

## **THE PERCEIVED IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ACCESS ON RURAL COMMUNITIES IN AL-AHSA REGION, SAUDI ARABIA**

Abdulrhman Qasei Alsubaie & Novel Lyndon

### **ABSTRACT**

Increasing penetration of smartphones in Saudi Arabia has increased access to social media. Smartphone ownership in Saudi Arabia is 87.34% and it is projected to further increase to 97.1% by 2025. This shows that smartphone penetration in the country is double the international average. The most notable use of the internet is for social interaction and this has enhanced the popularity of social media. Social media has greatly impacted the Saudi Arabian society that is largely defined by Islamic culture. Social media a force of change and it has transformed how people interact with friends. In this qualitative study, the data was collected through a survey method and an interview instrument is the research instrument employed. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the perceived impact of social media on the rural communities in Al-Ahsa, Saudi Arabia. The study used a sample of 17 students from King Faisal University and the study found that social media access enhances social interaction, attainment of freedom, and exchange of political ideologies. Also, social media access undermines personal privacy and dilutes a rich Islamic culture. The study also established that smartphone ownership is rapidly increasing in rural areas. Results of this study found the use of social media in rural areas is simultaneously beneficial and harmful. The findings will help leaders to develop policies that enhance the benefits of social media in rural areas but protect consumers from its harmful effects.

**Keywords:** Social media; Rural Communities; Al-Ahsa Region; Saudi Arabia; Social Media Impact

### **INTRODUCTION**

Internet access in Saudi Arabia has significantly increased since 1999 when the government repealed regulations that restricted internet access by the general public. The internet connection was available in Saudi Arabia as early as 1994 but the government limited its usage for medical, research, and academic purposes in an attempt to block access to culturally immoral and socially misleading information (Simsim 2011). A study by Samin (2008) evaluated how internet service is consumed by the people of Saudi Arabia. The most notable use of the internet is for social interaction and this has enhanced the popularity of social media. The advancement in social media technology has greatly impacted the way human beings communicate. Social media has enabled people in different parts of the world to communicate remotely despite wide geographical distances and this has reduced the world to a global village. According to Samin (2008), Saudi Arabia is the leading content creators in the Middle East and this reflects the increasing penetration of internet connectivity in the country.

The rapidly rising popularity of social media in Saudi Arabia is enhanced by the increasing penetration of the smartphone. According to the report published Kingdom's Communication and Information Technology Commission on Arab News (2017), there are at least 30 million users of mobile phones, and 88% of these devices are smartphones. This indicates that smartphone access in Saudi Arabia is approximately doubling the international average. The survey report published by Statista (2020) on August 26, 2020, shows that smartphone penetration has increased from 70.8% in 2017 to 87.34% in 2020 and it is projected to further increase to 97.1% by 2025. Saudi has provided an attractive market for leading phone manufacturing companies across the world. According to Statcounter GlobalStats (2020), the leading brand of smartphones used in the country is Apple with a preferred rate of 40.73%. Other smartphones brands include Samsung (28.63%), Huawei (22.47%), Xiaomi (1.76%), Lenovo (0.98%) and Oppo (0.96%).

An evaluation of the past works of literature there is minimal research on the effects of social media in Saudi rural communities and this calls for concern. Social media gives several connections ranging from social network sites where users can connect with family and friends (Khan 2012). As such communications begin, there is sharing of contacts which ultimately leads to communication with a purpose. In most cases, people only seek new connections in social media like new friends and fail to strengthen existing relationships with trusted friends. Privacy is one of the Saudi cultures that have been affected by the use of social media. According to Aljehani (2019), social media is breaking the prejudices in the gender disparity and bringing gender equality which has not to be advocated in the Saudi culture.

Social networking is predominantly with those with shared interests, cultural beliefs and norms and, and attitudes. In Saudi Arabia, there are many controlled sites for connections, and the government is involved in many ways like controlling online gambling, dating, and the kind of adult content consumed by the Saudi community because some contents of these sites contravene the religious dogma (Samin 2008). Therefore, the Saudi Arabians can create social groups that transcend attitudes and cultural beliefs but for learning the global views and accepting the social changes like gender equality. Additionally, individuals can share their expertise, their rights, privileges, and freedoms in social media. The connections allow for various opinions (Simsim 2011).

Through social media, as described by Hou et al. (2019), the behavior is changed for one can decide to share or not share his or her information, personal images, or statements. As a platform, social media is quickly changing the pattern of communication among the youths both positively and negatively. Besides, strong bonds are created and isolation of friends and families alike. Also, social media influences urban migration through education and career advancement, and access to information (Khan 2012).

The purpose of this research study is to evaluate the perceived effects of social media on rural communities, and the sampling will be from King Faisal University in Saudi Arabia. The use of social media in other parts of the world have been associated with both positive and negative consequences. The findings of the study will broaden the understanding of the impact of social media on rural communities in Saudi Arabia. The goal of this study is to evaluate the perceived impact of social media access by King Faisal University students. The specific research objectives were to gather data on the use of social media and to identify the positive and negative effects of social media in Saudi rural communities. The research questions include (i) what is the prevalence of smartphone ownership? (ii) what are the most popular social networking sites? and (iii) what

are the positive and negative impacts of social media access? The assumptions made in this study are that the participants in the study are assumed to be representative of the rural communities in Saudi Arabia and that respondents provided honest answers.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

A review of the past works of the literature shows that there is minimal research about the effects of social media in Saudi rural communities and this calls for concern that the study seeks to address.

The culture of the Saudi Arabian people is largely influenced by the Islamic religion. As described by Two & Curtice (2019), Saudi society is generally religious, conservative, and family-centered. Islam is the most dominant religion and strict adherence to its ideals is observed by everyone including the top leadership in the society. Mosques are found across the country to enable people to easily access the sacred religious place and every Muslim person is expected to pray five times each day. All the businesses are required to close during the prayer times to ensure everyone complies with religious duty. Muslim culture prohibits free interaction of people of different genders, for instance, the segregation of male and female students is a common practice in learning institutions including colleges and universities (Aljehani 2019).

### **Positive Effects of Social Media**

There are several benefits associated with the use of social media among the communities. Some of the benefits of using smartphones including its ability to enhance family bonding. Social media is an important communication tool that enables rural people to get in touch with their family members and friends in any part of the world (Alwagait et al. 2015). It reduces the cost of communication because interacting through the social media platform means no travel costs are involved. The rural residents need just to have a phone with internet access and they can conveniently communicate. Most of the social media platforms now can allow video calls. This is quite an advancement and it quenches the communication thirst for people in remote areas. Video calls provide a physical-like presence among those communicating remotely. Saudi Arabia students studying abroad in places such as the United States can participate in family events. Social media also enables rural people to create and share memories with family and friends (Jimenez & Morreale 2015).

Primack et al. (2019) states that social media access facilitates access to educative content. Many articles are shared on social media. They are important in educating society on various issues of interest. For instance, farmers can follow content related to farming while students can access free learning materials. Social media provides an opportunity for rural communities to engage in discussions of matters affecting them, for instance, they can channel their grievances to government representatives and this enhances governance. The citizens in rural areas were previously not heard but social media has enhanced their visibility in matters of national interests. Social media is a good tool for receiving and sharing information. It is now easy for the government to involve rural communities in development issues since social media serves as an instrument of public participation (Lenhart et al. 2010).

Social media has improved the ability of rural people to access superior products in the markets. This is because social media guides rural people when making purchase decisions. A person can compare prices for a product of their interest from different sellers and this enables them to get the best value for their money. Social media has a feature where sellers of different products are reviewed by those who have purchased items from them. A seller with a good rating will attract more customers since they are perceived as reputable (Aljehani 2019).

### **Negative Effects of Social Media**

People are increasingly becoming more obsessed with the things of the virtual world than real things (Primack et al. 2019). The enjoyment of simplicity and convenience brought about by smartphones comes at a high cost to our mental and social lives (Talaue et al. 2019). The use of a smartphone has become a great distractor of human progress. A lot of precious time is spent on the smartphone because of the addictive potential that has made users remain glued to it at all times. Alamri (2019) said that smartphones are kept at a clutching distance for ease of access, for instance, it is the first thing that a person would reach out to when they wake up at night. Smartphone use adversely affects social interactions as demonstrated by the University of British Columbia study (Bhattacharjee 2019). The use of smartphones during the conversation interrupts healthy in-person interaction and increases feelings of boredom (Al-Khaddam 2013).

According to Grau, Kleiser, & Bright (2019), the use of smartphones limits interpersonal interaction because many people are addicted to screen-based communication over in-person interaction. Parents are not giving enough attention to their kids because they are constantly on their smartphones. Human focus continues to deteriorate with the use of smartphones and this has reduced our productivity. The findings are seconded by a study conducted by Ward et al. (2017), who performed a mental experiment with 800 participants. The findings of the study show smartphone reduce memory performance because individuals who used smartphone had a lower score than those who did not. Another study conducted by Støle, Mangen & Schwippert (2020) found that students using smartphones to study perform poorly when compared to those who use printed materials.

### **Social Media Access and Impact on Rural Communities**

The rapidly increasing access to social media in rural areas has become a disruptive force in the conservative society. It continues to transform how people in rural areas relate and embrace their culture. Social media can create ties or breaks a society by diluting the cultural practices in a community (Alwagait et al. 2015). Social bonds exist due to continuous connection with friends and relatives even when far away using the internet. However, addiction to social media has separated families due to much attention therein. As most Saudi communities engage in social media, ethical issues in societies are neglected (Simsim 2011). For example, increased online crimes like stalking, information snooping, identity theft, cracking encryptions among others. The youths in the rural residents in the country find themselves addicted to the internet unknowingly or knowingly and, to some online destruction is an achievement (Aldraehim et al. 2013). E-terrorism has increased like hate speech and threatening emails.

According to Aldraehim et al. (2013). The attempt to block these sites by the government and other authorities. For example, the Saudi government has made efforts to block offensive sites such as online gambling, dating, and undesirable adult content. Alwagait et al. (2015) argue that these sites promote deviation from cultural, traditional, and religious beliefs. This is because such sites challenge cultural beliefs thus affecting the morals of the youths. The increased use of social media has changed massively society in terms of norms, sexuality, and religious dogmata among others (Alwagait et al. 2015).

Social media was closely monitored by the government and this has brought a lot of changes leading to isolation from friends and society (Edwards et al. 2013). People have engaged in social connection than a physical connection. As described by Bahkali et al. (2015), gender biases exist in Saudi Arabia as women get little opportunity to access social media. Men accessing social media is higher than women and there is a need to include women in internet accessibility (Bahkali et al. 2015; Lenhart et al. 2010). There is a lack of respect among the younger generation due to access to social media at their age. Leisure has lost its meaning in the community as most people take their time on social media. Excess consumption of social media has led to a decline in intellectual and social skills and even the need for communal work (Ward et al. 2017).

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In this study, three theories will be applied which include: Symbolic Interactionism, Social Exchange, and Social Penetration.

### **Symbolic Interactionism Theory**

The Symbolic Interactionism theory developed by George Herbert Mead relates to the social life process and thinking. The theory focuses on the forms of interactions that occur between people, what motivates them and how relationships in the community are built from a smaller unit to a relatively bigger unit, for example, from the family to a community. This formation is an intricate process build on trust, collective norms, and the shared common good (Homans 1958). The theory further explains how people learn from the actions of others in the community who either close associates or those who are considered as influential in the community. In Symbolic Interactionism, an interaction between in the community is mostly attributed to functional roles, each member in a circle identifies what the other does, and in doing so, the bond grows, and the interaction is promoted. After a given period, the interaction and the relationship created between two individuals can be equal at a certain level, in this, most individuals try to evaluate each other's position in the relationship. This evaluation is based on language and frequency of communication existing between the two individuals (Puddephatt 2017).

According to Puddephatt (2017), Symbolic Interactionism posits that behavior usually changes by a situation that depends on how social media influences the communities and individual's behaviors on ideas and living styles. Behavior is the action of people about communication, a changed communication can also impact the behavior of people in the community. Therefore, social media exposes people to the world which might change also change



the behavior of people with time. Behavior change has been monitoring in the Saudi Arabian rural communities due to the use and access to social media.

### **Social Exchange Theory**

Social Exchange Theory, developed by Emerson analyses how people communicate and interact with each other, how relationships are built, and how communities are formed (Emerson 1976). The theory holds that people behave in a manner that makes them feel secure and good and avoids behaviors that make them insecure and troubled. For this reason, communication among individuals is only initiated if the speaker is sure of a positive response (Emerson 1976). Emerson (1976) asserts that communication is characterized by agreement and acceptance of both the speaker and the recipient. This principle when applied in social media communication, works well only when both the recipient and the sender give each other opportunity, chance, and are in social agreement.

Therefore, participants who use social media for interaction in various ways in the rural communities can bring a lot of changes in their sharing of vital information that can be helpful in the communities (Aljasir, Woodcock, & Harrison 2013). The benefits can go beyond communities in Saudi Arabia as people can express their opinions in a meaningful manner in the community. For example, in the political arena, people air their voices about their democracy and the need to uphold human dignity. Users can also gain by the use of intellectual invasion to change the mindset of a given community and the perceptions of social connectors (Homans 1958). Rural communities can benefit from a changed mindset and become reformists rather than conservatives.

### **Social Penetration Theory**

Social Penetration Theory developed by Altman & Taylor (1973), can explain how human relationships are established. There are a lot of similarities between social penetration theory and the Social Exchange Theory. According to this theory, the process of sharing of information starts with an individual by sharing simple aspects of likes, tastes, and then moves to more complex aspects like sharing of goals and a belief or faith. Although not all this information of an individual is obtained or available in social media due to privacy, the choice of what to include is left to the social media user (Gaudin 2010). Findings from this theory the importance of privacy and how forms of communication change personal privacy. One of the key aspects of the theory is that like an onion with layers, so is it with personal information.

Just like the onion with layers, so is with internet communication, as friends narrow, confidentiality and privacy are only shared with the inner circle of friends. Additionally, the layers protect an individual from exposure to cyber-attacks on personal information. As one continues to communicate with the other, the trust is gradually developed, and the information deemed personal can now be shared. An individual can share his or her private information with those in the inner circle of close friends on social media (Altman & Taylor 1973).

## **Application of the Theories to the Current Study**

Among the theory under the theoretical framework, symbolic interactionism forms the main support in the evaluation process of the study because the theory assists in the creation of personal identity in the digital space. Social penetration and social theories will be utilized when analyzing for the study because they explain the impact of social media on students' behaviors and thinking processes. These theories expound on the correlation of daily usage of social media and its impacts on the rural Saudi Arabian community at large. Also, the theories explain the impact of social media on individual behaviors and how people express their feelings and thinking.

In this research, analysis of social media and how it impacts the users in Saudi Arabia. The theory that best suits the study among the mentioned above is symbolic interactionism. According to this theory, the interaction that exists between individual both great and small have a point of reference. This can be from the community, the inner circle, or a celebrity. This implies that the rural communities in Saudi Arabia are in a position to learn and have a changed mindset, way of thinking, and approaches to communal and social issues by having a point of reference from some key or influential people in the social media community. By learning the ways of life from interaction with the key figures who are role models to individuals in the rural communities in Saudi Arabia, the knowledge gained, and a changed mindset will bring a transformation due to the changed mindset of individuals in such communities

Social media is an ever-growing platform with newer technologies across the globe and this calls for people who are well conversant with new changes who will introduce the communities across Saudi Arabia. When change comes, the community must be ready to adapt to such changes for the common good. Therefore, it would be better to conduct frequent studies to learn the changes in social media and keep the communities and individuals updated. Being the first study in the country, it has the challenge of literature correlating to the topic and more so how it impacts the gender.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study has employed a qualitative study method to evaluate the perceived social impacts of social media on rural communities. Being among the few studies done on the topic in Al-Ahsa, it was imperative to have first-hand information on the impacts of social media on rural communities in Saudi Arabia. In this qualitative study, the data was collected through a survey method and a questionnaire is the research instrument employed. Open-ended questions were administered, and the respondents were receptive. Respondents answered questions that lasted about 20- 30 minutes. The total questions administered were 11 including the demographic questions about the respondents. The selection of the respondents was done by convenience sampling after having been briefed about the purpose of the study. Using students from King Faisal University was convenient because they were easily available, and they have good knowledge of the topic under investigation. Also, the respondents were assured of their privacy and they signed a consent form.

Interviews were conducted between October 8, 2020, to October 12, 2020, and notes that were taken during the interview were kept safe for the next process of data analysis and evaluation. All the notes containing the data will be shredded after the analysis to avoid access by the third

party. Any information that links the respondents with the information will not be taken personally. In doing the data analysis, the data were first sorted according to their classification and then the process of open coding began. Data sets were coded using axial coding to establish the themes on perceptions of participants in the study. Finally, thematic patterns were prepared by the deductive analytic technique.

### **Study Sample**

The study involved 17 students who were respondents. The participants in the study were randomly selected from King Faisal University. The sample consisted of 11 male students and 6 female students. Additionally, five were from rural Saudi Arabia and twelve were from urban setup in the country. The targeted ages of the participants ranged from 20 years to 30 years. The inclusion criteria were being between the first year and third year in college. Most of the respondents spend about six hours on the internet while at the university. A majority of respondents use Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat as their favorite social networking sites. They also use the internet for academic purposes.

### **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The focus of this section is to report the study findings and create tabular summaries of the results to enhance readability.

Table 1: Age distribution of the study participants

Gender/Age	20-25	26-30	Percentage
Male	6	5	58.82%
Female	4	2	41.18%
Total	10	7	100%

Table 1 shows that a majority of the respondents (58.82%) were between 20 and 25 years of age while those from 26-30 years represent (41.18%). Saudi Arabia is among the patriarchal societies of the world. In this regard, the males receive more preference than females and this has made it difficult for some of them to access higher education. The prevalence of gender discrimination was started in a study (Bahkali et al. 2015) study. Access to social media will give women in rural areas an opportunity to participate in community development.

Table 2: Smartphone ownership by students

Statement	Responses	Percentage
With Smartphones	15	88.24%
Without Smartphones	2	11.76%
Total	17	100%



Table 2 shows that a majority of community members (88.24%) own a smartphone while only 11.76% do not. Further inquiry showed they had either lost or damaged their previous smartphones. The smartphone ownership percentage computer in the study closely matches that reported by Statista (2020). This confirms that smartphone ownership in Saudi Arabia society is double the international average.

Table 3: Average time spent on social media

Number of Hours	Responses	Percentage
1-2	2	11.76%
3-4	5	29.41%
5-6	8	47.07%
7-8	2	11.76%
Total	17	100%

As seen in Table 3, most of the rural people spend between 5 and 6 hours on social media (47.07%). This is followed by those spending between 3 and 4 hours (29.41%) on social media – this group can be described as average users. The least time spends on social media is either less than 2 hours or above 7 hours (11.76%). The time spent on social media is high and it suggests that social media is impactful to the rural communities. Spending a lot of time on social media limits the time for interpersonal interaction which is important for social bonding and lack thereof fuel conflicts (Alwagait et al. 2015).

Table 4: The popular social media applications

Social Media Type	Responses	Percentage
Facebook	7	41.17%
WhatsApp	5	29.42%
Instagram	3	17.65%
Snap Chat	2	11.76%
Total	17	100%

Table 4 shows that the most popular social media platform is Facebook (41.17%), followed by WhatsApp (29.42%), Instagram (17.65%) and Snapchat (11.76%) is the least popular platform among college students. The global social media statistics indicate that Facebook, with approximately one billion daily active users, is the most popular. The reports show that 75 percent of the people who are above 13 years are have subscribed to Facebook and other popular social media applications (Aljasir, Woodcock, & Harrison 2013). The popularity of social media in the modern generation continues to increase because more people continue to join on an almost daily basis.

## **DISCUSSION**

Based on the findings from the study, I have identified five key areas that demonstrate the impact of social media access by rural communities. The identified areas include interaction, privacy, culture, and freedom, and politics.

### **Impact of Social Media on Interaction**

The data analysis showed that respondents use social media to interact with their friends and relative. The use of social media in a rural setting in Saudi Arabia is greatly penetrating communities. The study revealed that the use of social media in rural communities in the country excessively interferes with the social circle within families. By using social media, the individual can interact with a family member outside the country. The concept of Symbolic interactionism is what makes people interact with each other to form a relationship (Puddephatt 2017). The relationship between teenagers and their parents has significantly dropped due to the use of social media by such minors. As Simsim (2011) establishes, the use of the internet can change the behaviors of its consumers and bring a rift in the relationship. Progressive consumption of the internet makes adolescents develop an attitude of a solitary life. One of the respondents argued that following prominent and influential people on Twitter and Facebook makes an individual develop the desire to live a lifestyle of such a celebrity or a leader. Followers would want to dress, talk, and live like a celebrity. This shows how social media influences the students from a conservative culture to conflict with norms and traditions (Al-Khaddam 2013).

One respondent in the study said that "I prefer interacting with friends physical because technology can make me feel isolated from them". Most respondents agreed that the use of the internet brings the physical separation of families and relationships. Besides, the use of the internet deteriorates bonds between married couples by an obsession with social networking in an attempt to create a virtual circle of friends. This effect can lead to family issues like divorce or separation. Communication face to face reduces the effect of social media in the community (Jimenez & Morreale 2015).

### **Impact of Social Media on Privacy**

From women respondents, it was adduced that in the past, knowing the secrets of a home was difficult, this is because the community and culture limited women on the use of the internet and social media usage. However, this barrier has been broken and women can have the same access to the internet as their male counterparts (Bahkali et al. 2015). Women just like men can know what is happening in the community, country, and globally because they have good social networking. In the same way, women can now share their personal lives at the changes taking place at their homes easily to reach to their friends (Gaudin 2010). Both males and female respondents agreed that the internet interferes with privacy, one female student stated that "Sometimes the internet has positive ways like when you want to know the history about someone", in the same way, two male respondents argued that, "Social media is a threat to personal privacy...malicious people can create pornographic content using your identity" and "I love social media but I fear my privacy being compromised."

### **Impact of Social Media on Culture**

Most of the respondents agreed that the use of social media continues to change the culture of Saudi Arabia as the rural communities get corrupted by the outside world. Both male and female youths in Saudi Arabia have accessed inappropriate sites that contravene the culture of Saudi Arabia (Two & Curtice 2019). Access to socially immoral sites such as pornographic content causes contributes to loss of values and norms in long preserved in the country. However, some virtues have resulted from the use of social media in rural Saudi Arabia, for example, the scientific development in research and exposure to an avalanche of knowledge available cheaply across the world. Besides, one male respondent articulated that "Social media is a transformative technology that allows us to make new friends and catch up with old ones in any part of the world".

Another female respondent also said that "We are happy that social media is allowing us to receive and share ideas with friends from different cultures". The knowledge from the internet has led to a review of the rights of women in the country. For example, the idea of women driving their cars, in the theory of social exchange, people build relationships, form a circle of communities, and then they communicate and talk to each other (Alwagait et al. 2015). Most of the respondents asserted that the internet has significantly contributed to their scientific development of knowledge and cultural understanding by progressive networking with more developed societies.

### **Impact of Social Media on Freedom**

Freedom came out as the most pertinent issue in the research findings, both male and female respondents expressed their freedom to use the internet. Some respondents were happy that social media has liberated them from a conservative culture. With social media, they have a space to open up their minds to absorb new ideas and share opinions. According to them the use of the internet by communities across the country is moving to a more progressive and reformist nation. According to Bahkali et al. (2015), the Saudi government is repressive because Saudi men have more privileges than women and at this time the citizens especially women can air their grievances to the government on poor policies and rules favoring men and suppressing women.

Using the concept of social exchange theory, communication offers the users of the internet the privilege to share opinions (Emerson 1976). When the sharing of information is promoted in the community the gender disparity will be solved because women in Saudi will be able to have their opinions and views heard. The use of the internet has also given women to write freely and to express their freedom of speech. One female respondent articulated that "Through writing, you can write your opinion more easily." Lastly, through social networking sites, equality is seen between males and females in the consumption of social media.

### **Impact of Social Media on Politics**

Respondents agreed that political awareness in the country has increased due to access to social networking in the country. The majority of Saudi can conveniently access important political information affecting the country and other parts of the world through the use of social media (Lenhart et al. 2010). A male responded, argued that "Social media has enabled me to get regular

updates on political development in Saudi Arabia.” Access to information in Saudi and other Arab countries has increased more so after the Arab Spring Revolution. Another respondent also said, “With social media, we can raise our concerns to those in leadership, and shared concerns create a strong pressure on the government of the day.” An increase in access to information has made countries to take seriously the issues of the citizens expressed in writing via social media. Another female responded that "Social media has given the women of Saudi Arabia a unique opportunity to participate in the national debate, just like men and this makes me feel proud.”

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The findings of the study show that social media access by King Faisal University students has both positive and negative impacts. The impacts of the social media identified and discussed in this cross-sectional study include social interaction, personal freedom, cultural dilution, privacy concerns, and political ideology. Social media access has transformed interaction among the students and with the outside world. Students with social media can conveniently interact with family members and friends in any part of the world without incurring traveling-related costs. Social media has enabled students from a largely conservative culture to enjoy some personal space online. Social media has diluted the strictly-adhered Islamic culture as social media users interact with people from different cultures. Social media has compromised confidential information of the users and this has increased security threats such as identity theft. Although social media is beneficial, uncontrolled usage is harmful to the students' success in life. Also, social media enables people to conveniently access information about political development in Saudi Arabia. The study found that smartphone ownership in Saudi Arabia is rapidly increasing and the use of social media is not only beneficial to the rural community, but it can also cause a lot of harm. The findings will inform the development of policies that enhance benefits and simultaneously reduce the harm caused by social media.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank King Faisal University students for their contribution to the success of this study.

## **REFERENCES**

- Alamri, M. M. (2019). Undergraduate Students' Perceptions Toward Social Media Usage and Academic Performance: A Study from Saudi Arabia. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning (iJET)*, 14(03), 61-79.
- Aldraehim, M., Edwards, S., Watson, J., & Chan, T. (2013). Cultural impact on e-service use in Saudi Arabia: The role of nepotism. *International Journal for Infonomics*, 5(3-4), 655-662.
- Aljehani, H. A. (2019). Impact of Social Media on Social Value Systems among University Students in Saudi Arabia. *International Journal of Education and Practice*, 7(3), 216-229.

- Al-Khaddam, H. K. (2013). Impact of Social Networks on Interpersonal Communication of the Students University College Irbid Girls: Facebook as a Model. *Cross-Cultural Communication*, 9(5), 17-22.
- Arab News. (2017). Saudi Arabia has almost double international rate of smartphones. Retrieved from: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1211721/saudi-arabia>.
- Bahkali, S., Almainan, A., Bahkali, A., Almainan, S., Househ, M. S., & Alsurimi, K. (2015). The Role of Social Media in Promoting Women's Health Education in Saudi Arabia. In ICIMTH (pp. 259-262).
- BHATTACHARJEE, YUDHIJIT. (2019). "Smartphones revolutionize our lives—but at what cost?". Nationalgeographic.com, 2019. Online. Internet. 4 Oct. 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/2019/01/smartphones-revolutionize-our-lives-but-at-what-cost/>
- Edwards L. Sylvia, W., & Taizan, T., Chan, T. (2013). "Cultural Impact on E-service Use in Saudi Arabia: The Need for Interaction with other Humans." *International Journal of Advanced Computer Science*
- Emerson, R. M. (1976). "Social exchange theory." *Annual review of sociology*:335-362.
- Gaudin, S. 2010. "Facebook slapped with class-action privacy lawsuit."
- Grau, S., Kleiser, S., & Bright, L. (2019). Exploring social media addiction among student Millennials. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*.
- Homans. 1958. "Social behavior as exchange." *American journal of sociology* 63:597-606.
- Hou, Y., Xiong, D., Jiang, T., Song, L., & Wang, Q. (2019). Social media addiction: Its impact, mediation, and intervention. *Cyberpsychology: Journal of psychosocial research on cyberspace*, 13(1).
- Aljasir, S., Woodcock, A., & Harrison, S. (2013). "Facebook in Saudi Arabia: Some Aspects of Facebook Usage by Saudi University Students." *International Journal for Infonomics (IJI)* 5(3/4): 655-662
- Alwagait, S, Shahzad, B., & Sophia, A. (2015). "Impact of social media usage on students' academic performance in Saudi Arabia." *Computers in Human Behavior* 51, 1092-1097
- Jimenez, Y., & Morreale, P. (2015, August). Social Media Use and Impact on Interpersonal Communication. In *International Conference on Human-Computer Interaction* (pp. 91-96). Springer, Cham.
- Khan, S. (2012). Impact of social networking websites on students. *Abasyn Journal of Social Sciences*, 5(2), 56-77.
- Lenhart, A., Purcell, K., Smith, A., & Zickuhr, K. (2010). Social Media & Mobile Internet Use among Teens and Young Adults. Millennials. *Pew internet & American life project*.
- Altman, I, & Taylor, D. (1973). "Social penetration: The development of interpersonal relationships ": Holt, Rinehart and Winston New York.
- Primack, B. A., Karim, S. A., Shensa, A., Bowman, N., Knight, J., & Sidani, J. E. (2019). Positive and negative experiences on social media and perceived social isolation. *American Journal of Health Promotion*, 33(6), 859-868.
- Samin, N. (2008). Dynamics of internet use: saudi youth, religious minorities and tribal communities. *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*. 1(2), 197-215. Retrieved from <http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/brill/mjcc/2008/00000001/00000002/art00008>.

- Simsim, M. T. (2011). "Internet usage and user preferences in Saudi Arabia..", Statcounter GlobalStats. (2020). Mobile Vendor Market Share Saudi Arabia. Retrieved from: <https://gs.statcounter.com/vendor-market-share/mobile/saudi-arabia>
- Statista (2020). Saudi Arabia smartphone penetration (share of population) 2017-2025. Retrieved from: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/625436/smartphone-user-penetration-in-saudi-arabia/>.
- Støle, H., Mangel, A., & Schwippert, K. (2020). Assessing children's reading comprehension on paper and screen: A mode-effect study. *Computers & Education*, 103861.
- Talae, G. M., Al-Saad, A., Al-Rushaidan, N., Al-Hugail, A., & Al-Fahhad, S. (2019). Social Media: It's Impact to Saudi Arabian College Students. *International Journal of Cyber Behavior, Psychology and Learning (IJCBL)*, 9(1), 33-48.
- Two, J., & Curtice, M. (2019). The Islamic faith and best interests. *BJPsych bulletin*, 43(4), 177-181.
- Ward, A. F., Duke, K., Gneezy, A., & Bos, M. W. (2017). Brain drain: The mere presence of one's own smartphone reduces available cognitive capacity. *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, 2(2), 140-154.
- Puddephatt, A. J. (2017). George Herbert Mead. In *The interactionist imagination* (pp. 95-119). Palgrave Macmillan, London.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

### **ABDULRHMAN QASEI ALSUBAIE**

Centre for Development, Social and Environment  
Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia  
43600 Bangi, Selangor  
abdulrhman.qasei@gmail.com

### **PROF. DR. NOVEL LYNDON**

Centre for Development, Social and Environment  
Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia  
43600 Bangi, Selangor  
novel@ukm.edu.my