

The Influence of Culture on Instagram Use

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Abstract—Instagram, the photo and video-sharing social medium, is rapidly gaining popularity. The State of Kuwait presents an excellent case for exploring the influence of culture on Instagram use. Like other Arab countries, the traditional culture of Kuwait greatly affects the attitudes and behaviors of its People. It is interesting to examine the influence of gender on Instagram use activities. In Kuwait, the culture, besides security reasons, inhabits females from disclosing contact information. The central theme of this research paper is to understand gender differences on Instagram use by Kuwaiti higher education students. This study confirms that males are more likely than females to post their personal pictures on Instagram, more likely to disclose their personal information and more likely to have public accounts unlike females who are more likely to have private accounts than males.

Index Terms—social media, gender differences, cultural differences, media and culture, usability, Instagram

I. INTRODUCTION

Instagram, the photo and video-sharing social medium, is rapidly gaining popularity and preference with more than 200 million users [1] and 13% of the total users of social media placing it fourth in rank after Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest [2]. It is a social media application that allows people to share with others their daily life activities, lifestyles, habits and interests in pictures and videos. Instagram is easy to operate, and it only requires downloading, choosing a username and password, and finally posting pictures that others see. People can either upload posts taken instantly or stored ones from their mobile phone gallery.

Like other social networks, Instagram is built on having followers like family, friends or strangers who follow the updates of Instagrammers' life via posted pictures and videos. Created profiles include personal information and a picture to identify the account. People either create public, directly accessed, accounts or private ones that require seeking permission from the Instagrammer before viewing the posts. Once following Instagrammers, followers can view the pictures and videos' timelines. People viewing the posts can interact

with what they see by pressing the "Like" button or provide comments to express their opinions on the posts.

The State of Kuwait presents an excellent case for exploring the influence of culture on Instagram use. Like other Arab countries, the traditional culture of Kuwait greatly affects the attitudes and behaviors of its People. It is interesting to examine the influence of gender on Instagram use activities. In Arab countries, females have been subjugated by a cultural conservatism. The status of Arab females has improved; yet, variations between genders still exist because of "local traditions and social customs" [3] which "has always been a marked preference for boys over girls" [3]. This paper begins with literature review, hypothesis, method, results, then discussion and conclusion.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Wherever Females compose the majority users of many Social Networking Sites (SNS) [4], Facebook [5], MySpace [6], Twitter, Bebo, Flickr [7] and Pinterest [8]. Conversely, males make up the majority of Google's users (71%) [8], Digg, YouTube and LinkedIn [6]. These surveys confirm that the nature, functions and design of social media determines their users and effects. Females prefer Facebook, Myspace, Twitter, and Pinterest because they are interpersonal and discussion-oriented while males favor Google, Digg, YouTube and LinkedIn because they are information and content-oriented [9]-[11]. We also argue that females prefer social media more than males because these media are primarily social in their nature and this nature is similar to the social makeup of females.

Instagram use by males and females will not eschew from those uses of other social media. Females use it to socialize and provide opinion while males use it to collect information and pass time. Both will use it to present their daily life to others, however, the culture and traditions of Kuwait may mediate such use. Females will be more reserved about presenting themselves to others in personal pictures because the "social attitudes have remained relatively constant" [3] in the conservative Arab and Muslim culture. In many times, "The Koran is far more protective of women's rights and status than is the case with more recent social practices" [3]. This cultural context is enforced by the Arab patriarchal kinship

system, which expects males to protect the family and financially provide for it and females to have greater roles at home and in raising children [3].

In addition, among the Arabs, family honor, which has roots in the sexual conducts of females, is an important value that has to remain unsoiled. If not bounded by marriage, such conducts bring shame to family and “blacken its face”. It is difficult to erase or restore a dishonor. To prevent such conducts, many Arab countries segregate between the two genders in places [12]. Furthermore, many families force their daughters to wear Hejab because it communicates an image of a decent female. Thus, many families will think that posting personal pictures of females show them as having playful and unrestrained character that seeks relations with males. This is to avoid giving “rise to false impressions or unfounded gossip” [3]. To the Arabs, “Guarding a woman’s image is neither a personal nor a family choice; it is imposed by the culture” [3]. Therefore, even if females post personal photos, they have to appear sober and modest in them and not reveal much of their bodies. Also, females who have public accounts will avoid posting their personal pictures in favor of pictures of materials they own or places they go.

A. Privacy Settings

More females believe that there is risk online. They report more about privacy concerns [13] and are more likely to read privacy statements [14]. This interest in the online privacy issues by females is perhaps because they are more likely to be victims of online abuse. According to the Working to Hold Online Abuse Organization [15], 73% of the 2500 online harassment and stalking cases from 2000 to 2008 are for females. To maintain their privacy, they create private accounts [16], support privacy policies and provide false information [17].

Kuwaiti females will probably be more likely to create private accounts on Instagram due to safety and more importantly cultural reasons. Many fathers, brothers and husbands will reject that females have stranger male followers because it communicates a negative impression or create bad reputation about the females. Conversely, having a private account may communicate that a female is moral and well-mannered. More likely, males will have public accounts and followers from the opposite sex because “The misbehavior by women is believed to do more damage to family honor than the misbehavior of men” [3]. The Arab culture treats males more favorably. Males can go out with anyone and come back at any time while females are restricted. Thus, they will limit their Instagram’s relationships only to family and friends. Even in the United States, 52% of females say that their social media profiles are set private so that only friends view them [18].

B. Information Disclosure

Females are extroverted and reveal more information about themselves on MySpace [19] and Facebook [20]. This personal information includes their relationships, preferences, jobs, and religious affiliations [21]. However, more often than females, males provide their contact

information such as telephone numbers, emails and home addresses on their SNS profile accounts [22]. Females feel more worried about providing such information [4]. About 20% of them say they will share their location details in comparison to 65% of males. Also, 55% of males will share their email contact while only 42% of females will do so [21].

In Kuwait, the culture, besides security reasons, inhabits females from disclosing contact information. This culture assumes that “the inherent personalities between men and women are vastly different” [3]. Females who display contacts will be perceived as flirty and frivolous. Displaying contact information will reveal males flirty and wanting to contact females too, but the culture is less critical to males. It gives them more freedom in behaving and movement than females. It also forbids interaction between males and females who are strange to each other [3]. Generally, it is indecent if a male and female stay behind closed doors or go out on a date. That is why there is a separation between males and females in social gatherings, schools and many workplaces in Kuwait.

III. HYPOTHESIS

The central theme of this research paper is to understand the influence of culture on Instagram use by Kuwaiti higher education students. The following research questions are posited: Accordingly, this study tries to answer and confirm three hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Males are more likely to post their personal pictures on Instagram than females?

Hypothesis 2: Females are more likely to have private Instagram accounts than males.

Hypothesis 3: Males are more likely to reveal their personal information on their profile accounts than females?

IV. METHODS

The sample of this study includes university students in Kuwait. This segment is chosen because it uses Instagram more often than other age groups. About 539 university students participated in a questionnaire that took about 10 minutes to fill out. It was distributed to students who were enrolled in general education courses to guarantee a sample representing diverse body of students from different fields. Such courses were like Introduction to Politics, Introduction to Physical Education, Principles of Psychology, principles of Business...etc. The questionnaire was originally in English and translated to Arabic to control language from being an artifact. It took about 15 minutes to fill out. Subjects were told that their information will be confidential.

V. RESULTS

This study seeks to confirm its three hypotheses. To confirm them, independent t-test procedures were used to find out the differences between males and females. The first hypothesis stated, Males are more likely to post their

personal pictures on Instagram than females. The t-test revealed that males ($M = 1.82$; $SD = .38$), more than females ($M = 1.49$; $SD = .50$), posted personal pictures on Instagram ($t(522) = 8.00$, $p = .001$). This finding confirms the first hypothesis.

The second hypothesis stated that Females are more likely to have private Instagram accounts than males. The t-test statistical procedure confirmed this hypothesis. Males ($M = 1.21$; $SD = .41$) are more likely than females ($M = 1.10$; $SD = .30$) to have public accounts ($t(520) = 3.54$, $p = .001$).

The last hypothesis which stated that Males are more likely to reveal their personal information on their profile accounts than females. The t-test revealed that More frequently than females ($M = 2.92$; $SD = 1.77$), males ($M = 3.68$; $SD = 2.01$) disclose their personal information ($t(527) = 4.49$, $p = .001$). The third hypothesis is confirmed. Table I below shows types of information, each gender disclosed with percentage.

TABLE I. TYPES OF INFORMATION, EACH GENDER WITH %

Information Disclosed	Males			Females		
	Freq.	Rank	%	Freq.	Rank	%
Real name	152	1	78	206	1	59
Personal pictures	140	2	72	126	3	37
Preferred saying	77	3	40	175	2	51
Age/ Birthday	57	5	29	101	4	29
Major/school of study	57	5	29	92	5	27
Contacts	47	6	24	42	9	12
Interests and hobbies	46	7	24	67	7	19
Gender	36	8	19	68	6	20
Nationality	34	9	18	52	8	15
Job title	24	10	12	17	11	5
Place of living	18	11	9	16	12	5
Marital status	18	12	9	22	12	6

VI. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This paper sought to find out the influence of culture on Instagram use between males and females. The Kuwaiti, as an Arab culture, can dictate the use of emerging social media. This study confirms that males are more likely than females to post their personal pictures on Instagram, more likely to disclose their personal information and more likely to have public accounts unlike females who are more likely to have private accounts than males. Such findings confirm what the literature discussed about the status of Arab females. Such culture has always preferred males over females [3] and this is why males are more likely than females to post their personal pictures or disclose their personal information on Instagram. The image of a female is part of the image of the entire family or clan. Father, brothers and husbands probably will allow females to have Instagram accounts, but would probably not prefer that their sisters, wives and daughters to post their personal pictures especially if they have public accounts or disclose personal information. Such conduct might

“blacken its face” of the family [12]. “Guarding a woman’s image is neither a personal nor a family choice; it is imposed by the culture” [3].

This is also similar to having public accounts by females. Families are more likely to reject that their daughters to allow other stranger males to follow them. Having males followers may shows a female who is a playful. Such image is because “The misbehavior by women is believed to do more damage to family honor than the misbehavior of men” [3].

Future studies might compare between Arab and Western females on the use of Instagram. Using a cultural perspective might further highlight the influence on culture on the use of various social media. Future studies might also examine age as a factor influence usage of Instagram in issues related to privacy settings, disclosure, types of pictures posted, and level of involvements, etc.

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