Impact of Social Media Usage on Married Couple Behavior a Pilot Study in Middle East

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Abstract

As social animals, we are in need to communicate, collaborate and express our feelings and thoughts. But today our way of communication has changed; internet and social media occupied the imperious part of our lives. Now, community depend upon social media more than face to face communication to express themselves. But the use and role of social media vary from person to person. Growing evidence has shown that the social media has become the top addiction of present day time, which is affecting people's life not only as individual but also as a community. Social media addiction also proved to be the cause of negative impact on the relationship especially among couples. As of fact, role of social media on the lives of couples is vacillating. In one prospect, social media is the source of getting support, while at the other end it is the cause of conflicts and some negative feelings among couples. This paper specifically aims at studying the impact of social media on the lives of couples in Middle East. For this purpose, a survey study was conducted, where almost 287 respondents participated. Results indicates that social media is the major cause of negative impact on the lives of couples.

Keywords: social media; martial relationship; social behaviour; loneliness is relationship; negative impact of social media

1.   INTRODUCTION

Since ages, people have developed ways to express their feelings and thoughts to other people using verbal and nonverbal cues. Thanks to the technology used today, people are not required to meet in person to communicate [1]. According to [2], using CMC, conversations between individuals are more intimate and people are more willing to share details they wouldn't feel comfortable sharing in person[31].

Social networking sites are one of the most visited sites on the Internet. People use them as an online communication medium to connect with their friends or make new friends. Facebook and Twitter, two of the most popular social media sites, each have over 100 million users [3], [4]. Every user has a profile where they can include personal information such as their: name, age, gender, etc. Users may also send posts, comments, videos and images. The norm in social media is posting about personal life, thoughts and perspectives. Users receive validation when their online friends give them feedback on

their posts. The returned value expected of social media is not to fulfil information needs but to meet social-emotional needs [1].

Recognizing the overlap between individuals online and offline networks, an interesting study conducted on a sample of college students has found that students use social networking sites to connect with people they already know rather than making new relationships. Moreover, 73% of the studied sample only accepted friend requests of people they've met in person [4].

Social media can even change the way romantic relationships are established and maintained. Offline public display of affection (PDA) takes the form of holding hands or exchanging hugs. Affection displayed online on the other hand, known as public display of commitment is shown by liking pictures, posts or sharing inside jokes. Liking content is a virtual sign of approval. In addition, taking pictures of a significant other and posting them on social media shows commitment in front of other users [1]. Ultimately, Changing the status online serves as an indication that the relationship is official. It is also seen as a way to prevent people from flirting with a partner [5].

Romantic relationships may also be disrupted from the use of social media. Social media makes surveillance of one's partner easy. Monitoring a partner's behaviour online may lead to jealousy, anxiety and mistrust. Individuals with low self-esteem may find their partner's actions on social media as faults decreasing the level of satisfaction in the relationship [1].

In the Middle East, where the rise of social media usage is increasing exponentially [6], this study focuses on finding how social media impact their marital life.

2.   LITERATURE REVIEW

People are interested to get married by the advantages a marriage involves, such as safety, companionship, love, and emotional support and understanding. However, outside these positive outlooks on marriage, marital life also comprises with numerous conjugal pressures, tensions, arguments and disagreements. A rising amount of research has inspected and studied the possible impact of using social media on marital relationships and conjugal lives. A study [7] in America reported that 10% of internet users are of the opinion that social media had a "major impact" on their mutual rapport, and 17% say that it had a "minor impact." They reported that people felt closer to their partners because of online conversations and

many were able to resolve an argument using social media that they were having trouble resolving in person. On the other hand, some have felt that their spouse was often distracted by their cell phone when they were together and often got upset by the amount of time they spent online or by what they were doing online. For instance,[8] , a ground-breaking study, found that the usage of Facebook anticipated harmful relationship outcomes, such as breakups, divorces, and cheating. This research predicted these outcomes only when there was clash on the usage of Facebook and only among those who had been part of love relationship for three years or less. Study [9] covered comparable results with respect to Twitter. Higher usage of Twitter was linked and connected to negative outcomes in relationships as well. In this study however, relationship length did not relate or impact the amount of time they spent on using social media or their conjugal lives. Irrespective of the length of the relationship, those who were on Twitter more frequently and used it often were more likely to have conflicts related to Twitter, which then anticipated negative relationship outcomes. Furthermore, recently, [10] extended its study to another social media site and found that there were conflicts related to posting selfies on Instagram, which also led to negative relationship outcomes. The study of the relation between social media usage and its impact on marital lives was carried out recently in the United States. A survey [11] carried out in the United States; found that Facebook anticipated higher rates of divorce in 43 different states. Additionally, the use of social media forecasted dissatisfaction, trouble and lower quality in marital life.

Moreover, some research was conducted related to the online sources that trigger relationship conflicts. According to [12], 920 married couples stated that displaying personal details, flirting, sexting, and falling in love with others are part of online infidelity behaviours'. Study [13] reported that Facebook provides services that could lead to infidelity behaviour. For instance, accepting a friend request from a previous or ex-partner, receiving private messages, writing comments and liking attractive pictures, and similarly posting false relationship statuses. These online actions have been recognized as possible threats towards loyalty and faithfulness and researchers have started to relate these actions to some aspects of relationship commitment. Yet, there is no known research that has studied whether usage of these online service that may contribute to infidelity related behaviours' is related to lower quality of marital life and dissatisfaction.

There are number of negative factors which emerged using social media especially between couples such as surveillance (keeping an eye on other's significant activity), jealousy, depression, mistrust, sense of ignorance, improper interaction with others etc. According to study, surveillance and jealous are two most important and influential reasons for creating negative impact on married lives. In romantic relationships, the excessive use of social media can cause parties to be distracted and can give their partners less attention while being together. This can consequently lower the quality of time that they spend together, thus affecting and impairing the intimacy in the relationships [14]. An individual who is passionate about the use of social media can cause his/her partner to feel lonely and ignored, although they are physically together. Additionally,

seeing that a partner excessively uses social media to socialize with other people can cause suspicion and jealousy. Subsequently this can cause an individual to monitor and spy on his/her partner or get involved in other harmful behaviour [15].

Many governmental agencies and large organizations use high technology tools for surveillance and data collection, this raised the public's concern that their privacy is being compromised [16]. However, on social media, surveillance is not only a practice of some authority, but anyone and everyone who uses a social networking site is potentially exercising surveillance [17]. Surveillance that allows individuals to monitor others' online and offline activities is called interpersonal electronic surveillance (IES) [17]. IES is encouraged by the vast amount of information available on social media, the public nature of social media sites and the anonymity courtesy of accessing information [17].

Users of social media typically share personal information such as their name, physical appearance, age, relationship status, hometown and activities on their profiles. Profiles are either public or semi-public. The former allows any user registered in the site to gain access to their personal information, the latter only allows specific users to gain access [17]. A study conducted on mySpace users finds that users do not usually set high privacy settings [18]. Similar results were found on Facebook, where a significant number of students publicly sharing sensitive information disregarding their privacy [17].

Individuals who practice IES on social media can easily find message exchanges, relationships, attended or planned gatherings of an individual. The popularity of social media resulted to almost socially accept online couple surveillance [1]. According to [17], monitoring a partner's activities is reported as the second most common act on Facebook. Romantic partners who exercise surveillance, usually feel that their relationship is threatened [17]. As stated in [1], surveillance directly corresponds with trust issues in the relationship. Also, using surveillance as a means to check up on your partner frequently has showed a negative effect on the relationship [1]. Additionally, surveillance is not only limited to individuals monitoring their partners. Some use social media to collect information about a previous or past lover [19], [20]. Most find it tempting to observe their exes. Reference [17] reported that individuals would somewhat rather check out and browse their former lovers and their current partners rather than introduce themselves to new people and go into a new relationship online. Surveillance alone can straightforwardly drive to jealousy [20].

Jealousy is an emotion that accompanies a person when they feel that a critical aspect of their relationship with a loved one or the relationship altogether is threatened by another person. The three roles to play in a love triangle, which triggers jealousy, are: the admirer, the loved one and the rival [21]. A jealous reaction can either be a response to a real or unreal threat. [1]. Individuals with low self-esteem experience more jealousy than those with high self-esteem [22].

The usage of social media has created new means for jealousy by allowing disclosure of information that could not have been available elsewhere [1], [22]. Romantic partners who spend

longer time on Facebook are more likely to experience jealousy [23]. Inappropriate online activities by a loved one may cause a lover, due to the jealousy felt, to constantly check up on their partner's activities. A jealous lover may also express their feelings online, potentially causing an argument between them [1]. Reference [17] finds that relational surveillance is more common in short or new relationships or in younger individuals to find information on their partner to better know them. Even though this may give the impression of a positive influence, it may also initiate jealousy. Reference [24] reported that the increased use of Facebook can induce jealousy in romantic relationships when ambiguous information is discovered. And consequently, this may lead to the excessive use of Facebook to minimize the ambiguity that was uncovered. This could then lead to an infinite loop.

The impacts of social media on romantic partners do not end by the end of their relationship. Post breakup effects were discovered when a study has found that re-reading and over analysing old posts and messages are activities engaged by 64% of Facebook users. Furthermore, surveillance practices on Facebook are common phenomena for couples after their separation. An astonishing 88% of ex-partners who remained friends on Facebook have spied on their ex-partner's profile. Eventually, experiencing more breakup distress the longer they spend monitoring their ex-partner. [25]. Previous studies encouraged Facebook users to delete or unfriend their ex after a breakup. However, a recent study contradicts this statement when its findings showed that participants who remained Facebook friends with their ex-partner had lower breakup distress than those who are not friends on Facebook. Concluding that, following a single approach to heal breakup distress on all individuals is not possible. Nonetheless, it is suggested for ex-partners whose relationship ended badly to unfriend each other from Facebook. On the other hand, it's a good idea to remain friends on Facebook for ex-partners who haven't suffered from a problematic breakup. [25].

On the other hand, social media sites can be present positive signs of promise and commitment. Today, partners separated by distance do not face a major difficulty and usually preserve their romantic relationships and feel close because of social media. Loved ones stay connected all the time through it and do not see physical distance as an obstacle [22], [26] . In a new relationship, when one of the partners changes the relationship status in one of the sites to "In a relationship" is a major step in a relationship [5]. It was also stated that individuals who publicize their affection to one another on social media is a sign of love and that partners value these bold romantic gestures.

Often the type of the social media used has a more significant impact on relationships than the time spent on them. Sites that include browsing friends' profiles and partners usually have the strongest impact. This might oppose the theory of jealousy in romantic relationships caused by social media, but the emotion of happiness or jealousy can be determined by the information found. More often, individuals who look through their friends' profiles are likely to confront information about their partners as well. Romantic wall posts or pictures can create happiness. For instance, when an individual see that their partner has gossiped about their relationship with their friends and family or has added pictures showing them together can create

happiness within the relationship. Moreover, people who are obsessed with popularity could also feel happiness in the use of social media. Individuals who care about popularity and like to look popular on social media feel happier if their partners publicize their relationships, add positive posts, and upload romantic pictures online.

Social media sites also were found to affect self-esteem [27]. People who suffer from low self-esteem have seen the usage of social media as an advantage. Loss self-esteem individuals in romantic relationships have gained higher self-esteem and happiness when their partners publicize their relationships or have changed their statuses to "In a relationship." In conclusion, if individuals are satisfied with their relationships, social media sites could provide them with more positive emotions and satisfaction. People pleased with their relationships will most like browse their social media happily.

Since the main purpose of this paper is to study the effect of social media usage on marital life in the Middle East, it is important to understand the impact of social media on the Middle East. Today, the use of the Internet in the Middle East may be greater than anywhere in the world. Reference [28] reported that the usage of the Internet ranges from low of 9% of the population in Iraq to 98.6% in UAE. Reference [29] stated are noticeable cultural differences in the use of social media. According to a survey conducted, there was great use of Facebook, Twitter, and Google+. Furthermore, men were the key users of the Internet and in Middle Eastern dating and chatting web sites. Nevertheless, use of the Internet and social media in the Middle East is strongly attracting young people regardless of culture and gender.

In the Middle East, people's outlook towards social media is a bit complex in comparison to the West. Most cultures in the Middle Eastern society are more conservative compared to the Western societies. Men and women are likely and are expected to not have casual chats with people of the opposite sex. For instance, in Saudi Arabia, there is a strict and firm separation of sexes. Yet however, in these most conservative countries, there are online social medias such as khtabh.net that are thriving. There are many Twitter sites and lots of forums that provide online assistance for Saudi men and women looking for mates for traditional marriages. Moreover, in Kuwait, according to [30], most university students are used to using the Internet. 75% of these students are active on social media. Of those 75%, 30% of them used social media to regularly chat with the opposite sex. Additionally, in Egypt, students at American University, reported that they had met members of the opposite sex through the MSN. MSN website includes an instant messenger section, which enables instant online conversations.

After understanding the attitude of the Middle East towards social media and the outlook it has towards meeting the opposite sex online, the goal of this paper is to study the effect it has on married life in the Middle East and if the Middle Eastern society faces the same dissatisfaction, trouble and lower quality in marital life the West faces.

3.   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research paper aims to focus on studying and analysing the impact of social media on married life. For data collection purpose, a survey questionnaire was developed by authors and has been conducted over the period of two months April 2017-May 2017. Survey targeted married people in middle east. Both partners are asked to fill survey individually to get the real impact of social media on both genders. Moreover, authors were available through emails and WhatsApp to answer all queries regarding the survey from the participants. Survey questionnaire was validated and tested by number of experts to get reliable and profound data as well as to validate the understanding of questions. In total about 287 individuals participated in the survey with their complete responses. Respondent were all married people and have been married between 1-more than 25 years (Mean=2.55, SD= 1.46). Most of them have not used any social media app or platform to meet their spouse (Mean=0.15, SD= 0.36). The geographic information of participants is shown in the following figure 1 (Map based on Longitude (generated) and Latitude (generated). Color shows count of User. The marks are labelled by count of User and Location. Details are shown for Location.):
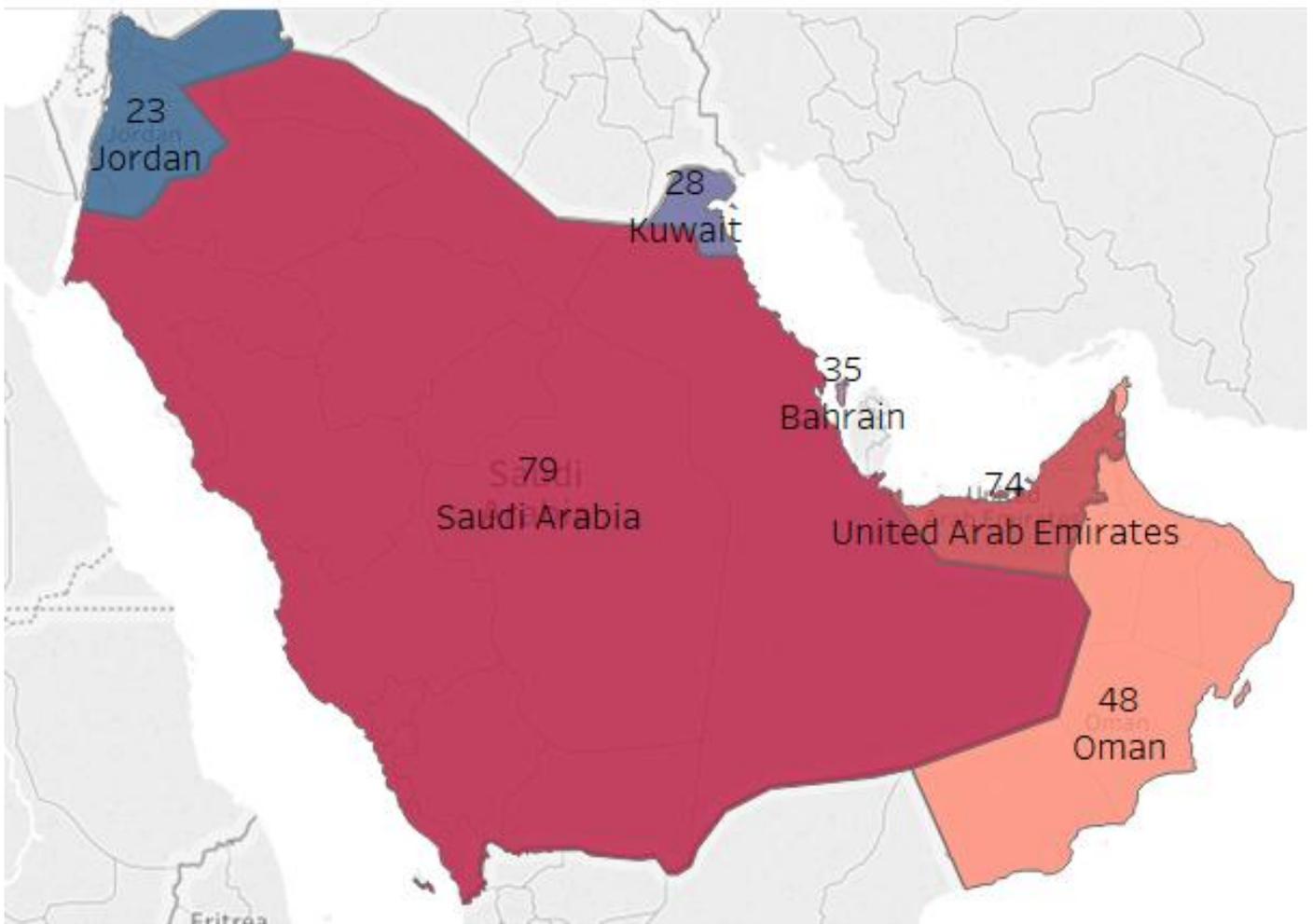

Figure 1: Geographic Information of Participants

According to their response, most popular apps used by the respondents are shown in Fig. 2. Packed bubbles are used to show information. We have asked them to select more than one app and percentage of participant response was calculated.

WhatsApp is found to be the most popular app among middle east couples.

Most Popular Apps
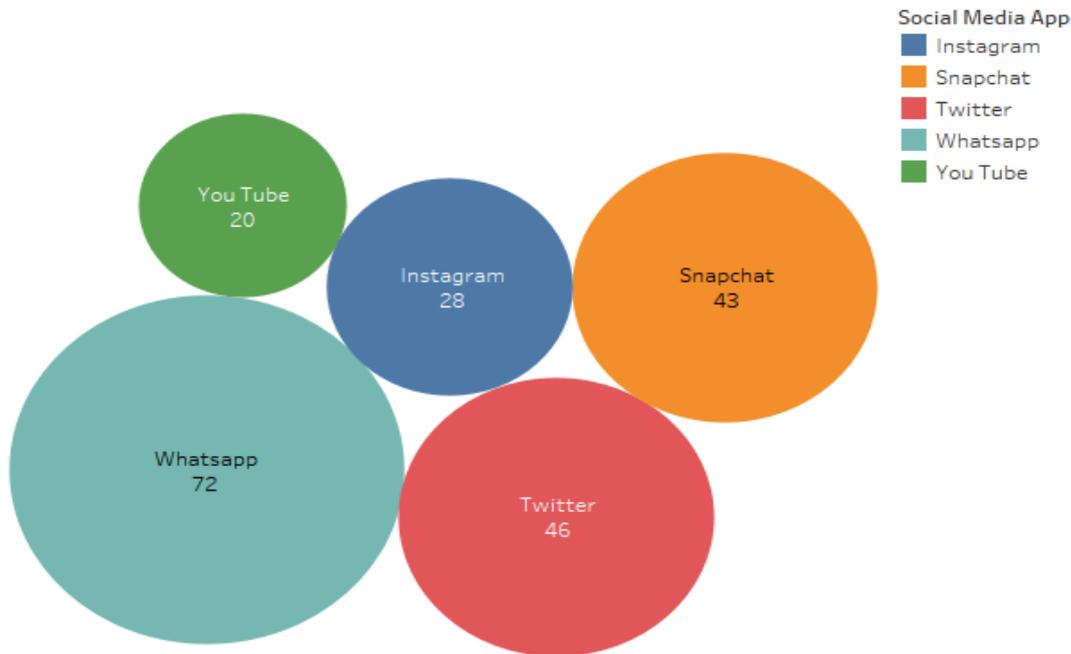
Social Media App and sum of User Percentage. Color shows details about Social Media App. Size shows sum of User Percentage. The marks are labeled by Social Media App and sum of User Percentage.

Figure 2: Top Five Social Media Apps used in Middle East

1.1. Hypothesis:

H1: Social Media usage and negative vibes on relationship is positively associated.

H2: Social Media usage and Loneliness are associated.

H3: Social Media usage and trust on social activities is negatively associated.

1.2. Measures:

Following are the factors that are considered for the study in hand:

1. *Social Media Usage*: Social Media Usage measure concentrated on the usage of social media by the individual as well as his/her partner. Example questions include: "In a typical day, how many hours do you spend on social media?", "In a typical day, how many hours does your spouse spend on social media?". "How often do u look at your partner's profile. Data was gathered using Likert type scale. Correlation of these questions was found to be *r(289) = 0.49, p<0.001*, so they all are treated as single variable.

2. *Negative Vibes in Relationship:* To measure the negative vibes in the relationship, researchers developed many questions. Sample questions include "Have you ever had an argument with your spouse about the amount of time one of you was spending online?", "Do you think social applications causes drama in relationships?", "Have you ever found out that your spouse was doing something online that was upsetting to you?". We get the answers into dichotomous yes/no answer choices.

3. *Loneliness:* This scale is used to check closeness of couples with one another, and how social media is affecting this intimacy. Data was gathered using Likert type scale ranging from 1 (not very much) to 5 (a great deal) and 1 (Strongly Disagree) to (Strongly Agree). Example questions are "How much do you like to spend time alone with your spouse?", Do you think social media has affected the quality of time you spend with your spouse? Cronbach's alpha was found to be 0.67.

4. *Trust:* Trust scale was designed to find the feeling of trust. Respondents are asked to answer queries and answers were either Yes or No. Example questions are "Do you trust your spouse's online activity?", "Does your spouse know about all your social media accounts and friend list?" etc.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Following table shows mean and standard deviation against each scale. In order to test hypothesis regression analysis was

done. As a result, a significant relationship was emerged between social network usage and negative vibes in relationship (p<0.001). Second significant relationship was emerged between social media usage and loneliness (p<0.001). Relationship between social media usage and Trust become non-significant (p=0.15).
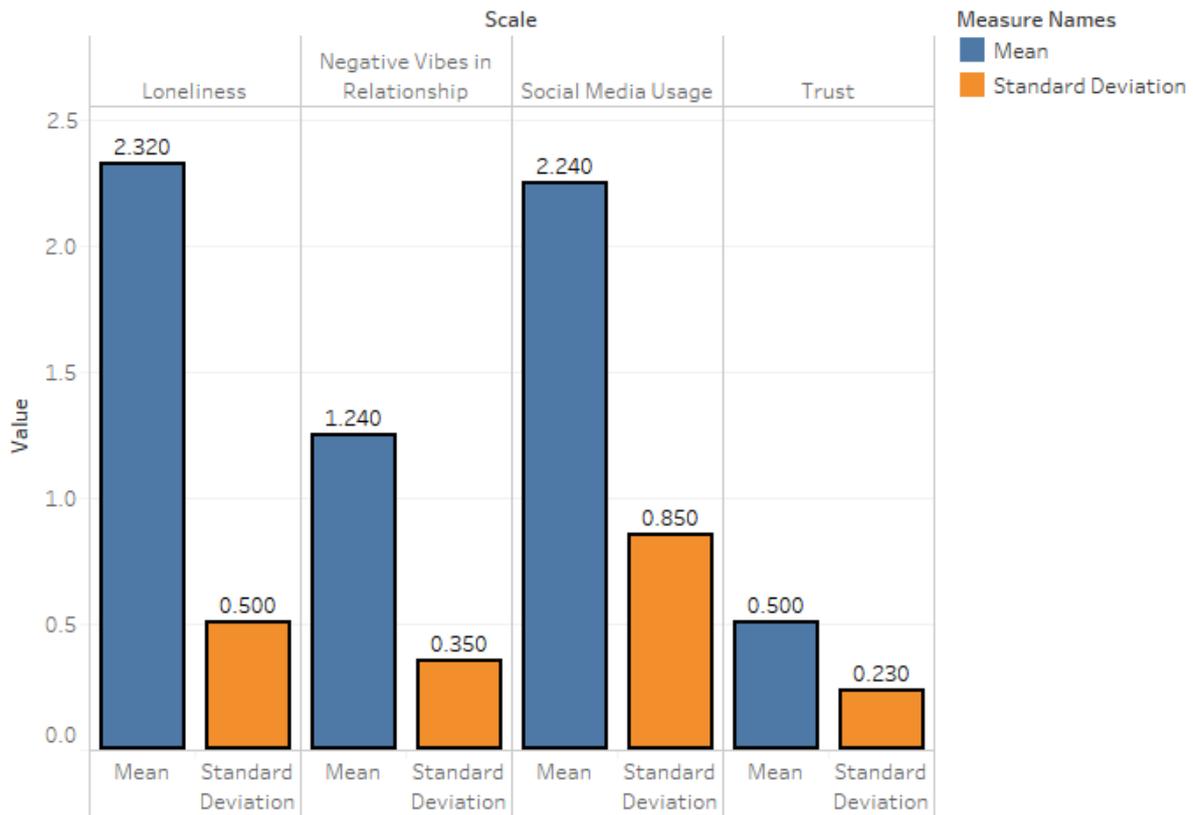
The purpose of the study was to investigate the impact of high social media usage on the married life i.e. how more use of social media is effecting couples. According to first hypothesis when people are more involved in social media it creates different kind of negative feelings in their relationship. Second hypothesis was related to social intimacy that couples have feeling of loneliness and less social intimacy due to high level use of social media. Third hypothesis is related to couple trust that couples trust each other's social media activities. According to the results mentioned above more social media usage lead to negative vibes in their marital relationship such as arguments over social media use, ignorance from the partner, Inappropriate posts, lack of publicizing relationship status etc. Secondly, according to the results second hypothesis is proved that high level use of social media lead to loneliness and less social intimacy among couples, which has adversely reduced the quality time that the couples used to share between them.

Another majorly effected factor was reduced face to face communication among couples. Third hypothesis was related to trust that couples trust each other in case of social media, which was proved to be wrong according to the statistical results. All these three factors are leading us to the conclusion that excessive use of social media has negative impact on married life i.e. excessive use of social media lead to negative feelings and uncertainty in relationship at one hand, while at the other hand it is dragging us to loneliness.

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation

Scale	Mean	Standard Deviation
Social Media Usage	2.24	0.85
Negative Vibes in Relationship	1.24	0.35
Loneliness	2.32	0.50
Trust	0.5	0.23

Figure 3: Mean and Standard Deviation

5.   MORE EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

To understand the impact of social media on married life in more meaningful prospect, we have asked several other questions from our respondents. Following are some of the findings from the empirical data:

1.   *Partner's Surveillance:* First thing we are interested to know that whether couples are looking secretly at each other profiles if they are suspicious about their activities. To our surprise 68% of the respondents believe they are not curious about the online activities of their partners. Figure 4 shows more interesting findings, as it shows information classified on the basis of country and gender.

2.   *Relationship Status:* Second interesting factor was to know about the display or hiding of relationship status on their profiles. Majority of the respondents are of the opinion that it doesn't have any impact on their relationship to have relationship status on their profiles. Complete result is shown in Fig.6.

3.   *Jealousy in Relationship:* Jealousy is considered as most important factor in martial relationship especially when it comes to the use of social media. So, next factor to consider was jealousy whether social media has added some jealousy into the relationship or not? Result of this question is very evenly distributed.
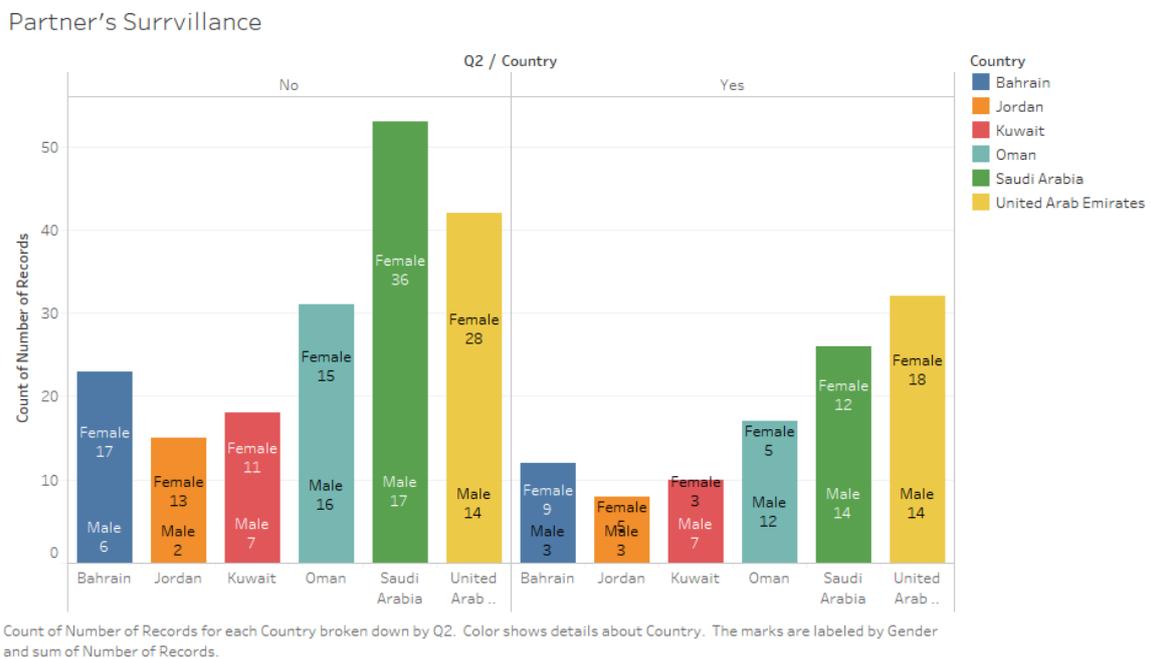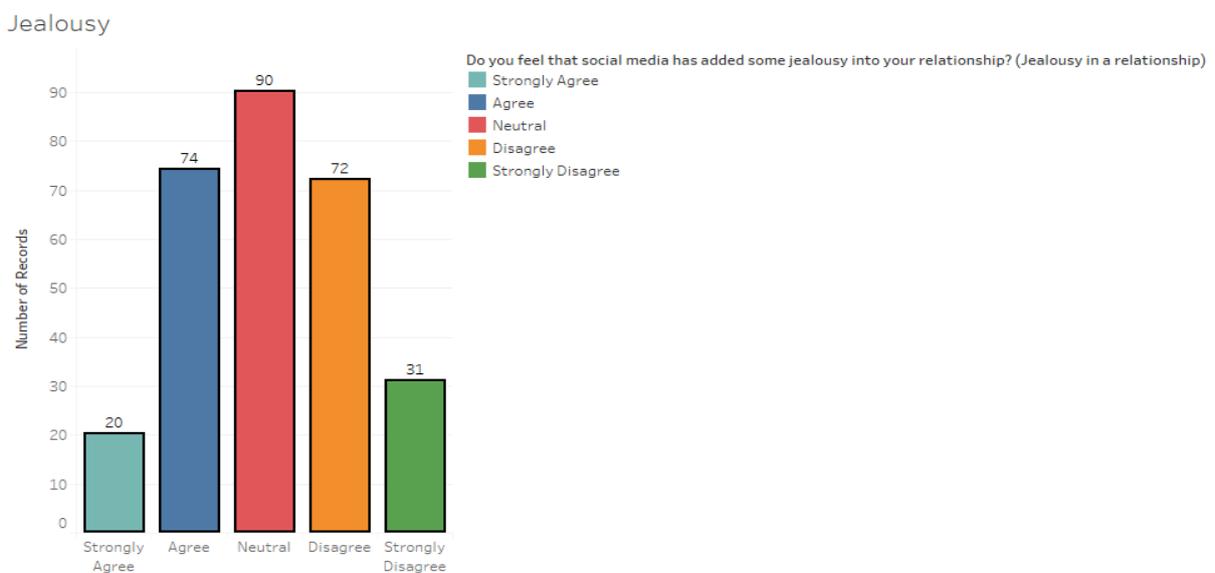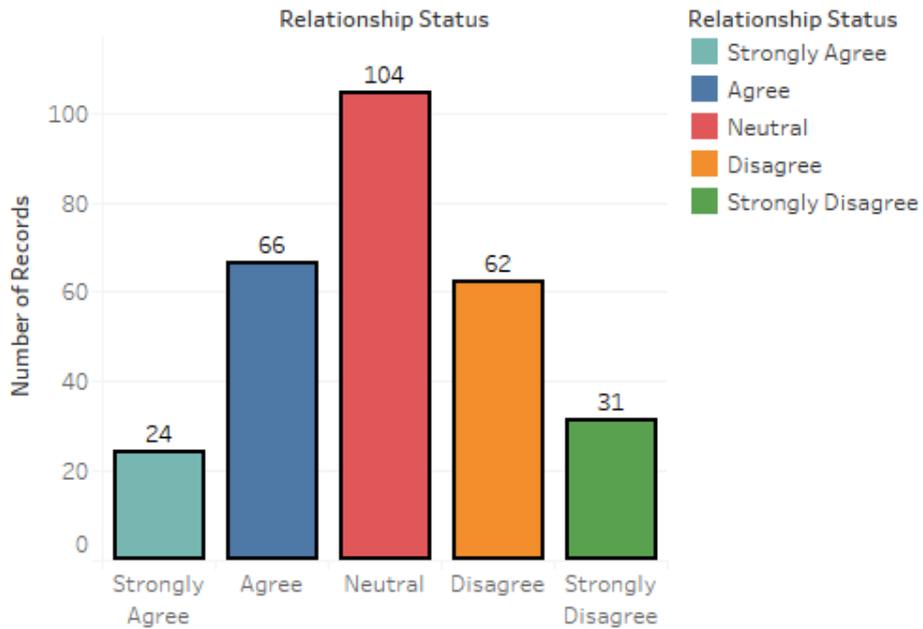

Figure 4: Partner's Surveillance

Figure 5: Jealousy in Relationship

Relationship Status

Figure 6: Relationship Status

4. *Suggestions on use of social Media:* The time spent using social media was one of the top causes for social media to negatively impact a relationship, a suggestion to limit the amount of time spent by both partners in order to increase martial satisfaction resulted in 47% of participants believed that it is important to set a limit, 32% were neutral and 21% do not believe that setting a limit is necessary. This is portrayed in Fig. 7.

Limit on Social Media Use
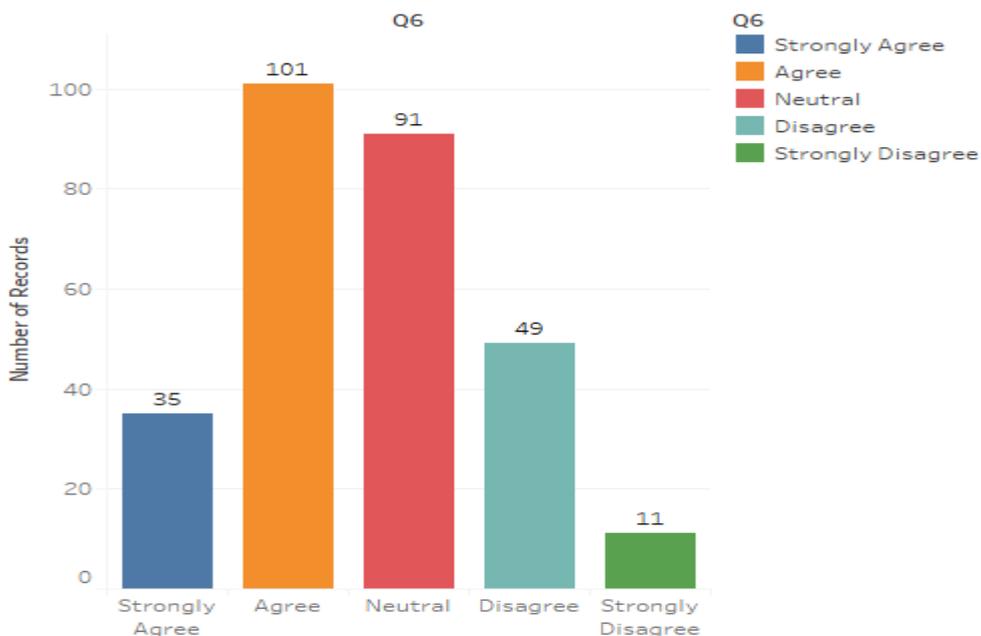
Figure 7: Limit on Social Media Use

5. *Ideal Time Range for Social Media Usage* Some participants were irritated by their partners' use of social media. Some felt that their partners were often distracted and were regularly using social media on an average day. Participants were asked to give the ideal time range to use social media in a day. As shown in the figure, about 80% felt that 1-3 hours are enough to spend on social media sites. More than that was rejected by most participants, Fig. 7.
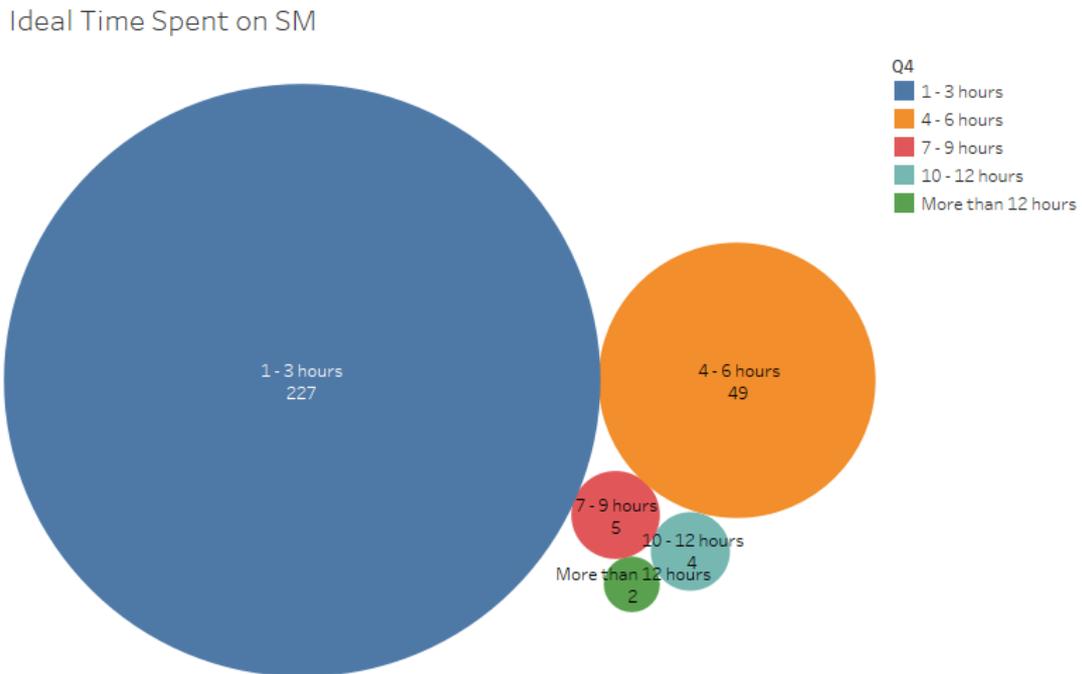
Figure 8: Ideal Time spent on SM

6. *Top Causes to Negatively Impact a relationship:* Some participants realized that social media has affected their relationships negatively. It is important to us to know how social media have affected them unconstructively. Participants were asked to provide us with top causes that might provoke negative behaviour or emotions such as surveillance or jealousy. Clear results are shown in figure 9.
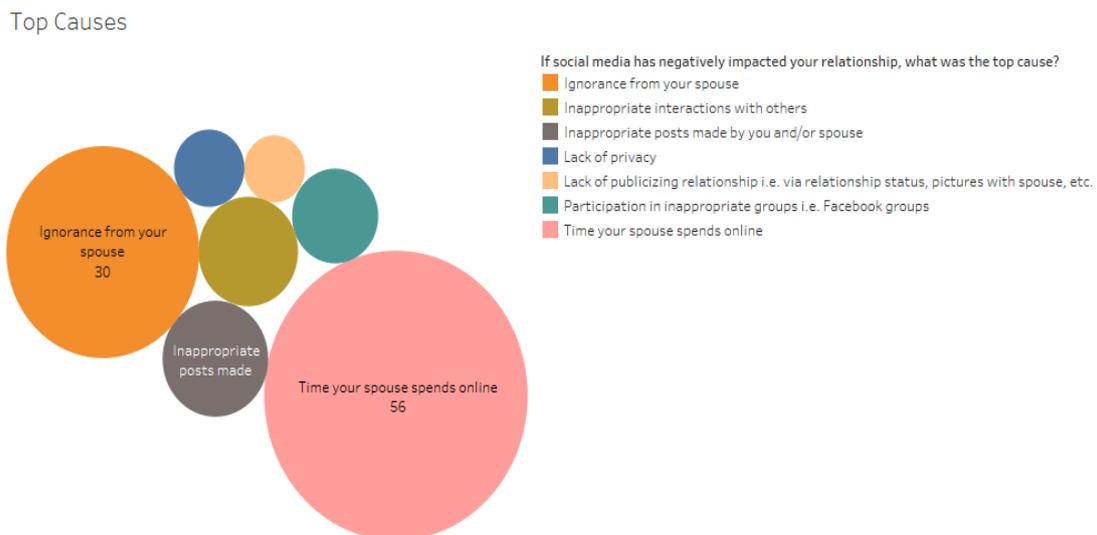
Figure 9: Top causes of Negative Impact

6.   CONCLUSION

To conclude, the study conducted shows all three-mentioned hypothesis to be true. Social media addiction as well as increased use of social media can lead to negative impact on the relationship especially it is damaging the marital relationships. Lack of trust, loneliness and inappropriate posts by the spouse are considered to be the main factors causing negative vibes on the relationship between spouses. Current study can be considered as a profound addition to the literature investigating the relationship between social media use and martial relationships especially in Middle East.

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