On the Scale in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Facebook vs. Snapchat

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Abstract

This research aims to analyse the practices adopted by social media users in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), specifically users of Facebook and Snapchat. To collect data from participants, a questionnaire was used, generating 915 responses. The analysis of the data shows a clear preference for Snapchat over Facebook in the KSA, where 89% of the participants have accounts on Snapchat compared to 66% of them with accounts on Facebook. Moreover, the preference for Snapchat over Facebook has been clearly shown in the daily usage of participants, where 83% of those with Snapchat accounts can be described as very active users. They have accessed their Snapchat accounts at least once a day compared to only 15% of Facebook users. Different reasons were provided by the participants explaining the practices they adopted. We believe that such research could help social media applications' designers and policy makers to understand the behaviour of users in the KSA when using social media applications and the rationale behind their behaviour and preferences. This understanding could help improve the performance of current applications and new ones.

Key words:
Image-based social media applications, Facebook, Snapchat, KSA, users' practices.

1. Introduction

Social media has become a marker of this era, where different social media applications are heavily used by millions of people every single day. These applications have a major impact nowadays on people's lives, where the widespread dissemination of information could affect or shape the general opinion of readers. One of the reasons that make social media popular is the variety of these applications. However, it has been noticed that in some countries, some social media applications are more popular than others.

Several objectives will be considered in this research, but the main one will be to study the behaviour and practices of social media users in the KSA, specifically users of Facebook and Snapchat. In addition, this research aims to understand the reasons for and aspects of adopting different behaviours for each application.

Facebook and Snapchat are mainly used to publish and share photos and video streams; however, the differences in the varying use of these applications and user acceptance are noticeable. Facebook was released earlier in 2004. It has been categorized as the most used application in many countries. However, Snapchat was released years later and has almost the same number of users as Facebook. According to [1], in 2021 the number of Facebook users in the KSA reached 18.98 million (54% of the population), while Snapchat users in the KSA reached 17.73 million (53% of the population). The conclusion was that "Saudi Arabia continues to be a social media powerhouse, being one of the biggest national markets for Snapchat." In addition, in July 2018, it was reported that the KSA has the most active Snapchat users in the world [2]. In this case, a question may arise that although both Facebook and Snapchat are mainly image-based social networking applications, what are the factors that make users of social media applications in the KSA prefer one of the two over the other, and why?

To answer this question, the practices of social media users for the two applications should be analysed and understood, and so should the reasons for these practices. In this paper, we illustrate related previous research, present a summary of the unique setting of the KSA, describe and discuss our methodological approach, outline the findings about the participants' practices while using Facebook and Snapchat, and finally discuss the implications of these practices in the KSA.

2. Related Work

Social media are technologies that allow users to create and share different types of information and ideas and interact with other users through computer-mediated virtual

reality [3]. Therefore, social media users access social media services by using desktops and laptops or downloading applications to their mobile devices, such as smartphones and tablets. These applications offer social media's various functions. As users are involved in social media services, they generate platforms where they can interact, share, modify, discuss, and co-create online posts for other users. In addition, these users can be communities, organizations, or individuals.

It has been noticed that social media formed and changed the way humans interact and communicate. According to [3], social media "introduce substantial and pervasive changes to communication between organizations, communities, and individuals." Interestingly, these changes are encouraged. They have also inspired the creation of a new field called Technoself Studies (TSS). TSS are a new, interdisciplinary area of research focusing on all aspects of technological virtual society and human identity and concentrating on the relationships between human practices and technologies [4]. Worth mentioning here is that this new field focuses on mapping and analysing the changes in the concept of human identity as a consequence of the changes in technology, with an emphasis on the former, not the latter. In this field, some studies have been carried out in the health care area. For example, Moreno et al. [5] investigated the relationship between the personal and professional use of social media by physicians. The authors concluded that physicians with a high level of usage of social media would adopt practices such as focusing on the effect of social media on participants along with a better self-estimation of competences. Al Onezi et al. [6] investigated the effect of online social support provided to people who quit smoking in the KSA. They found that online social support was more effective than traditional support methods. The findings clearly showed that users who participated and received support from social media groups on Twitter and WhatsApp found it easier to quit smoking than did others. Different studies have been carried out in the education and academic sectors and have focused on the effects of social media use on students' academic performance [7]. The study found a significant negative impact on academic performance when students used social media for non-academic purposes, particularly for video gaming. Alwagait et al.[8] carried out a similar study in the KSA, and the results showed that student GPA scores were not affected by the use of social media. Students even emphasised the importance of time management as a factor besides the use of social media. Meanwhile, [9] found that although teachers and students agreed that social media should only be used for socialising, they were still willing to use it for educational purposes, and they believed it would improve their educational skills. Focusing on privacy concerns for social media users, [10] found that users' concerns about privacy along with the type of self the user wanted to express play an important role in

choosing which social media application to use. When asked to choose between Snapchat and Instagram, users primarily used Snapchat to express their true and actual selves. Meanwhile, Instagram users said they basically used the application to express ideal self and higher privacy concerns.

In an important study, [11] examined the behaviour of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat users and the influence of these social media networks on the relationships among people who work or live in the same society. The study found that Twitter users had higher bridging social relationships than did Instagram, Facebook, or Snapchat users. Bridging social relationships refers to strengthening weak and distant relationships between individuals that make available opportunities for information sharing [12]. The study found that Snapchat users had higher bonding social relationships than did Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter users. Bonding social capital applies to strong relationships, providing emotional kinship, trust, and social support [12].

As this research was carried out in the KSA, it is useful to provide a brief background of the KSA and to introduce the main issues relevant to this study. The KSA was founded in 1932. As 97% of the population is Muslim[13], Islam plays an important role, in that Islamic principles and traditions are intertwined with the Saudi culture.

3. Research Design

The purpose of this research is to analyse the practices of Facebook and Snapchat users in the KSA and to identify the reasons behind these practices. The study focused on answering these questions:
RQ1: Which one is preferred more in the KSA: Facebook or Snapchat, and how is this preference represented?
RQ2: What are the reasons that make users least prefer the other application?

An online questionnaire was created using Google Forms. It was distributed to eligible participants to answer these questions. The random target subjects of the questionnaire are social media users in the KSA above 18 years. The questionnaire took 10 to 15 minutes to complete and comprised 12 closed questions: two questions about age and gender, five questions about Facebook use, and five questions about Snapchat use. After collecting the responses, the data were entered into the computer and processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS V.20). SPSS is a widely used program for statistical analysis in the social sciences. It is also used by market researchers, health researchers, survey companies, governments, education researchers, marketing organizations, data miners, and others.

4. Findings

915 respondents received the questionnaire, 571 (62%) were females and 344 (38%) were males. The data were analysed using SPSS to compute various statistics. The responses were collected and recorded using tables and graphs to compute the frequencies and percentages for each question. By asking the participants whether they had accounts on Facebook/Snapchat or not, we found that 608 participants (66%) did have accounts on Facebook, 352 (58%) female, and 256 (42%) male, and 815 of the participants (89%) had accounts on Snapchat, 527 (65%) female, and 288 (35%) male, as seen in Figure 1.
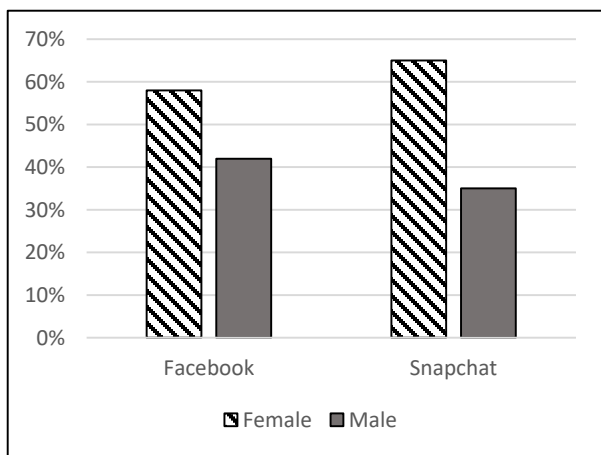
Figure 1: Participants having accounts.

Figure 2 shows the percentage of participants' answers regarding the date in which they created their accounts.
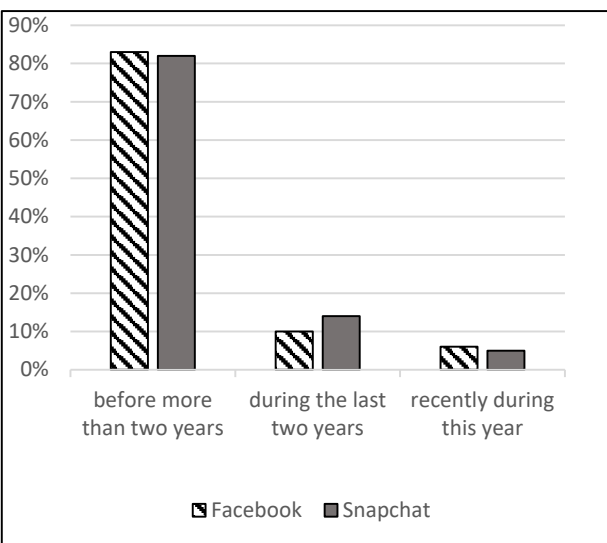

Figure 2: Date of accounts creation.

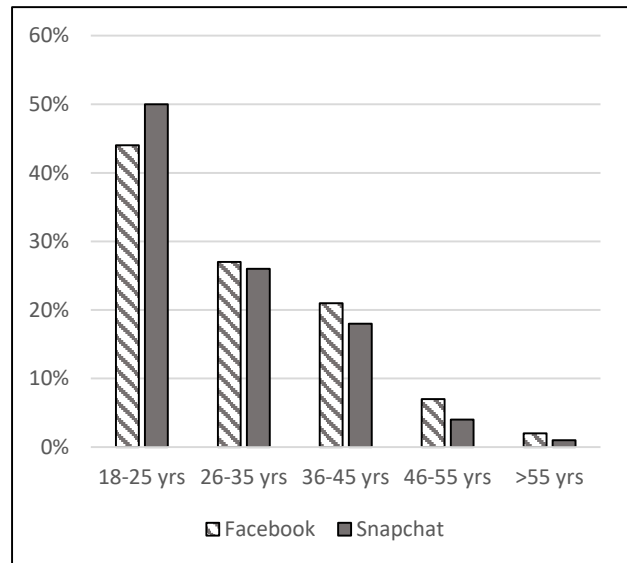Meanwhile, Figure 3 shows the age of the participants who

Figure 3: Participants age.

used their accounts on applications (rather than websites).

These apps are shown to be more popular among young participants than among old ones.

Participants were asked to pick the most appropriate sentence that described how often they used Facebook and Snapchat. The answers are presented in Figure 4, where it shows 675 (83%) of participants (452 female, 223 male) accessed their Snapchat accounts at least one time per day, compared to only 92 (15%) of participants (35 female, 57 male) accessed their Facebook accounts at least once a day.
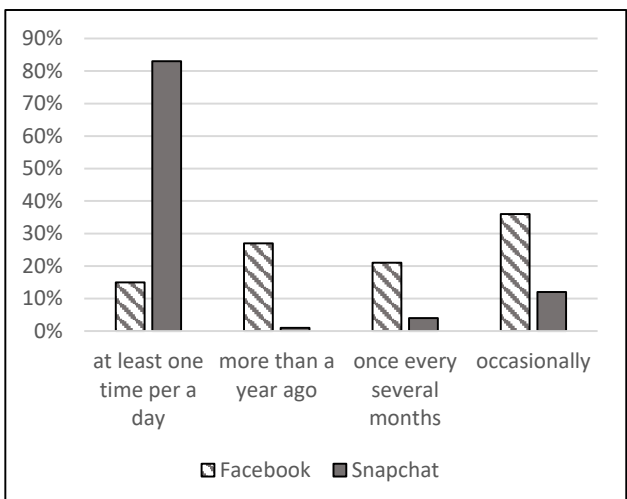

Figure 4: Frequencies of accessing the account.

Participants were asked to choose the relevant reason(s) for creating and using their accounts on the said social media applications. The answers are presented in Figure 5. The most highlighted reason was "to follow up on family and friends" for both applications. However, 209 (34%) of participants (139 females, 70 males) said they used Facebook because "it is required for a game registration," compared to only 4 (0.5%) of participants (1 female, 3 males) who said they used Snapchat for the same reason. Interestingly, 281 (35%) of participants (178 females, 103 males) reported that they used Snapchat "to get help from classmates with homework." On the other hand, only 16 (3%) of participants (7 females, 9 males) chose this reason for using Facebook. "Following celebrities" was chosen by only 2% of participants for Facebook and 4% for Snapchat. Other reasons mentioned by the participants include work, news, entertainment, etc.
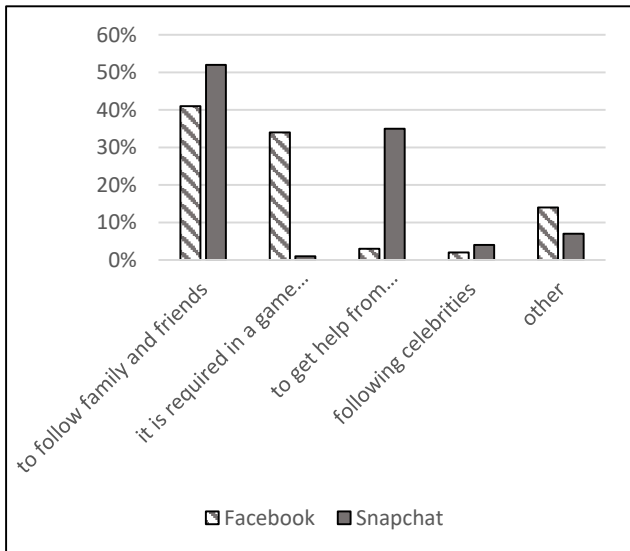

Figure 5: *Reasons for using the account.*

One the other hand, as shown in Figure 6, 307 (34%) of participants did not have accounts on Facebook even though all the participants declared that they had heard about Facebook before. On the other hand, only 100 (11%) of the participants did not have accounts on Snapchat.
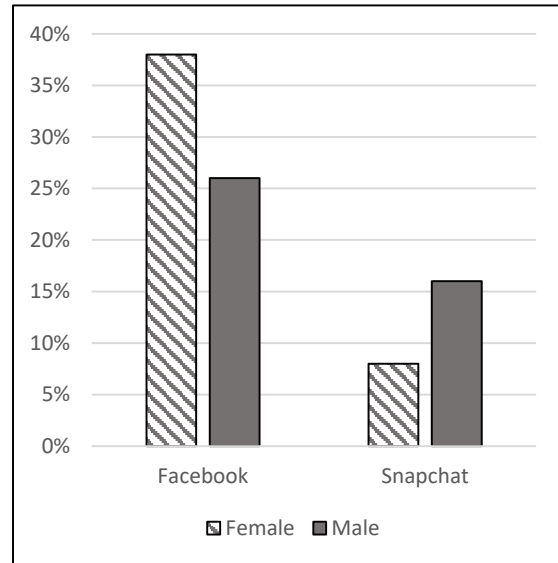

Figure 6: *Participants not having accounts.*

Participants were asked to provide reasons for not having Facebook accounts. They were presented with several reasons and were allowed to pick more than one (shown in Figure 7). The most highlighted reason for not having a Facebook account was "I did not like the idea of the application," where 123 participants (40%), including 84 (38%) females and 39 (44%) males, chose this reason. The second and third reasons for not having Facebook accounts were different among males and females. On the one hand, 21 (24%) of males said, "The application is popular in other countries but not in the KSA" and 19 (22%) of them said, "because none of my family and friends has an account" there. The order of answers was opposite for female participants, where 35 females (16%) chose the former and 70 females (32%) chose the latter. The shortage in personal technical devices was not one of the main reasons for not having Facebook accounts for either gender; the reason "I do not have a personal computer or smart phone to access my account" was chosen only by two male participants (2%) and only five female participants (2%). Other reasons were mentioned by the participants for not having a Facebook account, including the fact that the content is either fake or dull. Five participants (1.6%) mentioned that they worry about their security and privacy when using the application.

The most common reason for not using Snapchat (shown in Figure 7) was, "I did not like the idea of the application," where 65 participants (65%) (27 (61%) females, 38 (68%) males) use it because they do not have Snapchat accounts. Nearly all the other participants chose "because none of my family and friends has an account" there as a reason for not using Snapchat. Other reasons were mentioned by some of the participants for not using Snapchat, such as the content

on the application being misleading, fake or dull. They also added that the application motivates negative curiosity and intrusion into other people's lives. Interestingly, none of the participants chose the reason "the application is popular in other countries but not in the KSA" for Snapchat, compared to 18% of the participants who said that about Facebook. Similarly, the reason "I do not have a personal computer or smart phone to access my account" was not picked by any of the participants regarding Snapchat, while seven participants did so for Facebook, most of them females.
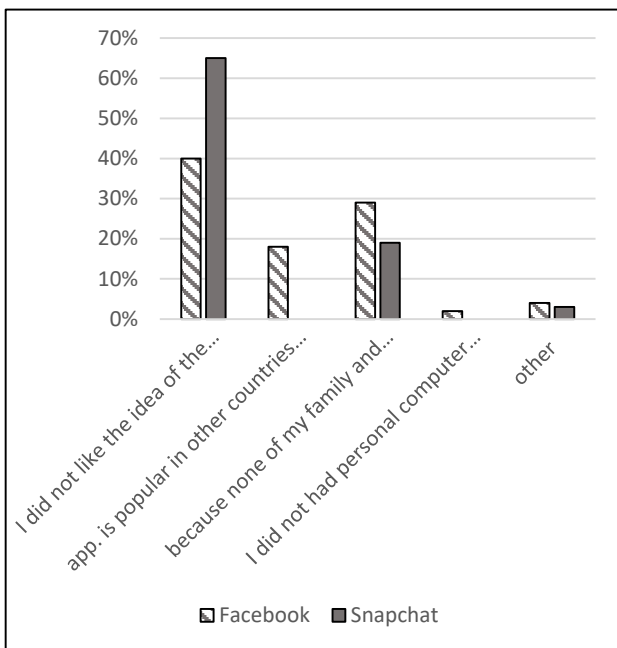

Figure 7: *Reasons for not having accounts.*

5. Discussion

The study focused on answering two questions:

RQ1: Which one is preferred more in the KSA: Facebook or Snapchat, and how is this preference represented?
RQ2: What are the reasons that make users least prefer the other application?

What can be noticed from Figure 1 is that 66% of participants use Facebook. Meanwhile, the participants with Snapchat accounts are 23% higher for accounts created more than two years ago, as shown in Figure 2. Figure 3 shows that these applications are popular among young participants from ages 18 to 25 compared to older people. The statistics show that owning an account on Snapchat among this age group is 6% higher than on Facebook. Interestingly, the possibility of owning an account on Facebook is higher than owning an account on Snapchat for all the other age groups: 26 to over 55. This means that

Facebook is popular among people older than 25. In Figure 4, there is a great indicator for preferring Snapchat over Facebook among participants. This is clear in the frequency of accessing accounts in each application. The majority of Snapchat users (83%) access their accounts at least one time per day, while most Facebook users (36%) access their accounts occasionally. The main reason for using the two applications, according to the participants, is to follow others, which is obviously the main purpose of creating such applications. The second most selected reason by Facebook users is for game registration. The second most selected reason by Snapchat users is to do homework with classmates. The interesting point here is that the analysis of the data shown in Figure 5 indicates that 34% of participants with Facebook accounts use their accounts for video games, compared to only 0.5% of participants with Snapchat accounts for the same reason. Therefore, the answer for RQ1 based on the analysis is that Snapchat is more preferred based on the percentage of participants using the application and based on the frequency of using and accessing their accounts.

Although all the participants declared they had heard of Facebook before, 34% of participants did not have accounts, compared to only 11% of participants with no Snapchat accounts. The main two reasons for this are not preferring the idea of application, and that the application is not used by family and friends. Interestingly, none of the participants selected the reason that "the application is popular in other countries but not in the KSA" for not using Snapchat, compared to only 18% of the participants who gave the same answer about Facebook. Based on this, the answer for RQ2 is based on the analysis of the data using answers to the reasons that make Facebook unattractive for (or least preferred by) most users. These are: the idea of the application is not preferred, the application is not used by family members or friends, and the application is not popular in the KSA.

6. Conclusion

Studying the practices of social media users is important and helpful for social media designers and policy makers when designing new applications or improving existing ones. In this paper, we believe that making the idea of the social media application simple to understand for end users would be the first step toward making the application popular. However, more needs to be done to further analyse the behaviour of social media users and to understand the reasons behind adopting certain practices.

Acknowledgement

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