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## Motivations for using social media: comparative study based on cultural differences between American and Jordanian students

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**Abstract:** Social network sites (SNSs) have gained popularity over the last decade. Students use SNSs according to their personal differences, which are influenced by cultural and demographic factors. This paper proposed a model that included four basic factors that act as predictors of continuous use of SNSs. The factors are personal, social, educational and entertainment. The first objective of this study is to investigate the influence of the predictors on the dependent variable. Results indicated a full support of our proposed model, with an  $R^2 = 0.296$ . The second objective is to explore the differences between US and Jordanian students. An Analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was conducted and results yielded significant cultural differences and stronger than gender

differences. The test yielded 17 significant differences compared to 10 based on gender. This research calls for more research that tries to explore what cultural factors cause such differences.

**Keywords:** comparative study; continuous use of SNs; cultural differences; Jordan; social networks; USA.

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## 1 Introduction

Social media is defined as a set of web-based services that are used by a number of persons who have the similar interests, preferences or professions, via the internet (Wu et al., 2014). The objective of social media is to provide a useful platform that enables individuals to share their knowledge, content and experiences.

Different types of social media are considered as tools or channels that facilitate the communication, collaboration and cooperation among people. Users can contact others individually or within groups utilising such networks. Some researchers consider social networks (SNs) as an open domain or anti-corruption tool that participates in building a culture of transparency (Bertot et al., 2010). Persons whether they are students, workers or instructors can obtain information or gain knowledge from different sources once they needed, and in a convenient fashion. SNs offer many types of data in several forms such as text, audio, video, photos and so on. People (regardless of their experience level in SN applications) can share their ideas, knowledge, experience and expertise with others.

Social media channels have developed rapidly and witnessed a huge demand for new applications in order to keep up with individuals' needs, desires and expectations. Also, it served the purpose of facilitating organisational knowledge sharing process (Chow and Chan, 2008). Users can conduct meetings from anywhere and anytime by utilising the applications offered by SNs such as Facebook, Viber, Skype and others.

With the fast developments of SN sites (SNSs), users became more experienced in their decision-making process, especially after the revolution of mobile devices. Users can browse the internet anywhere and anytime with the support of these portable/functional devices. It is difficult to determine users' motivations or interests during a specific point in time as they can easily switch between applications because of the large available alternatives in front of them (Wu et al., 2014).

Nowadays, social media has changed our lifestyle; it became an essential part of our daily activities and a major motive for internet use. A study utilising a qualitative survey distributed on Estonian population has clarified two basic factors that are acting as major motives for using the internet, they are: social media and entertainment (SME), and work and information (WI). WI was positively associated with high educational level, ethnic majority status and the frequency of using SNSs at work or at school (Realo et al., 2011).

Quan-Haase and Young (2010) have compared two types of social media networks, Facebook and Instant messaging in order to determine the major use for each one. They concluded that the common use of Facebook is to have fun and to know about the social activities. Whereas people use the Instant messaging in order to maintain and develop the relationships between persons.

In all, 10 gratifications were the answer for a study titled as "Why people use social media: a uses and gratifications approach" which aimed to discover the major purposes for using the social media. The 10 gratifications are social interaction, information seeking, pass time, entertainment, relaxation, communicatory utility, convenience utility, expression of opinion, information sharing and surveillance/knowledge about others (Whiting and Williams, 2013).

The paper consists of four sections: the first one is the literature review which explains number of proposed factors representing the potential reasons for using the social media sites or networks. The next section is about the methodology which is

adopted in the study to serve its purpose and objective(s). The third one is to discuss the data analysis results. Finally, the conclusion and future work are described in detail.

## **2 Literature review**

This section contains a set of studies that were performed in the same domain of this work. Three sub-sections represent the suggested predictors for our proposed model for this study, and the predictors show the reasons or purposes behind using the social media sites.

### *2.1 Personal purposes and entertainment purposes*

Many persons suffer from different psychological problems such as feeling alone, self-inferiority, lack of confidence, depression and other problems. Such individuals tend to create their own virtual world which satisfies their interests, needs and demands. Such virtual world is depicted through their use of social media, where they may find solutions for the problems they face. A previous work studied the effect of using SNSs on satisfying the self-esteem based on four major scales as follows: Rosenberg's self-esteem scale, Lai's personality test, a Facebook usage scale and a Facebook addiction scale (FAS) (Hong et al., 2014). They can express their feelings to others with similar interests or at least those who could face similar situations. Hong et al. (2014) attempted in their study to explain the relationship between Facebook use and Facebook addiction. Finally, they have concluded that people with self-inferiority tend to use Facebook, while people who suffer from depression will have Facebook addiction (Chen and Kim, 2013). Based on that, social media may provide competing platforms to enable individuals to develop their ideas and become more creative and innovative (Van Dijck, 2013).

Two major perspectives are reported in the literature, which present the motives and reasons for using social media networks. The first one tends to depend on the rational and goal-oriented use of SNSs, such view is called the utilitarian motives. Another perspective is pleasure oriented and is called hedonic motives. The study depended on such classification concluded that social media sites play a significant role in supporting both types of motives. Users may have an influence on their friends and encourage them to join such applications. Basically, four gratifications were observed namely affection, leisure, immediate access and coordination purposes (Xu et al., 2012). Organising vacation trips is another intention for using SNSs, where the role of social media sites helps tourists to determine what to use and diverse trip elements which has a positive impact on market trends (Parra-López et al., 2011). On the other side, the increasing growth of such sites makes it so important for parents to be more responsible towards their children when using them. Most of the teens spend most of their time playing on the gaming sites, and other social media sites which can be considered unhealthy environment for children and adolescent (Fernández, 2011). So, using social media might result in different results where some would face negative consequences (Frehat and Abu-Shanab, 2014) and others might see huge benefits from such experience. Different applications will result in different results and different purposes by users will yield different results also. For example, a study conducted on university students in USA and Europe and concluded that there is a negative relationship between using SNS

and students' Grade Point Average. The authors assured that the way of using such sites were disrupted (Karpinski et al., 2013).

## *2.2 Social purposes*

Isolation is a prominent factor that is related to SNSs use (Abu-Shanab and Frehat, 2015b). The authors reached such conclusion based on data analysis of 302 responses on a survey that measured the influence of trust, intensity of use, satisfaction, isolation and social participation on behavioural intentions. Results supported only isolation and intensity of use, and failed to support the other three factors. Brandtzæg and Heim (2009) have investigated the percentage of people using SNSs and their own motives to use such applications by utilising a quantitative and qualitative research design. They concluded that most people sampled are using social media in order to contact others, find new friendships and just to socialise. Another research explored the impact of public relations related to activities conducted using social media, in which the value of social media has been determined as a public relations tactic. The findings supported the notion that social media power is an evidence of its effectiveness as a communication tool (Taylor and Kent, 2010). The use and gratifications (U and G) of online SNSs in terms of creating an identity in a social form are the main results which have been discovered after a study conducted among a set of 12- to 14-year-old girls from Ireland (Dunne et al., 2010). Another study explored the bad and good influences of Facebook and concluded that the highest perceived benefit of SNSs is finding old and new friends, while the highest perceived downside of SNSs is its influence on addiction on such applications and isolation from face-to-face environment (Abu-Shanab and Al-Tarawneh, 2013). The study utilised 206 responses on a survey distributed on university students in Jordan.

## *2.3 Educational purposes*

Social media plays a significant role in the educational sector. Many schools, universities and teachers are using social media as a tool for education. In the medical sector, an experiment was done at Penn State College of Medicine. The experiment utilised many social media tools to be used by 4th year university student in their elective courses. Students were supposed to provide a qualitative as well as quantitative evaluation about the courses at the end of semester to understand their performance. The research result was that integrating the tools of social media into medical programs offers many benefits over the conventional ways in education, and was considered a significant step to prepare a well-equipped and educated staff for future who would adopt any new technology conveniently (George and Dellasega, 2011).

Moran et al. (2011) have claimed that the online videos, podcasts and wikis are reported as the most valuable social media tools in the learning process, through which students can get their extra assignments, comments on posts about particular problem in the course and they can obtain more information and examples for better understanding. SNSs are seen as a useful tool that successfully facilitates a collaborative learning process (Moran et al., 2011). Another study distributed an online survey on first year students at a British university, which investigated Facebook as a tool that can be used to achieve educational purposes in a social context. The study concluded that Facebook helps students to find new friends who can assist them in their learning process as well as keep

in touch with their friends and families (Madge et al., 2009). In addition, when trying to observe the role of adopting mobile computing devices (smartphones) and social media networks capabilities in higher education, a study concluded that integrating SMNs and mobile technology will lead to more students' engagement in content creation process (Gikas and Grant, 2013).

The relationship between personal learning environment (PLE), social media and self-regulated learning was the aim of a study conducted by Dabbagh and Kitsantas (2012). The authors had concluded that not all of students have enough knowledge management skills to build a PLE which meets their learning process needs, but they act as a self-regulated learner in order to acquire, manage and develop PLE via adopting social media tools.

The term of massive open online courses (MOOCs) has been developed to be used as a new technique or strategy for learning and teaching aims to create and improve the learning process inputs and output as well (Guàrdia et al., 2013). The idea was derived basing on the learners perspectives in order to empower them to encourage critical thinking and collaboration, enhance competence-based deliverables and facilitate assistance using information and communication technology (ICT) tools and media. Students who are using MOOCs can react to the comments, chat easily by optimising social media and other ICT tools (Pelet et al., 2015).

In the Jordanian context, a study that utilised responses from 113 students on issues related to the influence of SNs on high school students' performance and its relationship to performance (Abu-Shanab and Al-Tarawneh, 2015a). The authors used students GPA as a surrogate for academic performance and concluded that the longer the time spent on Facebook, the worse students' performance would be (neglecting their duties and assignments).

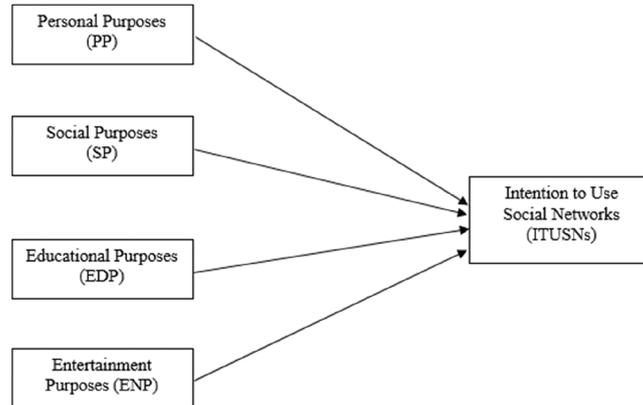
The findings of a comparative study between Americans and Koreans were related to the cultural differences in the motivations of using SNSs (Kim et al., 2011). The researchers proposed five basic factors as the determining motives for using SNSs by American and Korean students and they are seeking friends, seeking social support, seeking entertainment, seeking information and seeking convenience. Another study has adopted similar factors to study the motivations and reasons behind using SNSs as follows: socialising, entertainment, information and seeking self-status by distributing 1715 surveys to college students basing on their hometown, demographics such as the gender, and their year in school (Park et al., 2009). Previous studies mentioned above have guided our review of the literature and structured our proposition under four major sections: personal purposes, social purposes, educational and entertainment purposes.

### **3 Methodology**

Social media is overwhelming our lives and became an important part of our daily activities. This study explored the literature and concluded four major factors that would have a significant influence on the intention to continue using the social media. The aim of study is twofold: the first is to examine the factors influencing the intention to continue using the social media. The four factors expected to influence the use of social media are the following and as shown in Figure 1: personal, social, educational and entertainment. The second objective is to explore the differences between American and

Jordanian students in relations to all the factors (and their sub-concepts) used in the study. Table 1 summarises the meaning of each proposed purpose of use.

**Figure 1** The regression model



**Table 1** Factors of using SNSs and it explains the meanings of each purpose

<i>Purposes/motives</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>References</i>
Personal	To get respect, self-esteem, confidence, creativity and being able to compete	Bolton et al. (2013) and Valenzuela et al. (2009)
Social	To socialise with others, find new friends, contact with others with similar interests	Bolton et al. (2013), Valenzuela et al. (2009), and Lovejoy and Saxton (2012)
Educational	To find information, news, conduct research, share knowledge and experience, and personalise the learning process	Bolton et al. (2013) Valenzuela et al. (2009), and Lovejoy and Saxton (2012)
Entertainment	To have fun, enjoy time or just spend time	Bolton et al. (2013)

### 3.1 Instrument used

The paper used previous research to build an instrument that would be used in this study. A questionnaire is a good instrument to measure responses from a large sample of respondents. Also, a structured survey would be easier to compare how different samples can differ or be similar with respect to their perceptions towards certain concepts. The instrument used in this study included three sections; the first section illustrated the objectives of research. The second section included simple demographic data such as gender and age. The instrument included no identification questions exposing respondents' identity to probe more accurate responses as respondents feel free when filling the survey. The final section included 17 items measuring the four constructs shown in the research model, and the dependent variable. The four constructs used in this study were measured using five items for each.

The instrument utilised a 5-point Likert scale with 1 representing total disagreement, and 5 representing a total agreement. With such type of scale, it is common in social sciences to allocate the ranges of responses when calculating the mean into the following categories: 1–2.33 is considered a low mean; 2.34–3.66, a moderate mean; and 3.67–5, a high mean. Such categorisation is based on dividing the total interval by three (categories), which yields the following:  $(5-1)/4 = 1.33$  for each interval. Once the instrument was ready, content analysis was conducted using five master students who participated in translating the instrument from Arabic to English and vice versa [utilising the backward translation method proposed by Brislin (1976)]. The description of items of the instrument is shown in Table 2 with the estimated means and standard deviations.

**Table 2** Item descriptions, means and standard deviations

<i>Item description</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. dev.</i>
P1: ... to get respect and appreciation from others	2.65	1.239
P2: ... to feel confident and achieve self-esteem	2.72	1.199
P3: ... to develop ideas for my life	3.67	1.223
P4: ... to better compete with others	2.77	1.290
P5: ... to get help and support from others	3.49	1.161
<i>Total construct means and standard deviation (personal purposes)</i>	<i>3.063</i>	<i>0.935</i>
S1: ... to communicate with people who I do not know	3.22	1.323
S2: ... to communicate with people with similar interests	3.55	1.097
S3: ... to find new friends I never met	2.84	1.301
S4: ... to sustain my existing relationships	3.74	1.102
S5: ... to revive my old abandoned relationships	3.41	1.213
<i>Total construct means and standard deviation (social purposes)</i>	<i>3.353</i>	<i>0.823</i>
ED1: ... to find new and useful information I need	4.11	0.978
ED2: ... to get help in completing and doing assignments	3.59	1.202
ED3: ... to conduct research about specific problem	3.47	1.196
ED4: ... to share with others my knowledge and expertise	3.54	1.088
ED5: ... to know about assignments deadlines and requirements	3.71	1.187
<i>Total construct means and standard deviation (educational purposes)</i>	<i>3.684</i>	<i>0.872</i>
EN1: ... to have fun, and enjoy my time when alone	4.06	0.992
EN2: ... just to pass time	3.97	1.047
EN3: ... to enjoy my time within groups	3.16	1.227
EN4: ... to explore my sense of humor with others	3.59	1.091
EN5: ... to listen to music, and see videos posted by others.	3.88	1.152
<i>Total construct means and standard deviation (entertainment purposes)</i>	<i>3.729</i>	<i>0.779</i>
CITU1: I will continue using social media (SNSs) in the future	4.28	0.878
CITU2: I will use more social media types	3.64	1.098
CITU3: I expect that I will continue using social media (SNSs)	4.22	0.873
<i>Total construct means and standard deviation (continuous use of SN)</i>	<i>4.045</i>	<i>0.782</i>

... I use social networks ...

### 3.2 *The sample and sampling process*

The authors distributed the surveys and collected data from university students in two countries at the same time. The sampling process in both countries was based on voluntary bases. Faculty members were asked whether they would allow the researchers to distribute the survey on students and supervise the process of collecting data. In class setup, students were asked whether they volunteer for such task and were not forced to do that. Finally, not extra credit or incentive was given to students in for filling the survey. Research concluded that context, sample and topic were significant factors influencing research results more than being student or not (Peterson and Merunka, 2014).

The first sample included 118 usable surveys collected from students in the University of Detroit Mercy in the USA. The second sample included 111 usable surveys collected from students in Yarmouk University in Jordan. The sample included 113 males (49.3%) and 116 females (50.7%). As for age, the sample included 75 students with age less than 20 years (32.8), 152 students with age from 20 to 30 years (66.4%) and 2 students with age more than 30 years (0.9%).

For such Likert scale, a value between 1 and 2.33 indicates a low perception, a value between 2.33 and 3.67 would indicate a medium perception, and finally a value between 3.67 and 5 would indicate a high perception.

## 4 **Data analysis and discussion**

The first step is to explore the overall item means and standard deviations. Table 2 includes an estimate individual items and the overall variable. Results shown in Table 2 indicate a majority of medium perceptions regarding the factors related to the personal and social factors. On the other hand, higher perceptions are witnessed for entertainment and educational factors. Overall, personal factor yielded medium perception (mean = 3.063), social factor yielded medium perception (mean = 3.353), educational factor yielded high perception (mean = 3.684) and finally, entertainment factor yielded high perception (mean = 3.729). The overall perception regarding the intention to continue using SNs yielded high value (mean = 4.045).

The second step in analysis is to estimate the overall construct value for all five constructs and use such value in multiple regression to estimate the influence of such four factors on the continuous intention to use. To estimate regression, the first step was to see whether some outlier values (responses) are distorting our analysis. The initial estimate of regression called for one instance only and thus was removed from the further analysis. The total sample size used for regression totalled 228 surveys.

Multiple regression results are shown in Table 3, where the result of regression indicated a significant model that predicts the continuous intention to use SNs (CITU). The coefficient of determination  $R^2 = 0.296$  ( $F_{4,223} = 23.435$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), which means that the variability of CITU can be explained by 29.6%. The coefficient table (Table 3) indicates also a support for all factors in predicting the CITU with differential significance level.

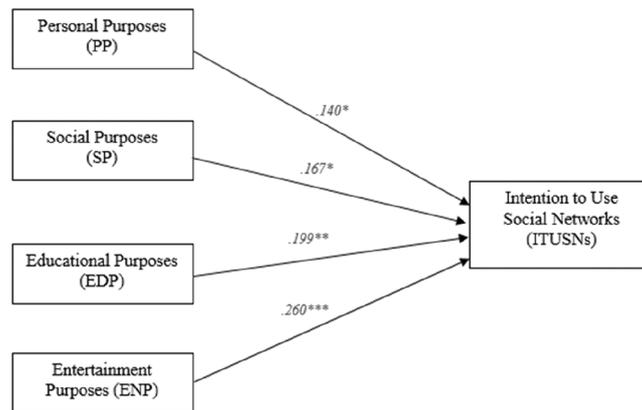
**Table 3** The regression coefficient table

Constructs	Unstand. coeff.		Stand. coeff	t	Sig.
	B	Std. error	Beta		
Constant)	1.566	0.266		5.890	0.000
Personal purposes (PP)	0.116	0.058	0.140	2.001	0.047
Social purposes (SP)	0.157	0.063	0.167	2.488	0.014
Educational purposes (EDP)	0.176	0.058	0.199	3.032	0.003
Entertainment purposes (ENP)	0.257	0.059	0.260	4.339	0.000

*Dependent variable: Continuous intention to use SNs (CITU).*

The values of standardised betas in the coefficient table indicate that entertainment purposes are the most influential factor on CITU (beta = 0.260), followed by educational purposes (beta = 0.199). The other two factors were also significant in predicting CITU SNs, with beta values lower than the previously mentioned two (social purposes beta = 0.176 and personal purposes beta = 0.140). Figure 2 shows the resulting research model.

**Figure 2** Resulting research model with beta values



The second research objective is related to the focus of this research, where we aim at contrasting the results of this study between the two cultures. We assume that the cultures of the two countries will impose differences in behaving on SNs. The culture factor will be treated as a black box, where we are not interested in exploring the reasons behind such differences. Still, this exploratory study will try to see whether differences exist between the two groups of students.

To test for differences between the two groups, a one-way ANOVA was conducted using student country as a differentiating factor. To see whether the differences are substantial or not, the same test was done on gender. Gender is a significant determinant in research (AbuShanab et al., 2010; Abu-Shanab and Al-Jamal, 2015a) and if culture (country) incurs a difference more than gender, we rest our argument. The test utilised an ANOVA test using an alpha value =0.05. All values of  $p < 0.05$  would mean that the difference is significant based on country or based on gender. The first test compared all

items of the survey (results are shown in Table 4). The second test compared the overall constructs based also on gender and country (results are shown in Table 5). We also estimated the means and standard deviations for the two categories of country (i.e. the mean of US students' responses vs. the means for Jordanian students' responses).

**Table 4** ANOVA test for individual items based on country and gender

<i>Item</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std.Dev.</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
PP1	USA	2.42	1.219	8.013	0.005	0.159	0.690
	Jordan	2.87	1.207				
PP2	USA	2.47	1.257	10.568	0.001	3.222	0.074
	Jordan	2.97	1.066				
PP3	USA	3.02	1.293	94.614	0.000	11.180	0.001
	Jordan	4.34	0.640				
PP4	USA	2.54	1.323	7.499	0.007	0.023	0.879
	Jordan	3.00	1.202				
PP5	USA	3.09	1.237	30.840	0.000	2.796	0.096
	Jordan	3.90	0.908				
SP1	USA	2.70	1.341	42.848	0.000	2.600	0.108
	Jordan	3.76	1.072				
SP2	USA	3.35	1.162	8.079	0.005	4.497	0.035
	Jordan	3.76	0.984				
SP3	USA	2.50	1.380	17.027	0.000	0.795	0.374
	Jordan	3.19	1.116				
SP4	USA	3.75	1.136	0.054	0.817	1.638	0.202
	Jordan	3.72	1.068				
SP5	USA	3.25	1.174	4.229	0.041	0.001	0.973
	Jordan	3.58	1.240				
EDP1	USA	3.80	1.116	27.033	0.000	9.891	0.002
	Jordan	4.44	0.670				
EDP2	USA	3.12	1.301	42.042	0.000	8.669	0.004
	Jordan	4.07	0.860				
EDP3	USA	3.04	1.302	34.211	0.000	9.929	0.002
	Jordan	3.91	0.873				

Results in Table 4 indicated that 17 out of 23 items were significantly different when compared based on country, but only 9 out of 23 were significantly different when compared based on gender. Such result supports our notion of the importance of culture influence. The differences were mostly focused on personal and social purposes of using SNs. In the same table, we can see also that the Jordanian means were higher than US means, for almost all items (significant items). It is important to mention that only significant results need to be taken into consideration. The second test shown in Table 5 indicated also a more prevalence of differences between the two cultures for the overall

construct values. Such result supports also our remise in this research. Similarly, the means of Jordanian students were higher than US students.

**Table 5** ANOVA test for overall constructs based on country and gender

Construct	Country	Mean	Std. deviation	Country based		Gender based	
				F	Sig.	F	Sig.
Personal	USA	2.707	1.016	39.378	0.000	3.501	0.063
	Jordan	3.421	0.653				
	Total	3.054	0.928				
Social purposes	USA	3.111	0.868	21.854	0.000	1.000	0.318
	Jordan	3.598	0.690				
	Total	3.348	0.822				
Educational purposes	USA	3.304	0.985	56.237	0.000	14.925	0.000
	Jordan	4.083	0.489				
	Total	3.683	0.874				
Entertainment purposes	USA	3.874	0.806	8.113	0.005	0.917	0.339
	Jordan	3.584	0.725				
	Total	3.732	0.780				
Continuous use purposes	USA	3.932	0.832	6.189	0.014	5.386	0.021
	Jordan	4.183	0.683				
	Total	4.054	0.772				

## 5 Conclusion and future work

This research tried to explore how students perceive the purposes of using SNs. The objectives of research were attained using a survey designed to probe student’s perception regarding four major dimensions (types of purposes): personal, social, educational and entertainment. The first objective was to see whether the four purposes will significantly influence the continuous intention to use SNs. Results indicated a full support of our proposed research model with a coefficient of determination equal to 0.296.

The second objective was to explore whether differences exist between the perceptions of US students and Jordanian students. An ANOVA test was conducted on the same data utilising the differences based on gender and country. Results indicated a stronger influence of culture (country) than gender influence. Such results support our assumptions. Also, our results indicated that means of responses for Jordanian students were higher than US students.

Our research utilised a new developed survey that collected items from previous research and tried to adapt such items to US and Arabic environment. Still, the instrument needs to be validated more to improve our results. This issue calls for more research on issues related to SNs, or other technologies and how different cultures perceive such technologies. The second limitation of this work is the sample size, where comparable sizes of sample are targeted, which limited our research to a small size. Still, the

sample size exceeds the recommended size for generalisability (Hair et al., 1998). Finally, future research can contribute to other factors related to using SNs.

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