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Virtual Religiosity among University Youth
on Social Networks Sites: A Field Study

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Abstract

The present thesis aims to identify the features of virtual religiosity among university students through social media as a model. The author adopted the descriptive approach and applied a five-domain questionnaire (demographics- extent of exposure to Facebook- features of the social responsibility features of social media's religious content- extent of using Facebook- scale of social values) to a sample of (356) social media users of Minia University students. The results showed that the item (the participants (always) follow social media) was ranked first. The time of (three hours and more) following the social media content was ranked first. The participants' trust in the religious content of social media (moderate level) was ranked first. Concerning the ways of interacting with posts of religious participation, (just view) was ranked first. The features of virtual religiosity through social media ranged 74.4%:80%. Additionally, the percentages of measuring There was a statistically significant positive correlation between virtual religiosity through social media of university students. However, there was no statistically significant positive correlation between the ratio of following social media and trust in their religious content among the participants. There was a statistically significant positive correlation between the trust in the religious content of social media and the participants' interaction. There was a statistically significant positive correlation between the features of social responsibility of social media content. There were statistically insignificant differences in the rate of following social media according to (gender and residence) among the participants. Moreover, there were statistically insignificant differences in the features of virtual religiosity through social media according to (gender and residence) among the participants. There were statistically insignificant differences in the degree of trust in the religious content of social media according to gender among the participants favoring the males. There were statistically insignificant differences in interacting with the religious content through social media according to (gender and residence) among the participants.

Keywords: Virtual religiosity, University students, Social media, Ethical values, Facebook

Introduction

Social networks have extensively affected media and so enabled the users to communicate freely. The Arab youth movement, represented by their revolutions, highlighted the ability of this type of media to change the features of communities, add an asset to political life, and warn against the competition of traditional media. Young people initially used social networks to chat and let off some steam. Subsequently, they have used them to exchange views that help improve political, social and economic life. Hence, youth protest movements began in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Libya, Bahrain and Jordan. Using social networks, they could transfer their ideas to the whole Arab world. Recently, social networks have become worldwide. Moreover, they have replaced what sociology classified as the third place where one resorts to after his/her first place (home) and second place (work, school or university) (Rasheed, 2014).

Mohammed (2021) states that social networks, including Facebook, have several advantages; for example, they present a new method to call to Allah, i.e. preachers and Muslims, in general, present their call variously. Because many people use Facebook, it may have an enormous effect on this field, which the present study addresses. Recently, such platforms and social media have been used for call and the term "virtual religiosity" has emerged. Moreover, they have been a means for presenting instant news, entertainment and recreation, expressing opinions on world events and communicating with friends and relatives who live in distant areas.

Nomar (2019) reports that the views on the concept of religion moving from reality to virtuality are various, so they contributed to drawing new perceptions on how the Muslim self seems on social networking sites. Some contend that the virtual interaction between woman and man is unacceptable, others claim that the frequent religious publications reflect that the person who

published them is religious. Furthermore, understanding digital or virtual religiosity related to the practices of religious digital space users, who adopt new symbols and raise new issues regarding religious practice, is diverse.

Francis, Quesnell, and Lewis (2010) claim that tendency towards religiosity is not only defined by one's environment but also genes that have a relevant effect. For identical twins, the behavior or attitude towards religion is similar in adulthood. Nevertheless, it is dissimilar for non-identical twins, which asserts the genetic effect on religiosity. This influence gradually appears during the stages of growth when one gets rid of the environmental impacts in childhood.

Keywords: Virtual religiosity, University youth, Social networks sites.

Statement of the Problem

Facebook is a virtual social network that connects the user with other people who have an account, where they exchange news, posts, and blogs as well as share photos, music and videos. Because of the relevant argument, the site was banned in many countries, including Syria, Egypt, Iran, Tunisia, Bahrain ... etc. Its use was also banned in various public departments because it wastes the personnel's time. Privacy represents a major issue for its users.

Facebook allows its subscribers to express their attitudes, tendencies, needs, and opinions, which reveal the social, cultural or religious aspects of their personalities. Thus, they can influence their followers. They are also affected by the presented topics and issues. Religiously, not everything shared by Facebook users corresponds to reality and reflects whether the person is religious or not. Social networks are one of the most important alternative media that help the persons perform all the roles of the communicative process as a sender, a receiver, and a means. Their activities and practices on Facebook enable them to participate,

share and express their psychological state, mood, admiration and anger. It has been significant to study the phenomenon of virtual religiosity among the youth, who represent the backbone of the community and the foundation of progress. Accordingly, the problem of the study is defined in measuring the phenomenon of virtual religiosity among young people on social networking sites.

Significance

1. The present research addresses contemporary issues and the growing role of young people in drawing the map of the change in the community.
2. Social networking sites, which, if employed, strengthen the values of tolerant religiosity, knowledge, criticism, review and self-dialogue, on which the cultural or religious development project is based.
3. Presenting a hypothetical image that expresses the culture of religiosity as it represents an authentic and substantial component of the culture of the Egyptian society, especially the university youth.

Objectives

The present research aims to identify the rates of the participants' follow-up to social networks (Facebook), measure the degree of their confidence in the contents of religious social networking sites, identify the forms of the participants' interaction with religious contents and posts on social networking sites, and define the general features of virtual and actual religiosity among university youth who use social networks.

Questions

1. What are the rates of the participants' follow-up to social networks (Facebook)?
2. What is the degree of the participants' confidence in the contents of religious social networking sites?

3. What are the forms of the participants' interaction with religious contents and posts on social networking sites?
4. What are the general features of virtual and actual religiosity among university youth who use social networks?

Literature Review

Elhami (2020) identified the characteristics of religiosity discourse as thought, belief and practice among Muslim users of social media, especially Facebook. The author adopted discourse analysis approach, which allows dismantling the linguistic and textual elements of religious posts on Facebook and reinterpreting them scientifically to discover the design and main features of discourse. The analysis was applied to a sample of Islamic posts on Facebook pages of individuals residing in Egypt in January, February and March 2017.

Dief (2018) investigated the characteristics of Islamic religious discourse on social networks by analyzing a sample of religious pages on Facebook. The study adopted content analysis as a tool that helps identify the nature, orientations and content of the religious discourse; the nature of the groups it addresses; scientific information and facts on the relevant changes, especially that of the nature of the means through which it is transmitted, and its connection to social networks as an important manifestation of the new media. This asserts the change in the pattern of the traditional religious discourse due to these modern technologies. The results manifested the role of social networking sites, especially Facebook, in changing the nature of religious discourse, in terms of form and content.

Sahari (2017) addressed hatred discourse on social media, especially Facebook, in Algeria. The study adopted the analytical descriptive approach. Content analysis was adopted as a tool to analyze the content of the posts on Facebook when the study was conducted. The sample included posts on hate discourse shared by

Facebook users on their accounts. The intended sample comprised (73) items selected during the period of study. Results showed that hate discourses included images and videos with a percentage of (93, 01%) because images best create hate discourse and persuade Facebook users to comment. Moreover, the person writes the discourse anonymously to avoid punishment.

Abdelmohsen (2016) identified the role of Facebook in spreading religious education among Saudi university youth. The sample comprised (181) university youth. The results showed that (85%) of the male participants have an account on Facebook that spreads religious education, while (96%) of the female participants have an account on it. Moreover, male participants had an account on Facebook because it presents new religious information with a percentage of (34.1%), followed by confidence in the information presented with a percentage of (20%). Furthermore, (61.1%) of the male participants were keen to follow the religious topics shared on Facebook that spreads religious education, (68.2%) trusted these topics and (75.2%) stated that using Facebook that spreads religious education increased their religious information.

Abbas (2015) identified the role of virtual groups in spreading peace culture among youth. The study is descriptive analytical. The study adopted the social survey approach. A questionnaire was adopted as a tool. The random sample comprised (100) university students at the Faculty of Social Work, Aswan University. The results demonstrated that youth contend that virtual groups promote the values of belonging among university youth.

Almenayes (2014) examined the relationship between religiosity and the psychological consequences of social media usage in a Muslim country based on secularization theory. Using a sample of college undergraduates, a survey including measures of religiosity as well as positive and negative psychological effects, was conducted. Results showed that religiosity was negatively related

to viewing social media as an alternative to face-to-face interaction as well as feelings of anxiety and panic. Moreover, there were significant gender differences in four of the five dependent variables. Furthermore, religiosity protected ones from the negative consequences of social media usage.

Yaqoub (2012) investigated the attitudes of social media users towards religious extremism and moral deviation through analyzing the opinions of the students and faculty members at the College of Arts in King Faisal University, who use social media websites from October 2014 to January 2016. The study adopted the focus group approach by selecting a sample of students at the College of Arts in King Faisal University to have qualitative results and questionnaires were distributed to a sample of experts from faculty members at the College of Arts to have quantitative results.

Thus, the study collected quantitative and qualitative data, highlighted the Kingdom's interest in blocking porn sites to protect moral and social patterns, and defined the extremists and deviants as well as how to confront them. The study showed negative attitudes of the faculty members (the participants) towards the students who use social networks sites to face religious extremism and moral deviation. Moreover, the sample of the students who use social networks sites showed the same result. Ro'ya Center for Public Opinion Studies (2012) explored the impact of social networks sites on Sudanese university students. The study adopted the analytical descriptive approach and a questionnaire including, the participants' data, closed-ended questions and open-ended questions. The random sample comprised (500) participants from Khartoum University, Omdurman Islamic (OIU) University, Sudan University of Science and Technology, Ahfad University Science and Culture University, The Future University (FU) and The National Ribat University. Each university had (50) items. The results

illustrated that (59) reported that communication using social networks did not affect academic achievement, (41) claimed that it had an effect, (53) stated that it did not affect their social activities, and (46) stated that it did not affect their social activities negatively.

Hypotheses

- There are statistically significant differences in the participants' rates of virtual religiosity according to the variables of gender and address.
- There are statistically significant differences in the participants' interaction with religious posts according to the variables of gender and address.

Methodology

The author adopts the descriptive approach, which targets the characteristics of a particular phenomenon or a specific situation. It collects, analyzes and interprets facts to get data and present the results. Descriptive studies are used to describe scientific and political trends, leisure-time patterns, and human relations, explore human behavior and some problems as well as identify the trends, values and cultural patterns of the members of the same community. The author also adopts the survey approach.

Population

The population consisted of (18-22) students who are enrolled in public Egyptian universities and use their active accounts on Facebook to express their thoughts, which reflect the diversity of their knowledge, cultural backgrounds as well as features and levels of religiosity.

Sampling

The sample comprised (356) users of social networking sites, who study at Minia University and live in urban and rural areas. This sample was selected according to the following scientific interpretations:

- They constantly use social networking sites. To apply the questionnaire tool in the interview, the scale involved the virtual features of religiosity prepared by the author after reviewing the scales of the characteristics of religiosity in the previous studies.
- The participants' activate accounts on Facebook help apply the observation card prepared by the author in light of the former scale of virtual religiosity features.

Tools

The author adopted the questionnaire, which consisted of three domains. The first included the participants' demographic variables of gender and address, the second involved the questions from (1-11) which measured the rate of the participants' logging on Facebook, and the third included question (13) and (15) items which measured the participants' rate of using Facebook.

To verify its validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by (5) reviewers to evaluate the appropriateness, relevance, clarity, and wordiness of the items. According to their views, some items were omitted and modified to have the final form of the questionnaire. Intrinsic validity was estimated as an indicator of the questionnaire's validity by estimating the square root of reliability coefficient that was (.94). This asserts that the questionnaire is highly reliable. The questionnaire's reliability was estimated using Cronbach's equation and by applying it to a pilot sample of (40) participants. It was (.90), which asserts that the questionnaire is highly reliable.

Limits

Human Limits: The study was applied to a sample of (356) students aged (18-22), study at Minia University and have active accounts on social networking sites.

Temporal Limits: The study was applied in the second semester of the academic year 2020/2021

Spatial Limits: The study was applied to Minia University students.

Objective Limits: The characteristics of virtual religiosity among university youth on social networking sites.

Definition of Terms

Virtual religiosity: It is procedurally defined as the features and manifestations of religious behavior, including beliefs, worship, treatments and morals, practiced individually or collectively by university students on their Facebook accounts. The author defines social networks procedurally: it is a network of networks of virtual communities on the Internet, and it is one of the most popular and widespread among university youth, and it is represented in the Facebook site used to communicate and exchange religious discussions.

University youth: They are procedurally defined as a sample of Minia University students aged (18-22) and have an active account on Facebook.

Social networks sites: They are procedurally defined as a network of virtual communities on the Internet, represented in Facebook, which university youth extensively use to communicate and exchange religious discussions.

Statistical Coefficients

The author adopted the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software that involves the following statistical coefficients: Cronbach's Alpha coefficient to estimate reliability,

square root to estimate validity, frequencies and percentages, relative weight, Pearson correlation coefficient, arithmetic mean, standard deviation, and T-Test of differences significance.

Results and Discussion

First: Sample Specification

The study was applied to a sample of (356) students at Minia and Cairo universities. The questionnaires were numbered (1-356) and encoded according to (SPSS) software.

Table (1): Distribution of the participants according to gender (N=356).

Sample Specification	Group	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	196	5.1%
	Female	160	44.9%
	Total	356	100%
Address	Rural	220	61.8%
	Urban	136	38.2%
	Total	356	100%

Table (1) shows that the percentage of males is ranked the first (55.1%) and that of females is ranked the second (44.9%). In terms of the participants' distribution, the percentage of rural ones is ranked the first (61.8%) and that of urban ones is ranked the second place (38.2%).

Second: General Results

Table (2): Rates of the participants' follow-up of social networking sites.

Rates of Networks follow-up	Frequency	Percentage %	Ranking
Always	248	69.7%	1
Sometimes	104	29.2%	2
Seldom	4	1.1%	3
Total	356	100	

Table (2) shows that the percentage (69.7%) of the participants who always follow social networks sites is ranked the first (69.7%) because telecommunications companies have made the internet accessible for several users at homes and outdoors at low cost, in addition to the spread of mobile phones that made access to the Internet easier than in the past and facilitated the process of

using social networks, in general, and Facebook, in particular. The percentage of those who sometimes follow them is ranked the second (29.2%) and that of those who seldom follow them is ranked the last (1.1%). The author attributes this result to the low economic status that hinders buying devices, which they see as an indication of luxury; their disinterest in social networks sites which maximized the percentage of (seldom). This denotes that the participants substantially use social networks.

The results of the present research are consistent with Al-Harbi (2014), Muhammad (2015), and Muhammad (2020) that the percentage of the participants who always use social networks is ranked the first, that of those who sometimes use them is ranked the second and that of those who seldom use them is ranked the last. Moreover, the results are inconsistent with Ragab (2010) that there was no difference in the participants' exposure to Islamic websites on the Internet.

Table (3): The time the participants spend following the contents of social networks daily.

No. of Hours	Frequency	Percentage	Ranking
Less than hour	60	%16.9	3
From an hour to less than three hours	140	39.3%	2
Three hours +	156	43.8%	1
Total	356	100	

Table (3) shows that the time the participants spend following the contents of social networks daily, represented in three hours or above, is ranked the first, with a percentage of (43.8%), while the percentage of those exposed to it (from one hour to less) from three hours); from an hour to less than three hours is ranked the second, with a percentage of (39.3%) and less than an hour is ranked the last, with a percentage of (16.9%).

These results indicate that the rate of the participants' use of social networks sites is high. The author attributes this to the fact that university youth extensively use social networking sites. Moreover, these sites play a role in their personal and social lives

due to the nature of the time they spend using them. To explain, these sites present various services popular with young people, such as the ability to share information, videos and audio with others. Furthermore, they reflect the concept that "the world is a small village".

This result is consistent with Chan and Fang (2017) that university youth spend (3-7) hours a day using social networking sites. However, the result is consistent with Al-Nouri (2014) that Saudi youth use social media from an hour to two hours daily. In the present study, hours of using social media have increased, which suggests that the number of hours that youth spend on social media increase, i.e., there is a correlation between them from a year to another.

Table (4): Length of the participants' use of social networking sites.

Length	Frequency	Percentage %	Ranking
Less than a year	68	19.1%	3
From a year to less than three years	84	23.6%	2
Three years or more	204	57.3%	1
Total	356	100	

Table (4) illustrates when the participants started using social media; from three years or more is ranked the first, with a percentage of (57.3%), from a year to less than three years is ranked the second, with a percentage of (23.6%) and less than a year it is ranked the third, with a percentage of (19.1%). This result demonstrates that users' knowledge of these sites is not recent and the participants are aware of the importance of social networking sites. It is consistent with Ahmed (2014) that asserted that the Egyptian university youth usually log on Facebook.

Table (5): Forms of the participants' reaction when receiving posts calling for religious participation.

Form	Frequency	Percentage %	Ranking
Actively reply and express my perspective	133	37.3%	2
See only	205	57.6%	1

Disinterest	13	3.7%	3
Deletion and block	5	1.4%	4
Total	356	100	

Table (5) shows that see only is ranked the first, with a percentage of (57.6%); actively reply and express my perspective is ranked the second, with a percentage of (37.3%); disinterest is ranked the third, with a percentage of (3.7%) and deletion and block is ranked the last, with a percentage of (1.4%). The author attributes this result to the fact that the majority of young people are not fully aware of religious issues, so they cannot express their opinion on religious posts. Moreover, social media is based on using the Internet and mobile technologies (cell phones) to transform communications into interactive dialogue. Furthermore, the community consists of integrated social units or some interconnected formats. Young people can share the topics posted on social media with their families and friends, so they have to participate in expressing their opinions to comprehend the content properly.

Table (6): The participants' attitude when benefiting from religious posts on social networks.

Attitude	Frequency	Percentage %	Ranking
Like	200	%56.2	1
Share	100	%28.1	2
Benefit but not share	76	%21.3	3
Comment	52	%14.6	5
Share post, picture or video	72	%20.2	4

(*) the participant can select more than one form (N=356).

Table (6) manifests that "like" is ranked the first, with a percentage of (56.2%); "share" is ranked the second, with a percentage of (28.1%); "benefit but not share" is ranked the third, with a percentage of (21.3%), and "comment" is ranked the last, with a percentage of (14.6%). This result asserts the availability of interactivity, which is an important characteristic of social networks.

The present research is consistent with Noshi and Al-Rubaie (2016) the percentage of the participants who interacted with the topics shared on social networks sites was the highest (54.3%), that of those who sometimes interacted was ranked the second (43.6%) and that of those who did not interact was ranked the third (2.1%). This shows the participants' interest in interacting with the topics that friends post. Moreover, it is consistent with Sadiq (2014) that the percentage of those who liked the posts shared on Facebook was (55.2%). However, sharing the posts was ranked the last, with a percentage of (6.8%).

Table (7): The participants' perspectives on virtual religiosity among the users of social networking sites.

Attitude	Frequency	Percentage %	Ranking
Join religious pages or groups	192	53.9%	1
Add a personal picture that has a religious connotation	100	28.1%	3
Add a picture on the cover that has a religious connotation	52	14.6%	4
Add a nickname with a religious connotation	40	11.2%	5
Multiplicity of religious posts	168	47.2%	2

(* the participant can select more than one form (N=356).

Table (7) reveals that "join religious pages or groups" is ranked the first, with a percentage of (53.9%), "multiplicity of religious posts" is ranked the second, with a percentage of (47.2%), and "adding a nickname with a religious connotation" was ranked the third, with a percentage of (11.2%). These results reflect the actual reality of the current stage, where Facebook is the most widely used site to express opinions, concepts and attitudes.

To verify the 1st hypothesis, arithmetic mean, standard deviation and T-value were estimated.

Table (8): Differences in the participants' rates of virtual religiosity according to the variables of gender and address.

(N=356)

Variables	Males=196		Females=160		T-value	Significance
	Arithmeti c mean	Standard deviation	Arithmeti c mean	Standard deviation		
Virtual religiosity on social networks sites	2.13	0.62	2.30	0.62	0.98	Significant
	Rural=220		Urban=136		T-value	Significance
	Arithmeti c mean	Standard deviation	Arithmeti c mean	Standard deviation		
	2.25	0.52	2.59	0.68	1.07	Significant

Table (8) shows statistically significant differences in the participants' rates of virtual religiosity according to the variables of gender and address. This indicates that these pages play a positive role in the religious awareness among the participants because the information posted on social networks sites is based on the Islamic assessment of events. It also analyzes and addresses the religious activities according to a civilized perspective consistent with the rural and urban society. Moreover, it involves news, reports, analyses, missionary work, Legal opinion, dialogue as well as presentation and dissemination of the features of virtual religiosity in a way that contributes to explaining and spreading Islam using these sites.

To verify the 2nd hypothesis, arithmetic mean, standard deviation and T-value were estimated.

Table (8): Differences in the participants' rates of interaction with religious posts on social networks sites according to the demographic variables of gender and address. (N=356)

Variables	Males=196		Females=160		T-Value	Significance
	Arithmeti c mean	Standard deviation	Arithmeti c mean	Standard deviation		
Interaction with religious posts	1.68	0.58	1.70	0.64	0.251-	Insignificant
	Minia (N=220)		Cairo (N=136)		T-Value	Significance
	Arithmeti c mean	Standard deviation	Arithmeti c mean	Standard deviation		
	1.71	0.67	1.64	0.47	1.06	Insignificant

Table (9) shows statistically insignificant differences in the participants' rates of interaction with religious posts on social networks sites according to the demographic variables of gender

and address, which suggests that the variables of gender and address had an insignificant effect on interaction with religious posts on social networking sites. The author attributes this result to the fact that the community members have the same customs, principles and religious values. Moreover, children have the same religious education that does not differ according to gender and address. Furthermore, public and private institutions of social upbringing raise children religiously regardless of their gender. The present study is consistent with Rahman and Goswami (2013), Muhammad (2015), Al-Samni (2017) and Al-Harbi (2018) that indicated no statistically significant differences in the religious contents and values according to the variable of gender and residence, while it is inconsistent with Al-Shuwaihat (2019) that showed statistically significant differences in the degree of the importance of religious values and contents according to the variable of gender in favor of females.

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