TOWARD DEVELOPING A MODEL OF FACEBOOK ADOPTION AMONG ARAB PEOPLE

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This research presents a theoretical framework of Facebook adoption and usage in the Arab world. Previous studies investigated the cultural impact factors on social networking web sites in western societies. However, there is a lack of studies that examine the influence of Arab cultural values on why and how Arab people engage in Facebook activities. The proposed model contributes to the intellectual effects for fostering a better understanding of the cultural diversity in the digital world. This study is offered as a prelude to further research to deepen the understanding of the e-social relationship between internet and the Arab people.

Keywords: Social networking sites, Facebook, Cultural values, IT adoption, The continuity of membership value.

Introduction

In the past few years, Facebook has risen to become the top social networking site with over 40 languages (www.allfacebook.com). At the beginning of 2011, Facebook occupied the second most popular site in the world, after Google, and the first social networking site (www.alexa.com), with over 596.4 million active users (www.facebook.com). About 70% of Facebook users are outside the United States. More than half of Facebook users are outside of college, and the fastest growing demographic are those 25 years old and older. With the availability of the Arabic version in 2009, Facebook has become the most popular social networking site, with rapid growth in the Arab world. According to "social bakers" site, the heart of Facebook statistics, twenty of the twenty two Arab countries are currently involved in the Facebook society (www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics/comoros). In particular, by October, 2011, twenty of the twenty two Arab countries are involved in the Facebook society with more than 33.07 million Arab users (www.socialbakers.com).

A notable difference between the West and Arab world (*See Table 1*) is that, while more than 50% of the western Facebook users are female (e.g. United State, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Spain, Ireland), on the average, only about 36% of Arabic Facebook members are female. Furthermore, there is another significant demographic difference between the Arab world and the West regarding the age groups of Facebook users. The majority of Facebook users in the Arab world are mostly students in the range between 13 to 24 years old (55%), and. Facebook users in the West for the same age group represents only about 36%, and the majority of them lies in range between 25 to 60 years old and older, and mostly are outside of college (www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics).

Table 1. The Demographic Differences between Arab and Western Facebook Users.

Nations	Female %	13-24 Age Group %
Arab World	36	55
United States	55	34
United Kingdom	52	36
Canada	54	33
Sweden	51	36
Australia	54	36
Netherlands	52	34
Denmark	51	34
Norway	50	34
Spain	51	27
Ireland	53	37

A number of researchers (e.g. Lewis and George, 2008; Veltri and Elgarah, 2009; Cardon et al., 2009; Posey et al., 2010) who study the social networking sites agreed that understanding the national culture is paramount to realize the diffusion and usage of social networking sites. Far less attention has been paid to study the impact of national culture on motivations, attitudes, usage, and continuity of Facebook membership value integrated into one comprehensive model. Furthermore, most of prior research has studied cultural impact on social networking sites in Western societies and some societies in the East. No previous study has investigated, in particular, the role of Arab cultural values on why and how Arab people engage in social networking sites.

Literature Review

Research frequently refers to national culture as a profound influential determinant that greatly affects the adoption of a technology (Straub et al., 1997; Kovacic, 2005; Sundqvist et al., 2005; Erumban and de Jong, 2006; Anandarajan et al., 2003; Gong et al., 2007; Calantone et al., 2006; Park et al., 2007; Srite and Karahanna, 2006; Myers and Tan, 2002; Veiga et al., 2001; Robichaux and Cooper 1998; Schepers and Wetzels, 2007). Loch et al., (2003) suggested that if cultural beliefs and attitudes toward Internet were better understood, then the Internet itself might be better adapted to the behavioral patterns of the adopting nation.

Researchers have developed a number of frameworks to classify the cultures of the world in order to understand its impact on the life and behaviors of nations, organizations, and individuals. IT researchers have frequently referenced the cultural dimensions developed by Geert Hofstede, the most influential researcher on cultural values (Straub et al., 1997; Kovacic, 2005; Sundqvist et al., 2005; Erumban and de Jong, 2006; Anandarajan et al., 2003; Gong et al., 2007; Calantone et al., 2006; Park et al., 2007; Srite and Karahanna, 2006; Myers and Tan, 2002; Veiga et al., 2001; Robichaux and Cooper 1998; Schepers and Wetzels, 2007). Recently, Hofstede et al. (2008) added the sixth cultural dimension, called Indulgence versus Restraint, focusing on happiness and life control. These dimensions did not yet validate empirically in the field of IT adoption and usage. Furthermore, most of the previous research (e.g. Marshall et al., 2008; Lewis and George, 2008; Dotan, 2010; Veltri and Elgarah, 2009; Cardon et al., 2009; Posey et al., 2010) has frequently referenced the cultural dimensions of Hofstede to discuss the impact of national culture on deferent issues of SNSs.

According to Hofstede's (1980) typology, the Arab countries were classified as having high power distance, high uncertainty avoidance, low individualism, and high masculinity. Such a society may not be ideal for ICT adoption and usage (Straub et al., 1997; Loch et al., 2003; Bagchi et al., 2004; Kovacic, 2005; Erumban and de Jong, 2006; Gong and al., 2007; Straub et al., 2001; Akour et al., 2006). Straub et al. (2001) investigated the impact of cultural values on the adoption of new technology in the Arab world. He revealed that Arab cultural beliefs are very strong predictors of resistance to information technology transfer. Loch et al. (2003) investigated the diffusion of the Internet in the Arab world and the role of

social norms and technological culturation. The vast majority of respondents had expressed significant reservations against Internet acceptance. Fifty eight percent disagreed that computers were well-accepted in Arab society and forty percent disagreed that that the Internet would have a positive impact on the Arab family and community ties. Akour et al., (2006) concluded that the Jordanians have a negative attitude toward the social impacts of the Internet. The Jordanians did not want it to replace their traditions, values, and customs of interactions and caring.

Except for two studies (Veltri and Elgarah, 2009; Cardon et al., 2009), most researches were limited to studying the relationship between cultural values and SNSs in Western societies, especially the USA, and some societies in the East, excluding the impact of Arabic culture in this area. Veltri and Elgarah (2009) examined how national cultural differences impact the adoption of social networking sites in comparison between Morocco and the USA. Cardon et al. (2009) discussed the differences in usage of social networking sites between ten countries, including Egypt.

The Proposed Model of Research

The research model (Figure 1) proposes that the cultural values have a direct impact on motivations, including self-presentation, social interaction, and curiosity. At the same time this study supposes a direct impact of cultural values on members' attitudes toward social networking sites, consisting of trust, credibility, and strength of ties. Furthermore, the study proposes that the three mentioned attitudes are interrelated, complemented, and prerequisites to each other. Credibility can be seen in many ways as the mirror of trust. And strength of ties can be seen as the mirror of both. In other words, if trust is satisfied, the members of social networking sites will feel in control because they do not fear the risks, which will support the credibility and lead to tightly knit social relations. Therefore, the model of study included these three attitudes in one construct. Based on the previous studies, the model also proposes a direct impact of motivations on Facebook usage, and continuity of membership value. Similarly, the model also posits a direct impact of attitudes on Facebook usage and continuity of membership value.
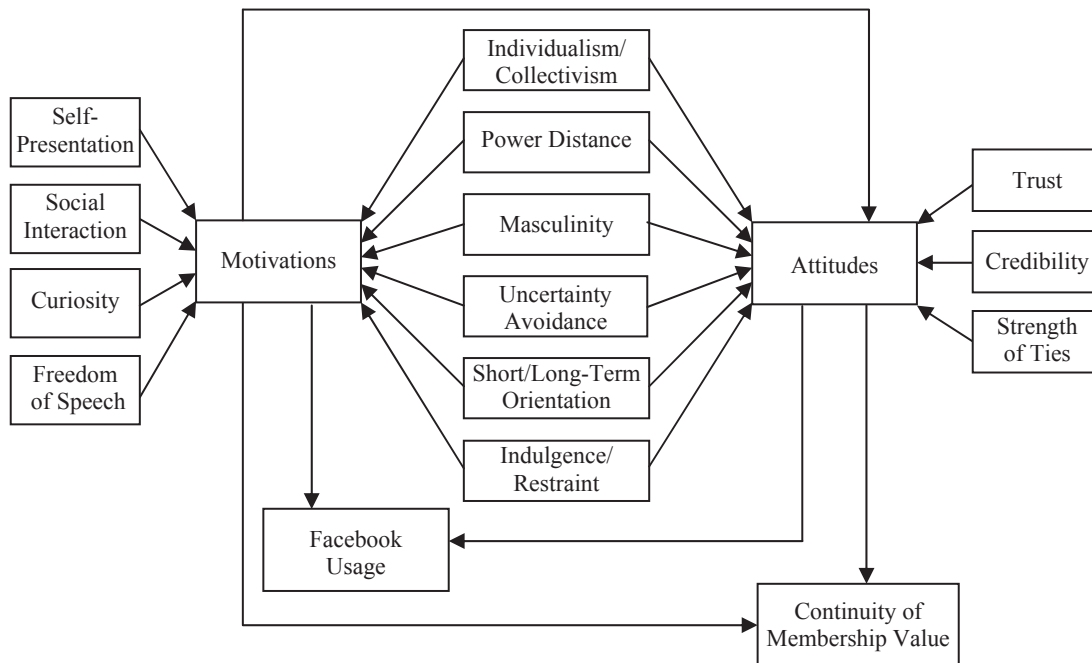

Figure1. The Research model of cultural impact on Engaging in Social Networking Sites.

Below each dimension of cultural values, motivations, attitudes, continuity of membership value, and patterns of Facebook usage are discussed in more details.

Motivations

Joining social networking sites is mostly selective and motivated by self-awareness of the individual's own needs and the particular types of media that give a certain advantage above other already known alternatives to satisfy those needs. Healy (1996) declared that, the Internet provides a kind of middle landscape for users because individuals can satisfy their needs for both separation and connectedness. A number of previous studies (e.g. Boyd and Ellison, 2007; Dwyer et al., 2007; Stefanone and Jang, 2007) suggested that the main motivations to use online social networking sites are interpersonal and social in nature. In the same direction, self-expression and socialization have been repeatedly identified as important motivations of blogging (Trammell et al. 2006; Tan and Teo, 2009).

The literature provides a sufficient fundamental explanation for the categories of motivations and needs to join social networking sites like self-representation, social communication, and curiosity (e.g. Bilandzic et al., 2009; Köbler et al., 2010; Stets and Burke 2000; Tan and Teo, 2009). Therefore, based on the above discussion, this study identified three motivations for engaging in electronic societies, namely: self-presentation, social interaction, and curiosity.

Attitudes toward Facebook

A consistent finding from research continuously reports that individual's attitudes play a strong role in predicting the acceptance and continuance usage of IT. Ajzen, and Madden (1986), Cialdini (2001), and Ghobakhloo et al. (2010) agreed that attitude toward a given behavior is an important measure of that behavior. Although there are different dimensions of people attitudes toward IT adoption and usage, most of research in the context of social networking sites has focused on revealing the interaction and effects of privacy and trust attitudes (e.g. Iachello and Hong, 2007; Stutzman et al., 2010; Marshall et al., 2008). This study assumes that the attitudes of trust, credibility, and strength of ties are critical factors that impact on usage patterns and continuity of Facebook membership value.

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Based on Hofstede's framework, the cultural dimensions made up of the degrees of individualism/collectivism, Masculinity, power distance, short/long-time orientation, uncertainty avoidance, and Indulgence/ Restraint.

Individualism versus Collectivism

Hofstede's Individualism dimension refers to the strength of the ties people have to others within the society.

Masculinity (MAS)

Masculinity refers to the distribution of roles between the genders, and to how much a society values the traditional man and woman roles. High Masculinity society scores are found in societies that identify tough values like assertiveness, heroism, and competition with the male role.

Power Distance Index (PD)

Power Distance dimension measures the extent to which an unequal distribution of power, wealth, and political authority is accepted, and to which the less powerful members accept and expect that power is distributed unequally.

Uncertainty Avoidance

Uncertainty Avoidance indicates to the degree to which the members of society feel threatened by uncertain, ambiguous, or unknown situations. The individuals of uncertainty avoiding culture have an extremely risk-averse society (Hofstede, 1991).

Long-Term Orientation (LTO)

The fifth dimension is found in the teachings of Confucius, to distinguish the difference in thinking between the East and West. Long-term orientation refers to what extent society adheres to their traditions and values.

Indulgence versus Restraint

Recently, Hofstede has been added the sixth cultural dimension, called Indulgence versus Restraint, focusing on happiness and life control (Hofstede et al., 2008), based on the work of Minkov (2007), who studied the world values across 93 countries. This dimension measures a person's happiness, sense of freedom, and availability of leisure time. Indulgence stands for a society that allows relatively free gratification of basic and natural human drives related to enjoying life and having fun, specially leisure, and merrymaking with friends, spending, and consumption.

The Continuity of Membership Value

After joining a social networking site, members are constantly evaluating the value of their membership and building their own perceptions towards the benefit and cost of being members in this network. Several authors (e.g. Tyma, 2007; Ibrahim, 2008; Tufekci, 2008) confirmed that members continually negotiate and direct the tension between perceived risks, such as identity theft, fraud, harassment, cyber stalking, hackers, leaking private information and blackmail (Dwyer et al., 2007; Stutzman et al., 2010; Debatin et al., 2009, Boyd and Ellison, 2008), and expected benefits of using social networking sites. The consequences may affect their inner thoughts concerning the value of their membership. A number of researchers (e.g. Dwyer et al., 2007; Stutzman et al., 2010; Debatin et al., 2009, Boyd and Ellison, 2008; Lampe et al., 2008), agreed that because of the perceived risks of using social networking sites, users may change their evaluation of membership over time.

Conclusion

The model posits that the cultural values of the Arab people have a direct impact on their motivation. At the same time this model assumes a direct impact of cultural values on the Arab people's attitudes toward Facebook adoption and usage. Based on the literature of social networking sites, the research also proposes a direct impact of motivation on Facebook usage and continuity of membership value.

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