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Impact of Social Media Use on Identity: A Case Study

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Abstract

This study assesses the use of social networking sites by Iraqi youth and its impact on their identity. A quantitative approach was employed first, using a survey questions distributed to a sample of students registered in four Iraqi universities to explore the social media uses depth and characteristics. Then, a qualitative study based on semi-structured interviews with a sample of Iraqi faculties, was able to determine the impact that could social media have on the sample' identity. Results showed that social media have been used extensively, mainly the Facebook, what's App. and Twitter. The mentioned social networks have served as a vehicle of news and entertainment. Faculties perceived social media as a threat to the original identity. The danger lies in their distance from the initial social and religious values. The sample evoked also psychological alienation as well as destructive ideas such as discrimination, hatred and intolerance. To overcome the negative aspects of social media on the sample's original identity, the respondents proposed several solutions such as enhancing the intelligentsia to raise the awareness of misuse of social networks and develop a number of mechanisms to enhance the use of the Arabic language.

Keywords: Social Media, Uses, Impact, identity, youth, Iraqi youth

INTRODUCTION

Internet modern applications have created not only a new form of interpersonal relationships, overcoming spatial and temporal limitations, but also a new life style sentenced to standardized values. Social features are globalized at the expense of local virtues and traditions, which represents a threat to the original identities.

The researchers raised the question about the social networks uses by Iraqi youth and their impact on their social and cultural identities. A sample of Iraqi university students was questioned in order to explore the social media use nature, level and particularities. A sample of faculties was interviewed in parallel, to determine whether or not social media were considered as influential factor on ruining local identity and reshaping a globalized model.

Therefore, this study investigates the level of exposure and the nature of social media uses as well as their impact on the initial identity from faculties' perspective.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The main question raised in this paper is: How far can we assure that social media usage has a distinctive impact on the university students' identity in Iraq? The following sub-questions were considered:
- Do Iraqi students use social media? & with which frequency?

- How do Iraqi students use Social Media?
- Which kind of social media are the most used by the sample?
-To what extent has social media supported students' original identity?
- What are the threats that social media could present on the social and cultural identities, if any?

This study draws from "Uses and Gratification Theory" that was developed to understand mass media impact in the 1970's, by Katz and his team. The theory states how the receivers use Media to satisfy their needs and to get specific gratifications (Al Jenaibi, 2015, p. 57). In this paper, a focus will be put on the nature and particularities of the social media use among an Iraqi students' sample, as well as faculties' attitude about the social media impact on the expressed young Iraqi students' identity.

This study will certainly determine if social media can be considered as influential factor on reinforcing local identities or reshaping them, leading to a unified – globalized identity model.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study would be a quality addition in terms of understanding the social media usage and impact on the students' identity. The outcome of the study will help to strategize and reconstruct students' attitude towards social media usage. It also provides researchers and academics with further evidences about the role that social media may play on reshaping identities and manipulating young people'biliefs on many topics.

LITTERATURE REVIEW

- A research paper was published by Mater Abdullah Hamdy study (2018) entitled: "Adopting university youth on social networking sites in providing information, survey study at the University of Tabuk, Saudi Arabia". The study aimed to identify the degree of youth of Saudi Arabia's dependence on social networking to provide information, news and knowledge. The paper relied on the descriptive method and a questionnaire has been applied to a sample of the University of Tabuk students in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Several results were reached including that the most important motivations for the use of Saudi social networking sites are entertainment, news updates, and socializing with friends and relatives. Results showed also that the interest in politics is very low.

- A research paper published by Walid Mohammed Ashima (2017) entitled: "The use of Jordanian university' students to enrich the innovations of interactive networks and their gratifications", aimed to identify why the Jordanian university' students use social media. The results showed that the use of various social networks reached 92.7%, while the intensity of use was increased during the period 2011 to 2014, and the students' purposes of use of these devices varied from the desire of leisure, to the willing of building virtual relationships.

- Al Jenaiby (2015) research paper about social media use in the UAE, was focused on how social media were integrated in the Emirati society. The researcher noticed that the most popular types of social networks in the Emirates are generally the same as those used in other regions across the Middle East, North Africa and beyond. Social media are perceived as a vital source of information, vehicle of news, opinion sharing, cultural production and entertainment.

To sum, several studies were focused on the uses of social media among young people in several Arabic countries to determine uses nature, level and particularities. This paper will not only invest in exploring the uses of social media among the young Iraqi universities' students, but also, will focus on the impact that social media may have on the identify construction, from faculties' perspective.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In the empirical part of this study, a quantitative approach was employed first, using a survey questions distributed to a sample of students registered in four Iraqi universities. The purpose was to identify the social media uses particularities. Then, a qualitative approach based on semi-structured interviews was able to determine the impact that could social media sites have on Iraqi youth identity and how to surround it, from the perspective of the faculties volunteered to participate in the study.

Population, sample and sampling procedure

The survey was distributed by a number of research collaborators (colleagues) living in Iraq during the period of 01/04/2018 to 30/04/2018. Four hundred (400) students of Iraqi governmental universities (University of Baghdad - Mustansiriya University) and private universities (University of Nahrain - Iraqi University) were questioned. The interviews were conducted in parallel with the surveys distribution. A sample of five (5) faculties was extracted from each university. 20 interviews were obtained and 20 respondents (10 males and 10 females) have participated.

To extract the survey's results, the researchers used SPSS. Some statistical methods that fit the nature of the required data were chosen, such as repetitions and percentages as well as the arithmetical averages and the standard deviations.

Researchers chose then to complete this paper with a qualitative approach by faculties' interviews. They believe that interviews will provide more accurate answers and reactions during the face- to- face discussions, where body language can be easily detected and taken into consideration during the interpretation process. Supplementary questions could also be added to the interview guide when needed. Interviews were conducted via Skype by the researchers and took 30 to 45 minutes each.

SURVEY'S RESULTS

The sample caracteristics are summarized in the table below:

Table1 : The sample discription

Variable	Groups	Repetition	%
Type	Male	200	50
	Female	200	50
Total		400	100
University type	public	200	50
	private	200	50
Total		400	100
Socioeconomic level	low	115	28.75
	Medium	131	32.75
	high	154	38.5
Total		400	100

Table2: The most used sites by gender

Variable	Male		Female		Total	
Response:	Q	%	Q	%	Q	%
Social media	162	81.0	159	79.5	321	**80.2**
Blogs	156	78.0	162	81.0	318	**79.5**
Forums	65	32.5	51	25.5	116	**29.0**
Public electronic web sites	23	11.5	32	16.0	55	**13.8**
Electronic specialized sites	22	11.0	25	12.5	47	**11.8**
Total	200		200		400	

According to the table above, the most three used networks by the sample were:
- Social media with 80. 2%,
- Blogging with 79.5%,
- Forums with 29%
.

Table3: Ranking of social media according to the sample' use level

Ranking	1st		2nd		3rd		Centric weight
S. N.	Q	%	Q	%	Q	%	%
Facebook	208	52	115	28.8	38	9.5	30.2
What's App	161	40.3	121	30.3	78	19.5	28.1
Twitter	48	12	116	29	163	40.8	21.9
You Tube	26	6.5	122	30.5	129	32.3	19.9
Total weights	400						100

The ranking of the social media sites according to their degree of use for the sample is collected as follow:

- Facebook with a percentage of 30.2%, (9.75% of the questioned students claim not using Facebook at all).
- What's App, with a percentage of 28.1% (10% of questioned students claim not using what's app. At all),
- Twitter with a percentage of 21.9% (18.25% of questioned students claim not using Twitter at all),
-YouTube is used of only 19.9% (30.75 % of questioned students claim not using You Tube at all).

Therefore, Facebook comes at the forefront of social networking sites on which young Iraqi people rely on for their different uses.

Table 4: Average daily hours spent in the social media

Type	Male		Female		Total	
Average hours	**Q**	**%**	**Q**	**%**	**Q**	**%**
2 to4 hrs.	72	36.0	75	37.5	147	**36.8**
Less than 1h	69	34.5	70	35.0	139	**34.8**
More than 4hrs	59	29.5	55	27.5	114	**28.5**
Total	200	100	200	100	400	**100**

According to the data collected in table 4, 36.8% of the respondents visit social media sites daily (2-4 hours); 36 % of them are males and 37.5% are females.

Table 5: The most followed contents in social media

Type	Male		Female		Total	
Content	Q	%	Q	%	Q	%
news	147	73.5	145	72.5	292	**73.0**
religion	94	47.0	84	42.0	178	**44.5**
security	89	44.5	143	71.5	232	**58.0**
culture	91	45.5	77	38.5	168	**42.0**
art	73	36.5	73	36.5	146	**36.5**
science	89	44.5	101	50.5	190	**47.5**
history	32	16.0	29	14.5	61	**١٥,٢**
sport	148	74.0	60	30.0	208	**52.0**
leisure	114	57.0	170	85.0	284	**71.0**
services	79	39.5	47	23.5	126	**31.5**
Total	**200**		**200**		**400**	

The top three most followed contents by the questioned students' sample are:
- News, with 73.0%,
- Leisure, with 71.0%,
- Security, with 58.0%

SURVEY RESULTS DISCUSSION

Iraqi young students included in the sample use social media sites with 81.02%. Facebook seemed to be their favorite application as it appears at the top of the used social networking sites, followed by what's' App., Twitter and YouTube. The sample doesn't seem to be addicted by social media. Thus, two to four hours a day claimed use shows a serious interest on social networking sites content. Respondents claimed being fascinated the most, by the news, as it is top rated with 73%, followed by entertainment then security.

The results match the findings of Al Jenaiby's research results (2015, p.56) announcing that social media usage has been extensive in the Arab world. She also argued that the most well-known social networking tools in the UAE are similar to those used in other countries in the Middle East, including Facebook as the top used one. Social media sites have served as a vital foundation and vehicle for news, data, commercial growth, opinion sharing, cultural production and entertainment.

Besides, Walid Mohammed Ashima results (2017, p337) showed that the use of various social networks reached 92.7%, and the students' purposes of use of these devices varied from the desire of leisure, to the willing of building virtual relationships. A small difference related to the main use purpose is noted; information for Iraqi young students vs leisure for Jordanian youth.

INTERVIEWS RESULTS

The interviews' questions were divided into two themes as follow:

Theme 1: Social media contents threatening the Iraqi young people identity,

Theme 2: Social media content that should be posted and maintained through social media to preserve Iraqi social and cultural identity.

Table 6: Social media contents threatening the Iraqi young people identity

Responses Phrases	Type	%
Social networking sites lead to the abandonment of some Iraqi customs and traditions	Male	50.5
	Female	55.0
	Average	**52.7**
In social networking sites are publishing topics that contradict the essence of Islamic religion	Male	49.0
	Female	33.0
	Average	**40.5**
Social networking sites lead to psychological alienation	Male	48.5
	Female	25.0
	Average	**36.75**
Social networking sites develop individual tendencies	Male	39.0
	Female	20.5
	Average	**29.75**
Social networking sites contribute to the elimination and removal of cultural differences between peoples and thus create a culture of dependency that destroys the cultural specificities of Arab identity	Male	35.0
	Female	16.5
	Average	**25.75**
Social networking sites contribute to spreading destructive ideas that promote discrimination, hatred and intolerance	Male	41.0
	Female	23.0
	Average	**32.0**

The majority of the respondents pointed certain subjects published via social media that could threaten the Iraqi social and cultural identities. The top three evocated contents are listed as the following:

- Social networking sites lead to the abandonment of some Iraqi customs and traditions (52.7%),

- In social networking sites are publishing topics that contradict the essence of Islamic religion (40.5%),

- Social networking sites lead to psychological alienation (36.75%).

- A number of respondents spoke about other psychological and human negative effects such as:

- Social networking sites develop individual tendencies.

- Social networking sites contribute to the elimination and removal of cultural differences between peoples and thus create a culture of dependency that destroys the cultural specificities of Arab identity.

- Social networking sites contribute to spreading destructive ideas that promote discrimination, hatred and intolerance.

Table 7: Social media content that should be maintained through social media to preserve Iraqi social identity

Responses Phrases	Type	%
Raising awareness of misuse of social networking sites danger	Male	54.0
	Female	43.5
	Average	**48.75**
Developing mechanisms and strategies to counteract what is transmitted through social media sites targeting the local cultural identity ruination.	Male	48.5
	Female	39.0
	Total	**43.75**
Deepen students' awareness of the fourth generation war and the intellectual invasion through social networking sites	Male	38.5
	Female	28.5
	Average	**33.5**
Develop mechanisms to promote the use of the Arabic language and the importance of preserving it	Male	38.5
	Female	33.5
	Average	**36.0**

Respondents assured that social media have a crucial impact on Iraqi young people, and suggested to enhance the intelligentsia (sociologists, scientists, academicians, etc), to produce certain contents to limit the negative effects on Iraqi youth cultural identity. Many proposals were registered as indicated below:

- Raising the awareness of misuse of the social networking sites danger (48.75%),

- Developing mechanisms and strategies to counteract what is transmitted through social media sites targeting local cultural identity ruination (43.75%),

- Developing mechanisms to promote the use of Arabic language and the importance of preserving it (36%),

- Deepening students' awareness of the fourth generation war and intellectual invasion through social networking sites (33.50%).

INTERVIEWS RESULTS DISCUSSION

The danger of social networking sites on identities from faculties' perspective lies in their distance from the initial social and religious values. The sample evocated also the psychological alienation as well as spreading destructive ideas: Discrimination, hatred and intolerance.

According to the sample, the kind of uses mentioned above contribute to destroy the original identity of the young Iraqi students and to sculpt new features that are far from the Arab customs, traditions, language, culture and Islamic values. The mentioned uses do not necessary match with the essence of the Islamic religion mainly, principals like tolerance, brotherhood, peace and harmony in the context of difference.

To overcome the negative aspects of social networking sites and to maintain the youth's cultural and social balance, the respondents proposed several solutions and recommendations that could be summed up in: Enhancing the to produce certain contents and organize spontaneous and regular awareness campaigns through social media to limit the negative effects on youth cultural identity; Raising awareness of misuse of the social networking sites danger and develop

mechanisms to enhance the use of the Arabic language and raise the importance of preserving it.

Snoussi (2019, p10) noted that many researches evocated the problematic related to the dual: Digital media vs local education. The proliferation of digital technology contributes to the erosion of the local cultural values and practices. This cultural degeneration in return leads to the loss of the original identity among the young people, disrupting their focus and productivity, and ultimately retarding the social progress. Powerful media nowadays such as social networks are able to wash brains and reshape identities especially for people who are not well educated or young enough to be manipulated easily.

CONCLUSION

At the end, the researchers support the statement about social media impact on initial identities but note that the impact is not always negative and threatening the original oneness of individuals. Cultural and educational interactions also have many advantages and could be seen as a factor contributing to the development of the humanity. In fact, technological development can not in itself constitute a threat to local and ethnic identities and cultures, but the real danger lies in some negative connotations that tend to move away from human virtues, such as inciting hatred, racism and not accepting differences in race, religion or beliefs. As faculties sample stipulated, adherence to the human values can be considered among the constructive solutions in the direction of reducing the impact of negative implications that threaten national civilizations; the interviewed faculties' suggestions are of a great value.

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