

Chapter 48

Online Self–Presentation Strategies Among Social Networking Sites’ Users in the United Arab Emirates

Azza Abdel-Azim M. Ahmed

Zayed University, UAE & Cairo University, Egypt

ABSTRACT

This study explored the strategies of self-presentation (ingratiation, supplication, and enhancement) among United Arab Emirates users (n=230) of popular social networking sites (SNS). The size of social networks, degree of network connectivity, and perceptions of self-presentation success were examined. The results indicated a significant positive correlation between the frequency of SNS use and ingratiation and enhancement strategies. Greater diversity of online friends among the respondents was positively associated with the perception of online self-presentation success. Males and females differed in the size of the online social network they interacted with, diversity of online friends, and preferred self-presentation strategies. However, no significant gender differences were found in the levels of network connectivity and perceptions of self-presentation success.

INTRODUCTION

Internet-based social networking platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter are often considered innovative. In contrast with traditional media such as radio, film, and television, they allow for information sharing and social interaction (Pempek, Yermolayeva & Calvert, 2009). Social networking sites (SNS) offer users a degree of connection with others, relational satisfaction, and a way to learn about the surrounding culture (Croucher, 2011). Unlike traditional media, they support many-to-many communication modes, where information presented by each participant reaches many recipients at a time. Rather than viewing mass-produced content, with social networking sites, users become the creators of their own content. They also become the “stars” of their own productions (Pempek et al.,

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2009). Moreover, social media offer the potential to promote those opportunities, communicate with youth, and eventually facilitate positive youth development (Lee & Horsley, 2017).

New opportunities for self-presentation and impression management offered by SNS allow users to create custom pages and report personal information strategically. Users can interact in a variety of communication modes using plain text, posting status updates, writing comments on friends' pages, and sharing images (Rui & Stefanone, 2013). As noted by Boyd (2007), SNS are based around a "profile," a form of individual (or, less frequently group) home page, which offers a description of each member. In addition to text, images, and video created by a member, a social network site profile contains comments from other members, and a public list of people that one identifies as "friends" within the network. Member profiles are usually identified by participants' real names and often include photographs; thus, the network of connections is displayed as an integral piece of one's online self-presentation (Donath & Boyd, 2004).

SNS in the Gulf Cooperation Countries

In the past decade, social networking sites have established their place as an integral and interdependent actor in society in the Gulf area, specifically in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The most popular types of SNS in the UAE include Facebook, video sharing sites like YouTube, and microblogging platforms such as Twitter (Al Jenaibi, 2011). In 2019, WhatsApp comes on the top of social media used by 96% of GCC youth daily, then Facebook 81% and Instagram 79%; while nine in ten young Arabs use at least one of the major social media channels daily (Arab Youth Survey, 2019).

In the Arab region, over 125 million residents are using the Internet, with a near 30% annual growth rate and more than 53 million active SNS users. In 2012, countries like the UAE, Bahrain, Qatar, and Kuwait achieved Internet connectivity rates above 50%, while on average regional rates stood around 28%. Although countries like Morocco, Sudan, and Yemen had some of the lowest Internet penetration rates in the region, they also had the region's highest growth rates (Dubai School of Government, 2013). In a recent Arab Youth Survey report (2019), it was reported that 99% of UAE residents are active users of internet and social media, with a 1.5 growth compared to 2018; then Kuwait 92%, Bahrain 81%, Saudi Arabi (67%) and Oman (50%) (p. 75).

A study of the Arab social networks (Ahmed, 2010) found that Facebook was the most popular online social network (65.2%) among a sample of 325 respondents from Egypt and UAE. Similar results were presented by the 2013 Arab World Online report, which demonstrated that Facebook continues to be the most popular social network among Arabs, followed by Google+, and Twitter (Dubai School of Government, 2013). The report showed that 54% of respondents indicated using Facebook more than once a day, while 30% used Google+ at the same frequency. Only 14% of the sample used Twitter more than once a day.

Donath & Boyd (2004) noted that within SNS, members can find information about one another before a connection is made by looking at profile pages. Thus, common ground can be established, and new connections can be formed. Al Jenaibi (2011) concluded that social media have a strong presence in the lives of residents of the United Arab Emirates, using a sample of 556 participants from the UAE. The study found that social media are a vital source of news among respondents, and recognized their day-to-day reliance on social media in acquiring new friends and receiving news updates. In a recent survey, 71% among 3,373 respondents from 22 Arab countries agreed that online communication often replaced traditional communication (Dubai School of Government, 2013). However, to date there has

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