

## **USERS' PERCEPTION OF PRIVACY BOUNDARIES IN THE DIGITAL WORLD: A STUDY FROM THE ARAB WORLD**

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### **EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

The development of the internet and social media has dramatically altered the way people communicate and share information, creating new opportunities for social interaction, business, and entertainment. In fact, social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram allow people to communicate with each other in a real-time, despite their physical location. Furthermore, social networks have expanded and diversified their offerings. For example, Facebook has acquired Instagram and WhatsApp, and it has launched features such as Facebook Live and Facebook Marketplace. Likewise, Snapchat has introduced new features such as Snap Map and augmented reality filters. As well, LinkedIn has introduced new tools for job seekers and recruiters, and Twitter has expanded its focus on news and live events. In general, social media platforms make it easy to share news, articles, photos, and videos with friends, family, and followers (Dizikes, 2020). Overall, social media networks have evolved to become an integral part of daily life for many people, with a wide range of uses and features. According to Smart Insights, the number of social media users globally increased from 4.2 billion in January 2021 to 4.62 billion in January 2022. As a result, people post 500 million tweets, share over 10 billion pieces of Facebook content, and watch over a billion hours of YouTube video during the day (Chaffey, 2023).

There has been a significant growth in using social media networks in the Arab world over the past few years. According to a report by Global Media Insight (2023), for instance, there are over 28.8 million active social media users in Saudi Arabia, which represents 79.3% of the total population, and 99.8% of the UAE population is using social media networks. Moreover, Kemp's (2023) report shows that 96.8% of Qatar's population, 58.8% of Jordanians, and 47% of Egyptians are using social media networks. This growth in social media usage can be attributed to various factors, including the development of ICT, the increasing availability of affordable smartphones, high internet penetration rates, and the growing popularity of social media platforms among Arab youth (Alammary 2022). Same as the rest of the world, Arabs are using social media networks for different purposes, such as communicating with friends and relatives, shopping, seeking jobs, and so on. For example, social media networks are widely used by elites and everyday citizens to discuss politics and achieve political goals. In this context, a study by National Endowment for Democracy found that social media has become a powerful tool for political mobilization in the Arab world. Researchers have also used social media data to study political behaviour in the Arab world (Siegel, 2019). Furthermore, a report by Pew Research

Center claimed that social media played a role in the Arab uprisings that began in 2010 (Brown, Guskin & Mitchell, 2012).

Despite that social media has become an integral part of our lives, it comes with its own set of privacy concerns. Some of the most common social media privacy issues include social media phishing scams, hacking and account takeovers, shared location data used by stalkers and predators, data mining leading to identity theft, privacy “loopholes” exposing your sensitive information, employers or recruiters evaluating you based on your posts, doxing leading to emotional distress or physical harm, cyberbullying and online harassment. Furthermore, social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram collect and store massive amounts of personal data from users, including their location, search history, and social interactions (Zhang et al., 2020). This data is used to deliver personalized content and advertising to users, which can be beneficial for some individuals. However, concerns arise when this personal data is misused, shared without consent, or exploited for profit. For instance, millions of Facebook users' data was harvested without their consent and used for political advertising (Cadwalladr & Graham-Harrison, 2018). Moreover, Children are at risk of online grooming, cyberbullying, and exposure to inappropriate content, while individuals with disabilities may be more susceptible to online scams and phishing attacks (Kargupta & Kumar, 2021).

The basis for morality and ethics in the Arab world, especially for Muslims, is primarily derived from the Qur'anic text and the verbatim quotes from the Prophet Muhammad, known as the Sunnah.

These sources constitute the foundation of Sharia law, which not only shapes the judicial system but also establishes societal norms and expectations for behaviour. The concept of privacy is highly valued and is an integral part of daily life in the Arab world. The Holy Quran emphasizes the importance of seeking permission before entering someone's home as a means of safeguarding privacy and maintaining the sanctity of the house and body. The act of knocking on a door three times before entering is intended to prevent unintentional intrusion on one's private space, especially in situations where one may be in a state of undress or with their spouse or family. Failing to seek permission and entering without consent can lead to an invasion of privacy (Norah & Sarah, 2016).

The Arab world has a unique cultural and social context that affects the way people view privacy. For instance, people in the Arab world may value privacy differently than people in the Western world. Understanding these cultural differences is crucial in designing effective privacy policies that are sensitive to the needs and expectations of the Arab population (Askool, 2013). Besides, studying social media privacy concerns in the Arab world is required to understand cultural differences, political implications, business opportunities, and human rights issues. It is essential also to develop effective privacy policies and protect the privacy of individuals in the region (Norah & Sarah, 2016). Furthermore, social media has played a crucial role in the Arab Spring uprisings that took place in the region. These events have highlighted the importance of social media platforms as tools for political mobilization and expression of dissent. In fact, privacy concerns in the Arab world are not just about protecting individual rights, but they also have significant political implications (Abokhodair et al., 2017).

The Arab world is a rapidly growing market for social media platforms, with a high rate of social media adoption among its population. Understanding privacy concerns in the region is crucial for social media companies that wish to tap into this market and build trust with their users (Khawla F Ali et al., 2020). Also, privacy is a fundamental human right, and social media privacy

concerns in the Arab world are no exception. In this context, the previous research focused on the effect of cultural restrictions on individuals' motivation, users' attitudes, intentional behaviour, and social media's actual use, in addition to understanding the purposes, benefits, and risks of its use (e.g. (e.g., Askool, 2013; Abaido, 2020; Asiri et al., 20217). Also, some of the previous research investigated the role of Islam and cultural traditions in constructing norms around privacy (e.g., Abokhodair et al., 2017; Shehu et al., 2017). However, there are limited studies that investigate the impact of culture and governing laws in mitigating the negative impact of privacy while using social media websites. In particular, understanding and respecting the privacy boundaries of other users while interacting with them on these platforms. Hence, the extended research aims to investigate the role that morality and ethics that are driven from Islam and Arab culture are playing in regulating users' interaction with others over social media websites if associated with national laws that govern such interaction. In this way, the researchers believe that the research results will introduce a practical solution that could be used to make social media platforms a safe place for users, especially while interacting with others. Also, the extended research will propose recommendations for future research to expand the study and generalize its results.

**KEYWORDS:** Social Media, Privacy, Arab World, Ethics.

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