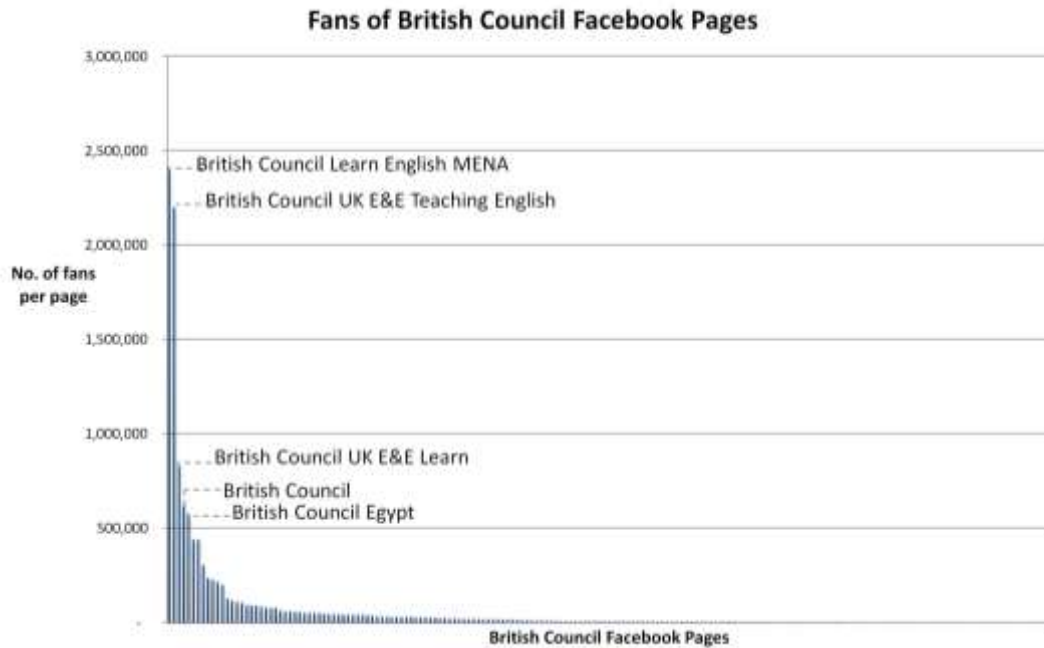


Figure 7: British Council Facebook pages, data from British Council Digital Dashboard Q4 2013 – 2014

On a more specific level of engagement, users can ‘like’, comment on, and share individual posts on a page. In addition, there is a distinction between a user engaging with a **page**, and engaging with a specific **post** on that page.

Firstly we examined the data on page ‘likes’ for the three month period.

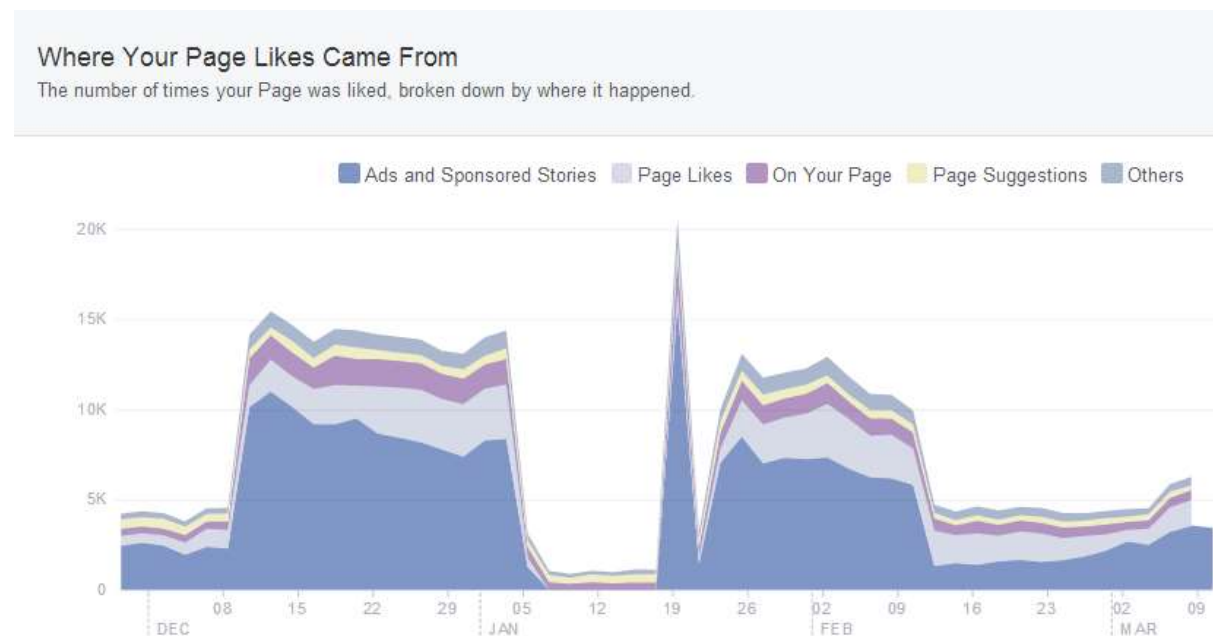


Figure 8: The location on Facebook where users like the BC MENA LE Page

**Facebook Insights data shows Ads and Sponsored Stories are the primary driver of page likes.** This fits with the earlier observation that the BC MENA LE page was heavily dependent on paid traffic sources for reach. It confirms that the investment in extending ‘reach’ through advertising is successful in attracting users who subsequently ‘like’ the page. The gap in advertising is matched by

the drop in daily likes. As a result, greater numbers of page likes can be gained by continuing the investment in advertising.

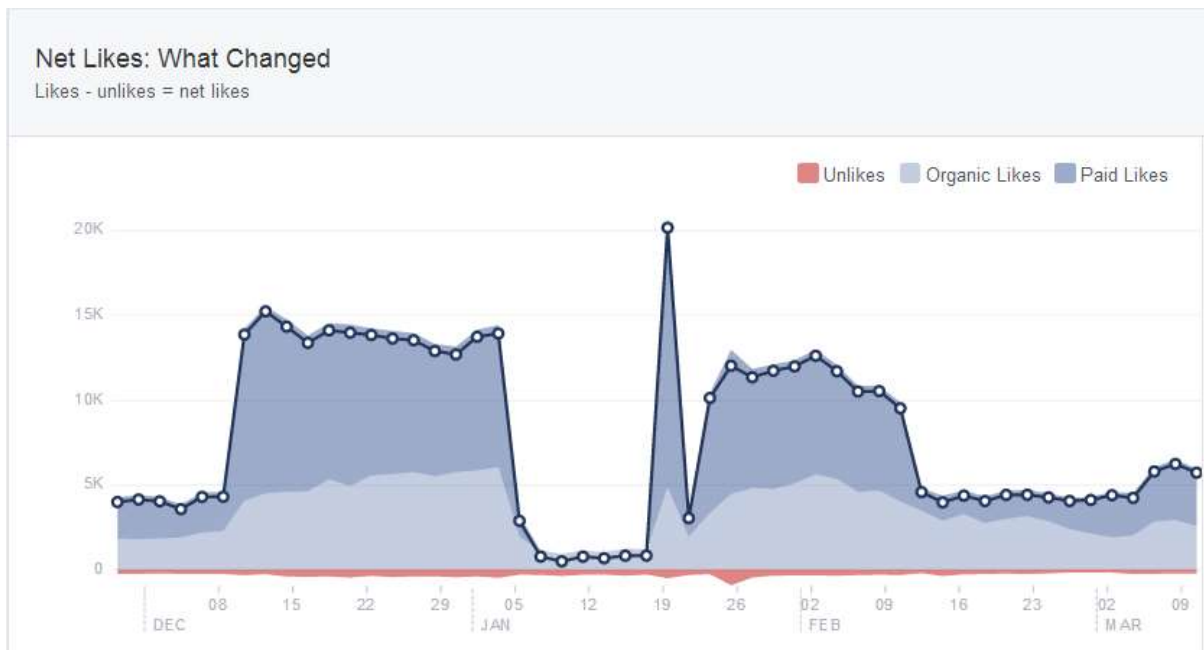


Figure 9: Comparison of BC MENA LE 'likes' and 'unlikes' over time

Just as it is possible for users to 'like' a page, it is equally possible for those users to 'unlike' it. As it suggests, this means people deciding they no longer 'like' a page nor wish to receive updates about that page when they use facebook. In the case of the BC MENA LE page it regularly gets between 5,000 and 10,000 daily page likes, but there are very few 'unlikes'. As a result 'net likes' almost entirely mirrors the graph for likes, with the corresponding gap between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> January, where there were no paid sources of 'reach' and 'likes'. This means most users remain fans once they have 'liked' a page and this creates the potential that they will see future posts. However, although it is possible they will see future posts, it is not guaranteed. While there are increasing numbers of users liking the page, these users do not all interact with posts on the page. This highlights the opportunity to develop methods through which users would engage to a greater extent with the posts on the page and subsequently retain engaged users. The data on specific engagement with posts is the focus of the following section.

### Engagement with specific content:

In addition to liking a page, users can engage with specific posts on the BC MENA LE Facebook page. During the period under observation, posts generated a total of 116,922 comments, 104,372 likes and shared posts 6162 times. This is an average of 289 comments, 250 likes and 16 shares per post, but perhaps more telling is the median; 40 comments, 144 likes and 9 shares. This indicates that a few posts account for a large proportion of the likes, comments and shares.



### The difference between a share and a like:

When you visit other websites, you may see buttons that let you share things like blog posts and articles back to Facebook:

- The **Like** button let's you share a link to your Timeline and in News Feed in one click. [Learn more about Like.](#)
- The **Share** button lets you write something about a link and choose the audience you want to post to.

The level of overall engagement, and the specific measures – likes, comments and shares, varied considerably over this period. Facebook Insights show ‘comments’ and ‘likes’ are the primary means of engagement, with ‘shares’ being consistently lower.<sup>30</sup>

#### Likes, Comments, and Shares

These actions will help you reach more people.

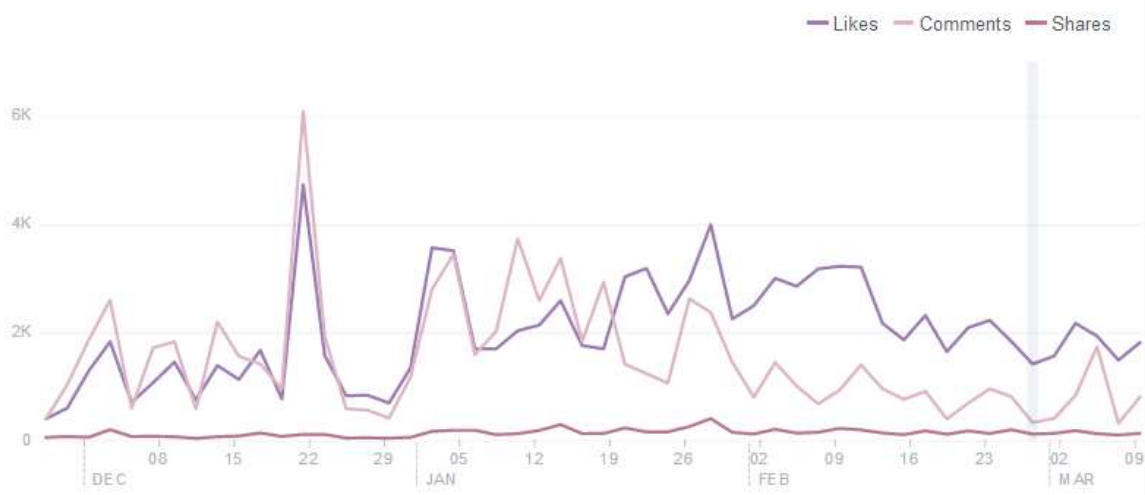


Figure 10: Comparison of likes, comments, and shares, from Facebook insights

This data shows that some content and periods of time witnessed greater levels of engagement than others. This is consistent with the earlier finding that some posts are particularly engaging and account for a large proportion of interactions. For example, the 21<sup>st</sup> December has a particularly prominent spike in activity. This spike in activity may be because two posts caught the attention of users on that day, in addition, one of those posts was the most liked and commented post during the entire period.

<sup>30</sup> Likes vs. Shares: <https://www.facebook.com/help/216373778387917?sr=5&sid=0pcLj2nm6UbEMCO9>

## Most engaging content:

As developing greater cultural value relies on converting reach into engagement we looked more closely at the posts which received particularly high levels of interaction in the last three months. The most engaging content in statistical terms can be considered from two perspectives; the *total engagement*: the volume of comments and likes (see Figure 11), or *proportional engagement*: the number of comments and likes per 1,000 unique views (see Figure 12 & 13). This gives us a wider range of perspectives on what makes engaging content and as a result contributes to cultural value. This section highlights the most engaging content over the last three months. A deeper qualitative analysis then reviews the findings for the lifetime of the page to assess the elements of engaging content which contribute to the cultural value of the page.

In terms of total engagement, the image of the cat was both most liked and commented but not most shared.

### Most liked:<sup>31</sup>



### Most commented:



### Most shared:<sup>32</sup>



Figure 11: Most liked, commented and shared posts. Data is taken from Facebook Insights.

*Proportional engagement* is calculated as using unique user views over the lifetime of the post, so the same user viewing the post twice is still only counted once. The average was 4.2 comments per 1,000 unique views, and 7.6 'likes' per 1,000 unique views, with a median of 2.1 comments and 6.5 'likes' per 1,000 unique views. The most engaging content achieves a much higher response. A post which was part of the 'Great' campaign celebrating 'Great Britain week' in Bahrain had the most likes per 1,000 unique views.<sup>33</sup> It achieved the equivalent of 90 'likes' per 1,000 views, but was actually viewed by very few users.

<sup>31</sup> Cat: <https://www.facebook.com/LearnEnglish.BritishCouncilMENA/posts/10152150078427354>

<sup>32</sup> Hit the Sack:

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10152232698527354&set=a.397618872353.195503.392784687353&type=1>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.Facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10152198455277354&set=a.397618872353.195503.392784687353&type=1>



Figure 12: Most liked proportional to the number of views, data from Facebook Insights

Analysing *proportional engagement* in terms of comments, the most engaging post achieved 24 comments per 1,000 unique views. This post is a multiple choice question and is typical of the complete the sentence type post, except that it does not come with a picture.<sup>34</sup>



Figure 13: Most commented as a proportion as a number of views, data from Facebook Insights

The scores for the top posts in terms of proportional engagement are considerably higher than the average for a post. This indicates that while some posts do not achieve extensive reach, they are highly engaging for those that do view them. The importance of these posts should not be overlooked by focusing only on the total engagement figures as these posts deliver greater cultural value. Instead, consideration might be given to why these are not reaching as many people, and whether there are ways to achieve greater reach, perhaps through advertising. Future research could focus on identifying and contrasting the posts which achieve high proportional engagement and the reasons for lower reach.

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.Facebook.com/LearnEnglish.BritishCouncilMENA/posts/10152192704482354>

## Qualitative analysis of engagement

The Learn English Facebook MENA page contains a great variety of posts which can be grouped into broad types in terms of content: multiple choice questions, their answers, conversations with the English Doctor, information on vocabulary (e.g. weather related words), short writing exercises in grammar and vocabulary, information and short tasks related to the specific date (eg World Poetry Day), and links to other relevant content.

### Identifying aspects of 'popularity'.

Numbers of 'comments', 'likes' and 'shares' can be taken as a measure of a post's success in engaging users, one of the drivers of cultural value from the user perspective. Using the publicly available data for the lifetime of the page, we looked at the content of most liked, commented and shared posts to examine what aspects of content contribute to the cultural value of these 'popular' posts. We looked at the content of 'comments' and their 'replies' to see whether users are responding to the tasks set, and engaging in conversations.

We identified several attributes of posts which seem to attract users to 'like', 'comment' or 'share':

#### 1. Multiple choice:

When we looked at which type of content was most commented on in our long term data we saw that 9 out of the top 10 posts were multiple choice questions.

We can suggest that these may be responded to more than other types of post as multiple choice is:

- Quick to respond to - many comments are simply a one letter answer.
- Easy to respond to - even total beginners can have a go as a sentence is not called for.
- Satisfying to respond to as there is a right answer and a good chance of choosing it.
- When you can see how others have responded (generally correctly) you are even more likely to get the right answer.



Figure 14: The most commented on post in the data with 4774 comments.  
This was also the 9th most 'liked' post.

The question posed with this picture was;

["Could you give me a hand?" means: a\) Could you help me? b\) Could you shake my hand? c\) Could you give me money? The answer is \(a\). Congrats to all who got it right.](#)

Figure 14 (above) was the post with the most comments and supports our hypothesis. When we looked at the content of the first 500 comments we observed that 98% of them were simply the answer, either a single letter or in text eg 'Please could you help me?'.

The odd one out in the top 10 posts for most comments was seen in 9<sup>th</sup> position. **'What's your favourite colour?'** poses a question which demands a written response, but in this case a very simple response can be given – a one word colour. Hence, this post fulfils many of the criteria given above for multiple choice.



**How many differences can you spot?**

Figure 15: The 12<sup>th</sup> most commented post

The 12<sup>th</sup> most commented on post is a **'Spot the Difference'** puzzle (Figure 15). The question posed was; [How many differences can you find out? Write complete English sentences.](#) This is the most commented on post that actually asks for a fuller written response, but here we can surmise that the visual puzzle plays a powerful role in engaging people – again it is a challenge which gives an easily won sense of satisfaction. This type of task can be useful and enjoyable, providing cultural value in terms of engagement and utility.

## 2. Visual images:

When we looked at the **posts with most likes** during the lifetime of the page, the top 4 out of 5 contain surprising and visually arresting images.



Figure 16: Images from the 3 most 'liked' posts with 5535, 4265 and 4262 likes respectively.

This may be a result of successfully producing attractive content and the way images appear on the page. Basically posts with images attract the eye and are more visually prominent than those with only text which is particularly true on a Smartphone screen. However, the popularity of these images also hints that people may be driven by the image in terms of their 'likes', perhaps more so at times than the learning content.

The number of 'shares' often exceeds the number of 'likes' in the long term data. The middle image above carries the text: ['What do you think of this haircut? Would you do it?'](#) and attracted 4609 likes but 6307 shares. The number of 'shares' indicates that the user is adding a comment or selecting a specific group of their friends with which to share the post. This may indicate greater cultural value as users are being prompted to add information, but equally may indicate that the users are sharing the image and adding an alternative context so users do not think they are sharing it as an English language lesson. For this particular post there were many fewer comments than shares (1654 as opposed to 4609), thus people are sharing the image and questions rather than offering the answer in the way users usually respond to questions on the BC MENA LE page. A significant proportion of comments for this post are not in English, and the content of those comments in English are also very limited eg 'It's crazy', or 'terrible', and they do not respond fully to the questions set. This indicates that people are commenting on the image itself, rather than taking part in the learning task. The value of this image is in the ability to attract people to the post, which suggests two outcomes. Greater organic reach could be achieved by using more striking images, and greater cultural value would be produced if striking images were more closely tied to the image as currently much of the reach comes from users discussing the image rather than the task.

The highest scoring post in terms of 'likes' (comprised of the left hand image above accompanied by the text: [Write down the names of the fruits you see in this photo then write a cool caption for it.](#)) also shows more 'shares' than 'comments', in fact almost ten times as many. This indicates that either people are sharing the image many times, or that most 'shares' are by people who have not commented.

### 3. Humour and identification:

One particular post which was the 4<sup>th</sup> most liked (4174 likes) in our longer term data stands out.



Figure 17: [At a job interview, what would your answer to this question be?](#)

Firstly this post makes a joke, about imagining there being a fire. It is clear from the comments that some people have not understood the joke and respond very literally to the question posed by the interviewer, others use their imagination. This establishes something of a debate between users. But the context here may also be relevant to its popularity. Many people are learning English to better their career prospects and we know from the quantitative data that most users are young, so they identify the context of this task as one that is relevant to their personal aim in learning English.

#### 4. Sharing potential for teachers:

In our more recent data collected over the last three months, we examined the most 'shared' post.



Figure 18: Most shared post in last three months.<sup>35</sup>

Over three months this post had 225 shares. However only 8 of these 'shares' had any accompanying comment from the sharer, and even then the comments were minimal, for example the answer, or an instruction, 'choose one'. This may indicate that when people share posts they do so with little attempt to have a 'conversation' about the post, or that users are selecting the group of friends with which they wish to share the post.

On a more positive note a significant number of those shares were by Facebook users who were clearly involved in English teaching; 6 out of 225 for this post. They were: 'Linguaphone Iraq', 'planet of words', A.K.Institute of Grammar', Khin Thu Zar Ho (English Teacher)', Colegio Acaymo – Ntra. Sra. de Candelaria', and 'English tips and hints'. Of course there were likely to be many more English teachers sharing, but we cannot recognise them as such as they used individual names, or are not using English. This highlights the cultural value that users gain from engaging with the BC MENA LE page, as they recognise the attractiveness and utility of the content leading them to share it with their students.

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10152232698527354&set=a.397618872353.195503.392784687353&type=1>



Perhaps surprisingly the English Doctor is rarely shared. We looked at a snapshot of ‘shares’ on the 25<sup>th</sup> March for the preceding three days. There were only 2 shares of the English Doctor’s post from the day before, and only 12 shares from the post two days before. (By comparison posts which relate to ‘today is...’ are shared more often. For example World Water Day on the 22<sup>nd</sup> March gets 60 shares after 3 days). This reinforces that although some posts are shared specifically to advance teaching and learning in English, the fact that the English Doctor is rarely shared indicates that there are other factors which motivate sharing.<sup>36</sup>

## Examining engagement through the content of comments:

Some of the more ‘popular’ posts in both datasets revealed flurries of activity triggered by interactions between users in the form of comments and subsequent replies. Three different ways in which users’ comments contributed to the popularity of a post were observed.

- Debate about the right answer
- Response to a user who contributes information
- Development of a back and forth conversation between one user and many

### 1. Debate about the right answer.

This, a post we have already seen in the quantitative data, is the most **commented** on post from the last three months.



Figure 19: A question that provokes discussion

There are two factors that may have created interest around this post.

Firstly, looking at the 100 top comments (excluding replies) 69 offered the correct answer ‘off’, but 18 offered ‘out’ – this is a high level of disagreement compared to other posts (for example if we look at another popular multiple choice post ‘Could you give me a hand’, then 95 of the first 100 answers are correct). Within the replies to comments the disagreement between ‘off’ and ‘out’ is even more obvious (11 out of 17 answers to the second most replied to comment giving the wrong

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<sup>36</sup> Although specific replies to the English Doctor cannot be shared, it would be possible to share the entire post and replies.



answer 'out'). **This indicates that people tend to look at others replies and stick with a group of answers that mirrors their own response, and also that disagreement about the correct answer can actually generate more comments as debate is triggered between users.**

Secondly, a user made a comment on this post which was a joke – *'but my shoes are clean!'* This comment garnered the most replies with 31. Out of these replies only 8 offer an answer to the multiple choice, with the majority of the other replies showing people responding to each other: examples include: *'not as clean as the house!'*, or *'not correct but smart answer hehehee'*, or *'SO get out of my home'*. So it appears that comments which offer more than a simple answer encourage engagement of a qualitatively different type – with more conversational back and forth, humour, banter etc. There may also be a cultural factor coming into play here with an expectation of shoe removal across the MENA countries: one post states *'take off your shoes means take off your shoes (keep up your manners)'*. It is interesting to note that the comment which received the next highest number of replies was a simple answer, and in turn elicited more simple answers in reply, in fact 17 out of 18 replies gave a straightforward response to the multiple choice. **So it appears that the tone and nature of comments affects the tone and nature of replies to those comments, and can have an influence in generating activity for that post.**

## 2. Response to a user who contributes information



Figure 20: is the most shared post in our three month data. The top comment for this post attracted a high number of 'likes' and a high number of 'replies'. This comment expanded on the etymology of the phrase 'hit the sack':

"Hit the sack" means: a) Turn off the TV, b) Eat something, c) Go to sleep. Choose the correct answer.

Hani Baertig Mann 'Surely means go to sleep .. It is used informally in both America and Australia . In Britain, they'd like to say hit the hay. For our mates who are asking why ... This has to take us back to the 1800s when people used to sleep on hay in barns as bedding... Over time it has become a figure of speech that compares hay or sack to bed which directly means sleep ..'

Many people were appreciative of this comment and thanked the contributor. We can only guess why this comment was so popular – perhaps because users appreciate the etymological content, perhaps because they appreciate the time and effort taken, perhaps because the being bored at the TV and going to bed is a fairly universal experience. But it is likely that the value of this comment contributed in part to the high number of shares.

### 3. Development of a back and forth conversation between one user and many.

Even more interaction can be seen for another post where a comment by a user triggers a chain of back and forth replies. In the data set collected over the lifetime of the page this post (Figure 21) is 9<sup>th</sup> in terms of 'comments' and 6<sup>th</sup> in terms of 'likes'.



Figure 21: A post which sparked a conversation.

The expression "Behind the times" here means: a) He is very late. b) He is old-fashioned. c) He is thinking.

The comments themselves are more expansive and conversational than for many other posts which take the form of multiple choice questions. The top comment in terms of 'replies' attempts to explain the English, but also comes to the wrong conclusion:

Souma Sousou I think it can not be (b) because he isn't very different, he is wearing like them. But the answer (c) can be the correct answer, he is behind the times means that he is not with us he is thinking about a thing which makes him/ or his mind very far to us.

Other users reply in order to correct her, and in fact enter into a group conversation to which the user Souma Sousou contributes a further 6 times. There is a discussion about which answer is correct with at least half the replies either expanding on the logic of the answer or commenting on

the fashion in the image. eg 'You have a point of view, but the expression means he's old-fashioned whether the picture fits or not!'. Souma Sousou, as perceived owner of this conversation, finally gets exasperated and replies:

*Souma Sousou plzzzzz think as you like i did not refuse any opinion, i just give an answer, this is what i think if it is right or wrong, if you like it or not this is your problem i know what i said and i am sure it is right so everyone let his opinion for his/herself, this is not very important for me, thanx*

When we look at other comments for this post (ie those not contained within this conversation of 'replies') we revert to the model of simple answers to the multiple choice. **This indicates that individual users are important in triggering discussion, but it is difficult to predict who will post a comment that may trigger a series of interactions, and what kind of post they may respond to.**

### Engagement through less 'popular' posts:

The quality of engagement is an important aspect when considering cultural value. Some posts, although they don't elicit high volumes of comments or likes, do attract users who put in a great deal of thought and effort into their responses, or engage with one another in a conversation or discussion. We have previously seen how a comment by a user can elicit discussion, but is there anything about a post that encourages users to extend themselves beyond the most basic response?

To investigate this we used numbers of words in comments as a marker of engagement, averaging the number of words in the top 25 comments. We used a snapshot of posts on the 11<sup>th</sup> March as a sample. 'How many countries have you visited' was the most recent post examined for that snapshot. For this post we saw a mean of 12.8 English words for the first 25 comments. The next most recent post asks for a list of countable and uncountable nouns and elicited a mean English word count of 14.1. A post from 4 days earlier, the 7<sup>th</sup> March, attracted a huge mean of 53 words over the first ten comments. This asks for a funny short story containing the words 'March, spring, picnic, flowers and crocodile'.

All of these posts way exceeded the word count, and therefore quality of engagement, for the most 'commented' post over the lifetime of the page:



Figure 22: A post which sparked a conversation.

["Could you give me a hand?" means: a\) Could you help me? b\) Could you shake my hand? c\) Could you give me money?](#)

This was multiple choice and only achieved a 2.4 word mean. When compared to the most 'liked' over a long period (which was not multiple choice and asked the user to write names of fruits) which returned an average 8 words per comment, then our 'snapshot' posts do well. Thus there seems to be little relation between most commented and liked, and quality of engagement. **In fact this finding supports previous findings that the most commented on posts tend to be the least demanding, and the comments the least involved.**

It is also noticeable that the more words tend to be used the better the quality of the English, so it is clear that different posts are appealing to different levels of English learner. Less adept English learners respond to the easier and briefer tasks, more experienced learners to the more complex tasks.

## Engagement with the English Doctor

In terms of qualitative analysis we looked at posts which were not asking users to take part in a task. In our snapshot of the page on the 11<sup>th</sup> March the English Doctor stands out, as there is direct interaction between a representative of the British Council and users which goes beyond giving answers. Exploring the Facebook page as a visitor it strikes us that the Doctor:

- Is visually prominent on the page with a signature green blocked graphic – there is a sense of excitement when the Doctor is 'available'.
- Is very fast to respond.
- Offers a sense of a 'live' experience.
- Is personable and references own experience of English eg *'I used it myself in an email this morning'*.
- Has a tone of voice which is gentle, straightforward and soothing.
- Is uncritical.
- Responds more than once if the questioner begins a conversation.
- Puts up notes on the main page that some questions might be answered by looking through old answers, but does not mention this in response to individuals.
- Offers many suggestions about other British Council materials to access to move people on.
- Suggests the book 'English Vocabulary in Use' repeatedly.

In terms of language the Doctor uses simple vocabulary, and a number of caveat words to create the tone of being uncritical (eg the word 'usually'). The English Doctor also uses first names and smilies– eg *'You're welcome, Mian (smiley)'*.

Questions and responses seem to fit into 3 types –

1) Specific English usage (eg *'Is it correct to say? The cow gives milk well'.*) – this is the easiest to respond to with direct information on grammar, vocabulary and syntax.

2) Generic English usage (eg 'I want to ask you about the difference between regular and irregular verbs') – the doctor tends to offer references to other sources.

3) Questions relating more to the questioners own life experiences ('I am thinking about creating an english club in this area' or 'I am no longer do my job how can I keep my accent?') – this requires careful thought from the Doctor, and wider references. The English Doctor also often asks questions back and enters into a conversation.

Reviewing a number of posts from the English Doctor it is clear that repetition of questions is a big issue. It is also clear that there are other sources of information that could provide the answers to many of the questions the English Doctor is asked, if users searched for them. However the English Doctor takes every question on its own merit. This demonstrates that the key value of the English Doctor is situated perhaps more in the characteristics which make users feel warm towards the Facebook page, rather than in the contribution to English learning. The English Doctor undoubtedly helps those who ask a question but the responses are rarely shared, so the main impact of the English Doctor lies with the millions of other users who do not ask questions. **The English Doctor is a vital ingredient in the successful recipe that recruits and retains users to this page, through offering a welcoming and personal atmosphere. The English Doctor contributes to the lasting engagement of the page.** Other initiatives such as 'Fan of the Month' also contribute to these characteristics, as well as encouraging people to be active on the page. Nefertiti Reine, winner for February responded with:

*'Thank you so much for this honor. I am so glad and I would like to thank you for all your efforts and help. Thank you for all the activities you share with us everyday. Special thanks for all English Doctors.'* (3<sup>rd</sup> March)

In terms of cultural value the English Doctor is extremely important even though the posts receive low numbers of likes, comments and shares. This is because interactions with the English Doctor are of a very high quality and users cannot help but recognise a great and accessible service being offered for free, and with a personal touch.

### **Lasting Engagement by users**

This section uses the publicly observable data from the lifetime of the page. The publicly observable data for this section was archived from the BC MENA LE Facebook page using a computer program specifically written for the purpose. The program is an automated process designed to mine the data which a user would be able to collect if they viewed every post and comment on the Facebook page. This approach focuses on aggregating the interactions and user engagement that can be seen by others visiting the BC MENA LE page. As noted earlier there is a distinction between page likes (fans) and users that 'like' a specific post. This section looks at the interactions with posts on the page. We observed:

- Total post likes: 809,429,
- Total post comments: 487,454
- Total post shares: 203,480

While this process could be used to analyse the interaction with other Facebook pages for benchmarking, this was beyond the scope of this research. Focusing on the BC MENA LE page, the

analysis found that while the page has 2.4 million fans, across the lifetime of the page 129,000 users have commented on a post, and of these users 80,000 have commented twice. 9,660 users commented 10 or more times and nearly 600 users commented 50 or more times. **This shows that a large proportion of users comment only once or twice, but there is also a group of users who value the experience of interacting with the BC MENA LE page repeatedly.**

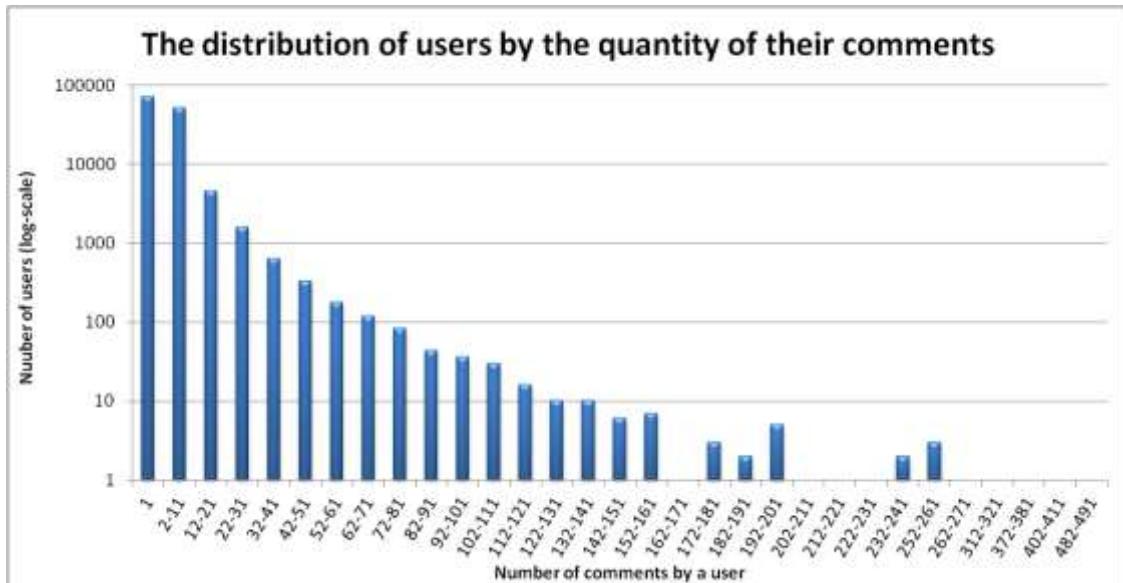


Figure 23: Distribution of users commenting on the page calculated using the user ID of each user observed interacting with the page

In addition to engaging repeatedly, assessing the longevity of user interaction can show whether users derive value from returning to the page repeatedly. Some users engage with the BC MENA LE page over a relatively long period of time. For example, 44,203 users commented in more than one month and 22,780 users commented on content in at least 3 months. This shows that 18% of users that comment on a BC MENA LE post are sufficiently interested and gain sufficient value to comment on a post again in at least another two months.

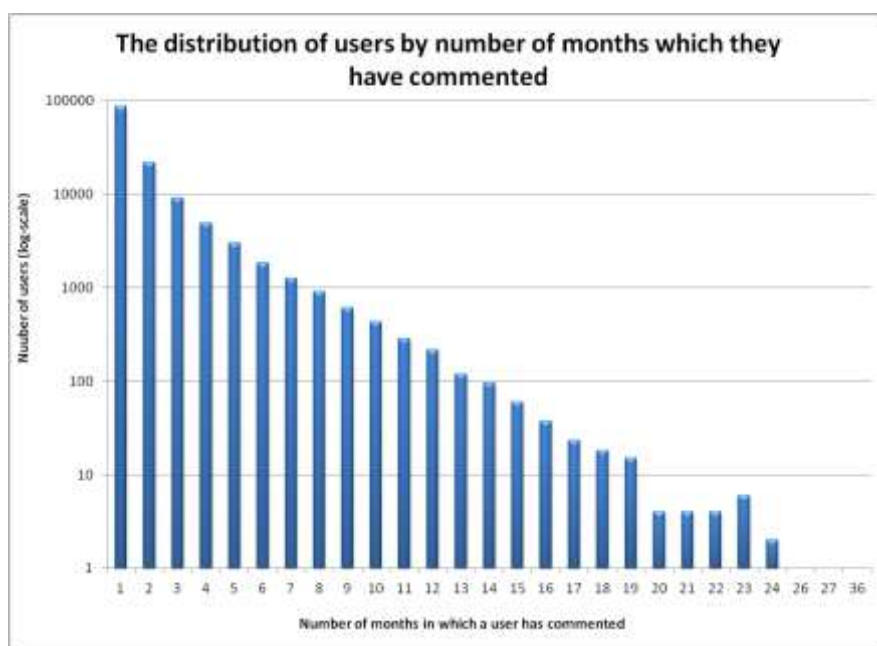


Figure 24: Number of months in which a user commented

Comparative research with other British Council pages could provide insight into their relative performance and whether specific techniques or good practice can be identified to drive engagement over longer periods of time.

### Comparing liking and commenting as different modes of engagement

Assessing the behaviour of users across the lifetime of the page shows likes and comments tend to originate from different users. While comments indicate users' engagement in learning, likes increase the reach of the page by appearance in the users' Facebook feed.

From this perspective, BC MENA LE could seek greater cultural value by encouraging users to engage via both modes simultaneously. However, our data suggests that **the majority of those who often engage with BC MENA LE do so via only one mode**: either liking or commenting. Indeed, the overlap of "likers" and "commenters" among them is only 3994 out of 19389 users, or 21% (this is represented in Figure 25).

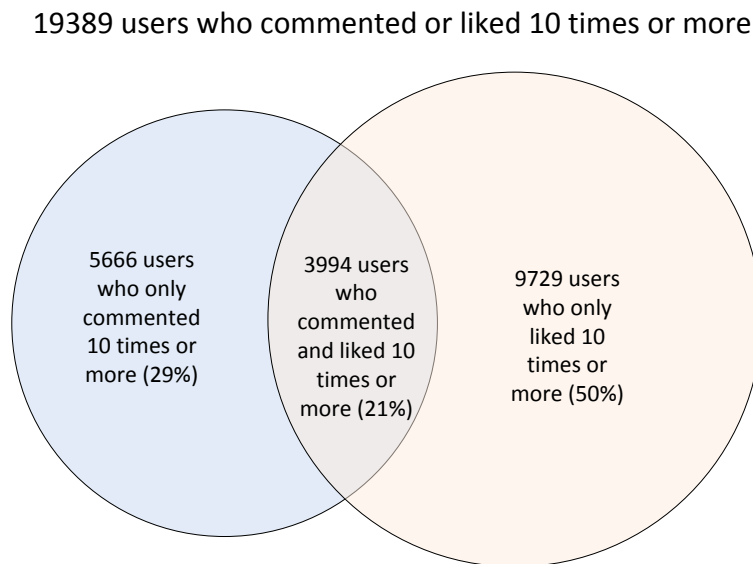


Figure 25 Overlap between likers and comments. This figure examines those users who often engage with the BC MENA LE page. By often engagement we imply having at least 10 likes or 10 comments on the page. Totally, there are 19389 of such users. 9660 have left 10 or more comments, 13723 have left 10 or more likes, and only 3994 have done both. We call those 3994 users "'overlapping' community', as on the diagram above they lie on the overlap of the two circles.

Further examination of the "overlapping community" (above) shows that members of the overlapping community continue to engage via both likes and comments. (see Figure 26). Thus **BC MENA LE could encourage "likers" to leave some comments and motivate active "commenters" to leave some likes**. Such practices may push "likers" and "commenters" towards consistent simultaneous use of both engagement modes **extending organic reach by increasing likes and increasing cultural value through encouraging users to comment**.

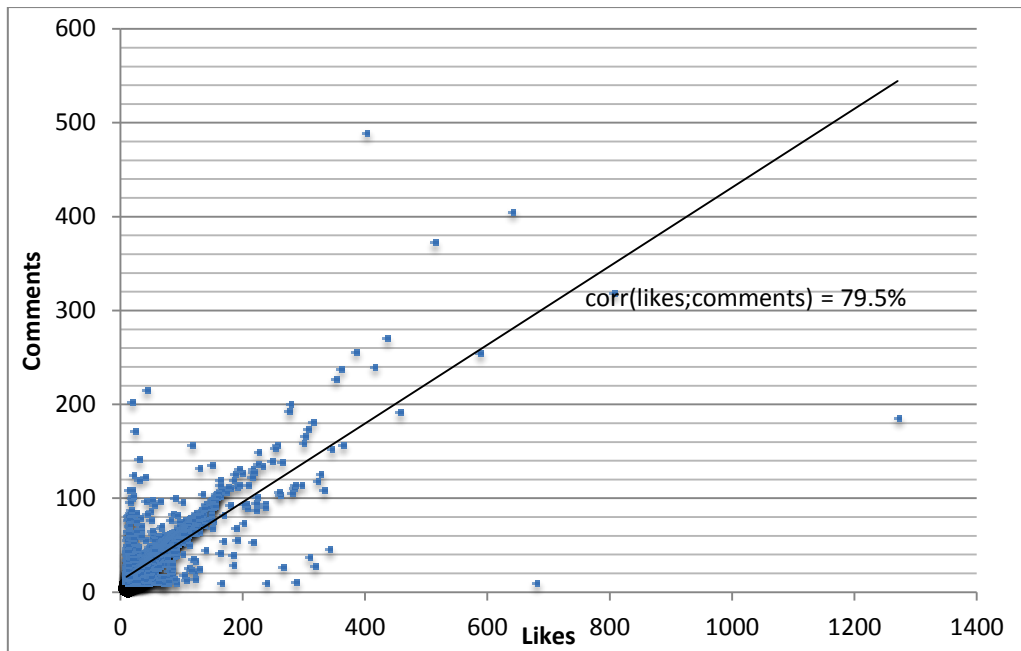


Figure 26 Likes and comments for the “overlapping community”. This figure represents the numbers of likes (horizontal axis) and comments (vertical axis) for all the users (nodes) who are on the overlap of frequent liking and commenting, i.e. who have both liked and commented 10 times or more. For these users we see a strong positive relationship (the trend-line is shown in black) with a linear correlation coefficient of ~80% (can be interpreted as high correlation).

### Consistency and activity of commenting

Our data suggests that **users who comment on the BC MENA LE page consistently over a longer period of time also comment more frequently within a month of their activity on average** (see figure 27). Active and consistent commenting on the BC MENA LE page maybe interpreted as valuing it as a **source for routine practice of English skills**.

The methodology behind these findings and recommendations is in comparing the consistency commenting with the activity of commenting and vice versa. By *consistency of commenting* we imply a user's tendency to comment on the page over a long period of time. As a measurement of commenting consistency we choose the number of months in which a user commented on the page at least once. By *activity of commenting* we imply the pace of a user's interaction with the BC MENA LE page when they are engaged. As a measurement of commenting activity we imply the average number of comments a user leaves in the months of their activity.



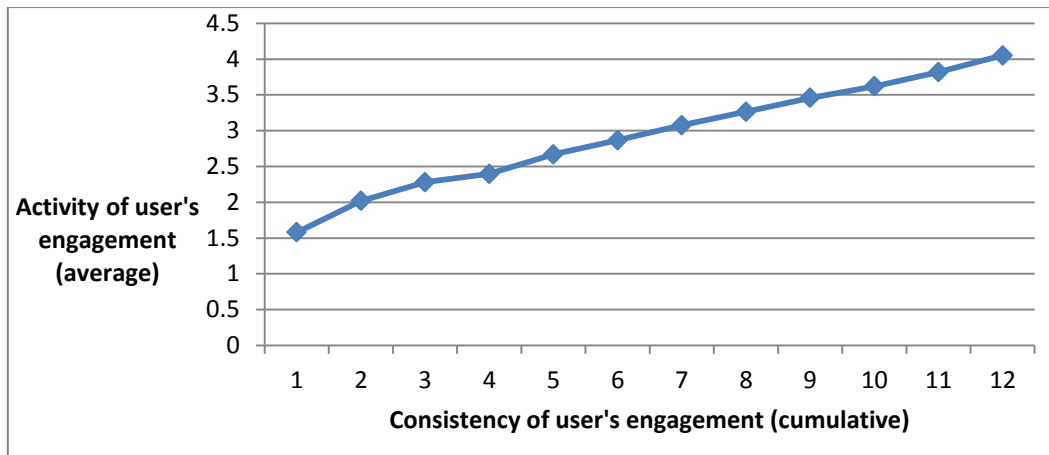


Figure 27. A rise of engagement activity with an increase in engagement consistency. The horizontal axis represents cumulative engagement consistency (in months). The vertical axis represents average engagement consistency (in comments-per-month). For example, 3 on horizontal axis and 2.28 on vertical axis means that the users who were presented in the dataset in 3 or more different months on average posted 2.28 comments per month of their activity. The curve that represents the relationship is persistently rising.

However, our data also suggest that **users who comment on the BC MENA LE page more frequently within a month of their activity do not necessarily tend to do it consistently over a longer period of time** (see figure 27). This implies that there are commenters who have few distinct spikes of high activity. For example, 21.2% of users who commented on the BC MENA LE page at least 10 times did it in no more than 3 different months (see figure 29). Active but inconsistent commenting on the BC MENA LE page maybe interpreted as valuing it a **source for quick refreshment of English skills**.

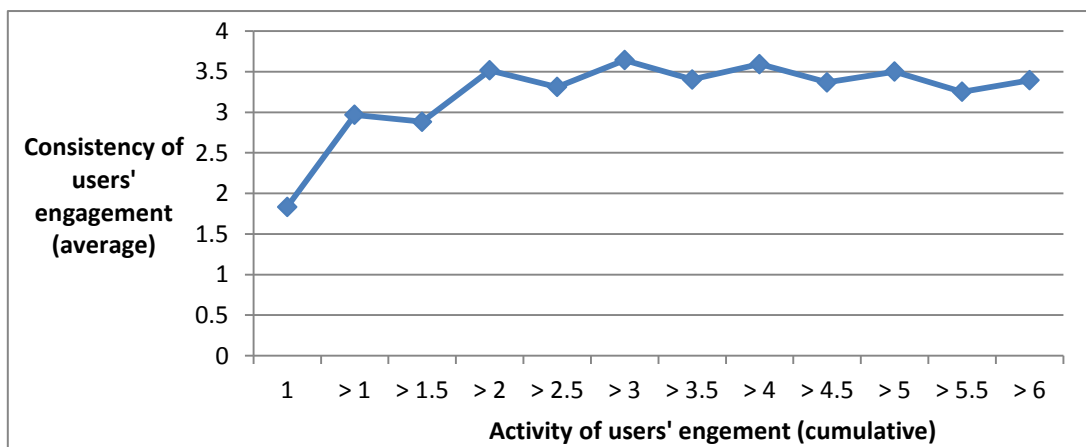


Figure 28: A fluctuating behaviour of engagement consistency with an increase in engagement activity. The horizontal axis represents cumulative engagement activity (in comments-per-months). The vertical axis represents average engagement activity in months. For example, >2 on horizontal axis and 3.5 on vertical axis means that the users who posted more than 2 comments per months of their activity were presented in the dataset on average in 3.5 different months. The curve that represents the relationship rises at first but then fluctuates.

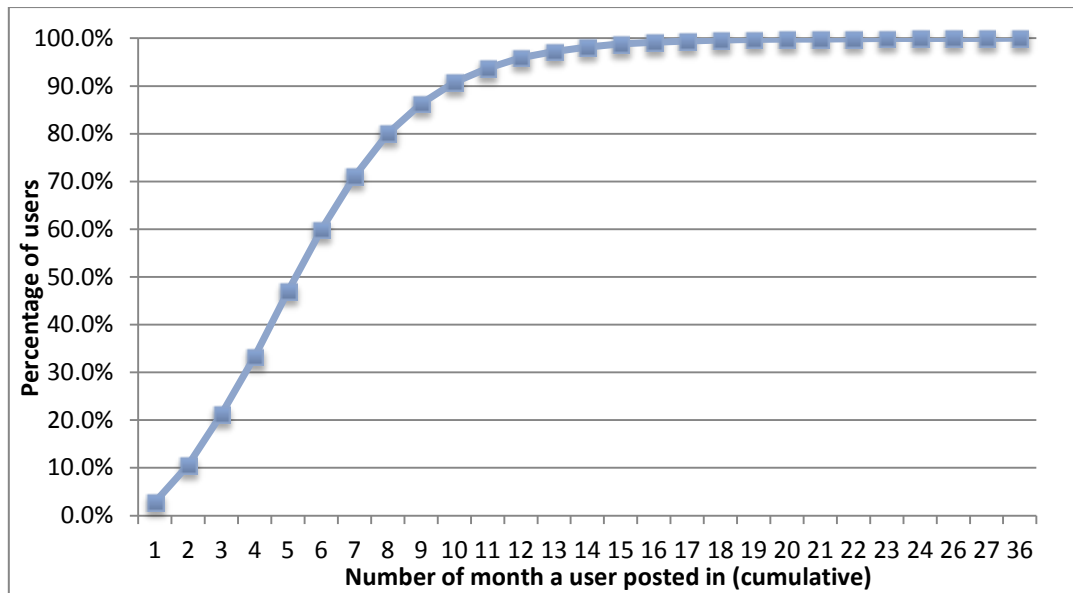


Figure 29: Cumulative percentage distribution of users who commented at least 10 times by number of months they did it in. This graph is concerned only with users who posted at least 10 times. The horizontal axis represents cumulative number of months a user posted in. The vertical axis represents the percentage of users who satisfy the criterion. For example, 3 on horizontal axis and 21.2% on vertical axis means that 21.2% of users who commented 10 times or more did it in no more than 3 different months.

The analysis of aggregated user behaviour shows that users derive cultural value through two different types of interaction, brief bursts perhaps indicating a refresher, and sustained interaction indicating a habit of learning. From the perspective of cultural value the BC MENA LE page could include **exercises tailored to the needs of each group**. Those who comment consistently would probably value the series of exercises that are evolving in content and difficulty over time so they feel progression. Those who comment inconsistently would probably value the exercises that are helpful in practicing a set of different skills simultaneously.

### Engagement by groups of users

While each Facebook account is unique, Facebook is by design a social network between friends. Users communicate with each other and are able to see what their friends are doing. This creates the potential that the relationships between users may have an influence on their engagement with specific facebook pages or posts.

Efficiency and privacy concerns prevent the mining of the entire facebook graph to analyse this at a granular level. However, an overview can be created by analysing the users that commented on the same or similar combinations of posts. This approach shows the users who would have been looking at the same posts could have seen each other's answers or even responded to each other.

To conduct this analysis we built a network representation of the Facebook 'graph' the connections between users and the content they interact with, focusing specifically on users that commented on posts on the BC MENA page. From this representation we extracted groups of users that interacted with similar posts.<sup>37</sup> Within the 129,000 users who commented on at least one facebook post, there

<sup>37</sup> Group identification was done using 'modularity' in Gephi.

were seven groups identified which more than 200 users. These groups, being the largest, were used to identify whether users engaged with facebook at different times.<sup>38</sup>

Arbitrary Group ID	No of users
MOD_0	6582
MOD_55	1985
MOD_79	1184
MOD_64	1041
MOD_123	867
MOD_34	814
MOD_59	200

Figure 30: Size of statistically interconnected communities

The graph below shows that the seven largest groups of users engaged with the BC MENA LE page at different times. **This shows that there is a general tendency for groups of users to engage over a period of time, before losing interest.** The groups vary in the length of their interest; some users such as those in group MOD\_123 comment for a brief intense period of interest, while others comment over less intense periods of interest which last 18 months to two years.

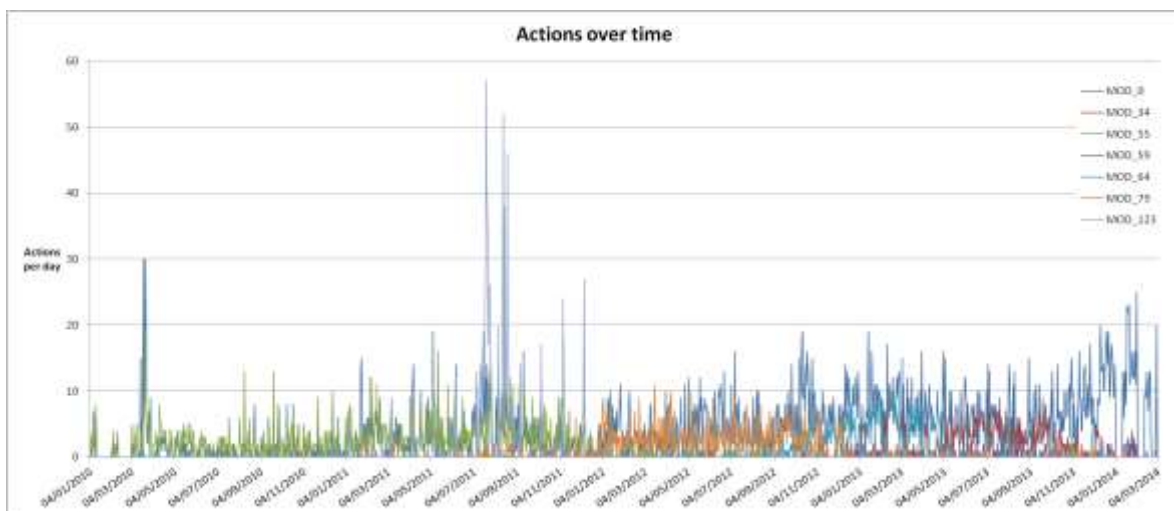


Figure 31: Comparison of interaction by different groups over time

**This analysis indicates that while the number of page likes continues to grow, the BC MENA LE page has to continually engage new users, as the data shows that existing groups of users lose interest.** This highlights that while some users are engaging with the page over many months, eventually even the most engaged users exhaust the current level of tasks offered by the BC MENA LE page. As a result, interaction with the BC MENA LE page does not result in the creation of a core community that is invested in the ongoing life of the page. It highlights the opportunity for users to gain even greater cultural value from the page if there is an opportunity to progress through identifiable levels of difficulty.

<sup>38</sup> The BC MENA administrator account has been excluded from this analysis.

A core community that is invested in the ongoing life of the page may be developed if the most experienced learners have the opportunity to progress to a level where they provide support to less experienced learners. We also observed some teachers interacting on the site who could fulfil a similar role. This would exploit the pre-existing tendency for more experienced users to discuss answers, as shown in the qualitative section. Adopting this as part of BC MENA LE strategy would shift the relationship away from a hub and spoke model where users engage predominantly with the British Council to one where the community engages with each other. A shift in the relationship between BC MENA LE and users could help retention of users and deliver greater cultural value by facilitating international connections between users. This would allow the British Council to add greater cultural value to the language learning, for example, by promoting internationalism in addition to delivering greater engagement in language learning.

An alternative approach, which is not mutually exclusive from the previous approach, would be to clearly identify opportunities to progress, including other web based resources or British Council services. This would most likely rely on users making a progression through levels of difficulty to reach a level where they feel able to move to use other services. Clear suggested links to more advanced learning services would allow the BC MENA LE page to direct users to useful services, rather than leaving them to drift away. Just as there is an opportunity to increase conversion from reach to engagement, establishing links to other resources could convert BC MENA LE users into users of other British Council services. This would increase the cultural value of the page to users as they would be able to find further opportunities for learning when the utility of the resources offered by BC MENA LE are exhausted.

## **Conclusions and Suggestions for Further Research:**

The MENA Learn English Facebook page has attracted, and continues to attract, a large fan base. The findings below identify elements of this success from the perspective of cultural value and opportunities to increase that value.

- During the period 19 December 2013 to 13 March 2014 the page had been successful in producing an attractive product receiving over 15 million views. This level of reach relies heavily on paid sources of traffic, such as advertising and sponsored stories. On average 75% of daily traffic came from paid sources and only 25% was organic, meaning users who saw a post on the BC MENA LE page, in their News Feed because they are already fans, or when it appeared in a friend's news feed because they had interacted with the BC MENA LE page. Organic traffic could be increased if MENA LE page was easier to find or to access from other the British Council websites and social media. In addition organic reach could be achieved by using more striking images in posts as these attract users to share the content with Facebook friends.
- The Facebook page is successfully converting reach into engagement for some users. In seeking greater cultural value, increasing this conversion rate could be a focus for the future development of the page. Currently there are 2.4 million fans and 129,000 users have commented on at least one post during the lifetime of the MENA Learn English page. A core

group of nearly 10,000 users have commented on posts more than ten times and nearly 600 users commented 50 or more times. To drive greater engagement, quirky and amusing visual images and multiple choice questions tend to be associated with high numbers of 'comments', 'likes' and 'shares'. We observed that 'popular' posts tend to combine being entertaining and being undemanding. This type of content may increase conversion from reach to engagement.

- There has been great success in increasing the number of page likes to 2.4 million, however, maintaining interest is a challenge for the BC MENA LE page. Users that comment, most frequently comment only once. As a result, BC MENA LE has to continually engage new users to maintain the same level of comments. Users that engage with posts on the Facebook page fall into two groups of particularly engaged users; one group that 'comments' frequently and one that 'likes' posts frequently. Only a minority appear to do both frequently, finding ways to increase comments from those who already 'like' posts could increase engagement as a driver of cultural value.
- The page has demonstrated it is attractive users at different stages of learning English. The page can achieve even greater cultural value if there is differentiation between the tasks for different types of user and the experience they are seeking. As might be expected, those at an early stage in their English language learning respond to the less demanding posts. Where posts demand more of their users, the users that respond tend to do so more thoroughly and in better English, but there tend to be fewer 'comments'. Creating a clear differentiation between different levels of questions may help provide a sense of progression, maintaining the interest of users and help users find posts they are most likely to be engaged by.
- Developing different pathways of engagement which differentiate early stage and more experienced learners also creates the potential to develop a community of more experienced learners that could support each other's learning. This already happens to a small extent because on the occasion that users respond with genuine 'comments', rather than just the answer to a question, they can elicit a degree of conversation or discussion with other users. This relates to experienced learners because discussion was not observed around easier questions, when users merely offer answers, but did occur when the answer required more complex thought or knowledge. Exploiting this pre-existing tendency would shift the relationship away from a hub and spoke model where users engage predominantly with the British Council to one where the community engages with each other. By shifting the relationship, the page could facilitate international connections between users. This would allow the British Council to add greater cultural value to the language learning, for example, by promoting internationalism in addition to delivering greater engagement in language learning.
- The greater engagement and increased cultural value from developing a greater sense of community could have other advantages including greater loyalty. Users who engage consistently (over a number of months) tend to display higher than average levels of activity during the months that they engage with the Facebook page.

- The role of the English Doctor offers a valuable contribution to the page in terms of English learning, but perhaps more importantly in setting a warm and welcoming tone which may be the key to the pages' success. However, there is a clear limitation of the current format of the English doctor, it is humanly impossible to answer all the questions if the page becomes more successful. We identify two potential avenues first, as the same questions are asked frequently an FAQ section of the most common questions might help reduce repetition. Second, if there are differentiated groups of users, the answers to some basic questions could be crowdsourced from more experienced learners.

To these ends we suggest a number of areas for further consideration:

- Move users along a continuum from passive viewers to active learners, thereby deepening their level of interaction with the content on the page. This could take place through a series of conversions, for example;
  - Website visitors to Facebook visitors
  - Facebook visitors to fans
  - Facebook visitors to liking posts
  - Facebook visitors to commenting on posts
  - Commenting on posts to active learners through other British Council services.
 Defining measures which the British Council considers success for each conversion would allow the page to track the performance of the page in cultural value terms as well as Facebook metrics. Future research could support the development of techniques to achieve these conversions in addition to the approaches discussed in this report.
- A strategy to increase the involvement of users in the content of the page, for example at a simple level this could result in users posting more content, and could be supported by further research into the characteristics of loyal users. These loyal users, for example, may be those that comment frequently and over a longer period of time. This would allow research to identify what influences their loyalty and provide insight upon which to build a larger group of loyal users in future. As loyal users comment more frequently they might also be a user group which could be encouraged to post too.

In addition to the conclusions above, we have some more specific observations and suggestions;

#### *Cross promotion:*

The MENA Learn English Facebook page and the BC's Learn English Facebook page are complementary in terms of content, and overlap little – the former offers a personal and fun experience which is fundamentally confined to the page, the latter offers links to interesting and valuable educational resources. Thus users can benefit from interacting with both and cross promotion, which is not currently seen, need not detract from either pages popularity.

On the ME Learning English webpage <http://www.britishcouncil.org/me-english-english-for-the-future.htm> there is a large white space on the right hand side of the page which could be used to promote MENA Learn English social media.

### ***English Doctor FAQ:***

There may be a way in which the English Doctor could offer FAQs to reduce the amount of repetitious questioning without prejudicing the personal touch. Perhaps that could be an area for future research and development to support the production of a wider range of resources to which the English Doctor can direct users.



















### ***Pathways of engagement:***

There is an opportunity to build greater involvement for the more loyal users, by developing clearer pathways for users to travel from becoming a fan to a greater level of engagement and cultural relations. Without this greater involvement the page will have to continue to recruit new users as many users stop returning after a short period. This presents the potential that facilitating greater interaction between users could provide a means of building a greater community around the page providing greater sustainability and cultural value.

## Appendix 1

Social Bakers produces a country-by-country ranking of Facebook pages based on the number of fans in a specific country. The tables below show pages tagged 'society' and 'education' ranked by the number of 'local fans'.











Pages in Egypt Local Fans  Page Fans

#	Page	Local Fans	Fans	ER	Rating
1.	 مؤسسة مستشفى سرطان الأطفال 57357	4 309 646	4 534 743	0.099%	9
2.	 كلنا خالد سعيد	3 117 969	3 901 844	0.207%	6
3.	 الرئيس محمد مرسي - الصفحة الرسمية	2 178 892	3 421 636	N/A	7
4.	 الصفحة الرسمية لوزارة الداخلية	2 098 799	2 451 915	Find In Analytics	0
5.	 الصفحة الرسمية للمتحدث العسكري	1 826 105	2 080 426	Find In Analytics	0
6.	 حازم صلاح أبو إسماعيل	1 662 764	2 446 045	Find In Analytics	7
7.	 الصفحة الرسمية لرئاسة مجلس الوزراء	1 442 837	1 690 694	Find In Analytics	0
8.	 Misr El Kheir Foundation	1 354 906	1 403 767	Find In Analytics	9
9.	 احمد شفيق Ahmed Shafik	1 265 859	1 502 174	Find In Analytics	1
10.	 Dr. Hassan Al Amri	1 257 923	1 804 522	Find In Analytics	3
11.	 حزب الحرية و العدالة - الصفحة	1 194 350	1 656 783	Find In Analytics	8
12.	 عمرو موسى - Amre Moussa	1 153 251	1 493 897	Find In Analytics	0
13.	 Resala Charity Organization -...	1 092 961	1 228 499	Find In Analytics	0
14.	 ...أصدقاء مدينة زويل للعلوم	1 005 327	1 224 158	Find In Analytics	5
15.	 هشام قنديل	902 190	1 246 301	Find In Analytics	2
16.	 Computek Training Centers	891 309	1 917 898	Find In Analytics	N/A
17.	 ...إدارة و تسويق- Go Green Egypt Co.	833 668	1 478 884	Find In Analytics	5
18.	 LearnEnglish – British Council MENA	792 283	2 626 571	Find In Analytics	5
19.	 عمارة الحكيم	764 210	2 994 739	Find In Analytics	5
20.	 U.S. Embassy Cairo	746 151	812 610	Find In Analytics	1



## Pages in Iraq

BETA Local Fans  Page Fans

#	Page	Local Fans	Fans	ER	Rating
1.	 <a href="#">عمار الحكيم</a>	645 309	2 994 739	N/A	5
2.	 <a href="#">رئيس مجلس الوزراء نوري المالكي</a>	546 762	578 445	N/A	1
3.	 <a href="#">The American University of Iraq - ...</a>	537 205	666 966	N/A	0
4.	 <a href="#">Ayad Allawi / اياد علاوي</a>	392 249	405 179	Find in Analytics	0
5.	 <a href="#">د. حنان الفلاوي</a>	284 048	308 040	Find in Analytics	0
6.	 <a href="#">Barack Obama</a> ✓	219 263	40 561 058	Find in Analytics	5
7.	 <a href="#">Osama AL-Nujaifi</a> <a href="#">اسامه النجيفي</a>	217 132	631 332	Find in Analytics	0
8.	 <a href="#">LearnEnglish – British Council MENA</a>	198 320	2 626 571	Find in Analytics	5
9.	 <a href="#">U.S. Embassy Baghdad</a>	193 072	219 762	Find in Analytics	0
10.	 <a href="#">Hotcourses   الدراسة في الخارج</a>	167 601	568 508	Find in Analytics	0











## Pages in Algeria

BETA Local Fans  Page Fans

#	Page	Local Fans	Fans	ER	Rating
1.	 <a href="#">Abdelaziz... - عبد العزيز بوتفليقة</a> ✓	406 213	499 272	N/A	N/A
2.	 <a href="#">LearnEnglish – British Council MENA</a>	401 027	2 626 571	0.013%	5
3.	 <a href="#">Rachid Nekkaz</a>	278 992	311 776	N/A	10
4.	 <a href="#">ELS Educational Services, Inc.</a>	257 295	1 342 486	Find in Analytics	4
5.	 <a href="#">Ali Benflis</a> <a href="#">علي بن فليس</a>	247 712	255 951	Find in Analytics	N/A
6.	 <a href="#">La Fábrica del Real Madrid</a> ✓	218 017	5 447 362	Find in Analytics	6
7.	 <a href="#">Amar Ghoul</a> <a href="#">عمر غول</a>	151 244	169 494	Find in Analytics	5
8.	 <a href="#">Greenpeace</a> <a href="#">السلام الأخضر</a>	141 687	844 149	Find in Analytics	4
9.	 <a href="#">University of the People</a>	130 976	1 212 109	Find in Analytics	4
10.	 <a href="#">Enroll</a>	123 866	1 039 466	Find in Analytics	0

## Pages in Tunisia

BETA  
Local Fans  Page Fans

#	Page	Local Fans	Fans	ER	Rating
1.	 Ministère de l'Intérieur - Tunisie	411 532	460 999	0.014%	1
2.	 وزير ضغط الدم و السكر	267 662	316 322	N/A	0
3.	 LearnEnglish – British Council MENA	257 428	2 626 571	0.013%	5
4.	 Rached Ghannouchi رائد الغنوشي	208 376	320 070	Find in Analytics	0
5.	 Barack Obama	200 739	40 561 058	Find in Analytics	5
6.	 Moncef Marzouki - Page officielle	194 802	232 247	Find in Analytics	0
7.	 L'appel de la Tunisie(Officiel...	167 224	201 368	Find in Analytics	0
8.	 حركة النهضة التونسية	151 397	207 817	Find in Analytics	10
9.	 National Geographic Education	146 130	524 411	Find in Analytics	9
10.	 Walk Free	144 452	4 643 433	Find in Analytics	4