

The Impact of Social Media Networks on Public Opinion in the United Arab Emirates

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Abstract

Social media networks play a significant role in shaping the way people communicate in different societies around the world. It also highlights and reflects the values and principles upon which the ethical customs of a certain society are built. This research aims to identify the impact of social media networks on public opinion in the United Arab Emirates. The main hypothesis of this research is that social media networks have a significant impact on public opinion in the United Arab Emirates. The use of the functional analysis approach in this research comes through revealing the function of scientific laws and theories related to explaining the roles of social networking sites in directing public opinion and influencing the public to achieve quick goals, with occasional use of the comparative approach to benefit from Arab and international experiences in this field. The research reached several results, the most important of which is that family is a mirror on which the repercussions of social media networks are reflected, and that social media networks constitute an essential way through which family members interact and communicate. The researcher reached several recommendations, the most prominent of which is that parents should supervise how their children use and interact with social media networks, and that social institutions shall raise the cultural and social awareness among families regarding the use of social media networks in their daily life. The researcher also recommended that specialized centres shall be established to deal with any negative repercussions of social media networks, thus contributing to the optimal use of social media networks among families and society members.

Keywords: Family, Public Opinion, Social Media Networks, United Arab Emirates.

Introduction

Modern technological developments have brought about a qualitative shift and a real revolution in the world of communication, and at the heart of this revolution is the Internet that exceeds the limits of scientific expectations regarding the role it can play in people's lives and in the lives of human societies. It is not only a means of achieving communication

between people and transferring information, it is also the backbone of political and social life. In light of the profound transformations and rapid changes experienced by Arab society in general and the Emirati society in particular, in various aspects of cultural, scientific, economic, political and social life imposed by the nature of contemporary circumstances, the family is the most interactive social segment, and is always affected by the transformations and changes that are taking place within different societies. This makes social networking sites a qualitative breakthrough not only in the field of communication between individuals and groups, but also in the results and impact of this communication, as it has reached a point where it has become one of the most important factors of social change locally and globally (Algahtani, 2016. P.44).

The increasing number of subscribers to these digital networks, especially Arab youth, has led to an increase in their influence and role in society and the current socio-cultural transformations, and to an increase in their level of competition with traditional media in forming public opinion on many issues. Social media networks have been able to highlight the current events in the world more effectively than radio, television, and other media. Family members, as a unit within society, have also been influenced by these transformations. It is scientifically proven that family is the mirror on which the values and customs of social media networks are reflected. Therefore, any investigation of social media networks shall take into consideration family and the role it plays in society (Coyne et al., 2012).

Research Objectives

The general objective of this research is to identify the impact of social media networks on public opinion in the United Arab Emirates. There are other sub-objectives that it also attempt to achieve, including

- Identify the role of social media networks in enhancing family relationships in the United Arab Emirates.
- Identify the factors that enhanced the performance of these networks in relation to their influence on the family level of awareness.

Research Questions

This main question of this research is: what is the identify the impact of social media networks on public opinion in the United Arab Emirates.

This central question raises a group of sub-questions, the most important of which are:

- What is the role of social media networks in enhancing family relationships in the United Arab Emirates?
- What are the factors that enhanced the performance of these networks in relation to their influence on the family level of awareness?

Research Hypotheses

- Social media networks has a significant impact on public opinion in the United Arab Emirates.
- Social media networks play an essential role in enhancing family relationships in the United Arab Emirates.
- The government of the United Arab Emirates has taken the lead in making the most beneficial consequences of social media networks on family and the whole society.

Research Importance

The importance of this research lies in the fact that modern means of communication have changed the lives of individuals, families, and groups. This impact has included personal, psychological, social, moral, political, and economic life. Specialized researchers tend to study social and cultural changes and address modern means of communication as an effective environment in this change.

The importance of the research is also evident in the fact that electronic public opinion expresses all segments that possess this means or technological tool for expression, communication and discussion. The spread of the use of the internet and its development through e-mail, forums, and the emergence of social sites is the essence of virtual communication. Communication expresses the existence of an interactive relationship between a sender and a receiver, meaning that this relationship is not limited only to transferring a set of information, but rather through it “expressing opinions... and sharing and exchanging ideas.” It is a relationship built on the ability to understand and accept the way the future constructs its reality. Hence recognizing the difference.

The importance of the research is also evident in the fact that social networks have a role in expressing all trends and ideas within society in light of a dialogue whose basis is equal between the individual, the elite, and the masses. The elite no longer exercises its usual role in formulating, forming, and mobilizing public opinion after the development of the process of information flow and production. The individual has a role in producing information and formulating the media message. This revealed an attractive media environment used by many activists after the number of participants and the size of issues and interests expanded after the so-called Arab Spring, as the UAE ranked first in the Middle East region in terms of the percentage of internet users compared to the population in the Middle East region. The percentage reached 71% compared to the population, according to a recent report compiled by Service Plan Middle East, the largest independent agency group in Europe and the third largest independent agency group in the world.

Research Problem

Social media networks are a qualitative shift in the media industry and the exchange of ideas in societies. However, the optimal use of these means varies from one society to another, depending on its maturity, level of education, and the presence of other channels and means of expression. The use of these networks in our society is still not mature. Therefore, it cannot be relied upon as a tool for measuring public opinion or a basis for making a political decision. Therefore, this research highlights the extent to which the media and social networking sites have been able to influence the direction of public opinion and family relations in the United Arab Emirates and some of the experiences of Arab countries in general.

Literature Review

McGregor (2019) argued that public opinion is a socially constructed image of the public that is shaped by the procedures and sources of the media from which it is derived as well as how it is interpreted by those who are tasked with analysing and applying it. McGregor looks at how social media affects the public opinion through news and how these behaviours influence journalistic practises. Therefore, study consumer behaviour is important (Ahmed et al., 2021, 2021a, 2022d, 2023b; Alsharif et al., 2021c, 2022). McGregor interviewed journalists and made a content analysis of news articles on the 2016 US election to shed light on changing practises that guide how social media is used to reflect public opinion. The press covered

online feelings and trends as a type of public opinion that serves the horserace narrative and complements survey polling, despite the fact that social media users do not accurately represent the voters. Journalists used social media to reflect public opinion, especially in the wake of media events such as debates. These practises are ingrained in their daily work routines. Journalists were concerned about an overreliance on social media, such as their own carefully curated Twitter feeds, to inform coverage. Conceptions of public opinion are influenced by hybrid information flows between journalists, campaigns, and social media firms (McGregor, 2019).

Helmy (2003) discussed the impact of online communication on social relationships in Qatari society to a sample of young people of both genders, the number of which was (471). The study aims to identify the psychological, social, and cultural dimensions of the Internet as a means of electronic communication. It is an update in society on young people's social relationships with their families and their social interaction with their acquaintances and friends, in addition to its attempt to highlight the cultural characteristics of the Internet. The researcher relied on the social survey approach, and the questionnaire tool was used to collect the relevant data.

Jamal Sanad Al-Suwaidi presents a modernist reading of social media in his book "Social Media and Its Role in Future Transformations from Tribe to Facebook," where its importance stems from the fact that social media has recently become a radical change within the mechanisms of "political and social movement in large areas."

In his book, Dr. Al-Suwaidi also reveals the enormous effects that the means of communication have had on modern life, such as the increase in the strength of civil society, as it has taken it as a platform to spread and exercise its role beyond the local restrictions that some governments and authorities place on the activities of these institutions within countries, as well as companies and institutions benefiting from these means, such as: airlines, insurance companies, banks, investment and real estate institutions, and car sales, whether in stimulating their sales or improving their mental image, as most institutions in the world are now dealing with these means in real time to highlight the public's attitudes towards them. The author says: "... In addition to benefiting from the influence of these means, which are considered an influential channel of communication among young people, for example, the channels of communication between the Dubai Shopping Festival and the public did not stop, and these channels diversified according to the diversity of the audience groups, and were updated to keep pace with technical developments." The "Dubai Events and Promotion Establishment" believes that the means of communication are the most appropriate to represent the link between it and the youth of the festival's audience, as it enables it to promote commercially, explain the festival's activities, and identify the needs of visitors. The establishment also uses means of communication to hold the festival's auction competition on the website. Facebook and Instagram contribute to supporting the photo aspect of the festival through photography competitions. On Twitter, the establishment provides daily updates of information, news, and daily activities related to the festival.

Dr. Fatima Hassan (2012) asserted that In a relatively traditional society, such as the society of the United Arab Emirates and other Arab Gulf societies, traditional means of communication depend on the innate sense of individuals and their direct interaction and communication with each other. Social media has become the necessary alternative for the traditional communication with others. Although traditional culture is deeply rooted in Emirati society, especially among older generations, modern means of communication have begun to threaten that culture, especially since it has already occupied a large space in the

lives of new family members and generations, leaving little for traditional societal culture to continue. The influence of modern social media can be observed on national, social, and even religious occasions, such as Fridays, Ramadan, and holidays. It strongly competed with traditional means of communication, and overcame them in communication between people, sending greetings and congratulations, and receiving news. In the strong competition between new means of communication, there is little left for traditional means that began to vanish and decrease. The influence of traditional means of communication has become limited due to the fact that many people have turned away from it in favor of its strong competitor: modern means of communication.

La-Shammari (2017) aimed to identify the reasons that lead to subscribing to Facebook and Twitter, as well as to identify the nature of social relationships through these sites, and to reveal the positive and negative effects resulting from the use of these sites. It was concluded that the use of Facebook and Twitter has several positive effects, the most important of which are intellectual openness and cultural exchange, while the lack of family interaction is one of the most important negative effects. There is also a positive correlation between the reasons of using these sites and the dimensions of the nature of social relations. The results demonstrated the existence of a positive correlation between the method of use, its causes, the nature of social relationships, and its pros and cons.

Research Methodology

The choice of the approach used in this study is based on the problem that has been identified. Since this study seeks to collect information about users of social networking sites and how this use affected the direction of public opinion. This research attempts to explain and clarify the various events and situations that express a phenomenon or group of phenomena. The task is to analyse the reality in which these events and incidents take place and highlight the apparent causes of those events, with the aim of reaching useful logical conclusions that contribute to solving problems or removing obstacles or ambiguity surrounding some phenomena, in order to develop ideas, new information and behaviour models by using the statistical analysis approach that aims to give a horizontal and vertical view of the real results in this section by photographing and documenting current facts and realities and paying attention to studying the audience of recipients by describing the size and composition of this audience and the motives that made it influence and be affected by social networking sites.

The use of the functional analysis approach in this research comes through revealing the function of scientific laws and theories related to explaining the roles of social networking sites in directing public opinion and influencing the public in order to achieve quick goals, with occasional use of the comparative approach to benefit from Arab and international experiences in this field.

Discussion

Social Media Networks and Human Relations

There is no doubt that the tremendous development in modern communication technology has changed many patterns in people's lives, with the latter having contributed to many issues that are even related to human relations. Internet technology, for example, is an advanced form of development. The second generation of the Internet emerged and overturned many concepts and made many services available through its various means, the most important of which are online social networking sites. It is a phenomenon that has emerged over the past

five years and has developed from the beginning of its appearance to the present day to become one of the most widely used sites on the Internet, as it has turned into an alternative to various traditional activities of the past through the interaction of a very large number of users, so people have begun to spend a large amount of time with others who exchange with them. They share the same interest and share the same space, and with this tangible increase in the use of these sites from various categories, they have multiplied and diversified, providing a huge number of services that vary from one site to another (Sinanan, 2017).

“MySpace,” “Facebook,” “LinkedIn,” “Twitter,” and others have appeared. Although this development reflects a technological trend that has provided many positives to the user; On the other hand, it has overturned many concepts, especially enjoyment, leading to the raising of a number of issues, including the issue of privacy, social isolation, and identity, in addition to the potential effects on the system of social relations. However, it should be noted that the rapid development witnessed in the field of social networking via the Internet has created a kind of disagreement on the boundaries of these networks and their characteristics. This is what can be seen through the differences between researchers, for example, in classifying the site “YouTube” between a social networking site or a video sharing site (Al-Shammari, 2008).

Given the importance of mass communication means, their effective role in society, and the strength of their influence on individuals, it was necessary for it to devote itself to serving and developing society. To achieve this goal, it must have a set of ethical principles that guarantee the correction of its course. For about three decades, the field of media and communication has been subject to a set of influences, the most notable of which are: the impact of the technology has deeply affected it, and the impact of the dominance of the economy, culture, and market democracy that have destabilized its principles. Information has often become viewed as an industry and a tool for commerce. The importance of responsible ethical discourse has emerged to defend the independence of the media by raising objective and balanced performance. Ethical principles also seek to preserve the principles of media pluralism (Atieno, 2009).

The Impact of Social Media on Family and Societal Culture of the UAE

The United Arab Emirates, as one of the most contemporary societies of the world, was highly affected by the global social revolution. For several decades, it has witnessed a great interest in the field of transformation into a technical society based on taking advantage of the advantages offered by communication technology in a digital manner. The UAE sought assistance from modern technology in all fields to keep pace with the developments that have been witnessed by all countries around the world. That’s how it does not find itself isolated from the rest of the countries of the world. The modern communications and technology revolution has provided what is known as the virtual policy, which is represented by the increased spread of the phenomenon of personal blogs, and some social networking sites such as: Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, etc., which are the means and mechanisms that enable a large number of citizens around the world, the majority of whom are university and school students, to express their opinions and demands and try to obtain their rights that have been violated or stolen through social media networks (Fatima, 2017).

Social media plays an important role in establishing a new family and societal culture that depends on modern technology and the tremendous progress it has achieved in the field of communication between people, such that it has become an important factor, not only in the lives of individuals, but also families. There is no doubt that communication methods and

patterns are an important part of the culture of any society. Modern means of communication have succeeded, in record time, in establishing new ways of communication between people, so that traditional methods of communication have been marginalized, especially among new generations. New social media means such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Skype, and other means of communication are easy and available in the hands of every person who realizes the importance of this new style of communication in serving his life purposes and communicating with others in a time when traditional means of communication have become slow or expensive in many cases (Nicolescu, 2016).

Social media networks and family relationships in the United Arab Emirates

There is no doubt that social media networks have become one of the basic distinguishing features of this era, with the profound effects that its means and platforms have left on family and society, and with the unconventional rules it have created for communication between people and the transmission of information, news, pictures, and videos, transforming the world that was described in the recent past and with the beginnings of a technical revolution as a “small village” to a “tiny house” thanks to the wide spread of various text and visual communication media, which have become the main concern of a large segment of people, most of whom are young people (Schroeder, 2018).

Family, as the cornerstone of society is critical in this field as it is a mirror on which the repercussions of social media networks are reflected. The way families consume media has changed significantly during the last ten years. A family would typically pop some popcorn and gather around the family television set in the past. In many ways, the media today are all-consuming and all-encompassing. Families can watch television together while also using other technologies, such as texting, listening to music on their Ipods, downloading stuff from the Internet, conversing with pals online, and checking Facebook to see what people are up to (Simpson, 2006).

The media explosion may have altered how families consume media and the impact it can have on family dynamics and individual outcomes. While some people may believe that media influences are tearing people and families apart, others argue that media has become a crucial component of everyday family life and can have both positive and negative effects on how effectively families function. Researchers have demonstrated that, despite any negative consequences, media does not necessarily have to vie for adolescents’ time and attention with their families. In fact, parents and teenagers frequently engage in media activities together (Sim & Lee, 2011).

Family systems theory contends that interactions within a family create an open and ongoing system that is continuously influenced by the environment, which in this case would include media influences. The majority of the research that has been done on media effects concentrates on the results of individual media use interact with family and society use. In conclusion, media has been proven to have both positive and negative effects on both individuals and families (Soldatova & Rasskazova, 2016).

The impact of social media networks on public opinion

Social media has influenced how the general public feels about political issues. Social media has developed into a potent instrument for influencing how people think about political issues because it enables people to share facts and ideas quickly and easily. For instance, social media significantly influenced public perception about the candidates and their programmes during the 2016 US presidential election. others were able to post news stories, films, and

other materials about the candidates via social media, which in turn affected how others perceived them. Social media has been utilised as a potent tool by politicians, marketers, businesses, companies, and even people to achieve their aims once it became clear that social media has the most impact on public opinion of any type of media (Chan et al., 2012).

Social media usage in public opinion has a wide range of goals that vary depending on the situation. However, they can be divided into two broad goals

1. Changing an undesirable condition by fostering a collective opinion that would enable the populace to band together to voice their opinions on social or political issues and launch social movements.
2. Fostering an optimistic perception of the brand or business in the Public's mind.

Social media has grown to be the biggest influence on public opinion since the technological revolution revolutionised our way of life and the way we exchange knowledge.

What a person learns from the behaviours and knowledge existing in their immediate environment shapes their consciousness, personality, and thought pattern (H-Alsharif et al., 2020, 2021a, 2021b). This environment consists of their friends, family, school, places of worship, religious activities, and any other setting in which they can engage in social interaction and learn from others. Face-to-face communication or any artistic or cultural medium, such as music, film, or books, can facilitate such (Schroeder, 2018).

Since the advent of the internet and social media, these platforms have grown to play a significant role in the environment that shapes and influences people's awareness, propensities, opinions, and even behaviours. Additionally, it has emerged as the simplest method for getting in touch with individuals from around the globe, accessing information from numerous sources quickly and easily, and learning the various cultural views. Social media works in this way to sway public opinion and steer users in the direction of desired behaviour (Chung, 2018).

Conclusion and Recommendations

- Social media networks has a significant impact on public opinion.
- Family is a mirror on which the repercussions of social media networks are reflected.
- Social media networks constitute an essential way through which family members interact and communicate.
- Social media networks have been proven to have both positive and negative effects on both individuals and families.

This study has several recommendations, as follows

- There is a need to focus on how media infiltrates into people's opinions in scientific symposiums and conferences to avoid negative repercussions of social media networks.
- Parents shall supervise how their children use and interact with social media networks.
- Social institutions shall raise the cultural and social awareness among families regarding the use of social media networks in their daily life.
- Specialized centres shall be established to deal with any negative repercussions of social media networks, thus contributing to the optimal use of social media networks among families and society members.

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