

# Shakespeare Lives in Arabic

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# 1 Executive Summary

Britain and the world are commemorating the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death. This event has brought cultural appreciation across countries, languages and digital platforms. In collaboration with the GREAT Britain campaign, the British Council launched a global programme to honour and promote Shakespeare's life and work. The programme, which includes brand new productions of Shakespeare's plays, film adaptations, public readings and educational resources for schools and English language learners of all ages in the UK and around the world, also launched a unique online campaign to engage with global audiences in a form of digital cultural diplomacy. Common hashtags such as #ShakespeareLives and #Shakespeare400 surfaced as a result, and became the focus of conversations. Social media allows for faster, cost effective forms of mass communication and global 'connectivity'. Facebook and Twitter, in particular, also provide great resources for data analytics. Such data can help organisations – governmental or non-governmental – to develop and adapt their online strategies to reach their target audiences on a global scale, which in turn contributes to the future of their country's soft power.

This report examines the online conversation around the Shakespeare Lives programme in the Arabic language, and in Arabic-speaking countries, on social media platforms throughout 2016. It reveals the values associated by different audiences and actors with the Shakespeare Lives programme, Shakespeare himself, and Britain as a whole. We begin by giving a summary of findings from our research of Shakespeare Lives on Twitter and Facebook, before offering recommendations on how social media can be used to promote, and promote engagement with, ambitious international cultural programmes such as Shakespeare Lives.

We provide analysis from the first phase of our social media research on Shakespeare Lives in Arabic, which focused on the weekend around Shakespeare Day (23 April), the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Shakespeare's death. This most notably included [Shakespeare Day Live](#), a day of live Shakespeare Lives broadcasts streamed around the world through a digital pop-up channel co-curated by the BBC and the British Council. Highlights of Shakespeare Lives were also made freely available through the BBC iPlayer. Finally, we will provide analysis from the second and third phases of our research, which studied engagement with Shakespeare and Shakespeare Lives in Arabic-speaking countries throughout 2016 more broadly.

## 1.1 Summary of Findings: Twitter

- **Overall, the Shakespeare Lives programme had a disappointing level of reach and influence in Arabic-speaking countries.** Social media interactions did not manage to stimulate sufficient online conversation to trigger the desired engagement and interaction levels. No users posted first-hand experiences of attending an event.
- Tweets about Shakespeare Lives mainly expressed a sense of the UK as ‘welcoming’. Those posted by the British Council also expressed the pleasures of engaging with Shakespeare.
- Four trending topics were discussed on Twitter in Arabic during the weekend around Shakespeare Day (23 April): prominent figures celebrating Shakespeare; [the doodle designed by Google to mark Shakespeare Day](#); Shakespeare’s achievements as a playwright and his influence on world literature; and mentions of the Shakespeare Lives events in the MENA region.
- **Direct quotes from Shakespeare plays** comprised a large proportion of the overall sample of tweets referring to Shakespeare collected during our research. There was no lack of interest in Shakespeare in the MENA region. For example, our data collection showed that between May and September 2016, there were over 87,000 mentions of Shakespeare by Arabic-speaking Twitter users – a relatively high number.
- Members of the public were aware of Shakespeare Lives events taking place but very few tweets associated them with the British Council or Britain. Whether this contradicts the Shakespeare Lives mission of portraying Britain as a welcoming, diverse, creative and innovative nation is an open question.

## 1.2 Summary of Findings: Facebook

- The Facebook analysis showed that posts portraying local people showcasing their talents or taking part in Shakespeare Lives events or campaigns were more likely to receive high engagement levels. **Promoting local citizens, local celebrities and cultural intermediaries encourages users to interact with the content and enhances mutuality.**
- The Facebook analysis revealed that **the British Council is mainly seen as an educational provider rather than as a cultural organisation in the MENA region.** It is seen as a centre offering English language courses, examinations leading to desirable qualifications, and information about pursuing a higher education degree in the UK. The Shakespeare Lives programme reinforced the link between the British Council and opportunities to pursue desirable qualifications. **This may encourage people in MENA regions to study in the UK.**

## 1.3 Recommendations

1. **Adapt programmes to local markets.** Relevant content encourages greater interactivity, better reach, more exposure and better quality of engagement. Flexible adaption to local cultural contexts and circumstances includes carefully timing and coordinating posts in relation to local events to ensure high engagement, delivering relevant support to staff in the region, and taking language and cultural preferences into account.
2. **Listen to the conversation.** The findings show that users really enjoy posting quotations from Shakespeare's plays. The British Council could build on this in future cultural programmes by encouraging users to share their favourite passages and quotes. Asking users to post their favourite passages online will generate engagement and trigger conversations on social media platforms.
3. **The high interest in Shakespeare in the MENA region provides a great opportunity for the British Council to build on this highly engaged audience in future programmes.** The British Council could play a driving role in creating online conversations around Shakespeare and experiment with other British literary figures, especially those who have some connection with the MENA region.
4. **The Facebook analysis shows the potential of promoted posts.** Financially boosted posts generated a very high return in engagement levels, reaching 16,000 interactions and 399 shares. This could be useful in promoting cultural programmes and events.
5. **Showcasing participation and involvement in events** is very effective in encouraging users to engage with the content at hand. Instead of merely talking about values, using social media showcasing participation *demonstrates visually* mutuality and the public feeling welcomed.
6. **Offer users added value and rewards.** The Facebook analysis also showed that lessons could be learnt from the potential held in offering users an added value if they were to attend an event, or take part in a competition, or engage with British Council programmes in other ways.

## Phase One: Shakespeare Day

This section of the Shakespeare Lives in Arabic report sets out our analysis of conversation in Arabic around the Shakespeare Lives programme on Twitter during 22-25 April 2016, the weekend around Shakespeare Day. This case was selected for analysis as celebrations of Shakespeare Day drove a peak in discussion of Shakespeare across our languages of interest (Arabic, English, Mandarin, Russian and Spanish). This section of our report also studies how the British Council used Facebook to promote Shakespeare Lives during this period and the earlier stages of the programme more broadly (April-June 2016), and how members of the public engaged both with these posts and other types of content published by British Council accounts.

During the period around Shakespeare Day, discussion on Twitter was focused on four topics: prominent figures such President Obama and Prince Charles celebrating Shakespeare; the doodle designed by Google to mark the event; Shakespeare's achievements and influence; and Shakespeare Lives events taking place in Alexandria and Stratford-upon-Avon. Of the 1,000 tweets studied during this phase, just under 50% directly referred to the Shakespeare Lives programme. However, the majority of these tweets came from media sources rather than members of the public, suggesting that during this phase of the programme Shakespeare Lives had a strong presence among journalists on social media but was unable to translate this into significant discussion among target audiences. On Facebook, analysis during this phase finds that posts in Arabic attracted more interest and interactions than posts in English, with posts also more likely to foster engagement if they directly called on users to respond (for example, by asking questions). This also finds that engagement was highest with the British Council's Facebook posts relating to the English language and educational opportunities, suggesting that integrating promotion of cultural programmes with this type of social media content could increase interest and engagement.

## 2 Methods

### 2.1 Twitter

Using Sysomos MAP, we were able to obtain tweets over the period of four consecutive days (22-25 April 2016) around Shakespeare Day, the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Shakespeare's death. The search for tweets in the Arabic language used the following keywords:

(شكسبير OR شيكسبير OR "ليفز\_شكسبير" OR "ليفز شكسبير" OR shakespeare OR shakespearelives OR "shakespeare Lives") AND NOT RT

Of 4,125 tweets (excluding retweets) returned by the query, 1,000 were randomly selected for interpretative coding and analysis. An Arabic-speaking researcher then individually analysed the collected tweets according to the project's coding framework (see the Summary of Methodology document for more information on our approach and full coding frameworks). The data collected was analysed using Excel. The heat-maps, tables and charts compiled were then typically aggregated to present an overview of the data pertinent to the research, showing where certain topics were being discussed, as well as the overall positive or negative attitude to those topics. This entails the exercise of judgement by the researchers regarding the relative significance of certain data.

## **2.2 Facebook**

The research takes an ethnographic approach, describing the themes of posts and engagement with posts from five Middle East and North Africa (MENA) British Council Facebook pages: Egypt, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), Morocco, Jordan and Lebanon. These pages were selected to show the type of engagement with Shakespeare Lives in different countries, and compare this with the British Council's strategies for other programmes.

### 3 Findings and Analysis

#### 3.1 Twitter

Of the tweets examined, almost 50% mentioned the Shakespeare Lives programme, 25% made references to Britain, and none mentioned the British Council. Although only 10% of the tweets examined expressed a positive tone, the majority of these were in relation to the Shakespeare Lives programme. In terms of actors, just over 30% of tweets making references to the programme were posted by mainstream media or governmental bodies, the remaining tweets were posted by members of the public, alternative media and others.

Of the tweets mentioning the Shakespeare Lives programme, 50% associated ‘welcoming’ values with the programme, Britain or the conversation more generally, as shown in Figure 1 below. A quarter of the tweets also expressed values of ‘enjoyment’, ‘mutuality’ or finding ‘useful information’ with regards to the programme.

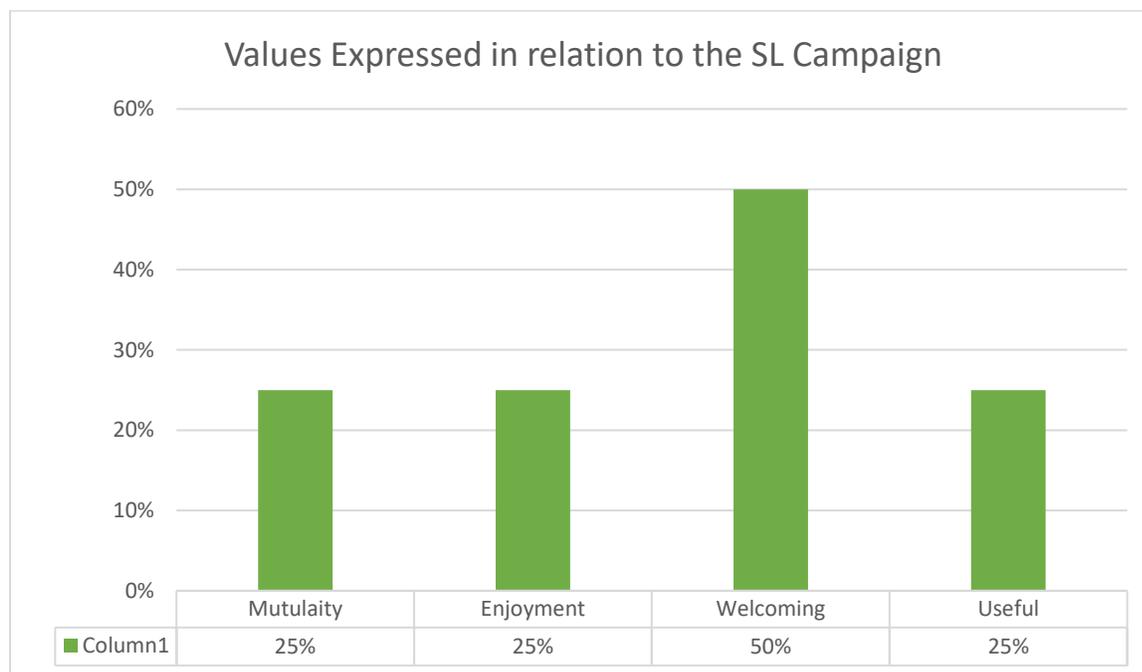


Figure 1 Values expressed in relation to the Shakespeare Lives programme

Interestingly, 60% of tweets mentioning Britain also made reference to the programme. Whether awareness of the programme also invoked more general awareness of Britain is unclear. 40% reported engagement with the events and a quarter expressed positive feelings about Shakespeare Lives. 50% of tweets with reactions to the programme came from government sources or policymakers. Similarly, 50% of government and policymakers’ tweets reported engagement to the events and provided useful information regarding the programme. Such findings contribute to the growing body of evidence that government sources are using digital platforms as a means of

soft power and cultural diplomacy. In a similar way, the vast majority of Arabic tweets coming from Europe mentioned Shakespeare Lives. A big proportion reported engagement or enjoyment, and expressed positive values of mutuality and innovation associated with the events.

None of the tweets analysed were posted by the British Council or made any reference to the British Council. In other words, whilst 454 tweets touched on the programme either directly or used the common hashtags which suggests a great level of awareness, the British Council received no public recognition through this medium.

The analysis shows that there were four recurring themes that featured in the examined sample:

1. Prominent figures celebrating Shakespeare (such as President Obama and Prince Charles)
2. The Doodle designed by Google to mark Shakespeare's death
3. Shakespeare's life
4. Information about Shakespeare Lives events (Egypt and Stratford upon-Avon)

The following section presents a detailed analysis of these four themes, evaluating how such themes are discussed online and encourage dialogue or deliberation.

### **3.1.1 Prominent Figures Celebrating Shakespeare**

US president Barack Obama visited the Globe Theatre on the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Shakespeare's death for a performance of various scenes from the famous tragedy "Hamlet". Similarly, the Prince of Wales has visited Stratford upon-Avon to join the celebrations that have been organised to mark the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of William Shakespeare's death. The sample examined saw a great deal of tweets mentioning Obama's and Prince Charles's visits. This constitutes 10% of the overall sample.

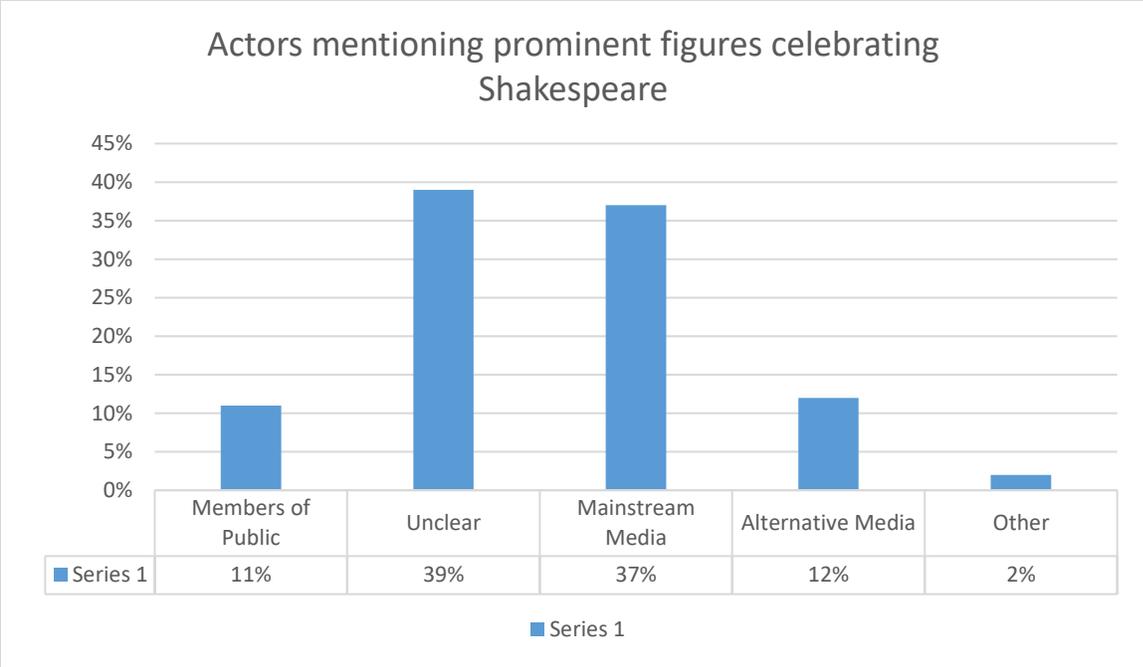


Figure 2 Actors mentioning prominent figures celebrating Shakespeare

As Figure 2 above shows, the media (both mainstream and alternative) have played a crucial role in driving the celebration of Shakespeare in the Arabic language. Just over 10% of tweets came from the public. Almost 60% of tweets provided useful information with regards to the programme. Almost 30% expressed values of ‘mutuality’ – 40% of which came from the media. Tweets about Obama and Prince Charles constituted 20% of all tweets posted by the media. This confirms claims that Arab media tend to report news by focusing on leaders.

### 3.1.2 Google Doodle

Google marked the 400th anniversary of William Shakespeare's death with a [doodle](#) on April 23<sup>rd</sup> 2016 that featured some of his most well-known works. Google doodles are drawings that represent events like holidays, anniversaries, or current events. The doodle received a considerable number of tweets, forming 12% of the overall sample. The majority of tweets came from media sources (36%), followed by members of the public (16%). Almost 40% of the Google tweets were classified as commented re-tweets. This indicates discussion. Users felt compelled to add their opinion or feeling when sharing news of the doodle. In terms of location, the majority of tweets came from the MENA region (35%). However, it is important to note that 46% and 63% of tweets in terms actor type and location respectively were ‘unclear’.

Although the Doodle had gone viral, only 13% of the tweets commented on its creativity or innovation. As the heat-maps below show, 13 tweets of the overall sample made references to innovation and creativity, *all* of which were in relation to the Google doodle. The majority of

tweets read: ‘Google celebrates the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Shakespeare’s death’, linking the tweet to an article or to Google’s search engine.

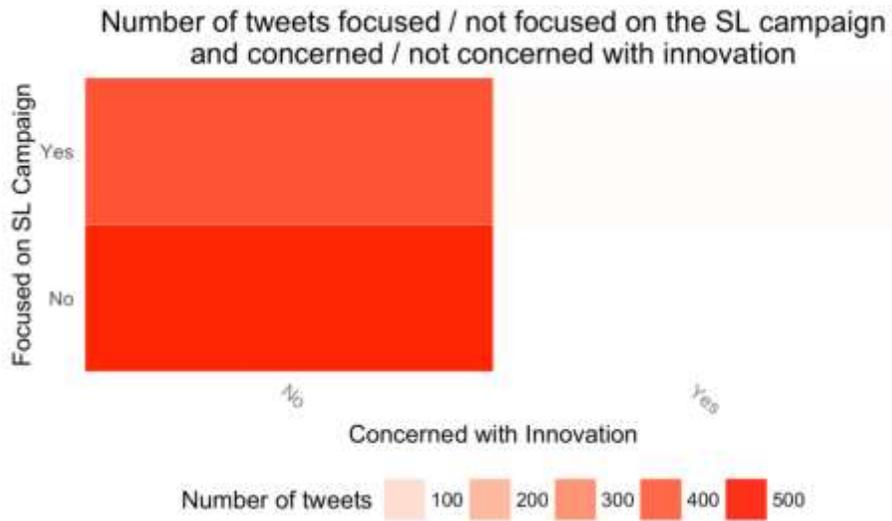


Figure 3 Number of tweets focused / not focused on the Shakespeare Lives programme and concerned / not concerned with innovation

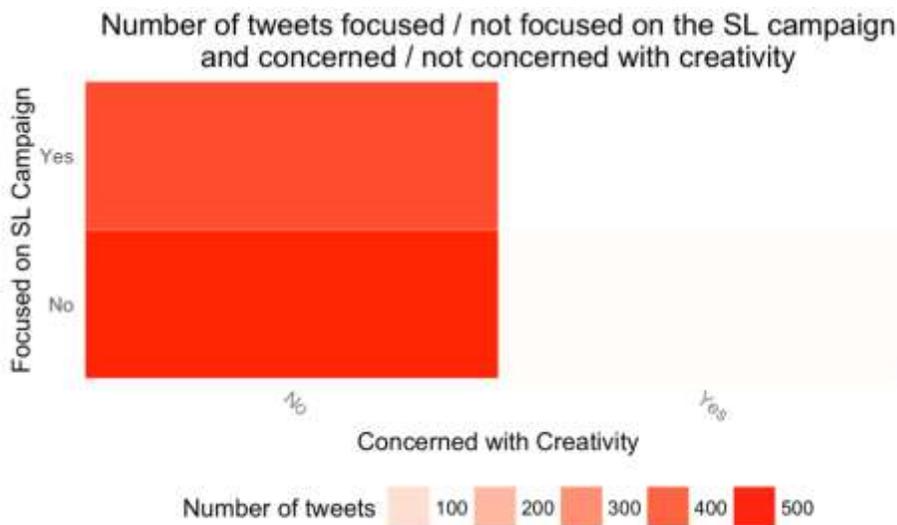


Figure 4 Focused on Shakespeare Lives and concerned / not concerned with creativity

### 3.1.3 Shakespeare resonating across cultures and time

In total, 52% of all examined tweets made no references to the Shakespeare Lives programme. Of those tweets, there were two recurring topics: direct quotations from Shakespeare plays, and

discussion of Shakespeare's life. The topics discussing Shakespeare's life discussed his contribution to the English language, facts about his life, and even references to Mummar Qadhafi's bizarre claim that Shakespeare is originally an Arab named Sheikh Zubair.

The most common way to celebrate Shakespeare was through sharing direct quotations. As shown in Figure 5 below, this category made up the biggest percentage in terms of the overall sample, comprising 36%. Direct quotes also constituted 69% of all non-Shakespeare Lives tweets. Given the significant manifestation of quotations on and around the anniversary of Shakespeare's death, it seems reasonable to assume that actors in the sample – whether public, media or policymakers – were celebrating the playwright's life and work.

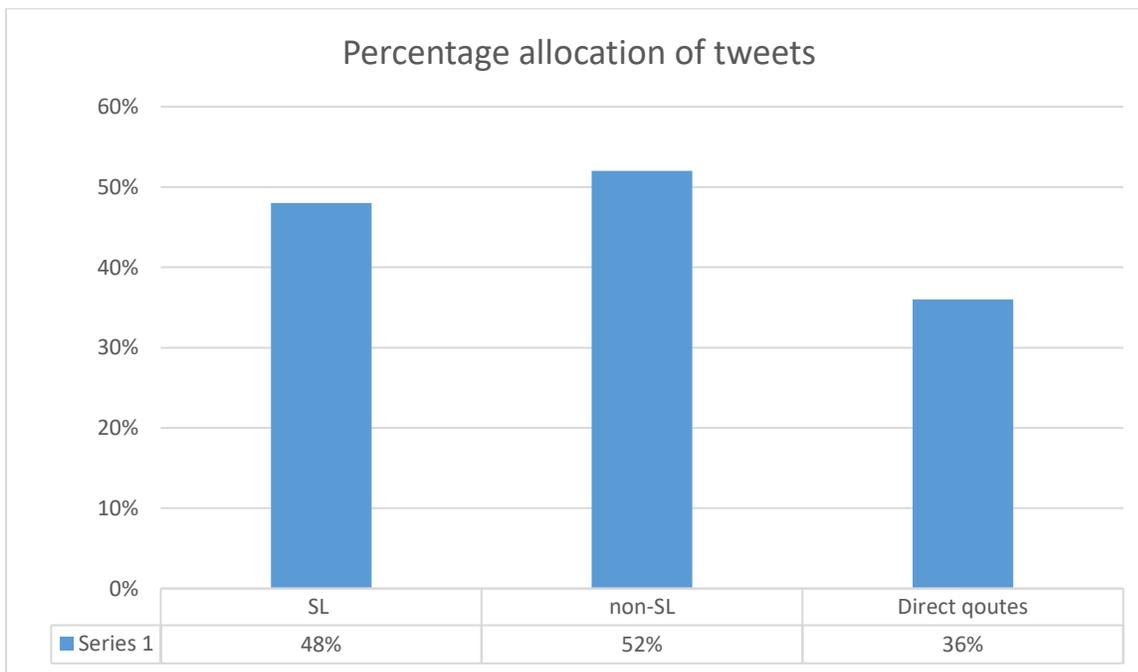


Figure 5 Percentage allocation of tweets

Unlike the previous categories, the majority of direct quotations came from members of the public (42%). Only 4% of such tweets were posted by mainstream media or a journalist. Direct tweets formed 95% of all quotation posts. This shows that members of the public were less inclined to post Shakespeare Lives related tweets and resorted to more traditional means of celebrating Shakespeare by flooding the Twittersphere with quotes from his works. Of course, one needs to remember the very nature of Twitter as a platform, limiting people to 140 characters per tweet. This in itself provides a great platform for brief updates which in the case of this study is translated into quotations.

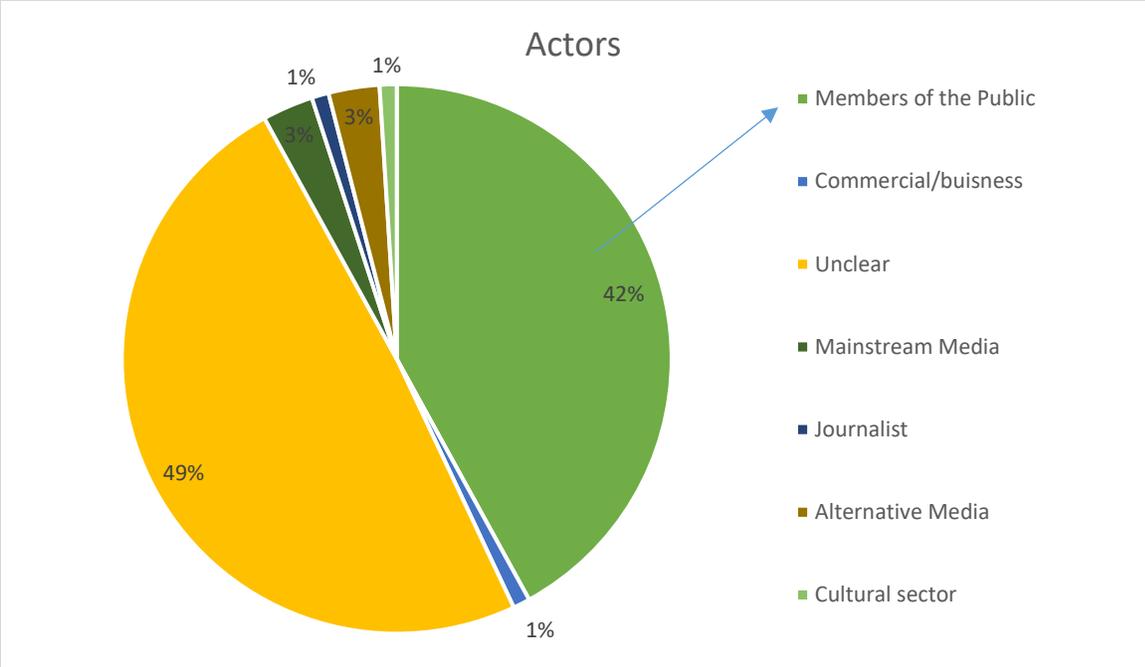


Figure 6 Percentage of actors in relation to direct quotes

The universal themes of Shakespeare’s plays – such as violence, rage, love and beauty – resonated in the selected quotations. Table 1 below shows some of the most featured quotes across our sample:

‘Be not afraid of greatness, some are born great, some achieve greatness and some have greatness thrust upon them’
‘Love all, trust a few, do wrong to none’
‘My heart leaps to be gone into my mother’s bosom’
‘A fool thinks himself to be wise, but a wise man knows himself to be a fool.’

Table 1. Common Shakespeare quotations present in Arabic Twitter data

This finding can help the British Council to promote Shakespeare Lives or other cultural programmes. Replicating what became known as the ‘Robben Island Bible’ online can generate engagement and trigger conversations on the Twittersphere. While Nelson Mandela was imprisoned on South Africa's Robben Island, one of the other political prisoners managed to retain a copy of Shakespeare's complete works, which was secretly circulated through the group. At that prisoner's request, many of the inmates in the Robben Island prison signed and dated their names beside passages. In a similar way, the British Council could launch a campaign encouraging people from all around the world to engage in a digital global activity of tweeting their favourite passages or quotations.

Another prominent theme that featured in the analysis is Shakespeare’s life. This made up 16% of the sample. Like direct quotes, the majority of tweets came from the public (30%), followed by mainstream media at just over 15% (Figure 7 below).

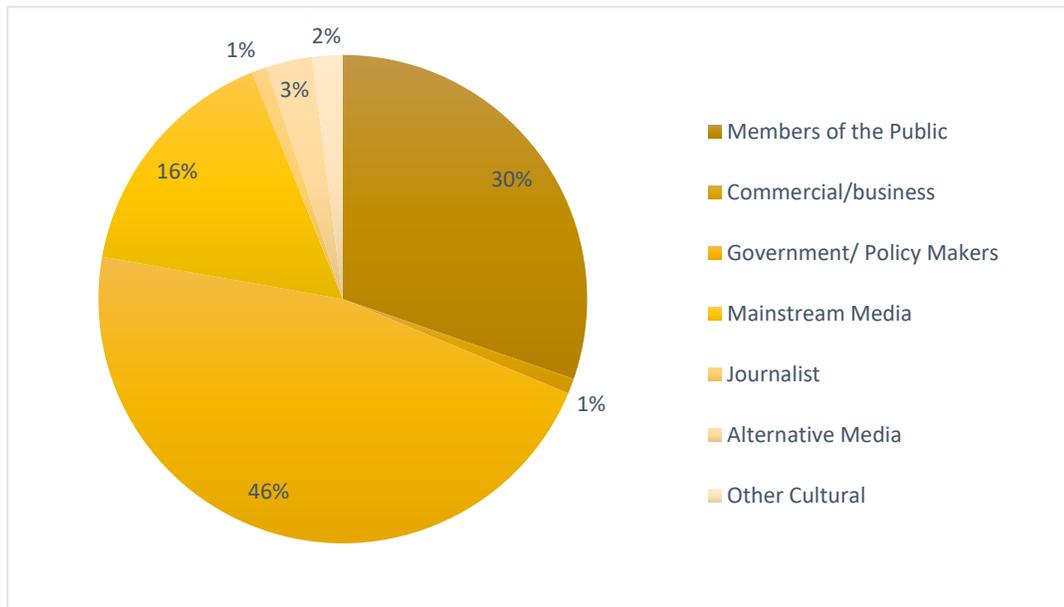


Figure 7 Percentage of actors with relation to Shakespeare's life

The most common method of discussing this topic was by linking articles that provided facts about Shakespeare’s life; as they read “In pictures: 15 facts that you did not know about Shakespeare”. Other tweets mentioned Shakespeare’s contribution to the English language – adding 3,000 words to the English dictionary. The collective themes of Shakespeare’s plays were reflected in the analysis as Shakespeare was often celebrated as a universal figure in which his work still appeals to modern, Arab audiences despite the difficulties of translating his works into Arabic.

Interestingly, a considerable number of tweets mentioned the bizarre claim that Shakespeare was not a native-born Englishman, but in fact an Arab named Sheikh Zubair. Such claims date back to 1989 when Radio Tehran announced that Libya’s Mummar Qadhafi had declared that Shakespeare was an Arab Muslim. Such tweets were often accompanied with links to articles citing evidence to prove the Sheikh Zubair ‘theory’, including his ‘Islamic’ beard, his full lips as well as his work’s relation to the teachings of the Islamic Sufi sect (Battersby, 2009).



Image 1 Example Tweet about Sheikh Zubair

### 3.1.4 Information about Shakespeare Lives events (Egypt and Stratford upon-Avon)

Just over 20% of the examined tweets made direct reference to events that were part of the Shakespeare Lives programme. The vast majority of those tweets referred to the events in Alexandria and Stratford-Upon-Avon. The British Council and Alexandrina Bibliotheca (the Library of Alexandria) celebrated the work of William Shakespeare on the occasion of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death. The celebrations included workshops and performances, film screenings and a three-day [academic conference](#). In the UK, celebrations took place in Stratford-upon-Avon, where crowds were entertained with a spectacular fireworks display.

Whilst the British Council was never mentioned in the overall population of the tweets relating to Shakespeare Lives events in the Arab World, there was a considerable number of tweets providing information about performances in Egypt and mentions of ‘English crowds’ celebrating in Shakespeare’s hometown. However, very few expressed any form of engagement with the events. The vast majority posted an article that detailed the playwright’s achievements and influence in the Arab World. Others posted images of the celebrations and fireworks display.

Interestingly, tweets mentioning Shakespeare Lives are more likely to express ‘welcoming and mutuality’ values as shown in the chart below. In a similar way, such tweets were more likely to focus on Britain. For example:

‘بريطانيا تدعو العالم لتحتفل بمرور ٤٠٠ عام على وفاة شكسبير’  
‘Britain invites the world to celebrate the anniversary of Shakespeare’s death’

As such, the Shakespeare Lives programme had an influence in how Shakespeare and Britain were projected, with Shakespeare as a prominent British figure and Britain as a cultured nation with welcoming values and mutuality.

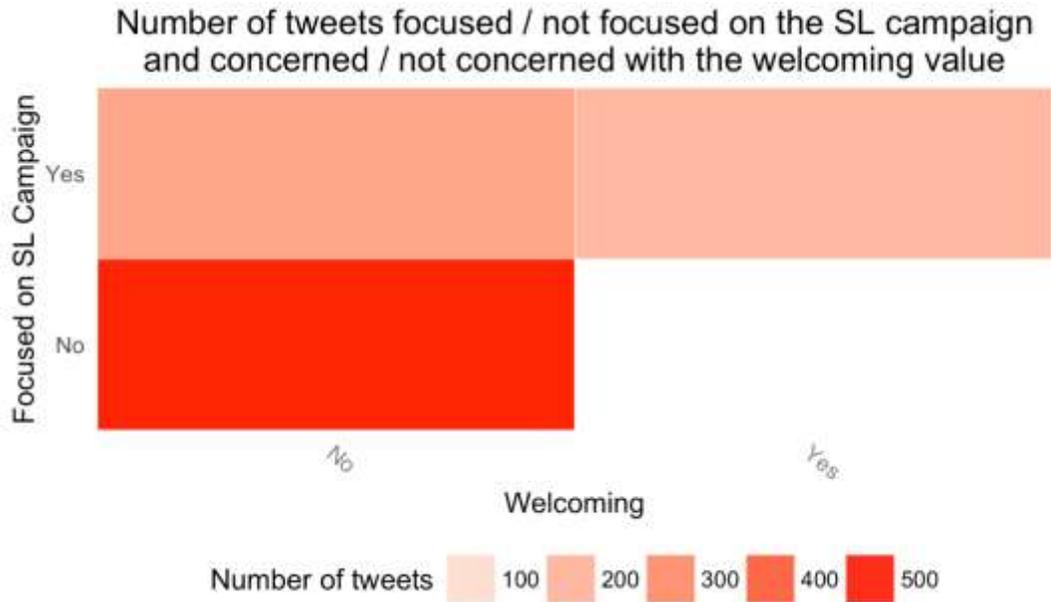


Figure 8 Number of tweets focused / not focused on Shakespeare Lives and concerned / not concerned with welcoming values

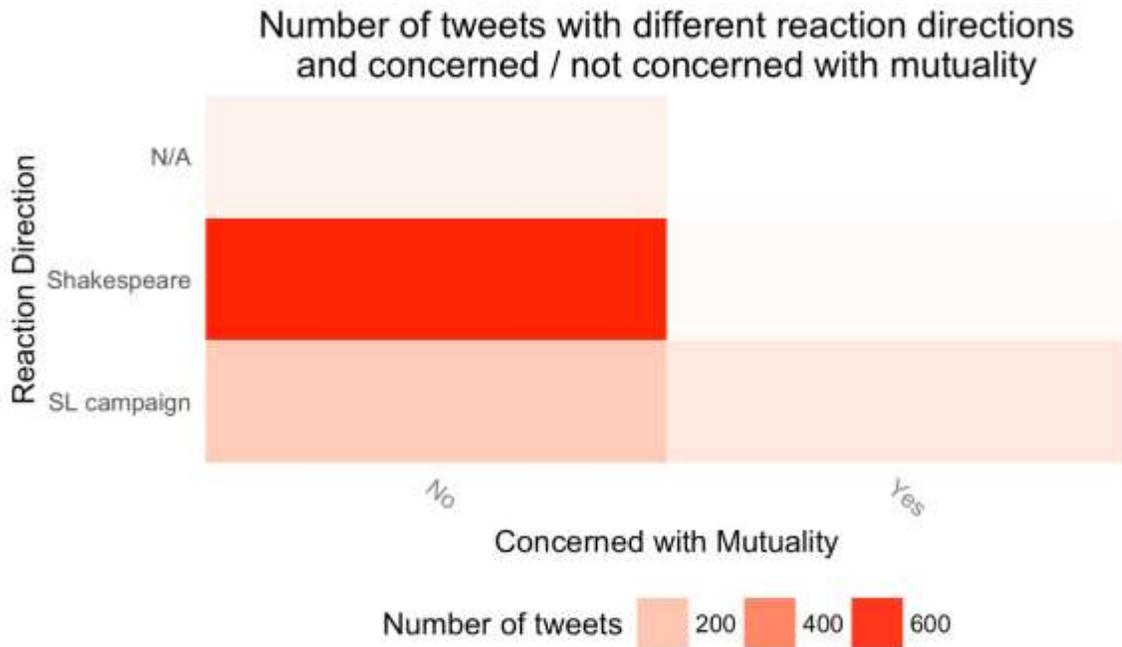


Figure 9 Number of tweets focused / not focused on Shakespeare Lives and concerned / not concerned with mutuality

In terms of actors, 17% of tweets were posted by members of the public, and 33% were posted by mainstream media. This shows that Shakespeare Lives had a great presence in the press but perhaps failed to create an engaging online conversation. It is also noteworthy that of the examined sample

no users posted first-hand experiences of attending an event or even excitement about attending an event.

## 3.2 Facebook

The British Council has centres across the MENA region from the Levant to the GCC to North Africa. The majority of British Council centres have Facebook accounts with large numbers of followers – reaching 1.3 million in Egypt. The analysis will look at five British Council Facebook pages, namely Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and Jordan. The analysed pages share a wide variety of posts – often identical across the countries. Most accounts post on a frequent basis, often more than twice times daily. The content of the posts vary from different events including English courses; brain teasers and quizzes; as well as Britain-related news and achievements. Such news covers a wide range of topics such as culture, art, history and education.

Whilst the diverse content of the page appeals to varied audiences, the analysis shows that, overall, the majority of the content attracted very little engagement. This is also true with regards to content related to the Shakespeare Lives programme. Within the posts examined, the reactions of followers towards to Shakespeare Lives content proved to be limited - ranging from 2-40 likes, a few comments and a few shares. However, a few posts - those inviting participants to join in the action – received considerably more interest.

Generally speaking, there were certain types of posts that generated considerable engagement, reaching hundreds of likes and comments. Such posts will be discussed below. What proved to be consistent across the board, however, is the level of customer service provided by the British Council responding to users in Arabic and English. This creates a great opportunity to collect and analyse user activity so that one can understand the kind of issues that are being raised via social media. This can help the British Council determine how many comments provide feedback, positive or negative, how many questions can be answered using existing links, and what time of day users are most active on social media.

### 3.2.1 Shakespeare Lives posts

As explained earlier, the majority of Shakespeare Lives content generated very little interest or engagement. This is shown in the examples below. Interestingly, whilst the examined accounts had around two, three or four posts relevant to the Shakespeare Lives programme on and around Shakespeare Day, in KSA there were none. All content was posted in English. Posts in Egypt and Lebanon were more informative and engaging, inviting users to attend various events and performances. Those in Jordan and Morocco were more likely to invite users to tune in and watch

the celebrations live on the BBC. This is of course expected, given there were no live events in the latter countries.

**British Council Jordan**  
23 April · 🌐

Shakespeare Lovers! Don't miss today's BBC live stream  
#ShakespeareLives:  
<https://www.britishcouncil.jo/.../join-us-celebrate-shakespea...>



Join us to celebrate Shakespeare Day Live | British Council  
WATCH LIVE ON DIGITAL POP-UP CHANNEL CO-CURATED BY THE BBC AND THE BRITISH COUNCIL  
BRITISHCOUNCIL.JO

👍 Like    💬 Comment    ➦ Share

👍 13

*Image 2 British Council Facebook post – Shakespeare Day Live*

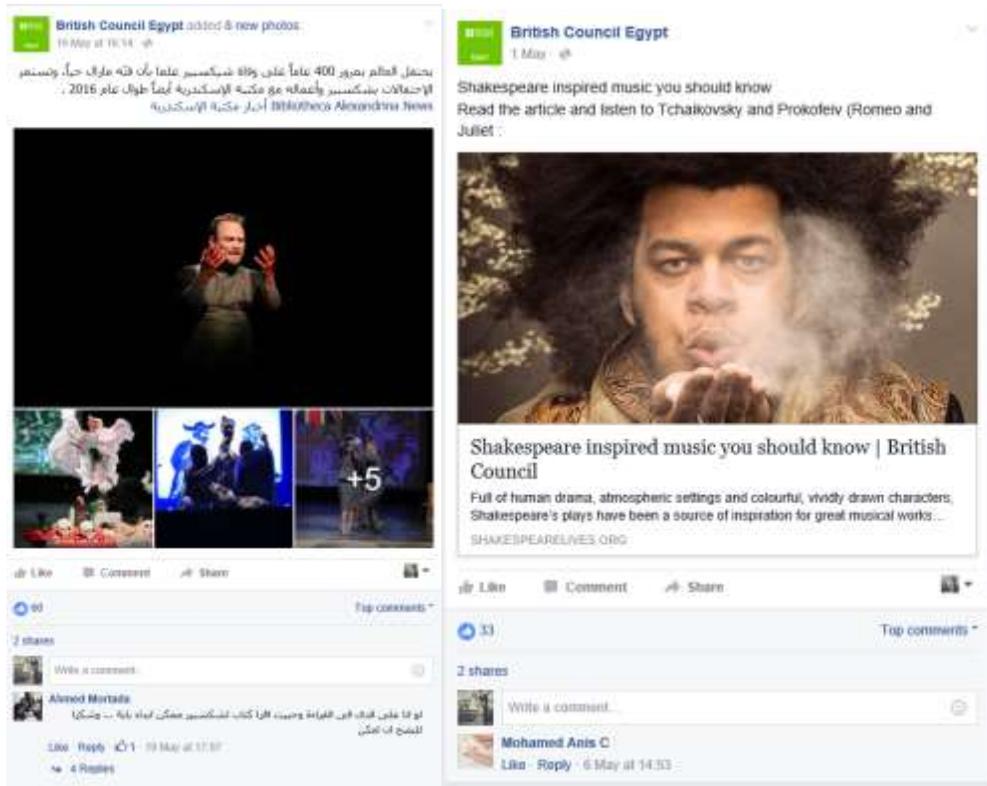


Image 3 British Council Egypt Facebook post – Shakespeare Lives

Posts in Egypt and Lebanon were more likely to attract more reactions as shown in the images below. Two things are worth noting here: first, Facebook posts in Arabic in Egypt received twice the number of interactions than those posted in English. Images of live events from around the world also received more engagement. Second, the public screening of *Romeo and Juliet* in Lebanon, marketed as ‘one special public screening’ generated additional interaction, perhaps because its one-off nature gave the users a sense of urgency. Such posts achieved a click through rate of two percent. Interestingly, the same event was shared just days after on the day of the screening, but only received three likes. The post read:

‘For never was a story of more woe than this of Juliet and her Romeo’ #ShakespeareLives  
 Join us today (20.00) at this unique occasion to watch an all-time Shakespeare classic –  
 and another Zeffirelli masterpiece –on the big screen, so don’t miss it!!

Social media users scan through hundreds of posts a day and only eye catching posts grab their attention. The British Council must ensure the optimal blend of written and visual text is applied. Here we see the visual impression:

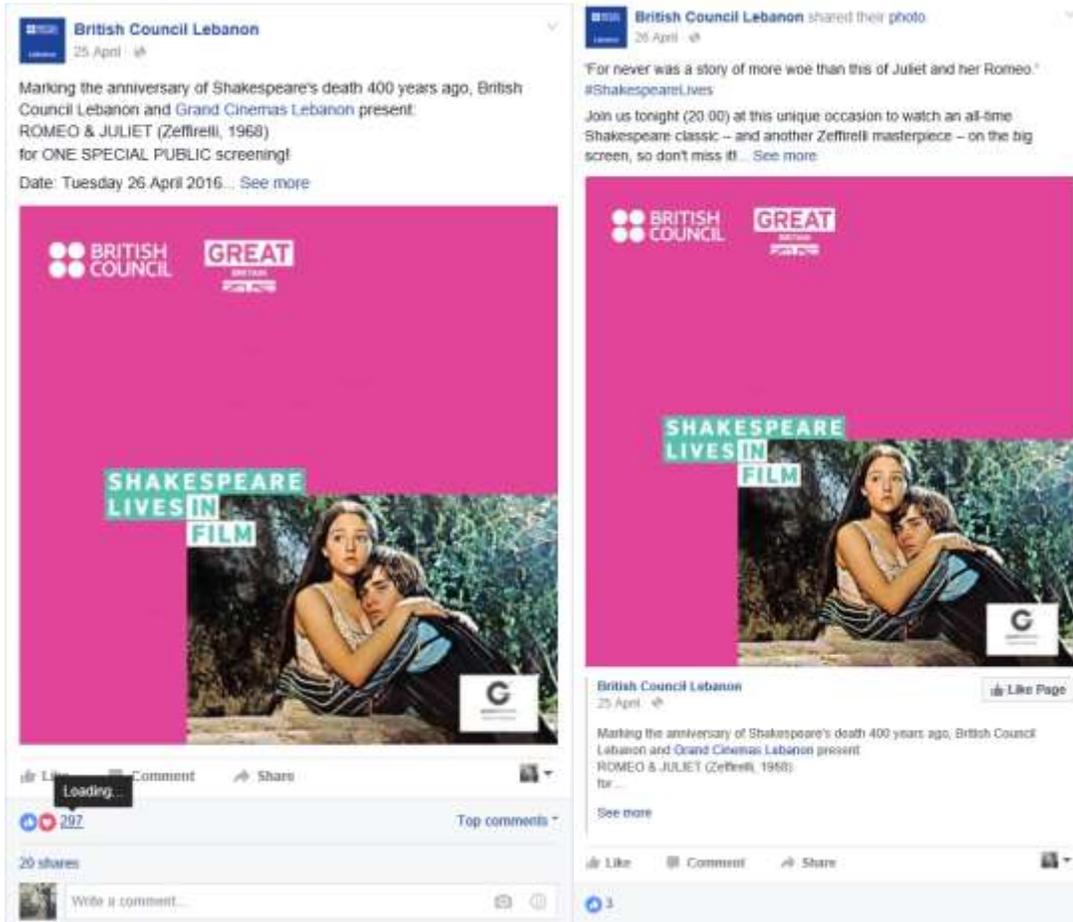


Image 4 British Council Lebanon Facebook posts – Shakespeare Lives - engagement

As shown in the image below, the post attracted a great deal of comments. The majority of comments expressed excitement about attending the screening, tagged friends to tell them about it and enquired about ticket prices. This created a sense of conversation around the event.



Image 5 British Council Facebook post – Shakespeare Lives - Comments

### 3.2.2 What generates traffic on British Council Facebook pages?

Posts with information about British Council English courses, studying in the UK and fill-in-the-blank tests (see image 6 below), generated the highest levels of interaction across the examined pages.

#### 3.2.2.1 British Council English courses

British Council English courses attracted the highest engagement figures across the board, with posts generating up to 5,200 likes. Whilst this might be a promoted post, it still managed to appeal to a considerable number of users, being shared over 100 times. Similar posts also managed to

appeal to a high number of people as shown in the examples below. Although the majority of posts are in English, posts about English courses are almost continually posted in Arabic. One needs to explore if this is a driving factor in the high number of interactions received on the page.



Image 6 British Council Facebook post - English Courses

Given this popularity, the British Council may consider how it can harness its English language promotion to the Shakespeare Lives programme. This raises the wider question of how to maximise mutual promotion between cultural and educational programmes.

### 3.2.2.2 Fill-in-the-blank / Spot the Error

A second way in which the British Council managed to generate more leads is by posting frequent questions asking users to fill in the blank or to ‘spot the error’ (using the #SpotTheError). Such posts generated the highest number of comments, creating a conversation. This shows that the

users often associate the British Council with learning English per se. The British Council can use a similar approach in promoting Shakespeare Lives – creating contests and using Shakespeare’s contribution to the English language to appeal to more users.



Image 7 British Council Facebook post - Fill in the blanks / Spot the Error

## 4 Conclusion to Phase One

The first phase of this report set out to examine the extent to which social media platforms (particularly Twitter) are capable of widening user participation and enabling global publics to engage with the Shakespeare Lives programme on and around the day of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death. We found that less than 50% of the examined data made any references to the Shakespeare Lives programme. The majority of tweets that did mention Shakespeare Lives came from media sources, which suggests that whilst the programme had a great presence in the press (online), this was not reflected among members of the public who use social media. There were recurring themes in discussion of the Shakespeare Lives programme and Shakespeare Day more broadly: prominent figures such as President Obama and Prince Charles celebrating Shakespeare; the doodle designed by Google to mark the event; Shakespeare’s achievements and influence; and mentions of Shakespeare Lives events in Alexandria and Stratford-upon-Avon. We found that Arabic-speaking Twitter users enjoy sharing quotes from Shakespeare plays, suggesting that encouraging followers to share quotes could increase engagement with British Council social media accounts. A topical discussion focussed on the bizarre claim that Shakespeare is originally an ‘Arab Muslim’. With regards to Facebook, we found that posts articulated in the Arabic

language attracted more interest and interactions. Similarly, call-to-action posts: asking questions, testing users and encouraging them not to miss an event were more engaging and more likely to create a conversation.

## Phases Two and Three: Shakespeare Lives in Arabic (and English)

This section of the Shakespeare Lives in Arabic report sets out our analysis over the second and third phases of our research. The second phase of our research studied tweets about Shakespeare and Shakespeare Lives from May-September 2016. Due to the difficulty of finding tweets that directly referred to the Shakespeare Lives programme in Arabic after Shakespeare Day, we liaised with the British Council to identify events in the MENA region throughout 2016 and create searches tailored specifically to these events rather than using generic Shakespeare or Shakespeare Lives search terms. In the third phase, we also broadened the parameters of our search by collecting tweets about Shakespeare Lives events and campaigns in Arabic speaking countries in both Arabic *and English*. This section of the report also continues to study how the British Council used Facebook to promote Shakespeare Lives (from June-December 2016), and how members of the public engaged both with these posts and other types of content published by British Council accounts.

This analysis finds that less than 10% of the 1,000 tweets analysed during phase two focused on the Shakespeare Lives campaign. This is in spite of a clear interest in Shakespeare among Arabic-speaking Twitter users, as during our data collection period we found that Shakespeare had been mentioned in 87,000 tweets between May and September.<sup>1</sup> This interest in Shakespeare was demonstrated mostly through sharing quotations from Shakespeare plays in Arabic, with 80% of our sample in this phase consisting of quotations.

The combination of a greater number of Shakespeare Lives events taking place in Arabic-speaking countries toward the end of 2016 and broadening our search to include tweets about these events *in English* meant that phase three of our research found greater, but still limited, evidence of engagement with the programme. Of the 1,021 tweets found through this final search (see the methods section below), 541 were directly relevant to the Shakespeare Lives programme, with 20% of these posted by members of the public. While this demonstrates some awareness among members of the public in the MENA region of Shakespeare Lives, only 3% of the sample analysed mentioned Britain and just over 5% of tweets associated the campaign with the British Council.

Analysis of Shakespeare Lives on Facebook during the second and third phase found again that users in the MENA region associate the British Council mostly with opportunities to learn English, or to study in the UK, again suggesting that engagement with cultural programmes will be highest when they are promoted in these contexts. However, we also found that engagement with

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<sup>1</sup> This came from the following search: (شكسبير OR كسبشيكسبير OR Shakespeare OR #Shakespearelives) AND NOT RT 1 May- 27 August.

Shakespeare Lives posts was greater when posts showed locals participating in events or taking part in campaigns, suggesting that these foster a valuable sense of reciprocal exchange with users.

## 5 Methods

### 5.1 Twitter

#### 5.1.1 Phase Two

Whilst a significant number of tweets mentioned Shakespeare and his work, tweets relevant to the Shakespeare Lives campaign were challenging to find. From a preliminary search for #ShakespeareLives tweets, it was evident that #ShakespeareLives was not trending within Arabic-speaking Twitter users, we found only 24 tweets between 1 May and 1 September 2016. A search for the Arabic translation of Shakespeare Lives used as a keyword in the first phase of research ("اليفز\_شكسبير") returned no tweets.

After consultation with British Council staff in MENA countries, a new set of keywords were selected including keywords/hashtags specific to Shakespeare Lives events in the region. However, this led to five tweets or less in most cases. Between 1 May and 17 September, one search we ran was:

هاملت AND NOT RT (Hamlet)

This returned 943 tweets but only a minority of these (57) were manually identified as being relevant. These were added to the coding workbook, as were the 24 tweets returned by the following search during the same period:

(#Shakespearelives OR #Shakespeare400 OR #Shakespearelivesforum) AND NOT RT

We supplemented this small number of tweets in Arabic directly relating to the Shakespeare Lives campaign by running the following search for tweets mentioning Shakespeare:

“شكسبير” AND NOT RT

This returned 68,548 tweets, demonstrating that there is no lack of interest in Shakespeare among Arabic-speaking Twitter users. Four peaks in mentions of Shakespeare (over 1,000 tweets per day) were identified on 24 May, 16 June, 16 August, and 20 August. We downloaded tweets from these dates and randomised them in Microsoft Excel, adding 919 of these to the coding workbook to form a set of 1,000 tweets. Unfortunately these peaks in discussion of Shakespeare were not driven by Shakespeare Lives and, as we have noted, less than 10% of tweets in this coding workbook directly referred to the programme.

### 5.1.2 Phase Three

As a result, we decided to take a different approach for the final phase of data collection. As well as looking for tweets in Arabic, we decided to also look for tweets in English about events in Arabic-speaking countries. The search included the whole year (2016) and combined Arabic and English Shakespeare/Shakespeare Lives keywords with names of countries and cities where Shakespeare Lives events have taken place, plus a few other keywords relating to events or collaborators. After a great deal of individual searches and adjustments, the search looked like this:

("شكسبير" OR "شيكسبير" OR "Shakespeare" OR "#Shakespearelives") AND ("Qatar" OR "قطر" OR "UAE" OR "United Arab Emirates" OR "المتحدة العربية الإمارات دولة" OR "الإمارات" OR "Egypt" OR "مصر" OR "Tunisia" OR "تونس" OR "Algeria" OR "الجزائر" OR "Iraq" OR "العراق" OR "Baghdad" OR "بغداد" OR "Erbil" OR "أربيل" OR "Basra" OR "البصرة" OR "Sulaimani" OR "السليمانية" OR "Duhok" OR "دهوك" OR "Ahlem Mosteghanemi" OR "Shakespeare World Translation Conference" OR "للترجمة العالمي شكسبير مؤتمر" OR "#Shakespearefilmweek" OR "#ShakespeareLivesForum" OR "Shakespeare Lives Forum") AND NOT "Shakespeare and Co" AND NOT "Shakespeare & Co" AND NOT RT

This resulted in 1,077 tweets, in which 56 were deleted, resulting in a total number of 1,021 tweets. Tweets in the second and third phase of research were coded according to the same coding framework as was used in phase one.

Given the difficulty in gathering tweets relevant to the campaign in Arabic, the search was also supplemented with keywords from a list of the British Council's Shakespeare Lives calendar events that were not included in past searches. Whilst most of the information on the events calendar is vague, the table below shows a list of events that were included in our search for the final report:

Month	Country	Event
September	Qatar	Patrick Doyle's "Shakespeare in Film" concert to coincide with a Doha Film Institute Season.
October	Iraq	Screening of Films at Film festival (Baghdad) cinemas/Erbil.
		"Shakespeare Week" performance + screenings of NT Live "Hamlet" starring Benedict Cumberbatch/ "King Lear" with Derek Jacobi at National Theatre Baghdad
	Oman	Shakespeare-themed lesson plans for English language learners from beginners to advanced levels
November	Iraq	Film screening of "All Night Long" - as part of music festival at the French Cultural Centre, Erbil

	Oman	Illustrated video synopses of Shakespeare’s most popular plays for teenage learners on LearnEnglish Teens, delivered in partnership with Manga Shakespeare
December	Oman	Closing Ceremony Final Evaluation Report

*Table 2: List of calendar events provided by the British Council*

## 5.2 Facebook

We continued to take an ethnographic approach, analysing British Council posts and engagement with them, including both Shakespeare Lives posts and posts about other British Council programmes. This analysis looks at various Arabic British Council Facebook pages including Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Algeria. In this final phase of research, we also looked at British Council pages in Iraq, Qatar and Oman as the majority of analysed tweets focused on those countries.

# 6 Findings and Analysis

## 6.1 Twitter (Phase Two)

Only 9% of tweets coded during the second phase of analysis mentioned the Shakespeare Lives programme. Similarly, only 4% of the sample made any references to Britain and just over 1% of tweets mentioned the British Council. In terms of actors, 53% of tweets came from members of the public, followed by mainstream media (making only 3% of the overall sample), with almost 40% of tweets coming from unknown sources. Of the 1,000 tweets analysed, the British Council posted only 9, which contributed 11% of all tweets about Shakespeare Lives and 13% of all mentions of the British Council. This signals *some* BC Twitter Arabic activity. None of the 454 tweets directly related to Shakespeare Lives analysed in the first phase, were posted by or made any reference to the British Council.

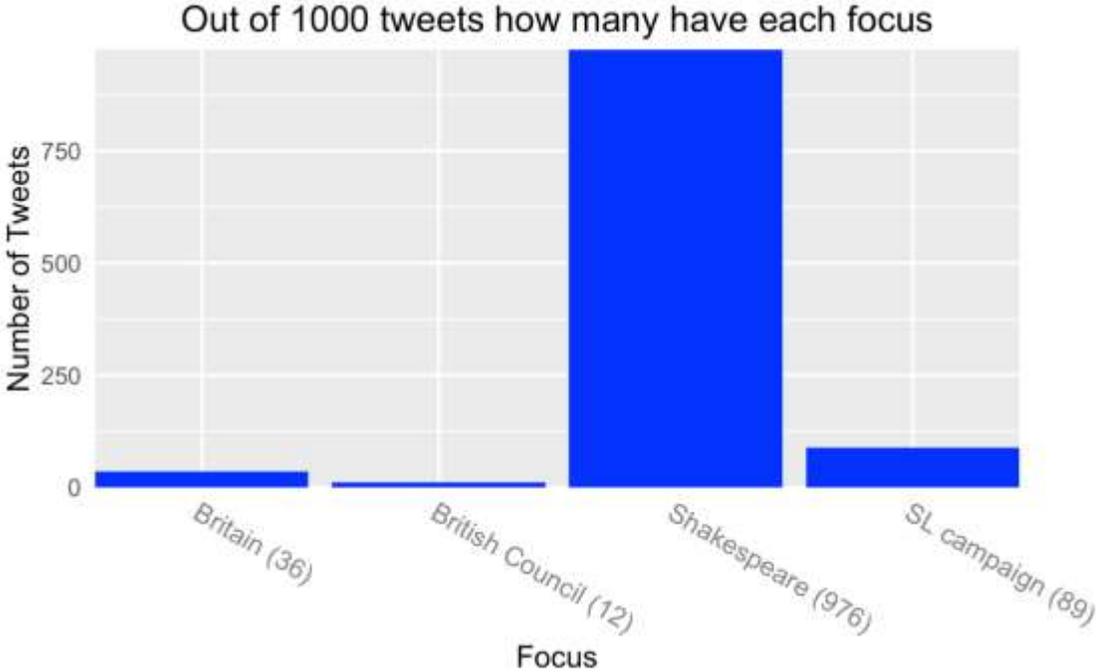


Figure 100: Direction of focus of tweets

In terms of location, almost 25% of tweets came from the MENA region with over 74% of tweets from unknown locations.

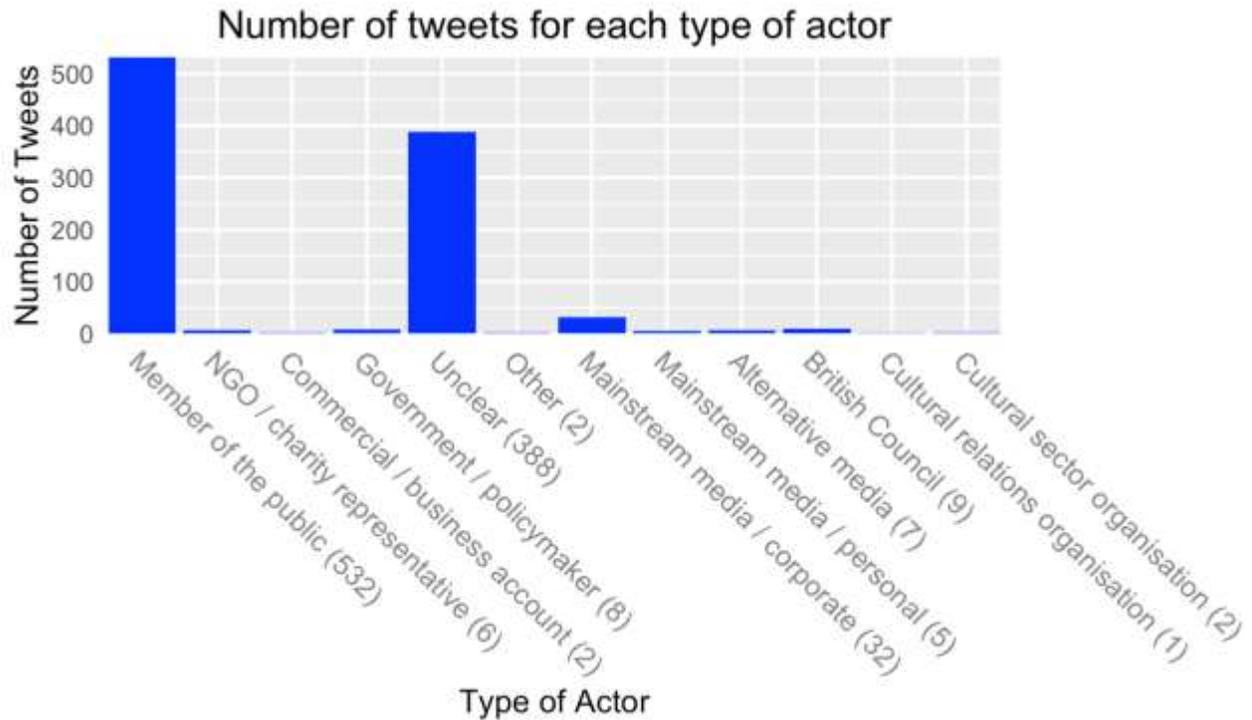


Figure 11: Number of tweets for each type of Actor

With regards to the values exhibited, only 11% of tweets mentioned any of the values promoted by the British Council through Shakespeare Lives. By far the largest proportion of these (9%) were useful/relevant information about the campaign and/or Shakespeare, followed by Enjoyability (1%), Innovation (1%), creativity (0.9%), diversity (0.8%), quality (0.7%), mutuality (0.4%) and welcoming values (0.3%). It is crucial to note that tweets associated with such values often came from mainstream media or the British Council.

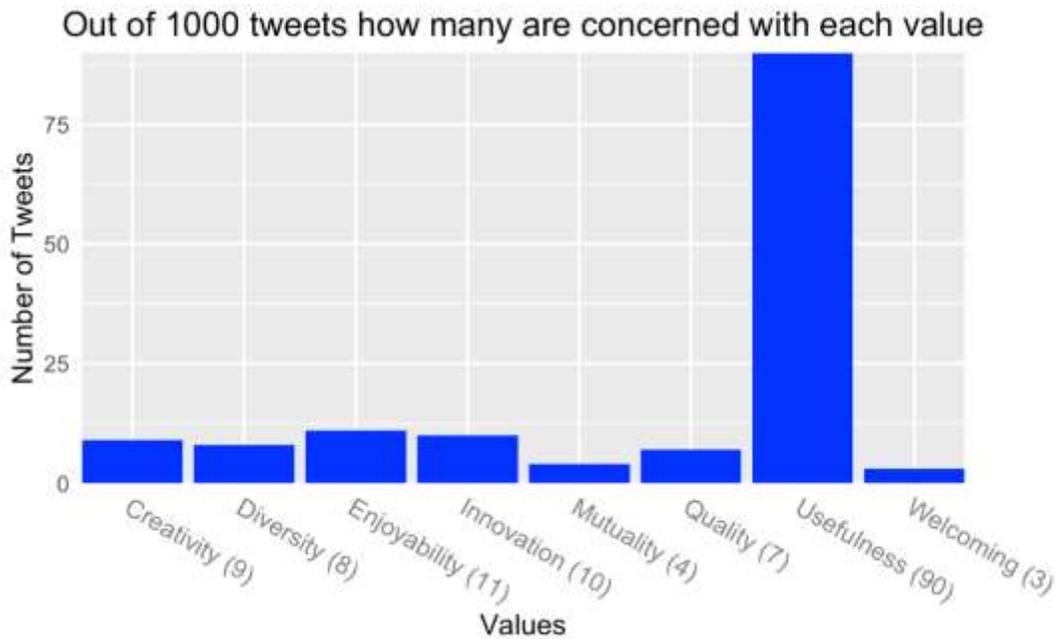


Figure 12: No. of tweets concerned with each Value

Remarkably, over 80% of the sample used direct quotes from Shakespeare (translated to Arabic). This shows that Arabic-speaking twitter users are familiar with the playwright’s works, but perhaps were not aware of the campaign. Such findings provide an opportunity for the British Council to target this highly engaged audience in future campaigns. However, further qualitative analysis showed that one of the reasons contributing to the lack of engagement with the campaign is that absence of events taking place during the sample period. This resulted in low engagement with Shakespeare Lives when compared to the first phase of research, where almost 50% of tweets mentioned the programme and 25% made references to Britain.

### 6.1.1 Tweets About Shakespeare Lives

Of the tweets mentioning Shakespeare Lives directly, 43% communicated ‘useful/relevant information’ about the campaign. A quarter of tweets about Shakespeare Lives came from mainstream media sources, a further 11% came from British Council accounts, and 8% were posted by governmental bodies – hence the useful values expressed. In terms of values with regards to the campaign, 9% of tweets expressed ‘diversity’, followed by ‘enjoyability/pleasure’ (8%), ‘quality’ (7%) and ‘creativity’ (6%) – see figure 13 for all values. This conflicts with findings from the previous phase of research. For 50% of tweets to express ‘welcoming’ values’ towards the campaign, Britain or the conversation more generally was an increase on phase one.

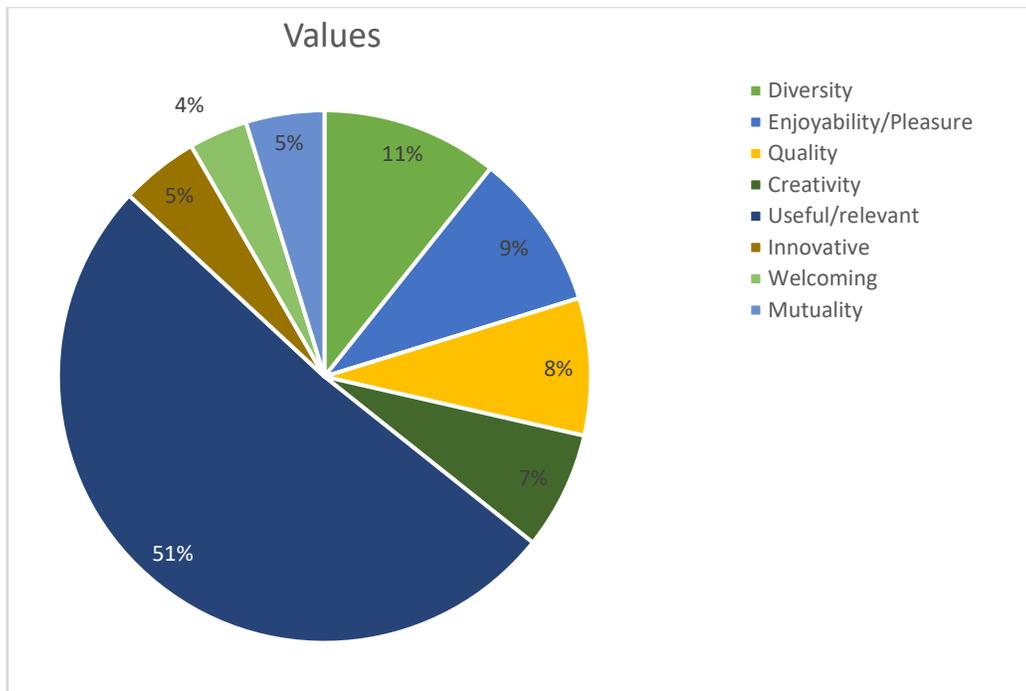


Figure 13: Percentage of values expressed in SL tweets

As expected, over 90% of tweets mentioning Britain made reference to Shakespeare Lives. To some extent this shows that awareness of the campaign also invoked a more general awareness of Britain. Unlike the previous phase of research, all tweets about Shakespeare Lives expressed ‘neutral’ connotations to the campaign – simply providing information about events.

### 6.1.2 Tweets quoting Shakespeare Plays

As mentioned earlier, the vast majority of tweets (81%) used direct quotes from Shakespeare. Whilst a big proportion of tweets were also merely quotations from Shakespeare’s work in the first phase of research, the percentage of tweets did not exceed 40% as shown in Figure 14 below.

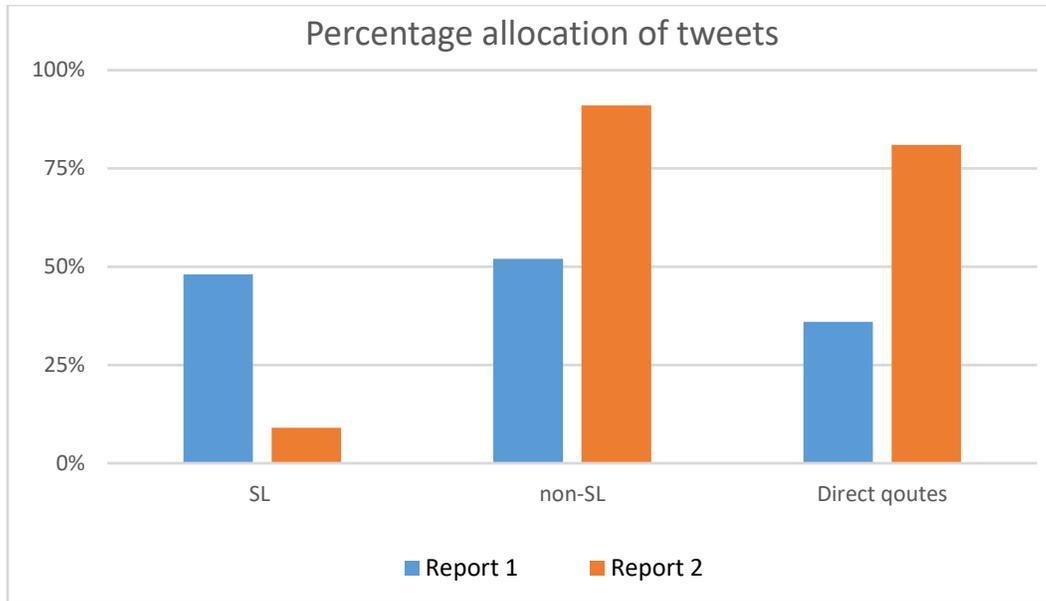


Figure 14: Trend Analysis - Percentage allocation of tweets

A more qualitative analysis of the data showed that there were fewer Shakespeare Lives events corresponding with the sample period. The Facebook analysis will show that higher education, English learning courses and exams were at the forefront of the BC’s focus.

Over 50% of tweets came from member of the public and over 30% were from unclear sources. This confirms our speculation that the Arabic-speaking twitter users are very much familiar with Shakespeare’s work. This can benefit the British Council in targeting an already available audience by getting them involved and engaged with the campaign by either attending and participating in events; or by launching an online campaign encouraging users to tweet their favourite quotes with the hashtag Shakespeare Lives – as an inspiration/replicate of what became known as the ‘Robben Island Bible’. Both strategies are capable of generating engagement and triggering conversations.

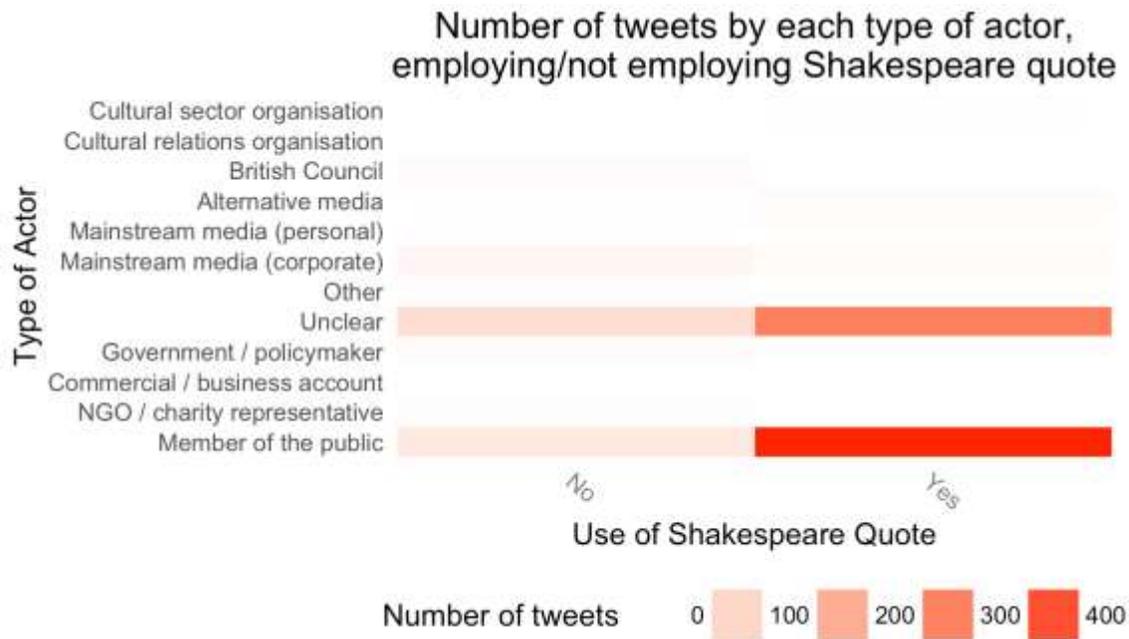


Figure 15: Number of tweets by each type of Actor employing Shakespeare quote

### 6.1.3 Tweets about Shakespeare’s life

The remaining 10% of the sample were tweets about Shakespeare’s life – providing information about his contribution to the English language; facts about his life and as in the case of the first phase, references to Mummar Qadhafi’s bizarre claim that Shakespeare is originally Arabic named Sheikh Zubair. Like direct quotations, the majority of tweets came from members of the public (41%), mostly linking articles about Shakespeare’s monumental achievements, or facts about his life that ‘we did not know’. Of course, Shakespeare’s contribution to the English language was also regularly mentioned.

## 6.2 Twitter (Phase Three)

In contrast, after tailoring our search to specific Shakespeare Lives events and including tweets in both Arabic and English, over 50% of tweets analysed during the final phase of our research mentioned the Shakespeare Lives programme. However, only 3% of the sample made any references to Britain and just over 5% of tweets mentioned the British Council. Of the 541 tweets analysed, the British Council posted 122 (23%). This is interesting as none of the 454 Shakespeare Lives tweets analysed in the first phase were posted by or made any reference to the British Council. This indicates that as the programme expanded, there was a greater awareness of the connection between the British Council and the particular events.

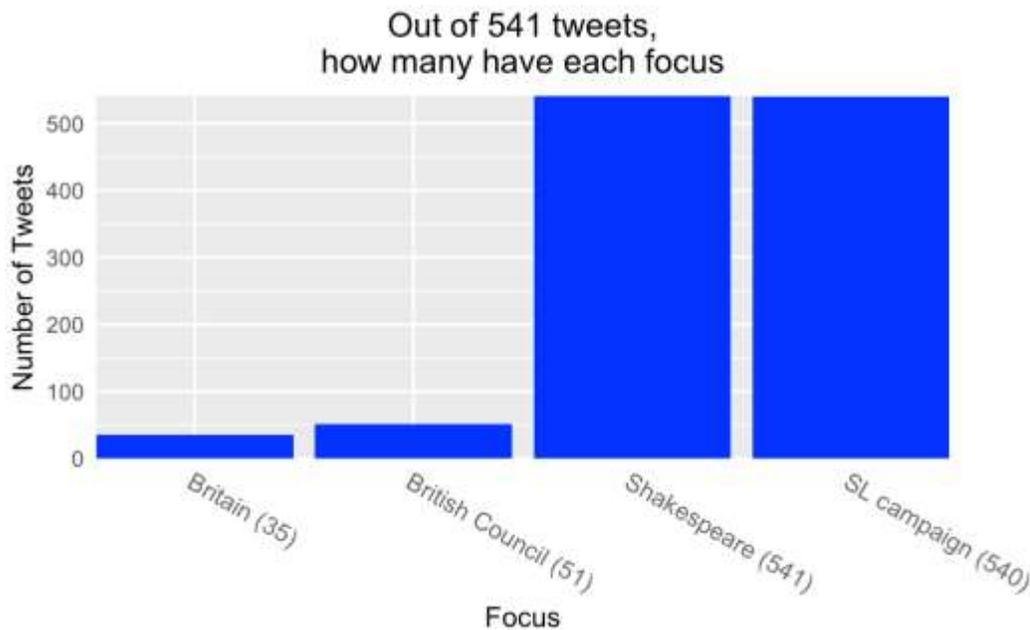


Figure 11: Direction of focus for each tweet

Where it was possible to identify the source of the tweet, almost 23% of tweets came from the British Council, followed by members of the public (20%), and mainstream media (10%). 27% of the tweets came from unknown sources.

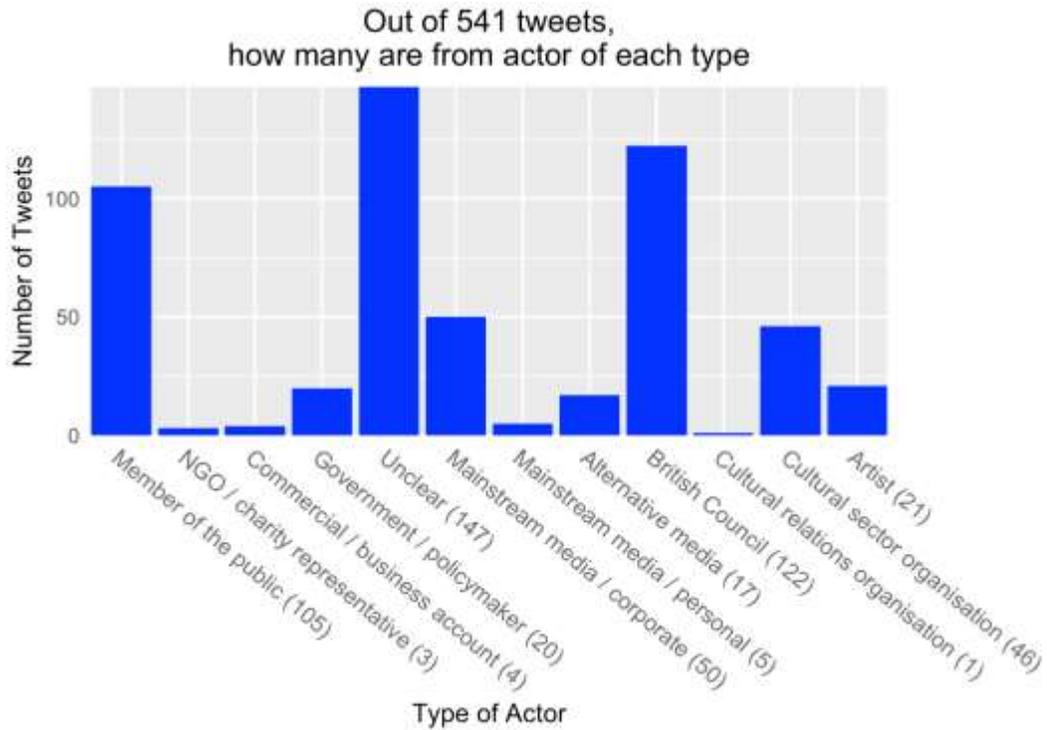


Figure 12: Actor Type

Where it was possible to identify where the tweets were sent from, almost 40% of tweets came from the MENA region, followed by 15% from North America and a further 9% from Europe. The remaining 35% came from unknown locations. Within the identified sources, the majority of tweets were posted by individuals based in Iraq (29%). This was followed by the USA (23%), UK (13%), Qatar (7%), Tunisia (6%) and finally Egypt (5%) – see Map 1.

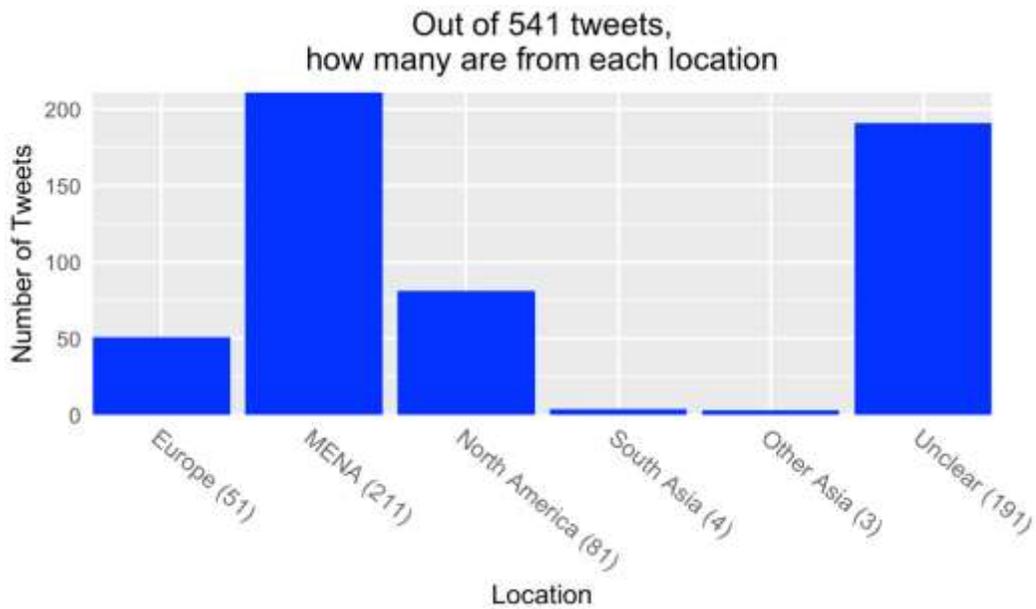
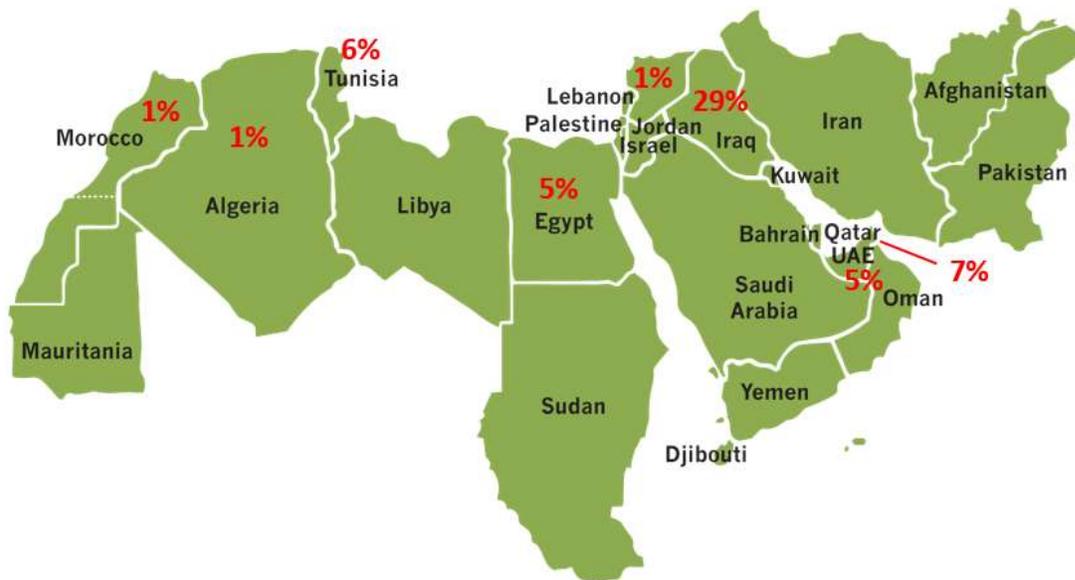


Figure 16: Location of tweets



Map 8: Distribution of tweets in the MENA region

## 6.2.1 Tweets About Shakespeare Lives

Of the tweets mentioning Shakespeare Lives, 63% communicated ‘useful/relevant information’ about the programme. Twenty percent of Shakespeare Lives tweets came from members of the public, a further 23% came from British Council sources, and 10% were posted by mainstream media – hence the ‘useful’ values expressed. With regards to the tone of tweets, the British Council, cultural organisations and governmental sources published the majority of positive tweets.

With regards to the values promoted by the British Council through Shakespeare Lives and the aims of the programme, just over 35% of tweets mentioned at least one of these. Of the tweets focusing on the Shakespeare Lives programme, this doubles to almost 70%. By far the largest proportion of these (63%) were useful/relevant information about the campaign and/or Shakespeare, followed by innovation (19%), enjoyability (11%), mutuality (4%), diversity (2%), and welcoming values (1%). However, the tweets associated with such values often came from mainstream media or the British Council itself.

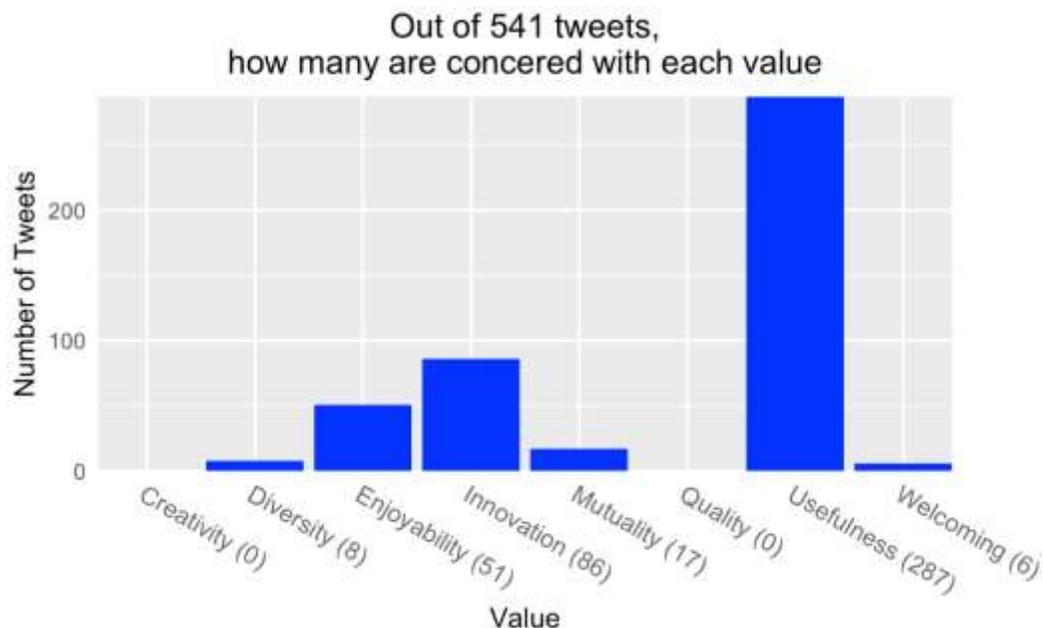


Figure 17: Number of tweets concerned with each value

Innovative values were often associated with the events or third party collaborators that introduced an innovative means of celebrating Shakespeare (see table 3). Such tweets incorporated learning and education in which the campaign collaborated with educational centres (such as the British Library) to provide avenues for learning and development.

Vodafone Qatar British Library offer Shakespeare downloads - Telecompaper (subscription) <a href="https://t.co/rex9L0hA2J">https://t.co/rex9L0hA2J</a>
Romeo and Juliet App an Asset to Learning Shakespeare: Meet the players with full text analysis... <a href="https://t.co/LWe3z1EZFc">https://t.co/LWe3z1EZFc</a> #Qatar #Doha
[Al Jazeera] "بيع بن" شكسبير "تتوقف عن العمل وبريطانيا تحيي ذكرى شكسبير" <a href="https://t.co/q2J4vCy3W5">https://t.co/q2J4vCy3W5</a> [Qatar]
Shakespeare Live! was a bold and innovative tribute . #Egypt <a href="https://t.co/epVt9vzqyG">https://t.co/epVt9vzqyG</a>
#EgyptWatch يحتفل محرك البحث جوجل، اليوم السبت، بذكرى رحيل ا :جوجل تحتفل بذكرى رحيل وليام شكسبير <a href="https://t.co/wr1hhZ4hWc">https://t.co/wr1hhZ4hWc</a> #Egypt مصر

Table 3: List of examples of Innovative tweets

The British Council posted almost 40% of the tweets expressing values of enjoyability. Similarly, it also posted 17% of those exhibiting useful/relevant information.

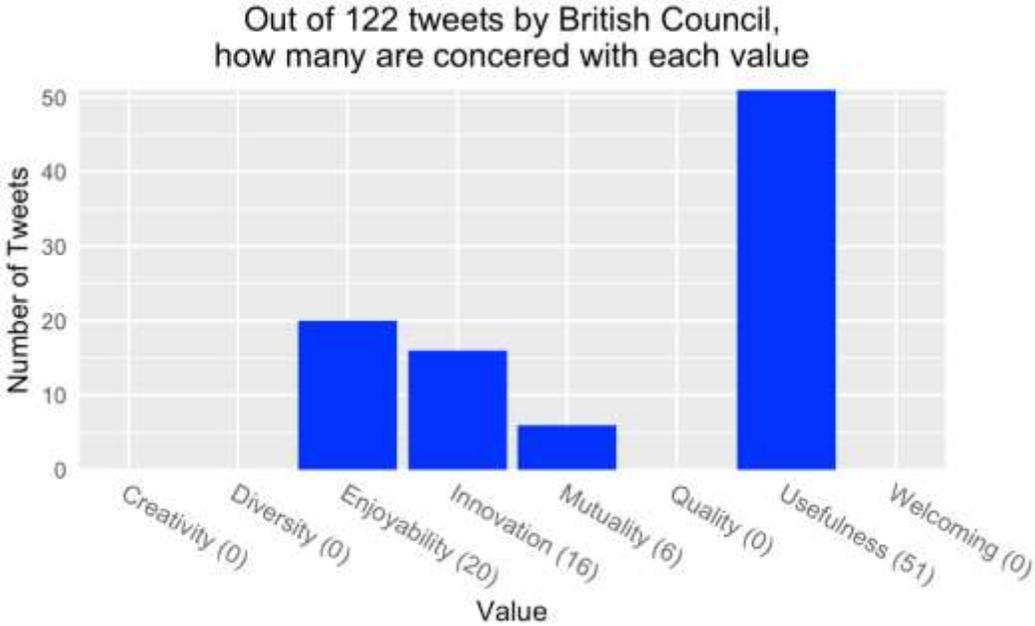


Figure18: Values expressed by British Council tweets

Map 1 shows that events taking place in Iraq, Tunisia and Qatar received the most recognition from the public. As such the majority of the British Council values posted by the public were providing useful and relevant information about the events whilst 20% of values communicated by members of the public were values of enjoyability.

### Number of Tweets: Value vs. Type of Actor

	Value							
	Diversity	Innovation	Welcoming	Creativity	Mutuality	Usefulness	Quality	Enjoyability
Member of the public	2	17	0	0	2	56	0	14
NGO / charity representative	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Commercial / business account	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Government / policymaker	0	2	1	0	2	7	0	2
Unclear	3	24	3	0	3	97	0	5
Mainstream media / corporate	0	8	0	0	0	28	0	0
Mainstream media / personal	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0
Alternative media	0	1	0	0	0	6	0	5
British Council	0	16	0	0	6	51	0	20
Cultural relations organisation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cultural sector organisation	0	12	2	0	4	29	0	4
Artist	2	5	0	0	0	10	0	0

Figure 13: Number of tweets: Values vs. Actor Type

Seven percent of the sample exhibited a positive tone towards Shakespeare Lives, the British Council, Britain or Shakespeare. Of the 7%, the British Council posted 43% of the tweets, a further 10% came from cultural sector organisations and another 7% came from Governmental sources. Of positive tweets, only 20% came from members of the public.

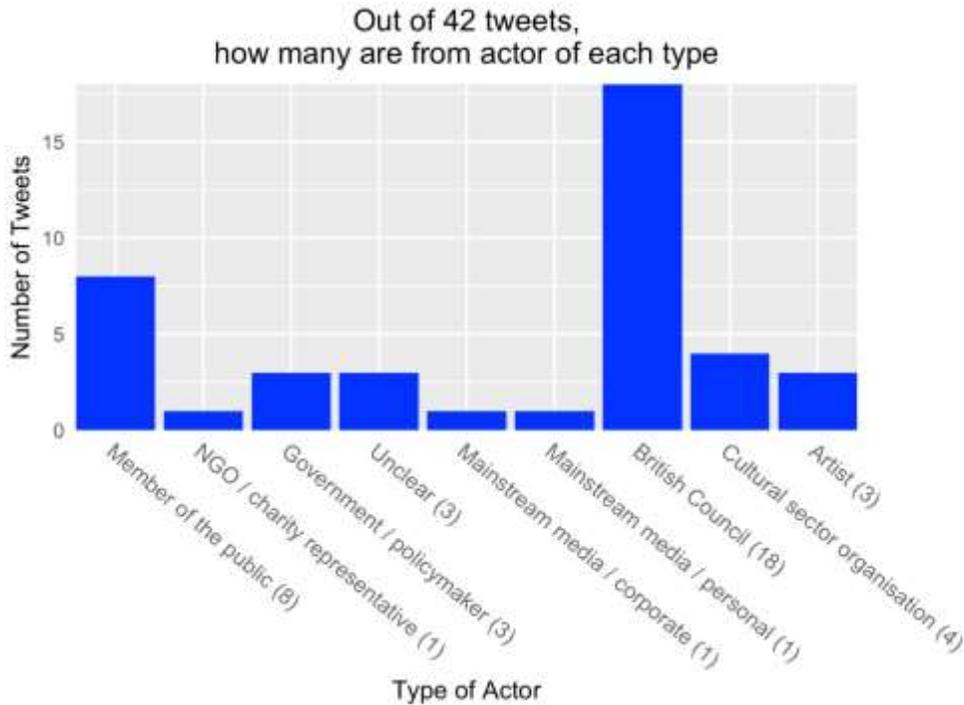


Figure19: Positive tweets vs. type of Actor

Table 4 below gives some examples of positive tweets gathered from the analysis. Whilst in total only 42 tweets, they demonstrate success for the programme as bringing enjoyment, appreciation, admiration and gratification. Although users expressed appreciation and praise of the quality of Shakespeare Lives outputs and described them as enjoyable, wonderful and a triumph; there was little evidence that users also saw Shakespeare Lives as welcoming, diverse, innovative and/or creative. As such, there were a few tweets in which users recommended the events to others – the majority of which included terms such as ‘check out the upcoming...’

Examples of positive tweets
<b>Congratulations to those involved in the amazing</b> #Basra #Iraq #ShakespeareLives event. #بصراوين <a href="https://t.co/VmfyqHW6Oy">https://t.co/VmfyqHW6Oy</a>
<b>A triumph!</b> Shakespeare Lives Basra completes a wonderful festival. <a href="https://t.co/v4IPo6QdIN">https://t.co/v4IPo6QdIN</a>
#HenryV in IDP Camp #Ankawa last weekend. Audience of Christian #Iraq-i's from #Mosul <b>loved it</b> #ShakespeareLives... <a href="https://t.co/2BLAkzPIKL">https://t.co/2BLAkzPIKL</a>
<b>Enjoyed seeing</b> @The_Globe in #Erbil get ready to see their #MidsummerNightsDream live stream soon #ShakespeareLives <a href="https://t.co/AT4mCtBfna">https://t.co/AT4mCtBfna</a>
<b>Great piece</b> from @GoodChanceCal who we met this year during #ShakespeareLives in #Iraq <a href="https://t.co/4DQfmdY5bs">https://t.co/4DQfmdY5bs</a>

<b>An honour to speak</b> at opening of Arab Film Festival #Oran <a href="https://t.co/85OTfEwtUo">https://t.co/85OTfEwtUo</a> #ShakespeareLives #Algeria
<b>Loved</b> @billthefilm today #ShakespeareLives in cinema in #Oran #Algeria @British_Film <a href="https://t.co/BiOkGJayrk">https://t.co/BiOkGJayrk</a>
<b>Great night at</b> Arab Film Festival with @billthefilm @islamaissa #ShakespeareLives in #Oran @British_Film #Algeria <a href="https://t.co/L4HhL5cVxP">https://t.co/L4HhL5cVxP</a>
<b>This is wonderful.</b> Thank you so much @yaddeen #shakespearelives #Iraq <a href="https://t.co/bWNAZaQjo4">https://t.co/bWNAZaQjo4</a>
The story behind AMidsummerNightsDream at #Erbil Citadel - <b>an inspirational video</b> #ShakespeareLives <a href="https://t.co/729h613FFD">https://t.co/729h613FFD</a>
<b>Audience loved</b> #Duhok AMidsummerNight'sDream #ShakespeareLives @BritishCouncil @AUIS_NEWS FB <a href="https://t.co/5YA69Q1fmU">https://t.co/5YA69Q1fmU</a> <a href="https://t.co/h75cEZPrbK">https://t.co/h75cEZPrbK</a>
<b>Great turnout</b> for #Coriolanus @British_Film at #EU film festival #sulaimani #ShakespeareLives #iraq <a href="https://t.co/wtKhI3Gm1r">https://t.co/wtKhI3Gm1r</a>
<b>Amazing location</b> for Shakespeare 7000 yr old #Citadel #Erbil #Iraq #ShakespeareLives @BritishCouncil <a href="https://t.co/eJOOYUIhjt">https://t.co/eJOOYUIhjt</a>
#ShakespeareLivesForum <b>Awesome to hear</b> a kurdish translation of Shakespeare by Dr. Salah Baban @gathertonarts
#shakespearelivesforum <b>Great opportunity to attend</b> this event with our students of BIS to live with Shakespeare at AUIS. Thank you

Table 4: List of examples of tweets expressing 'enjoyability'

## 6.2.2 The Role of the British Council in Promoting Shakespeare Lives

As explained earlier, only 35 out the 541 examined tweets mentioned Britain explicitly. Of these, over 30% came from media sources, 17% came from governmental sources and a mere 10% from the public. This shows that whilst members of the public were aware of the events taking place to celebrate 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Shakespeare's death very few associated the events with the British Council or Britain. This might suggest that the British Council's mission of ensuring that Britain is portrayed as a welcoming, diverse, creative and innovative nation is not adequately achieved as a result of the British Council's choice of events. The Facebook analysis will show that whilst the British Council had fallen short in enhancing awareness of the opportunities available in the UK as a place to study, work and visit using Shakespeare Lives, it managed to do so via alternative means – namely through its strong links to higher education and its recognition and success in the region as a major provider of English language teaching.

It was clear from the Twitter analysis that there were a number of British Council ambassadors employed in various MENA countries tasked with tweeting about the events. The ambassadors mostly tweeted in the English language providing information about upcoming events and often

expressing enjoyment or reporting engagement with the campaign. Table 5 below provides some examples of such tweets.

<i>Missed #Shakespeare theatre in #Algeria? Enjoy A Midsummer Night's Dream live-stream on Sunday! <a href="https://t.co/swrTM3tVUd">https://t.co/swrTM3tVUd</a></i>
<i>Enjoyed seeing @The_Globe in #Erbil get ready to see their #MidsummerNightsDream live stream soon #ShakespeareLives <a href="https://t.co/AT4mCtBfna">https://t.co/AT4mCtBfna</a></i>
<i>Enjoyed meeting Directors of National Theatre in Baghdad to talk about #ShakespeareLives #Iraq <a href="https://t.co/hbWHBp5H8D">https://t.co/hbWHBp5H8D</a> @UKinIraq</i>
<i>Getting ready for a busy week bringing Shakespeare Lives to Tunisia. Watch the animation here <a href="https://t.co/ixNQ88xMfU">https://t.co/ixNQ88xMfU</a></i>
<i>Fab launch @BFI with @British_Film #ShakespeareLives in film &amp; huge international tour: Shanghai Cuba Brazil Iraq <a href="https://t.co/1YBZiPItXM">https://t.co/1YBZiPItXM</a></i>

Table 5: examples of tweets published by British Council ambassadors to promote the campaign

A similar approach could have been adopted in the Arabic language. Our previous analysis shows that a large number of tweets mentioning Shakespeare use direct quotations translated into Arabic from Shakespeare’s work. This shows that Arabic-speaking Twitter users are familiar with and fond of the playwright’s works, but perhaps were not aware of Shakespeare Lives. Such findings provide an opportunity for the British Council to target this highly engaged audience in future programmes.

The analysis also revealed that Shakespeare Lives’ digital programme did not seem to result in any trending themes in the Arab Twitter-sphere that could have been influenced by the British Council. Members of the public who tweeted about the campaign often provided information about upcoming events, but received little, if any, engagement with these posts. This was mirrored by photos posted from British Council accounts about events (such as film nights) taking place in some MENA countries with small audiences.

### 6.3 Facebook

The British Council pages selected for analysis all share a similar approach in managing their accounts, often posting identical articles. As we have already noted, most accounts post on a regular basis, often several times daily. As in the case of Twitter, the pages examined often post in both Arabic and English. Generally, the content of the posts focussed mostly on English courses & exams (IELTS in particular); brain teasers and quizzes; as well as various cultural events happening in the UK - such as music, art, history & education. However, the majority of content attracted very little engagement. This was more evident in posts related to the Shakespeare Lives

programme. This section will show that there were a handful of posts about Shakespeare Lives which in turn generated very little interactions from the page fans. Adding the pages from countries that had more Shakespeare Lives events in their calendars returned similar results. However, it must be outlined that a number of posts relevant to English learning courses, exams and higher education received a considerable number of interactions. The next sections will first look at the effectiveness of British Council's Facebook strategy at promoting Shakespeare Lives. It will then analyse the British Council's Facebook strategy more generally. This will allow for cross comparison of the levels of interaction and engagement with different programmes.

### **6.3.1 Promoting the Shakespeare Lives Programme on Facebook**

From June 1 until October 10, there were approximately 20 posts related to Shakespeare Lives. Of these, 12 were posted by British Council Morocco, five by Algeria, three by Egypt and zero times by Jordan. The most common post was the live streamlining of a full live theoretical performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* - see images 8-12 below. British Council Algeria dedicated four daily posts to announce the event between September 7 - 10, attracting a total of 47 likes and two shares - this is very low, given the page has over 183,000 followers.

This analysis will show that users often engage with English learning and educational posts – this conflicts with the complexity of the terminology used in Shakespeare Lives posts shown in images 1-4 below. Interestingly, users were more likely to engage with posts that touch on topics that they can relate to such as 'love' (images 2 & 4). In fact, one user commented saying: 'someone has to teach Algerians about love, including myself, cos the place can be so loveless'. Another user added: 'if you are (familiar) with early Modern English, you fellow Algerian, then tuned-in and enjoy the play. Tis my advice'. This shows that the British Council can experiment with different variations of promoting the same event, continuing to pursue the methods that result in high engagement levels or create an online conversation.



Image 8&9: British Council Algeria - A Midsummer Night's Dream

**British Council Algeria**  
 8 September · 🌐

Come see what fools these mortals be! For the first time in the theatre's 417-year history, **Shakespeare's** Globe will be live-streaming a full, live theatrical performance. Tune in on Sunday 11 September to watch A Midsummer Night's Dream, via [bit.ly/dream\\_live](http://bit.ly/dream_live) #**ShakespeareLives**



**Shakespeare Lives - 'Riotous and celebratory' A Midsummer Night's Dream live streamed in a world first - BBC**  
 BBC.CO.UK

Like Comment Share

7

Write a comment...

**British Council Algeria**  
 7 September · 🌐

Will the course of true love run smooth? Watch our young lovers as they become entangled in Emma Rice's magical interpretation of A Midsummer Night's Dream. For the first time in the theatre's 417-year history, **Shakespeare's** Globe will be live-streaming a full, live theatrical performance. Tune in on Sunday 11 September to watch via [bit.ly/dream\\_live](http://bit.ly/dream_live) #**ShakespeareLives**



**Shakespeare Lives - 'Riotous and celebratory' A Midsummer Night's Dream live streamed in a world first - BBC**  
 BBC.CO.UK

Like Comment Share

16 Top comments +

2 shares

Write a comment...

Neal Daika someone has to teach algerians about love, including myself, cos that place can be so loveless!  
 Like · Reply · 7 September at 14:27

Sellerie Borj El Bahri if you are (familiar) with Early Modern English you fellow Algerians , then tuned -in and enjoy the play . Tis my advice .  
 Like · Reply · 8 September at 15:41 · Edited

Images 10 & 11: British Council Algeria - A Midsummer Night's Dream



Image 12: British Council Algeria - A Midsummer Night's Dream

Apart from live streaming, British Council Egypt also posted Phoebe Boswell's short film 'Dear Mister Shakespeare', which is the ninth film in the Shakespeare Lives short film collection and is inspired by Shakespeare's Othello. The film takes the form of a rhetorical letter to Shakespeare, in which 'the artist' explores Shakespeare's motivation in writing the character of Othello. This generated only nine interactions with one comment and no shares.



*Image 13: Dear Mister Shakespeare*

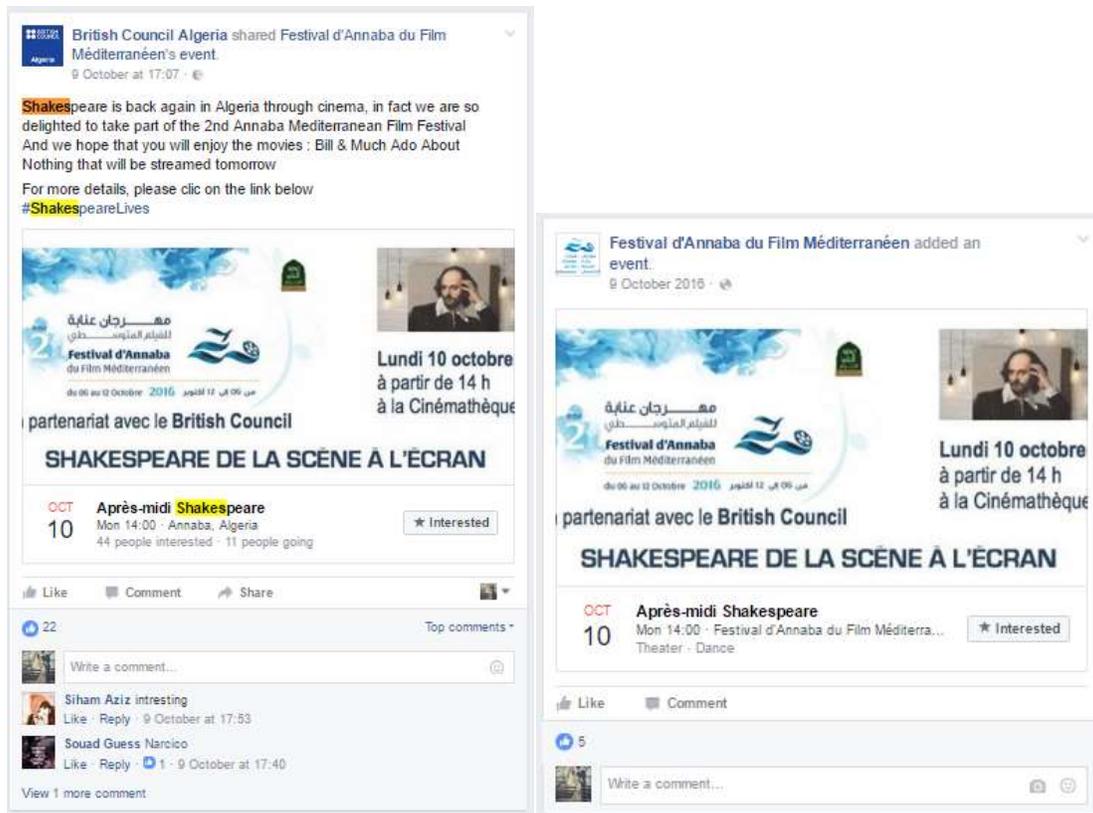
The post with the most likes combined a learning experience with knowledge about Shakespeare (see image 14). The British Council's 'Learn English' unit posted a video by the British actor James Garnon explaining how 'Shakespeare's verse and expressions have captured the hearts of so many people'. Interestingly, the article then offers English learners three tasks to check their understanding of English. The comment received on this post enquired about the availability of English courses to test fluency levels. In addition, the syntax used in the post provokes curiosity: 'why do Shakespeare's plays attract audiences around the world'.



Image 14: Learn English post

According to Facebook posts, Morocco and Algeria had a number of events planned for October 2016, including a film week, film festival poster contest, competitions and an open-air screening. In fact, Morocco was the only country of the examined accounts that had a Shakespeare-related image as the page's cover photo, as shown in Image 22 below. In terms of engagement, all Shakespeare Lives posts generated very little interaction as can be seen below. Having said that, images 15 and 16 below show the event being promoted by the event organiser (Festival d'Annaba du Film Mediterranéen) and shared by the British Council. Whilst neither of the posts generated a high amount of engagement, the British Council's post received 22 interactions and two comments in comparison to the five interactions received by the organiser's page. Interestingly, other events taking place in the festival that were promoted by the organiser's page received more engagement

from users than Shakespeare Lives events. This indicates a relative lack of interest in the campaign in the region.

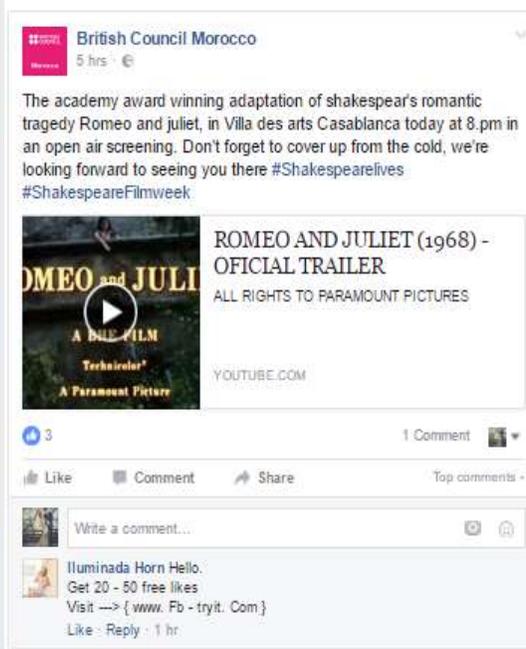


Images 15 & 16: upcoming Shakespeare Lives events

Events promoted on the British Council's Morocco page received very little engagement from users. The majority of tweets, as shown below, advertised upcoming events with very little detail on the campaign, Shakespeare, or Britain. The terminology used in the posts lacks the values of mutuality, diversity and/or innovation the British Council sought to promote. Users who are unaware of the programme might find it difficult to relate with it through these posts, which hinders engagement and subsequently limits users from recommending or sharing social media outputs. The posts provide enough information about 'where' and 'when' but shy away from telling the user 'why'. The analysis also shows that the majority of interaction on British Council pages happen on educational posts – often with regards to language or higher education. Shakespeare Lives content was therefore not regarded as educational or informative.



Image 17: upcoming Shakespeare Lives events



Images 18 & 19: upcoming Shakespeare Lives events

**British Council Morocco**  
11 August · 🌐

First week of our Poster Contest: if you're a young Moroccan with some graphic design skills and a unique sense of creativity submit your artwork for a chance to win a professional graphic tablet (Learn more on our website).



**Shakespeare: Concours d'affiches | British Council Maroc**

A l'occasion du 400ème anniversaire de la mort de William Shakespeare, le British Council organise un concours d'affiches.

BRITISHCOUNCIL.MA

👍 Like    💬 Comment    ➦ Share

**Upcoming Events** See All



**OCT 11** **Shakespeare Film Week - Casablanca, Tangie...**  
11 October–24 October · Villa Des Arts; Cinema Renais...  
1,426 people interested ★ Interested

Images 20 & 21: upcoming Shakespeare Lives events



**British Council Morocco**  
@BritishCouncilMorocco

- Home
- About
- Photos
- Reviews
- Twitter



👍 Like    💬 Message    💾 Save    ⋮ More

✍️ Status    📷 Photo/Video

Education · Rabat, Morocco  
4.2 ★★★★★ Closes in 30 minutes

Image 22: British Council Morocco homepage cover photo



*Image 23: upcoming Shakespeare Lives events*

To correspond with the Twitter analysis and the events highlighted in the study, we looked at British Council Facebook pages in Qatar, Iraq and Tunisia. The high level of activity gathered from those countries on Twitter was not matched on Facebook. From August 2016 until January 2017, British Council Qatar published four posts associated with Shakespeare Lives, British Council Tunisia published three posts and British Council Iraq posted six. Interestingly, Shakespeare Lives events that involved locals taking part in the events such the Shakespeare Cultural Forum in Basra in Iraq (see image 24 below) attracted the highest volume of engagement. Similarly, image 25 below shows 14 pictures of a partnership between the British Council and Le Ecrans de la Paix in which refugees in the camp in Erbil were invited to participate in the events. This shows that when the British Council projects mutuality in their posts, the public is more likely to engage and interact with the content. Such posts were also praised with comments of admiration and pride such as ‘we are so proud of you! Keep going’ and ‘well done, very impressive!’. The comments were a reflection of the performance/participation of Iraqis instead of praising the British Council or the campaign. This shows that inviting users to participate in events or recreating events to appeal for target cultures can generate a high level of interaction and high quality engagement in terms of like, shares and comments.

**British Council Iraq** added 17 new photos.  
29 November 2016 · Iraq

On November 24, 2016, Shakespeare Cultural Forum in Basra sponsored by British Council/ Basra,organised a unique festival of the 400th Anniversary of the death of William Shakespeare. This great event hosted people of different backgrounds and interests, the show included performance by English Language and Translation Department students, Reciting Shakespearean Sonnets, Live painting on stage, flash mop, a Film named " Venice of the East" driven by Shakespeare play ' Merchant of Venice' and much more. Shakespeare Lives Basra' has been an amazing experience for so many people.



50 likes · Chronological

1 share

**Ammar Alazzawi** Well done  
Like · Reply · 1 · 29 November 2016 at 17:15

**جوني الجبوري** Creative Basri Students. We are so proud of you. Keep going!  
Like · Reply · 1 · 30 November 2016 at 11:39

1 Reply

**Aya Sameer** It was great indeed! 🥳  
Like · Reply · 30 November 2016 at 18:06

**حسن الامارة**  
هذا قد شي حلووو بصراحة عجيني  
See translation  
Like · Reply · 6 December 2016 at 04:49

Write a comment...

Image 24: Shakespeare Lives event involving locals in Basra Iraq



British Council Iraq added 13 new photos.

21 November 2016 · 🌐

On 17 November, the British Council In partnership with Les Ecrans de la Paix showed Henry V at the Ainkawa 2 Refugee Camp in Erbil as part of Shakespeare Lives and The Shakespeare on Film Tour. The camp is under the management of the Assyrian Catholic Church. The people living there are mostly from Mosul in areas such as Bartella and Qaraqosh.



fad Deen (niworks.com)



👍 Like    💬 Comment    ➦ Share

👤 43

Chronological ▾

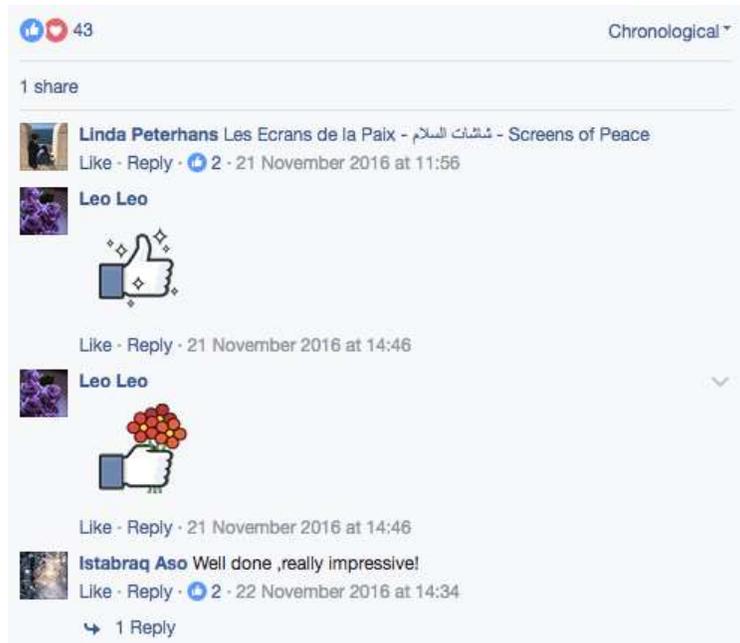


Image 25: Shakespeare Lives event involving locals in Iraq

### 6.3.2 English Courses, Exams & Higher Education

A big proportion of the British Council’s social media strategy was to promote English courses, provide information about and preparation for exams (IELTS for example) and encourage followers to consider higher education in the UK. Such posts often generate higher engagement levels - often very high. In images 26 & 27 below, for example, British Council Egypt attracted 16,000 interactions and 659 shares. One has to wonder if all British Council posts are organic or whether some were boosted or promoted. If this the case, the British Council might want to consider promoting posts about cultural programmes like Shakespeare Lives to attract more engagement and reach as many Facebook users as possible, given that we know from the Twitter analysis that there is a great interest in Shakespeare and his work in the MENA region.



from the potential held in offering users an added value if they were to attend/subscribe/join an event/competition/test for example.

**British Council Egypt**  
4 October at 13:51 · €

Accepted and Trusted in the USA

Take IELTS to prove you have the right English language skills to study in the USA. IELTS is now accepted by 3,000 institutions in the USA.

**USA accepts IELTS**

Study in the USA with IELTS | Register now

Major institutions all over the USA recognise that IELTS gives an accurate reflection of your ability to understand, read, write and speak English.

BRITISHCOUNCIL.ORG.EG

Like · Comment · Share

545 · Top comments · 13 shares

Write a comment...

Like · Reply · 2 · 4 October at 16:16

View 10 more comments

**British Council Egypt**  
Yesterday at 13:30 · €

Want to meet the top British universities in Egypt?

Attend Egypt Education Fair on 12, 13 and 14 October in Faimont Helopolis and meet the top 44 UK universities.

The British Council booth will also be there to answer you IELTS related questions as IELTS is the English language requirement for admission in most UK universities... See more

**Egypt Education Fair**  
Part of **Global Study UK**

MEET THE FOLLOWING UNIVERSITIES

Warwick	Fairmont Helopolis, Faimont
Kings College	12-14 October
Queen Mary	Wednesday 12 <sup>th</sup> October
Surrey	18:00 - 19:00
Southampton	Thursday 13 <sup>th</sup> October
Notttingham	10:00 - 15:00 & 18:00 - 19:00
Sheffield	Friday 14 <sup>th</sup> October
	18:00 - 19:00

+ 35 More UK Universities

FREE ENTRY

Like · Comment · Share

34 · Top comments · 2 shares

Write a comment...

- Fatma Ryad Menna Ahmed · Like · Reply · 22 hrs
- Fatma Ryad Menna Mamdouh · Like · Reply · 22 hrs
- Ahmed Samir Nour El-Din Samir · Like · Reply · Yesterday at 17:21
- Nashwa Lotty El Dabas Mohamed Ibrahim Akhour · Like · Reply · Yesterday at 15:43
- Ahmed Hamdy Kaoud Galal Elneshwy Ahmed Hamza · Like · Reply · 1 · Yesterday at 14:23
- Nadine A Fahmil Khaled Magdy · Like · Reply · Yesterday at 13:00
- Nada Hany Youssa Elmazloum · Like · Reply · 1 · Yesterday at 14:40
- Emma Townsend Nadim · Like · Reply · 14 hrs

Write a comment...

Images 28 & 29: IELTS posts



Images 30 & 31: IELTS Posts

Finally, posts related to English courses for adults also received a great amount of engagement. Image 32 below, generated 10,000 interactions in Jordan, engaging almost 6% of the page's followers. This is considerably higher than the other posts on the same page which suggests a great interest in learning the English language in Jordan – this might not correspond with the followers' interest in joining or engaging with Shakespeare Lives events. Again, the success of this post demonstrates that when promoted by the British Council, Facebook campaigns may be able to successfully attract new fans and reach a higher number of people, achieving great levels of engagement. The comments received all enquired about the courses offered with regards to start date, fees as well as the type of courses available. The post was shared 19 times, reaching a significant number of people.

**British Council Jordan**  
29 August · 🌐

كوننا خبراء اللغة الإنجليزية فسوف نساعدك على أن تتحدث، تقرأ، تسمع وتكتب باللغة الإنجليزية بثقة من خلال دورات اللغة الإنجليزية العامة. مبرسدا المخلصين حاصلين على مؤهلات رسمية وفقا لاعلى المعايير الدولية ويمتكون مهارات واسعة في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية للكبار في الأردن وحول العالم. سجل الآن!

لمزيد من المعلومات يرجى الاتصال على 06 4603420 او قم بزيارة موقعنا  
See more ... <https://goo.gl/oq7tfz>

See translation



**اللغة الإنجليزية للكبار | British Council**  
اتصلنا على أفضل ما في الحياة مع خبراء اللغة الإنجليزية في العالم.

BRITISHCOUNCIL\_JO Book Now

Like Comment Share

10k Top comments ·

19 shares

Write a comment...

**Majd Alhyari Om Ibrahim**  
متى رح تبدأ الدورات عندكم؟؟؟ هل يوجد دورة التركيز على المحادثة من ضمن دوراتكم القادمة؟؟؟  
See translation  
Like · Reply · 2 · 31 August at 02:09  
View 14 more replies

**British Council Jordan Mazen Shomali** هلا و سهلا مازن (Mazen Shomali) أهلا وسهلا لك معنا. شكرا لتواصلك معنا. في الوقت الحالي 7 يوجد لدينا دورات محادثة مكثفة و لكن يمكنك متابعة صفحتنا من اجل متابعة...  
See more...  
See translation  
Like · Reply · 19 September at 14:32

**Aidah Alabbadi**  
انا حابة اسجل دورة انجليزي شاملة. بحيث يكون المواد غريتين بالاسبوع. كيف آية الدفع. وفي مجال اسجل  
See translation  
Like · Reply · 2 · 19 September at 15:59  
View previous replies

**British Council Jordan**  
هلا و سهلا هيبا (Hiba Hassan) شكرا لتواصلك بالمجلس الثقافي البريطاني واتحادك بدورات اللغة الإنجليزية.  
تلكة الدورة العامة: 245 دينار  
See more...  
See translation  
Like · Reply · 27 September at 11:29  
View more replies

View more comments 2 of 93

Image 32: English for Adults

In summary, the Facebook analysis revealed that the British Council’s online social media strategy focused predominately on promoting English language courses, English examinations and higher education in the UK. There was a small amount of Shakespeare Lives posts published by a number

of British Council MENA pages, most of which did not receive any visible engagement with the users. The very few that did either combined a learning experience or published posts that portrayed members of the public physically engaging with the events. The majority of Shakespeare Lives posts were published in the English language, which might have had an impact on the level of user interaction.

## 7 Conclusions

This analysis suggests that awareness of the Shakespeare Lives programme was higher amongst English speakers in the MENA region compared to Arabic speakers. One reason for this is that Shakespeare Lives tweets published by the British Council were posted in English. This raises questions as to whether the British Council has excluded a large percentage of the population who communicate in the Arabic language. In fact the data gathering returned 68,548 Arabic tweets making references to Shakespeare between May and September. This visible interest in Shakespeare in the MENA region provides an opportunity for the British Council to target such highly engaged audience in future campaigns. Of all Shakespeare Lives tweets, 15% came from Europe or North America. This highlights the potential of the Arabic diaspora available for the British Council for acquiring *new users* as a target group in future programmes, extending the British Council's reach.

On average, 5% of Shakespeare Lives tweets made references to Britain or the British Council. The majority of which were published by the British Council – or what appears to be British Council ambassadors employed to promote the events. Members of the public and media sources played a marginal role in tweeting about events taking place in the MENA region, or associating the programme with the British Council or Britain. Such results underline the finding that the campaign's potential reach and influence online was not met in terms of user engagement and interaction. It also suggests that the events organised by the British Council did not specifically result in the perception of Britain as a welcoming, diverse, creative and innovative nation.

The Facebook analysis demonstrated that focusing on the participation of locals in Shakespeare Lives events attracted the highest volume of engagement. In other words, placing emphasis on the value of mutuality resulted in higher engagement and interaction levels. Moreover, The Facebook analysis also revealed that higher education, English learning courses and exams are perceived as being at the forefront of the British Council's online strategy. This indicates that the British Council is seen as an educational centre to users, rather than a cultural organisation aimed at representing Britain and its values.

The Facebook analysis suggests the potential held in promoted posts. This generated an increased amount of engagement levels, reaching 16,000 interactions and 659 shares at one point. Similar strategies can be implemented in promoting Shakespeare Lives or future programmes.

Finally, there was not a clear or consistent online strategy implemented across Twitter and Facebook to promote the events. The use of Twitter was very limited and only visible in a number of MENA countries. Facebook, on the other hand, played a primary role with most pages posting several times a day.