

Evaluating Demographic Factors between Gender on Facebook

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Abstract

Social networking sites have increased the way individuals across the globe relate and connect to each other with Facebook being the leading site. The identity that an individual takes depends on one's target audiences; thus, determining the content of their profile. The offline activities of an individual determine the online activities. This implies that Facebook activities are directly influenced by demographic factors. As such, the study has evaluated the impact demographic factors such as age, name, gender, and relationship status has on Facebook. The researchers suggest that most people use fake names, either full or some part of their Facebook names. In addition, most of the Facebook users are young people, especially college students. Besides, the gender of a user determines the main activities that one engages into in Facebook. Most females are concerned with privacy and trust issues with a higher tendency of updating statuses and uploading photos more frequently than male. Lastly, the study found that relationship status has a direct impact on Facebook identity representation where unmarried or divorced people use Facebook more often while married, engaged or dating users tend to be more conservative in their activities and relation with other people. The study supports the previous studies on the impacts of demographics and gender on the online behavior of Facebook users. Further, the study offers new knowledge of how the variations of the demographics impact the online presentation of individuals.

Keywords - Fake Account, Post, Upload, Offline, Online

Introduction

The increasing use of online social networking has facilitated the way people connect with each other in the current world. The enormous growth of people in social media, especially Facebook, is due to the need of expressing their views, increase their self-esteem, and gain the feeling of independence (Gil-Or, Levi-Belz, & Turel, 2015). Self-presentation on Facebook has continuously grown and it is heading to the extreme cases. According to Nadkarni and Hofmann (2012), the online activities exhibited by an individual are a reflection of the offline relations.

The use of the online features and applications of an individual reveals the offline experience of a person in both personality and social relationships. Online presentation, therefore, is a reflection of an individual's offline experience and is a means through which individuals assert their offline behavior such as self-admiration, self-image, and self-worth, neuroticism, and introversion. The online identity is also a clear representation of the offline world, like the people that one knows, and the associations and connections existing between these people. Contrary to the findings, Heivadi and Khajeheian (2013) assert that the identity that one takes on Facebook depends on the target audience that one needs to relate with. The users have an idyllic and the actual self that they would want to portray. They face a dilemma of matching the two identities. As such, the social norms of the group determine the purposeful expression behavior that an individual takes (Haimson & Hoffmann, 2016). The individuals will adjust to the fashionable norms of the group in a quest for belongingness. As a result, they will tend to manipulate their online presentation to suit the social norms and not necessarily input their real offline experiences. They will formulate ways that will enhance their belongingness to the groups despite the fact that it may not be a true reflection of their real life. They will use fake names and images to conceal their real identity and relationships. The purpose of the fake identity is to enable them to align to the desired customs of their intended audience and groups with confidence. Supporting these claims, Gil-Or, et al. (2015) claim that the use of fake names and images has substantially increased leading to more problematic behaviors among the users. Thus, the demography (age, gender, name and relationship factors) and culture of the online groups that the individuals relate to influence to a large extent the image they would like portrayed online. This paper pays attention to how individuals present themselves in Facebook and how their online presentation is influenced by the demographic factors.

Methodology

The research was a formal study with an exploratory approach. The main objective of the study was to assess the hypothesis that demographic factors influence the online presentation of individuals. The study also sought to respond to the research objectives by exploring the impact of the demographic factors on online presentation. The research aimed at gathering information on the demographic factors and individual online behavior and communicating the ways through which the factors influence online presentation. Also, it sought to explore the online behavior of Facebook users given the demographic circumstances. The exploratory approach was also suitable for the study because the focus of the research was to figure out and deduce the meaning of the presented concepts of the study. The style of the research helped in gathering a detailed comprehension of the underlying concepts enabling the development of a link between online presentation and demographic factors, and understanding the reasons behind the online behavior of individuals. The study took an inductive approach seeking to determine the influence of age, gender, name and relationship factors on the online presentation of individuals. The approach was appropriate since there are no underlying theories that define the relationship between online presentation and demographic factors. Therefore, the study involved secondary analysis of the scholarly work related to the subject matter of the study.

Anonymous Name

As Heivadi and Khajeheian (2013) propose, the use of fake profile in Facebook is on the rise. The actual self is not the one that most of the users in the Facebook exhibit, leading to the increased number of fake accounts on Facebook. The use of fake names is one of the aspects that contribute to the increase of fake Facebook accounts (Krombholz, Merkl, & Weippl, 2012). This, as a result, affects the relationship of people on Facebook as people accept friend requests from those they know more. Heivadi and Khajeheian (2013) claim that the name that one takes depend on the audience in mind, inclusive of the people who will be viewing their profile and what they wish people to know about them. A study by Aljasir, Woodcock, and Harrison (2013) found that most of the Facebook users in Saudi Arabia have Facebook friends ranging from 51-250, which constitutes to 41.9%, in their main account while 40.1% have less than 50 friends as shown in Table I. Females were found to have more friends (over 500) compared to men who had relatively few friends. The same study recorded that the participants disclosed that they hide their profile for various reasons such as hiding from their nuclear family and their employers. In this case, males are more reluctant to share their profile with their fathers and brothers, unlike females. As Debatin, et al. (2009) records the use of fake names is an effective way of hiding one's profile from people who may be concerned with details in such profiles. Additionally, the use of these fake names and attempting to hide the real name is a key factor contributing to the increasing number of fake accounts (Krasnova, Günther OSS, & Koroleva, 2009).²

The rise in fake Facebook accounts is quite eminent. As much as online identity is purported to be a reflection of offline identity, most people do not necessarily present their authentic self; or at least not entirely. It is either a fake profile or a forged post. This is made possible by the editing capabilities available on Facebook that enable a user to present himself or herself selectively. Users can be whomever they want online depending on audience targeted and the impact they desire to have thereof. The notable difference in online activities between male and female is attributed to the fact that women are more spoken, expressive and open compared to men.

| Nature of Account | N | Less than 50 | 51-250 | 251-500 | 500 Plus |
|-------------------|-----|----------------|----------------|---------------|--------------|
| Main Account | 372 | 149 (40.1%) | 156 (41.9%) | 40 (10.8%) | 27 (7.3%) |
| Second Account | 62 | 34 (54.8%) | 15 (24.2%) | 11 (17.7%) | 2 (3.2%) |
| Third Account | 20 | 6 (30.0%) | 6 (30.0%) | 5 (25.0%) | 3 (15.0%) |

Table I: Number of Facebook friends per account

Gender

There exist a pattern differentiating the way men and women make use of Facebook, leading to the theory showing that the use of the internet is gendered (Nazir, 2012). The identification of this pattern helps in determining the linguistic behavior of both genders. The gender identity exhibited in Facebook determines the behavior that one reveals in Facebook. For instance, women have a tendency of asking more questions as well as changing their profile more often as compared to men (Strano, 2011). Herring and Kapidzic (2015) claim that women have a greater tendency of using Facebook compared to men. Besides, females tend to post their 'cute' and seductive pictures while men share pictures and comments that are self-promoting. Guta and Karolak (2015) add that Saudi females tend to limit the visibility of their profile as they find Facebook as a platform to discuss issues affecting them while maintaining their privacy. This, therefore, is a clear indication that females like relating to the people they know and trust compared to the males (Nguyen & He, 2016). Understanding their audience, therefore, makes females associate well and express their feelings, unlike men who post fabricated information. In a different study, Mazman and Usluel (2011) found that females use Facebook to maintain existing relationships and for academic purposes while males use it to make new relationships.□

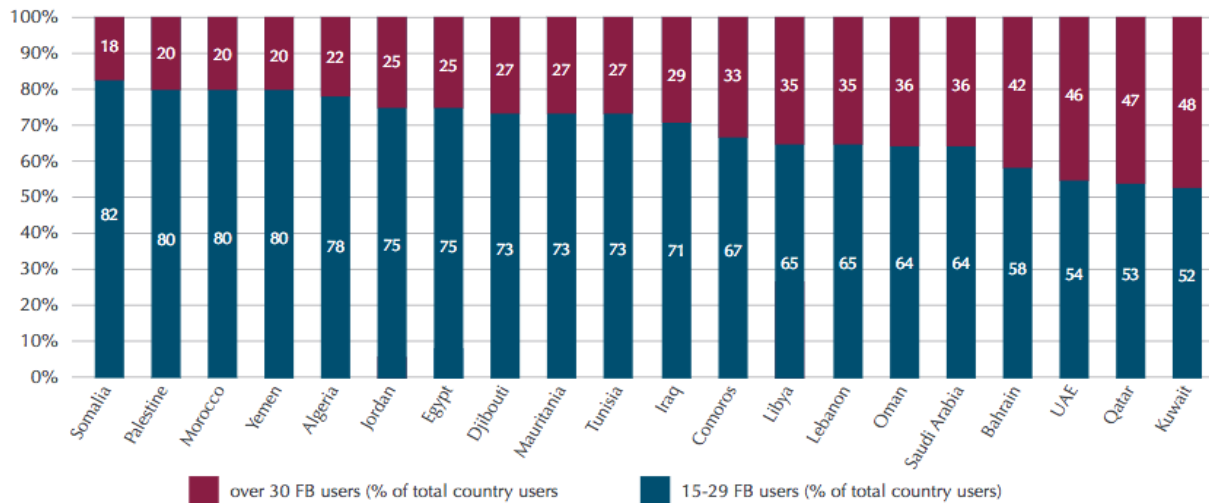
Statistics show that a majority of men use Facebook to gather information useful in building influence and as a mate-seeking tool. Females, on the other hand, are biologically wired for social media with their outspoken nature, desire to share and gossip-seeking tendencies, therefore constantly updating their status and profile pictures. This can also be attributed to the tendency for women to seek validation and fit in. For example, when a woman posts a photo and it gets 'likes' on Facebook it gives her a sense of acceptance. The reason why women practically live on social media is that their focus is on learning, showing support and maintaining relationships while for men it is in finding new relationships.

Age

The use of Facebook is common among the younger children and adolescents following the limited regulation and vulnerability to peer pressure (O'Keedde & Clark-Pearson, 2011). Mazman and Usluel (2011) add that most of the Facebook users are aged between 18 and 25 years where most of these users are university students. According to Dubai School of Government (2012), youth aged from 15 to 29 years make up 70% of the Facebook users within the Arab region since 2011. Saudi Arabia, in this case, has 65% of its Facebook users under this age group and the rest are over 30 years (see Figure I). The rampant usage of Facebook by this age group follows the interest of finding new and old friends as a way of maintaining relationships (Barker, 2009). Pempek, Yermolayeva, and Calvert (2009) posit that most of the undergraduate students spend approximately 30 min on Facebook reading the content rather than posting. Most of them interact with friends whom they have established an offline friendship (Sheldon, 2008). "Over the half of Facebook users being outside college campuses, have expanded their availability in recent consisting of those 25 years old and older (Strano, 2009, n.d.)." As a result, most of the college students take an identity that is more conversant to their friends as it is their primary network.

One thing is certain on the use of Facebook, and that is the fact that it has become an integral part of people’s life; a majority being students and the youth. The reason why Facebook is popular among young adults is that they desire to connect with others who share similar interest and keep up with current events. In addition to that, they use Facebook to fill in their free time, and this age group seems to have so much free time on their hands.

Figure I: The Percentage of Facebook Users in Terms of Age



Relationship Status

The invention of Facebook has improved the way families and individuals relate to each other as well as communicating with strangers (Sponcil & Gitimu, n.d.). With the predominance of Facebook users from college students, they disclose their relationship status to their peers for them to get feedback that may help in the development of the relationship and strengthen the existing ones (Fox, Warber, & Makstaller, 2013). Besides, divorced users tend to use Facebook for long hours while searching for more friends (Rashid & Tarafder, 2015).” To define one’s status, most of the users post on their friends’ walls or update different status concerning their current relationship status. Others, according to Sponcil and Gitimu (n.d.), send each other photographs and private messages to reveal their relationship status. The ability to state or declare the relationship status of an individual determines the way they relate to other interested parties. This factor, at times, tends to limit the way one relates to others as it is a limiting factor to the level of openness that one exhibits in Facebook.

When it comes to relationships, it is true that Facebook has provided a platform for users to establish and maintain relationships. The ability to conceal verbal cues online has enabled individuals to be more confident hence more open as compared to face-face. People tend to share a lot more online than they would in person and the more intimate the information shared is, the deeper the relationships build. Facebook has improved relationships with strangers and keeping in touch with distance friends and families. However, when it comes to

one-on-one relations with close friends and family members, the reality is that people no longer know how to interact in person and are always on the phone. For example, instead of catching up with persons present they are busy updating their activities thus leading to anti-social behavior.

Conclusion

In essence, the advent of Facebook facilitates the way people relate and communicate in general. The study has revealed that most users of the site are young people, whose main aim is to find new and old friends and maintain a relationship. A clear difference between the uses of Facebook on gender basis is evident where women tend to be active in updating status and uploading pictures. This follows their expressive nature, unlike men. Moreover, the prevalence of use of Facebook in college students is the way they use it for establishing intimate relationships, especially men, and use it for study purposes. The study also found that there is an increased number of fake accounts following the increased use of fake names. However, most of the users are not concerned with such names since it does not affect their relationship with their Facebook friends, as most are aware of these names.

There is an increasing rise in fake accounts. This is because users have a tendency to present themselves selectively online; usually their best version. This is particularly so for persons having esteem issues and lacking confidence offline and in person. The other reason for the rise in fake accounts is to maintain anonymity, and this is evident in persons posting about controversial issues. The reason why Facebook is more popular with women than men is to a great extent attributed to the fact that women are more social than men (Jacobs, 2012). When it comes to the young adults, it is clear that they desire to keep up with what's trending and have so much time in their hands hence form the majority of users. In regards to relations, Facebook has helped facilitate online relationships but at the cost of offline interactions.

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