

Social Media and the Formation of Virtual Values among Algerian Youth: Facebook as a Case Study

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Abstract

The study aimed to investigate the extent of the contribution of social media platforms, specifically Facebook, to the formation of virtual values among Algerian youth. These virtual values influence individual behavior. The study employed a survey methodology and focused on the research community of young people in the city of M'Sila. The research findings revealed that the youth in M'Sila regularly and intensively use Facebook despite the varying content and domains, and the diverse impact on individuals. This has led to the development and inculcation of certain virtual values that manifest in the behavior of the youth. Facebook's role in shaping these values was evident.

Keywords: Social media, Youth, Facebook, Virtual values

1. Introduction

The emergence of social media platforms became intertwined with the advent of the second generation of the web (Web 2.0), which truly revolutionized the world of the Internet and gave rise to what is now known as the virtual community. Pierre Léonard Harvey defined it as "a group of diverse individuals in terms of size and shape, interacting with each other through global communication systems within symbolic or imaginary boundaries." Harvey focused on key elements of the virtual community, including individuals, social relationships built on interaction and goals. He also highlighted social action and motivation within the technological environment of the Internet, emphasizing interaction among groups and individuals.

Among these social networks, Facebook has had a significant impact, creating a world where individuals of the community live within a technological sphere that captures most of their interests and consumes a considerable portion of their time. The influence of social media platforms, especially within the youth demographic, has become evident. Undoubtedly, today's youth are often referred to as the digital generation due to their strong affinity for communication technology and their adeptness in using it. This is why they are among the most affected by and engaged with these platforms. Among social media platforms, Facebook has exerted a significant influence. It has led individuals within society to live in a technological world that dominates a considerable portion of their interests and consumes a significant amount of their time. The impact of social media sites has become exceptionally clear, especially within the youth demographic. There is no doubt that today's youth are often characterized as the digital generation due to their strong attraction to communication technology and their adept control over it. Consequently, they are the most susceptible to and engaged with these digital mediums.

Studying values holds significant importance in the realms of humanities and social sciences, as they constitute a fundamental factor that shapes individual behavior. Values serve a range of ethical and social functions; they foster social cohesion, which is an ethical and social phenomenon in its own right. Moreover, values form the essential features of a society's conscience and collective consciousness. In this context, values aim to regulate behavior, preserve identity, and maintain unity. Identity serves as a reference framework for individual and collective actions, thus playing a role in shaping personal character and cognitive framework.

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Virtual values are formed through social media platforms like Facebook, as opinions and ideas of youth users contribute to a system of electronic social norms within virtual communities. By examining the contribution of Facebook to the formation of virtual values among youth in M'Sila, this study aims to address the research problem. The problem statement revolves around understanding the impact of social media platforms, particularly Facebook, on the formation of virtual values among Algerian youth, specifically in the city of M'Sila. The main research question is whether Facebook has contributed to the formation of virtual values among the youth of M'Sila?

1.1 *Subsidiary research questions*

- What are the habits and usage patterns of Facebook among the youth in M'Sila?
- What are the motivations and needs of the youth in M'Sila for using Facebook?
- What are the virtual values acquired through the use of Facebook?

2. **Materials and Methods**

In every study, the choice of a suitable methodology should align with the nature of the subject under investigation. Therefore, we find that the appropriate methodology is the survey method in order to comprehend all aspects of the topic and attempt to gather information related to it, as well as understand the study's concepts and variables.

We have adopted the survey methodology because it is the most fitting approach for our research topic. It aims to describe the studied phenomenon or identify the problem. It relies on description, analysis, and interpretation, through which we can uncover the motivations and reasons for using social media networks and their impact on the formation of virtual values among youth (Lenhart et al., 2010).

This study falls under the category of descriptive research, which aims to explain and clarify various events and situations related to a phenomenon or a set of phenomena (Rideout et al., 2010). It seeks to analyze the context in which these events occur. The study's objective is to determine the contribution of Facebook, as a social media platform, to the formation of values among Algerian youth and to understand the diverse values encompassed within Facebook pages.

1.1 *Research Community and Sample*

We adopted a questionnaire as a direct technique to pose a set of questions to the participants and obtain answers for quantitative processing, analysis of relationships between variables, and measurement of the studied phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). The questionnaires were distributed to a sample of 100 young individuals from the city of M'Sila, ranging in age from 17 to 36 years. The questionnaire consisted of three main sections that focused on the influence and contribution of Facebook to the formation of virtual values among youth.

We selected a non-probability purposive sampling method for our sample. This approach is characterized by its flexibility and speed of use, making it suitable for cases where the research community is large, such as studies involving readers, listeners, viewers, or public opinion research (Yin, 2017). The main idea behind this method is that the research community is heterogeneous. Consequently, the sample is divided into segments, each with distinct characteristics that are defined procedurally. The questionnaires were then distributed among the youth, collected, transcribed, and analyzed.

Table showing the study sample

Frequency	Gender	Relative Frequency
Male	50	50%
Female	50	50%
Total	100	100%

3. **Results**

The study's findings underscore the widespread presence of personal Facebook accounts among the youth, comprising a significant 65.67% of the sample. An intriguing observation is the prevalent use of aliases, particularly among females, which serves as a unique aspect of their online identity.

Furthermore, the research highlights a substantial portion, 68.33%, of the surveyed youth engaging with Facebook for over three hours. This extended usage can be attributed to the widespread availability of Internet connectivity and the accessibility of 3G and 4G services. The prevalence of smartphones plays a pivotal role, allowing youth to easily access Facebook while on the move and contributing to heightened participation in the platform.

Interestingly, a nighttime preference for Facebook usage is evident among the majority, accounting for 38.33%. This inclination can be attributed to the youth's tendency to unwind after their daytime commitments, such as studying

and working. Facebook serves as a means of entertainment, self-expression, and a break from daily routines, monotony, and the pressures they experience throughout the day.

In terms of language usage, the study identifies Arabic as the predominant choice, comprising 49.40%. This aligns with the M'Sila youth's focus on Quranic content on Facebook. Additionally, a combination of Arabic and English, accounting for 14.00%, is utilized, highlighting English's global influence (Livingstone et al., 2013).

The contents shared on Facebook notably mirror the real-life personalities of the youth. Through cultural news, videos, comments, and articles, the platform becomes a conduit for expressing opinions and ideas. This convergence of real-life traits within the virtual realm fosters the creation of new concepts and virtual values (Rideout & Roberts, 2010). The youth of M'Sila demonstrate a keen interest in social topics, closely followed by cultural, sports, religious, and political subjects. Notably, the use of Facebook has played a significant role in instilling and nurturing virtual values, encompassing empathy, virtual solidarity, virtual relationships, virtual kindness, and virtual peace.

Furthermore, the study reveals that Facebook usage fulfills various needs for the youth, including learning, entertainment, forming relationships and friendships, instilling values, achieving goals, and facilitating communication. In this virtual space, traditional values, such as maintaining family ties, have evolved. Facebook has transformed the dynamics of family and social relationships, transcending physical barriers through chat, voice calls, and video calls to exchange messages, images, and greetings (Primack et al., 2017).

4. Discussion

In today's rapidly evolving technological landscape, social media platforms have emerged as central elements in the lives of young individuals. While these platforms offer tremendous opportunities for communication and expression, they also present challenges and effects that require careful consideration. The recommendations put forth aim to shed light on the importance of studying and understanding the impact of social media on youth and their communities, as well as how to optimally harness these tools to shape positive values and achieve a balance between utilization and control (Twenge & Freeman, 2012).

Undoubtedly, conducting meticulous research on the influence of social media platforms on behaviors and values, especially among the youth, is of utmost importance. This comprehensive study should encompass an exploration of how behaviors exhibited on social media platforms impact cognitive processes, conceptual frameworks, and individual identities. Institutions, educational bodies, and media outlets bear the responsibility of raising awareness about both the positive and negative repercussions of social media platforms, with a specific focus on platforms such as "Facebook." By disseminating knowledge, these entities can empower young individuals to make well-informed decisions regarding their utilization of these platforms (Freeman & Christie, 2014).

Moreover, it is crucial to advocate for the optimal utilization of social media platforms and equip young people with the skills to critically analyze and assess the content they share or engage with. This can be achieved through the implementation of specialized training courses and the provision of educational resources aimed at enhancing their comprehension and responsible engagement with online content. Leveraging social media platforms as a means to instill positive values and foster meaningful discussions is a compelling endeavor. These platforms can serve as conduits for disseminating enlightening content and steering conversations toward educational and constructive topics (Kross et al., 2013).

To advance our understanding of the intricate dynamics between social media, values, and behaviors, further theoretical and empirical research is imperative. Given the nascent and intricate nature of this subject, ongoing research efforts will contribute to the evolution of more accurate theories and a deeper comprehension of these interconnections (Moreno & Becker, 2011). Social media companies should prioritize the needs and concerns of the youth, working diligently to incorporate features and tools that facilitate the cultivation of positive values and the promotion of constructive interactions. In summation, a concerted effort involving research, education, responsible utilization, and platform optimization is essential to navigate the influence of social media on behaviors and values, particularly among the younger demographic.

4.1 The Algerian Youth and Virtual Values

The interest in youth issues is a global phenomenon that recognizes their significant role in shaping contemporary society. They have an influence on various social, cultural, intellectual, economic, and political aspects of society. The importance of youth lies in their capacity for renewal and change. They often champion modernization through new values, which may contrast with prevailing traditional values. Therefore, youth are agents of cultural and social change within society as a whole (Tynes & Williams, 2010).

Given that the values of youth are learned and acquired through the prevailing environment and culture, studying these values is of utmost importance, especially in our rapidly changing world. The rapid advancements in knowledge explosion and technological acceleration have impacted the social, political, cultural, and moral systems of

society. Youth represent a critical stage in human development, characterized by their own unique culture that reflects values, attitudes, opinions, and behavioral patterns, which are often approved and accepted within their age group.

The study of virtual values has gained significant attention in shaping and enhancing certain values. This is particularly true due to the excessive use of technology in general and platforms like Facebook in particular. Researchers have been intrigued by how values have changed in the virtual realm compared to the real world (Leedy & Ormrod, 2018)

Through this study, it becomes evident that youth have formed and cultivated a set of virtual values through their use of Facebook. This is achieved through posts, interactions, comments, information exchange, and collaboration among users from around the world. Various virtual values emerged through posts related to solidarity, cooperation, fundraising, aid, assistance, and supporting those in need across the globe. The features, services, and applications provided by Facebook and similar platforms have contributed to the formation of virtual values like virtual cooperation, unity, benevolence, a sense of responsibility, belonging, free expression, and what is referred to as virtual responsibility. These virtual values were the result of interactions among diverse users of Facebook, primarily among young individuals aged 18 to 36. Youth in this age range are particularly aware of the websites they browse, especially popular and widely-used platforms. They engage in interactions and comments on various types of posts, especially those promoting social good, cooperation, benevolence, and ethical conduct. Furthermore, religious, political, economic, and security-related posts also garnered significant attention and interactions, as did other posts and services provided by Facebook to the youth demographic.

5. Conclusions

Social media platforms, including Facebook, play a significant role in shaping virtual values among the youth. These platforms provide a virtual environment that enables them to interact and express themselves. The usage of Facebook varies among young individuals based on their personal interests and needs. Some are drawn to religious, social, political, and cultural issues, leading them to form diverse virtual values such as loyalty to specific groups, belonging to communities, virtual benevolence, and solidarity. These values manifest in their behaviors and expressions on Facebook and other social media platforms and are influenced by societal and technological developments. The continuous use of these platforms contributes to reinforcing, shaping, and guiding the youth's behaviors in the digital world.

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