

## **Social Impact of Digital Media: Growth Pattern of Facebook in the Arab World**

ABDUL-KARIM ZIANI<sup>1</sup>, MOKHTAR ELARESHI<sup>2</sup> & MAHA ALRASHID<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,3</sup>University of Bahrain, Bahrain

<sup>2</sup>University of Tripoli, Libya

An online survey is reported that was carried out with more than 385 social media users aged 18 and over and extracted from nine Arab countries; Bahrain, Egypt, Algeria, Libya, Iraq, Kuwait, Syria, Jordan and Yemen. This research focuses on the use of Facebook by a selected group called Open Media Library (OML) which have interests in social media use. The aim of this research is to understand how and why users utilise Facebook and what their attitudes and perceptions are towards the purposes of Facebook. It examines how OML users utilise information and knowledge posted on Facebook, their preferred topics and motivations and the gratifications they obtained. As stated in the literature, this research confirms that Facebook can be used/defined as communication, collaboration and resource-sharing, as well as for intercultural communication and intercultural relationships. Curiosity and escapism, communication and experience, friendship and entertainment and identification of news and events are the main motivations for using Facebook. The findings are discussed in terms of their implications for the future of social media and its impacts on intercultural communication, media use and intercultural relationships.

**Keywords:** Facebook, social media, Intercultural communication, relationships, culture, uses and gratifications, motivations, Arab youth

The last 20 years have witnessed huge developments in technology information, especially after the increase use of the Internet in the Arab world. New technologies linked to the Internet and smart phones have played a critical role as communication platforms that enable Arab users to communicate and share knowledge together. One of the most interesting applications used in the Arab world is Facebook (Salem & Mourtade, 2015). It has become a popular tool for communication between Arab people and an interesting subject for scientific research too. Academically, EBSCO has reported returning 634 articles on social media published by psychology journals between 2014 and 2015 (Blachnio, Przepiorka, Boruch, & Balakier, 2016). There is, however, a little research on the relationship between social media, mainly Facebook, and academic knowledge in the Arab world, on factors that influence Arab users' perspectives and on how this application has affected the way in which Arab users are communicating. In other words, there is a need for greater understanding of the effects of social media, such as Facebook, in the modern life of Arab users. In this regard, there has been some thought about what role the social "new" media are currently playing and what impact they will have on future social and educational developments in the Arab world (Blachnio et al., 2016).

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Correspondence to: Abdul-Karim Ziani, Department of Media, Tourism and Arts, University of Bahrain, Skheer, P.O. Box 32038, Bahrain. E-mail: makram2008@hotmail.com

Historically, in 1979, Tom Truscott and Jim Ellis created the Usenet, a worldwide discussion system that allowed users to post information. However, social media, as we now know, started in the late 1980s when Bruce and Susan Abelson founded Open Diary, an early system for social networking that brought together online daily writers into one community (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The growing ability of high Internet speed access further added to the popularity of social media, including Myspace (2003) and Facebook (2004). This has shaped the development of social media. The most recent addition to this glamorous grouping has been the virtual world or, as it was known, Lab's Second Life (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009). Terminologically, the rise in interactive digital media has catapulted online users from the old Web 1.0 to the highly interactive Web 2.0 world (Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011). Social media is a formal definition, known as Web 2.0 and User Generated Content (UGC). The term UGC was introduced in 2005 and used to describe the various forms of media content that are publicly available and created by end-users. UGC is also a term used to describe a new way in which software developers and users started to use the Internet, as a tool whereby content and applications are no longer created and published by individuals, but instead are continuously modified by all users (Android system or Google mission). Web 2.0 can be seen as a platform for the evolution of social media. UGC, on the other hand, can be seen as the sum of all ways in which online users utilize social media.

Facebook has allowed users to be formatted in specific/closed groups that have similar interests (Jung & Sundar, 2016). These groups can create certain goals and specific targets. Facebook provides the users of the group an area of freedom where they can have more of a mini-forum dialogue. It also allows users the opportunity to coordinate between each other to organize meeting through what is known as "Events", to invite members of these groups to the meetings and to know who attended the meeting and who did not. There are many groups on Facebook designed to focus on studying different disciplines including media and communication. Arab media users have created several groups to reach others throughout the world. There are an estimated 50 Arab academic groups on Facebook, such as the Egyptian Media Library for Research (18,263 members), Open Media Library (OML) (12,179 members), Media Research and Studies (7,150 members) and Platform for Media Professors in the World (4,242 members).

Facebook has given users in the Arab world opportunities to communicate about issues of their choosing and to reach others. For example, the OML Group (created and managed by Abdul-Karim Ziani, assistant professor at the University of Bahrain) has provided users with opportunities to obtain news and information regarding the media and academic field and, hence, to absorb different news regarding their own positions, locations and other matters. OML Group connects Arab media users and those who have similar interests in the field in addition to allowing them to use/share opinions and keep up-to-date with their academic and media work and their friends' lives (Menaceur, 2015).

Further, there has been an increased academic emphasis on the growth and use of social media sites in the Arab world and this has adopted a variety of theoretical and methodological perspectives (B<sup>3</sup>achnio et al., 2016; Gunter & Elareshi, 2016). What is clear is that in social media, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and other applications, use has become more widespread across the Arab world, not only as a toolkit for politics, but also as an important communications device for many ordinary people in their regular professional and private lives. In this context, there is a growing need to understand the long-term implications for Arab users.

## Literature Review

The role played by digital media technologies in providing their users with different news and information in the Arab world is not a surprise. However, huge investment in online infrastructures has seen them advance more rapidly in some parts of the Arab world than anywhere else (United Nations, 2012). Digital technology tracking has revealed that the annual rate of internet penetration growth in the Arab world between 2006 and 2015 was 52.2 per cent, a total of 123,172,132 of the population, with 49,400,000 Facebook subscribers (a 20.9 per cent penetration rate) (Cole, Suman, Schramm, Zhou, & Tang, 2012; Salem & Mourtade, 2015).

Statistically, in the Arab world, social media especially Facebook is by far the most popular social media in the region, as found by several recent studies, projects and research centers (Dennis, Martin, & Wood, 2013; Gunter & Elareshi, 2016; Salem & Mourtade, 2015; Salem, Mourtade, & Alshaer, 2014). Dennis et al. (2013) found that the majority (94 per cent) of social media users were active on the network, while more than half (52 per cent) of them used Twitter, followed by 46 per cent using Google+, 14 per cent Instagram and only 6 per cent LinkedIn. Arabian Gazette (2015) found that Facebook was one of the most popular social media networking tools in the Arab world, with two out of five users saying that Facebook was their favorite. Jordanian and Libyan users were top in preferring Facebook (63 per cent and 50 per cent respectively). A vast majority of Facebook users (89 per cent) said that they checked Facebook daily (Arabian Gazette, 2015). The largest Arab age groups were those in the early 20s and 30s ([www.socialbakers.com](http://www.socialbakers.com)). These statistics confirm the huge impact of the Facebook on society, the economy and business (Thompson, 2013; Thongmak, 2014). Others have examined the use of Facebook before, but the originality of this study lies in its exploration of Arab media and academia (OML Group) and in the need for understanding and exploring group users' attitudes, motivations and gratifications.

Several studies have analyzed the use of social media for learning and educational purposes (Dabner, 2012; Donlan, 2014; Junco, 2015; Sharma, Joshi, & Sharma, 2016). Some have found that Facebook a useful tool for academic purpose and a way to help students to fulfill their daily activities such as going to lectures and performing tasks. Qureshi et al. (2014) stated that through Facebook, students and academic staff can use/share many information of both an entertaining and educational level, materials and multi-media clips. Additional, others have investigated how users can utilize Facebook for educational purposes(e.g., Mazman & Usluel, 2010; Sanchez, Cortijo, & Javed, 2014). They found that there are three main theories of Facebook educational level: (i) Communication, e.g., between students and academic staff, facilitating classrooms discussion and providing information about resources and other stuff; (ii) collaboration such as users' joining other academic groups (in our case, OML Group) and sharing other academic projects and ideas; (iii) and sharing resources/materials, including activities such as exchanging multimedia resources, videos, audios, animated videos etc. (Mazman & Usluel, 2010; Manasijevic et al., 2016).

Theoretically, the background for this study is based on social-presence theory, social-processes perceptive (self-presentation) and motivation theory. These theories and perspectives are important in understanding such phenomena. In brief, we argue that socializing (those in the same field) and self-presentation represent the core reasons for using Facebook. Some studies have found that there are other motivations. For example, Brandtzæg et al. (2010) found that entertainment and leisure are the main motives for using Facebook. Other motives, as identified by Ellison et al. (2007), included that 'keeping up with others' lives' or integrating with other users (university students).

To create a classification definition for social media use, some theories and concepts in the field of media research were used, such as social-presence theory, social-processes perceptible (self-presentation) and motivation theory. Social-presence Theory (ST), according to Short, Williams and Christie (1976) indicated that “the degree of salience of the other person in the interaction and the consequent salience of interpersonal relationships”. Media differ in the degree of social presence, defined as the acoustic, visual and physical contact that can be achieved. They allow merging between two communication partners (Short, et al. 1976). They argue that the fewer the channel or codes offered by a medium, the less energy users devote to the existence of other social members and vice versa. In other words, the higher the social presence, the larger the social influence that communication partners have on each other’s behavior. Social presence is influenced by inter-personal and asynchronous communication.

According to Goffman (1959), in social processes or self-presentation, people engage in different performances to leave a positive impression on others. In so doing, individuals may attempt to emphasize their positive aspects and conceal any negative ones, thus editing their self-presentation so they can be perceived in an acceptable means. Self-presentation states that in any type of social interaction, individuals have the desire to control the impressions that other people form of them. This is maybe why people decide to create a personal online account/page to present themselves in cyberspace (Schau & Gilly, 2003) and to do other things such as looking for news, information or knowledge. Through Facebook, Arab users have been enabled to access information and thousands of profiles of other applications users, including academic information and studies. This procedure is quite unlike from the traditional practice, in which news and information regarding the academic field is held in libraries and research centers. However, constructing their own online profiles in social media (e.g., Facebook) enables users not only to control information, but also to repost and to share knowledge more openly with those users who have similar attitudes.

Another framework we used in this study was the uses and gratifications (U&G) paradigm that has been used to conceptualize and examine off and online users’ motivations (Kayany & Yelsma, 2000). As well as focusing on personal use and media choice (Katz, 1959). Users’ reasons have not only been measured to try to predict broad media-use choices, but more to understand why people may turn to one medium/site over another (Kayany & Yelsma, 2000).

This paradigm was used to explain the reasons why respondents choose a certain medium e.g., Facebook over another and to illuminate the needs that motivate respondents to use Facebook. The assumption of this paradigm is that users are goal-directed in their behavior and are aware of their needs. Cheung and Lee (2009: 1338) indicated that “purposive value, self-discovery, entertainment value, social enhancement and maintaining interpersonal connectivity are the key values (or needs) that are widely adopted to determine the use of virtual communities” (online).

Functionally, social media sites (in our case, Facebook) are applications that enable their users to connect by creating personal-information profiles, inviting friends and colleagues to have access to those profiles and sending/receiving instant messages between each other. These profiles can include any type of personal information such as photos, videos, audio files, blogs and short/long messages. In the Arab world, like elsewhere, social media are of very high popularity among young users (Bajnaid, 2016; Dennis, Martin, & Wood, 2014; Salem & Mourtade, 2015; Salem et al., 2014).

Facebook now has over 1.55 billion users, with 800 million Facebook messenger users (The Statistics Portal, 2016). The total number of Facebook users increased by 13 per cent from 2014 to 2015 as reported by zephoria.com (2015). Dahlstrom et al. (2011) found that found that 90 per cent of US students used Facebook and only 37 per cent used Twitter. According to Arab Social Media Report (2015) Facebook and WhatsApp are the most used social media platforms. Facebook is the most used social media channel on the aggregate level of the Arab world. Youth represents the majority of social media users with 67 per cent aged between 15 and 29 years old (Salem & Mourtade, 2014).

Educational institutions, such as universities and colleges, have also focused on developing programs and activities for students that rely on social media networking and the main factor affecting the formation of social networks is the need to connect a group of users, or “beneficiaries”, who have the same cognitive concerns (Junco, 2015; Thongmak, 2014). Use of Facebook in the Arab world offers an vital background for the social, emotional and knowledge needs of young Arab adults who spend most of their time on social media sites (Salem & Mourtade, 2015). Arab Social Media Report (2014) indicates that there are more than 135 million individuals using the Internet across the Arab world. This is coupled with a mobile penetration rate of around 110 per cent on a regional level and more than 71 million active users of social media sites. These figures are not surprising if we know that there are around 400 million mobile devices and millions of other Internet-connected devices used in the Arab world.

This paper examines the nature of the use of Facebook by OML Group, which places much of its emphasis on utilization of Facebook for education and communication purposes. We also examined the motivations respondents give for using Facebook and their perceptions and opinions of the information they obtain. The research questions were therefore concerned with exploring and perceiving Facebook in terms of education and communication.

RQ1: What are the demographic characteristics of the OML Group and how does it use Facebook?

RQ2: How do OML users present themselves on Facebook?

RQ3: What are the perceptions of OML Group regarding the effectiveness of using Facebook?

RQ4: Does OML associate different gratifications with using Facebook?

## **Methodology**

The data analyzed in this study was obtained from an online questionnaire administered using monkeysurvey.com. The questionnaire targeted the OML Group page. A random sample of Facebook users was drawn up with the aim of matching the research question. A set of statements concerning Facebook use, motivations, gratifications and behaviors was developed. Most of the questions were adopted from past studies bearing in mind the culture of the Arab world. The questionnaire comprised 18 questions and divided into two parts. The first set of questions was developed according to Likert-type items to assess the reasons for Facebook usage and motivations.

The second part contained data regarding users’ demographic variables, Facebook knowledge (“How do you know about Facebook?”), access (“Where do you access Facebook?”), time spent on Facebook (“How often do you use Facebook?”), frequency of social media usage (“How often do you use social media?”) and identification of topics followed (“What types of topics do you follow on Facebook?”). This paper will present findings for exploring OML Group uses, perceptions and motivations regarding Facebook.

The requirement for participating in this study was membership of OML Group. Respondents were asked to state how they knew about Facebook, where they surfed it, the time they spent on Facebook, how often they used other social media sites, the types of relationship they had on Facebook, whether they used real names or nicknames, the topics they followed on Facebook and their reasons and motives for using Facebook.

## Results

The results reported in this paper were drawn from a regional online survey administered by a group of academic staff, targeting users of the OML Group page. The survey fielding was conducted between June and September 2015 with respondents numbered at almost 374. Responses were received from all countries in the Arab region. The sample consisted primarily of OML Group usages as it was administered via an online survey. Out of 374 investigated users, 57.7 per cent were female and 42.3 per cent male, divided by age as follows: less than 20 years old (6.9 per cent), 21-30 (59 per cent), 31-40 (21.9 per cent) and more than 41 (12 per cent). Their education was measured, with 4.3 per cent of the sample being in high school, 35.6 per cent at university, 11.6 per cent having a diploma and 48.5 per cent having reached MA/PhD level. Regarding their status, 57.5 per cent of the sample was single, 40.8 per cent married and 1.7 per cent divorced. The native countries were as follows: Bahrain (27.7 per cent), Egypt (17.6 per cent), Algeria (14.6 per cent), Libya (14 per cent), Iraq (9.6 per cent), Kuwait (7.1 per cent), Syria (6.6 per cent), Jordan (2.2 per cent) and Yemen (0.5 per cent). This paper reported the answers from a selected number of questions, which were part of a larger survey.

### How Do You Know about Facebook?

When it comes to how respondents got to know about Facebook, more than half (53.8 per cent) said they knew it from their colleagues and friends, with the rest replying as follows: family (19 per cent), the internet (14.3 per cent) and media (10.9 per cent). The chi-square test revealed one significant difference among demographic groups, with those having reached MA/PhD level (54 per cent) more likely than the others (university level 33.1 per cent, diploma 10.8 per cent and high school 2.2 per cent) to say that they knew of Facebook via their colleagues or friends,  $X^2=20.821$ ,  $df=12$ ,  $p<0.05$ .

### Reported Places where Users Access Facebook

Until recently, internet users commonly used and accessed the Internet through their desktop computers or laptops. However, with the spread of mobile devices, the ways in which Arab users go online are varying. In this survey, Facebook users were asked in which location they used the Internet. The most common location was the home (81.6 per cent), followed by "everywhere" (9.9 per cent). But few respondents (less than 1.5 per cent) did so in public places, university cafés, workplaces and net cafés. These percentages show that respondents are more likely to connect to the Internet when at home than when they are in other places. These findings are consistent with of those found by some recent studies on Internet access, which indicate that around 88 per cent of Arab online users access the Internet from home, 56 per cent from work and only 9 per cent from school or university (Salem et al., 2014). There was one significant gender difference regarding places for surfing the Internet. Female respondents (60.3 per cent) were more likely than males (39.7 per cent) to surf the Internet

at home, while males (80 per cent) were more likely than females (20 per cent) to do so at universities, “everywhere” (55.6 per cent versus 44.4 per cent respectively), at work (75 per cent versus 25 per cent), cafés (75 per cent versus 25 per cent), net cafés (100 per cent versus 0 per cent)  $X^2=13.486$ ,  $df=6$ ,  $p<0.05$ . One explanation of different results is that Arab men are more likely to be outdoors during the day, while women are usually indoors.

### Time Spent on Facebook per Day

Frequency of Facebook usage was measured here. 36.1 per cent of respondents spent less than one hour daily on Facebook, while 23.5 per cent used it for more than 3 hours a day. Similar findings were found by Arab Social Media Report (2014). They found that 28 percent of their respondents stated that they spent between 3 to 4 hours on the Internet. Manasijević et al. (2016) found that 48.7 per cent of Facebook users use Facebook 2 to 5 times daily. Those aged 21-30 (67.1 per cent) were more likely than the other groups, such as those aged less than 20 (17.8 per cent), those 41 and over (8.2 per cent) and those 31-40 (6.8 per cent) to spend less than one hour using Facebook,  $X^2=32.509$ ,  $df=9$ ,  $p<0.000$ . University student users (71.2 per cent) were more likely than the other groups to spend less than one-hour browsing Facebook (15.1 per cent MA/PhD level, 9.6 per cent high school and 4.1 per cent diploma), while MA/PhD respondents (48.9 per cent) were more likely than those at university (29.8 per cent), those with diplomas (19.1 per cent) and those at high-school level (2.1 per cent) to spend 1 to 2 hours browsing Facebook,  $X^2=80.765$ ,  $df=9$ ,  $p<0.000$ . These findings are consistent with Manasijević et al.(2016) who found that Serbian users spent an average of 2.76 hours daily on social media, Facebook. Thompson (2013) indicates that college students spend most of their time on different social media sites.

### Reported Use of Different Social Media Sites

The most popular daily activities that respondents do when they are on social media sites is use Facebook (60.3 per cent), followed by Instagram (40 per cent), YouTube (32.1 per cent) and Google+ (20 per cent). This finding was not surprising as Facebook was found to be the most popular social network in the Arab world, followed by Google+, YouTube and Twitter (Dennis et al., 2013; Salem & Mourtade, 2015; Salem et al., 2014). There were a number of significant differences regarding the use of different social media websites. Such differences emerged for Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Those aged 21-30 (55 per cent) were more likely than the other groups (those aged 31-40 (29 per cent), 41 and over (15 per cent), less than 20yrs (1.3 per cent)) to use Facebook,  $X^2=40.633$ ,  $df=6$ ,  $p<0.000$ . Those aged 21-30 (67 per cent) were also more likely than the others (those aged less than 20 (22.2 per cent), 31-40 (11.1 per cent), 41 and over (0.0 per cent)) to use Twitter,  $X^2=21.254$ ,  $df=9$ ,  $p=0.012$ . Those aged 21-30 (67 per cent) were more likely than the others (31-40 (16.4 per cent), less than 20 (14 per cent) 41 and over (4.1 per cent)) to use YouTube,  $X^2=26.354$ ,  $df=9$ ,  $p=0.002$ . There was also a significant education-level difference in using Twitter, with MA/PhD respondents (66 per cent) being more likely to use Twitter than others (university (19.4 per cent), diploma (14 per cent) and high school (1.3 per cent)),  $X^2=82.558$ ,  $df=6$ ,  $p=0.000$ . Education level was also found to be significant among the respondents, with university respondents (52.1 per cent) being more likely than others to use YouTube (MA/PhD students (36 per cent), diploma (7 per cent) and high school (6 per cent)),  $X^2=31.105$ ,  $df=9$ ,  $p=0.000$ .



## Real Name vs. Nickname

One of the purposes of this paper was to check whether respondents use their real name or a nickname in communicating with others. The majority of respondents (82 per cent) indicated that they used their real names to communicate, while few (18 per cent) did not do so. When the chi-square test was run, several significant differences emerged. As expected, females (81.4 per cent) were more likely than males (18.6 per cent) to utilize nicknames on their Facebook page,  $X^2=16.379$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p=0.000$ . Arab women are expected to use nicknames, rather than their real names, for traditional cultural reasons. For example, Aljasir (2015) indicates that in Arab Islamic culture (e.g., Saudi Arabia), social norms assist Saudi men to be proud of their names and heritage, while this is believed inappropriate for women. Those aged 21-30 (55.2 per cent) were more likely than those aged 31-40 (24.2 per cent), 41 and over (13 per cent) and less than 20 (7.7 per cent) to use real names on their Facebook page,  $X^2=7.614$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p=0.055$ .

Furthermore, respondents were asked about their Facebook profiles and how they identified themselves on Facebook. Nearly half of the respondents (46.3 per cent) used their own photos, while (31.8 per cent) used other people's photos. Only 17 per cent used expressive names in their profiles and 4.9 per cent used no photos. Male respondents (67.3 per cent) were more likely than females (33 per cent) to use their own photos, while females (86 per cent) were more likely than males (14 per cent) to use other people's photos. Females (69 per cent) were also more likely than males (31 per cent) to use no photos at all and to use expressive names (69 per cent vs. 31 per cent respectively),  $X^2=77.025$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p=0.000$ . These findings are consistent with Aljasir (2015) and Moaddel (2013) who found that men are more likely than women to use their real photos in their profiles. Those aged 21-30 (51 per cent) were more likely than those aged 31-40 (28 per cent), those 41 and over (17 per cent) and those less than 20 (5 per cent) to use their own photos on their Facebook page,  $X^2=25.330$ ,  $df=9$ ,  $p=0.003$ . MA/PhD respondents (56 per cent) were more likely than the others to use their own photos (university respondents 30.3 per cent, diploma 10 per cent and high-school level 5 per cent),  $X^2=23.957$ ,  $df=9$ ,  $p=0.004$ .

## Topics Most Followed on Facebook

A list of 15 topics was evaluated by participants in terms of their perceptions. These topics were selected to cover a different type of programs and it was essential to investigate which respondents were more/less likely to view certain topics as legitimate types of program. Almost all respondents stated that the type of topics they followed were social topics (71.2 per cent), cultural (64.6 per cent), scientific (61.3 per cent), politics (48.9 per cent), religion (46.4 per cent), arts (36.5 per cent), science and technology (36.3 per cent), women (27.5 per cent), services (26.1 per cent), sports (21.2 per cent) and children (20.1 per cent).

## Purpose of Using Facebook

Further analyses were performed to examine the reasons for using Facebook. A total of 72.5 per cent of investigated respondents stated that the most important purpose for using Facebook was to communicate with colleagues and friends, while few respondents (6.4 per cent) used Facebook for research and study purposes, for communicating with universities and other organizations (4.5 per cent) and for communicating with the opposite gender



(1.9 per cent). These results are consistent with those studies found that most Arab online users, and those elsewhere, use social media to communicate with friends and families, to get news and information on various issues, for professional uses, for job hunting, for searching and sharing opinions or for political activities (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2011; Manasijević et al., 2016; Reuben, 2008; Wong, Kwan, Leung, & Wang, 2014). Those aged 21-30 (62.3 per cent) were more likely than the other groups (those aged 31-40 19.1 per cent; 41 and over 10.2 per cent and less than 20, 8.3 per cent) to use Facebook to communicate with colleagues and friends,  $\chi^2=22.677$ ,  $df=12$ ,  $p=0.031$ . MA/PhD participants (45 per cent) were more likely than the others to communicate with colleagues and friends via Facebook (university 40 per cent, diploma 11 per cent and high-school level 5.1 per cent),  $\chi^2=33.586$ ,  $df=12$ ,  $p=0.001$ . In this regard, research has shown that the majority of college students (67 per cent to 75 per cent) use social media sites (Junco, 2015). Statue was also tested here and found that single respondents (60.5 per cent) were more likely to communicate with colleagues and friends via Facebook than were others (married 40 per cent, divorced 0.0 per cent),  $\chi^2=38.480$ ,  $df=8$ ,  $p=0.000$ .

### Motivations for Using Facebook

Participants who used Facebook 'daily' or 'often' were asked to clarify their motivations for using Facebook and to indicate the gratifications derived from it. There were 21 motivated statements associated with using Facebook. When analyzing the motivations, the scores were as follows: "to communicate with family and friends" (90.7 per cent), "to gain new experience and information beneficial to me" (88.5 per cent), "to exchange views with others via discussion" (86.6 per cent), "to obtain information about the world I'm living in" (85.6 per cent), "to communicate with people I cannot communicate with directly" (83.8 per cent), "to share photos, themes and passages with others" (72.4 per cent), "to post my personal activities" (71.1 per cent), "for entertainment" (68.7 per cent), "to identify events and news fashions" (65 per cent), "to get rid of boredom and fill leisure time" (64.6 per cent), "to discover the world of social media" (63.9 per cent), "it is pleasant to use" (60.5 per cent), "to identify new goods and services in markets" (58.8 per cent), "part of the routine I do when I'm online" (55.2 per cent), "to make friends of those who have not found me" (43.9 per cent), "because of curiosity" (42 per cent), "to forget about worries away from my family and friends" (35.5 per cent), "so I don't feel lonely and alienated" (32.5 per cent), "to escape from everyday life problems" (31.8 per cent), "because all around me use it" (31 per cent), "I use it when I'm frustrated" (22.8 per cent).

Factor analysis through the principal component analysis (PCA) with Varimax Rotation (VR) was run to the 21 overall motivations to develop a smaller number of factor variables for subsequent multi-variate data. Further statistics were run such as the Reliability (Cronbach's alpha), Bartlett's test of sphericity, the KMO value, which indicated that the data were suitable to run the factor analysis. Four factors emerged in this analysis. Table 1 below reveals the findings of the factor analysis with Means of the motivation, Variances, the reliability, Bartlett's test and KMO value.

Table 1 Factor analysis of motivations for using Facebook

	Factors				
	M	1	2	3	4
F1: Curiosity and Escaping	3.21				
-Because of curiosity	2.97	.525			
-To escape from everyday life problems	3.26	.818			
-So I don't feel lonely and alienation	3.29	.850			
-Because all around me use it	3.31	.653			
-I use it when I'm frustrated	3.59	.771			
-As part of routine I do when I'm online	2.79	.615			
-Forgetting about the worries away from my family and friends	3.26	.719			
F2: Communication and Experience	2.01				
-To communicate with family & friends	1.68		.623		
-To gain new experiences & info beneficial to me	1.73		.689		
-To post my personal activities	2.31		.606		
-To share photos, themes and passages with others	2.24		.626		
-To obtain information about the world I'm living in	1.82		.700		
-To exchange views with others via discussion	1.85		.734		
-To communicate with people I cannot communicate with them directly	1.89		.640		
-It is pleasant to use	2.56		.440		
F3: Friendship and Entertainment	2.57				
-To make friends of those who have not found around me	2.92			.571	
-For entertainment	2.35			.805	
-To get rid of the boredom & fill leisure time	2.43			.734	
F4: Identification of News and Events	2.47				
-To identify events & news fashions	2.48				.733
-To identifying new goods & services in markets	2.54				.773
-To discover the world of social media	2.39				.412
Eigen values		6.91	2.67	1.36	1.23
% Variance, total 58.01%		32.94	12.71	6.48	5.87
<b>Reliability (Cronbach's alpha score %) average (.896)</b>		.87	.84	.74	.68
Bartlett's test of sphericity, 2322.040, $P < .000$					
KMO value, .874, $P < .000$					

Extraction: PCA. Rotation Method: VR, Kaiser (Eigenvalue > 1), Mini loading:  $\geq .40$  on factor. Higher mean scores indicate high agreement, while lower scores indicate less agreement. Items measured on a 5-point scale (1 strong disagree and 5 strong agree)

The four factors solutions were: F1, called *Curiosity and Escaping*. Seven motivated items dealing with this factor were loaded, with mean scale 3.21, on a 5-point scale). F2, called *Communication and Experience*, was defined by eight items (M=2.01). F3, called *Friendship and Entertainment*, was defined by three items (M=2.57). F4, called *Identification of News and Events*, was also expressed by three items (M=2.47). These outcomes offered a clear orderly solution that established correlation coefficients between these items. Variables can be clearly clustered into these that were mostly motivated to use Facebook for the above reasons.

Participants with different demographic groups displayed different motivations for utilizing Facebook. Mann-Whitney U and the Kruskal-Wallis H tests were run to indicate any significant differences. There were no marked gender differences in the motivated items, apart from two exceptions. One was "posting my personal activities", with female respondents (58.3 per cent) being more likely than males (40.7 per cent) to indicate this motivation as highest agreement,  $U(318) = 10703.500$ ,  $P < .05$  (2-tailed). However, males (62.3 per cent) were more likely than females (37.7 per cent) to indicate that they "make

friends of those who have not found them”,  $U(310) = 9543.500$ ; exact  $P < .005$ , 2-tailed. These results are consistent with those found by Gourdeau (2015) and others who found that Facebook application may be more attractive to females than to males and that females are more active on Facebook than are males.

## Discussion

This study aims to explore different patterns of Facebook usage and the motivations associated with users' perceptions and opinions. The outcomes of the study revealed several interesting findings. It is evident that developments in the use of online social media in the Arab world form part of a wide sphere of technological revolution spanning the whole Arab world. This was started by the growth in the use of online media, e.g., reading, listening and watching different media online, in addition to the ability of people to use e-mails and chat-rooms, and these technologies quickly became adopted as tools of everyday life, including political activities, especially with the greater ability to buy and use smart phones via broadband and WiFi connections (Ziani & Elareshi, 2016). The latter was more noticeable around mid-2000. It has also been noted that the online world can be used and produced by anyone who has basic computer and Internet skills. In other words, to be an active user does not require much knowledge. Interestingly, in this world, some users attract more followers and online friends than do others (Lawrence, Sides, & Farrell, 2010; Wu, Hofman, Mason, & Watts, 2011). This is true regardless of whether the users are specialists in certain fields or whether they write about celebrity, politics, education, fashion and lifestyle issues. Some users can achieve an almost celebrity-like status if they command the regular attention of millions of followers (Gunter, 2014; Hindman, 2010).

It is worth to mention that social media in the Arab world have numerous positive aspects in enhancing the people's life, in addition to enhancing business profitability, the education system and governmental interactions with the public (Khraim, 2016). Regarding social media perceptions, however, Arab users have shown a lack of trust in the credibility of social media content, with some users indicating that social media has some negative effects on local cultures and traditions, as cited by Arab Social Media Report (2015). For example, 81 per cent of surveyed users said social media sites become everyday platform for Arabs to communicate with each other. The results of this study confirm such findings. Most respondents knew about Facebook via colleagues and friends and actually used Facebook to communicate with them. These 'social media sites give users the opportunity to share stories and activities with others' (Christy M.K Cheung, Chiu, & Lee, 2011: 1340).

In addition, this study confirms that the growth of social media in the Arab world is not limited to younger or new generation, with even those aged 40 and over (professors) increasingly using new media for different purposes. It is, hence, rational to state that new media (e.g., Facebook) can be seen as a revolutionary new platform or trend. For example, although respondents indicated that they used Facebook daily in their lives, they did spend time on other social media networks, e.g., Instagram, Snapchat and WhatsApp. This result is consistent with Manasijevic et al. (2016) and Thompson (2013) who found that users use Facebook 2 to 5 times daily, especially university students.

It appears that some social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, YouTube and WhatsApp) are highly utilized by respondents, and these platforms can be utilized for communicating and sharing knowledge (Balakrishnan & Shamim, 2013; Kaya & Bicen, 2016). Surprisingly, some gender differences emerged regarding self-disclosure. Furthermore, the way in which respondents present themselves on Facebook varies. Most use their real names to communicate with others, while some do not. In most Arab conservative cultures,

surprisingly, female users are more likely than males to use their real names. Most respondents also use their own photos in their profiles, with male respondents being more likely than females to do so.

Further, the interaction of social media platforms is changing the way in which people communicate. The results of this research highlighted several implications for understanding why/how respondents use Facebook platform. Our analysis reveals four motivations for respondents to use Facebook: curiosity and escaping, communication and experience, friendship and entertainment and identification of news and events. This result is consistent with previous virtual world studies. With online social networking sites, social interaction and connection are the objectives. These platforms help people to know about events, social parties and others (Cheung et al., 2011). These findings support the assumption that media are competing with other platforms (offline media) for attention, use and selection. Similar findings are cited by Aljasir (2015).

Regarding the purposes for using Facebook, this study found that users use Facebook as a communication tool to communicate with friends and family members. They use Facebook for gaining new experience and beneficial information, for exchanging views with others, for entertainment, for sharing different things and for following specific friends who have similar interests. These findings are consistent with several studies such as Alemdar and Köker (2013) and Alhabash, Park, Kononova, Chiang and Wise (2012).

## Conclusion

Social media sites (e.g., Facebook and Twitter) have been utilized differently in the Arab world. This is dependent on whether users are able to get access to the Internet, on their efforts and their locations. The more stable parts of the Arab world, for example, such as the GCC, have closely observed the changes taking place in less stable regions and the mediating role that digital-communications technologies have played. There is, therefore, a need for a deeper understanding of the power of social networks and the use of this platform. This understanding must not grow out of prejudice or from anecdotal experience alone. It is best based on systematic and objective empirical inquiry and evidence. The status of such evidence, and the establishment of an effective research agenda for the future are desperately needed. It is the aim of this paper to facilitate this process.

As a consequence, many groups on Facebook, ranging from open to closed groups, such as the academic field of media, are composed of individuals who have convergent interests and complementary roles within these communities. Creating such groups on Facebook allows the possibility to communicate with others who share interests or certain disciplines, to share files, photos and videos and to hold immediate talks. Given the evidence showing how social media became an integral part of Arab Facebook users' daily lives, it can be concluded that in line with previous studies, our respondents use Facebook for communications with friends and family. However, social media have also offered their users virtual world within which they can overcome different aspects of their cultural barriers and societies and this is especially so for Arab women by engaging them in different activities.

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**Dr. Abdul-Karim Ziani** is an assistant professor in the Department of Media, Tourism and Arts at Bahrain University, Bahrain. He is the author of *Conflict of Wills: Gaddafi's Image in the Washington Post Newspaper in the Era of President Reagan* (Talata Publishing House, 2007), and *American Press: Developing, Philosophy and Treatment* (Talata Publishing House, 2005). Among his special areas of interest are international political communication, new media, politics, journalism and news coverage.

**Dr. Mokhtar Elareshi** is a senior lecturer in the Department of Media and Communication, University of Tripoli, Libya. He was former head of the Department of Media at Azzaytuna University, Libya during 2003-2006. Dr. Elareshi is the author of the book *News Consumption in Libya* (Cambridge Scholar, 2013), co-author of *The Future of News Media in the Arab World* (LAP, 2014) and co-editor of *Social Media in the Arab World* (I.B Tauris, 2016). His research interests include news consumption, young adults' habits, new media and satellite television.

**Dr. Maha Alrashid** is an assistant professor in the Department of Media, Tourism and Arts, University of Bahrain. She is also the Director of Scientific Publication Centre. Her areas of research interest are media, strategic communication, digital Public Relations and communication management.