

# **Psychological effects of social networking sites: Towards a theoretical model**

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## **Abstract:**

The rapid increase in the use of social networking sites (SNS) has drawn attention to the psychological effects of these sites on users. Through a brief review of 119 Arab and western studies from 2011 to 2020, the results indicated that SNS help users in getting rid of psychological unity and improve their self-esteem. Moreover, SNS help them in increasing the sense of self-confidence, belonging to the society and feeling love, acceptance and appreciation as a result of their interaction on SNS.

However, the use of SNS causes many negative psychological effects such as increasing social comparisons, jealousy, depression, anxiety and stress, as a result of exposure to contradictory opinions and ideas. To contribute to this discussion, we attempt to present a complete vision of these psychological effects during our study years which help in reaching a theoretical model to explain how SNS affect the psychological aspects of users.

**Keywords:** social networking sites (SNS), psychological effects, a theoretical model of SNS

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## **Introduction:**

SNS have achieved a major leap in the field of exchanging opinions and expressing psychological states freely. These sites become ways to relieve stress and feel valued by others. SNS are also platforms for displaying traditional media content represented in newspapers and TV, interacting with that content, and monitoring the feedback of the audience.

SNS allow the audience to participate in making traditional media content, based on what SNS users provide. We can say that using SNS become a part of people's daily activities all over the world. The number of SNS users reached nearly 4.2 billion worldwide at the beginning of 2021; representing about 53.6% of the global population, with a 13.2% increase from the beginning of 2020. Individuals spend about two hours and 25 minutes per day on SNS platforms<sup>(1)</sup>.

In light of the multiplicity of SNS, and the lack of users' awareness about how to deal rationally with these sites, many negative practices appeared. In addition, these sites are used to alter the value system and spread hostile feelings, which lead to stress, depression, isolation, and many negative emotions.

As a result of increasing the negative impacts of SNS, many Arab and western studies have focused on monitoring and explaining the psychological effects of these sites on users. However, these studies faced some problems in choosing the appropriate theoretical framework, because they combined media and psychological aspects, as well as these frameworks used in these studies are mainly related to traditional media, so it is necessary to reach a new theoretical model that combines the media and psychological aspects, which will help researchers explain how SNS affect users' psychological aspects taking into consideration the elements of the new communication environment, which allow interaction, the exchange of opinions, and content creation.

## **The purpose of the study:**

Studies differed in the extent of SNS effects on the psychological aspects of users, as well as the type of these effects, whether positive or negative, so this study seeks to know the psychological

characteristics of users and monitor the different psychological effects of SNS on them and to what extent these effects have changed during the past ten years (2011-2020), in light of reviewing the results of the previous studies. Then formulate a theoretical model that would help researchers explain how SNS affect the psychological aspects of users, and understand the intermediate variables that control the occurrence of these effects, taking into consideration the elements of the SNS environment.

#### **The importance of the study:**

- This study is one of the inter-studies, that combines two majors of the social sciences, namely media and psychology.
- This study aligns with the world's interest in monitoring the SNS influences.
- presenting a complete vision of the psychological effects of SNS on users over the past ten years (2011-2020).
- This study presents a theoretical model that will help in explaining how SNS affect users' psychological aspects.

#### **Methodology:**

This study belongs to qualitative studies. It depended on the second-level analysis that allows monitoring and analyzing the results of the previous studies and facilitates achieving general and comprehensive results.

This study focused on reviewing and analyzing Arab and western studies which monitor the psychological effects of SNS on users in different countries. It also depended on the following procedures in applying the second-level analysis:

- Determining the time frame of the studies, which extends from 2011 to 2020, over ten years.
- Identifying the studies that focused on the psychological effects of SNS during this time period.

- Classifying the results of these studies according to the variables of this study.
- Monitoring and analyzing the results of these studies during the time frame of our study.
- Formulating a theoretical model that combines media and psychological aspects in explaining the psychological effects of SNS, taking into consideration the elements of the new communication environment.

#### **Sample selection criteria:**

The reviewed literature followed these criteria:

- Arab and western studies were represented in our study which covered the Arab region and varied regions of North America, Europe and Asia.
- representing various SNS platforms.
- All outcome psychological impacts positive or negative were observed.
- Years from 2011 till 2020 were represented in our study.

#### **The sample:**

The time period from 2011 to 2020 was chosen due to the increase in the popularity and use of SNS during the past ten years, along with the increasing negative effects of SNS on users, especially the psychological ones.

The study depended on the available sample method. The reviewed studies varied between studies published in scientific journals, scientific theses, scientific conferences presentations, scientific papers and reports, studies published in books, totaling 119 studies, of which 50 are Arab studies and 69 western, viewed through the Egyptian Knowledge Bank, Google Scholar, Wiley Online Library and the library of Faculty of Mass Communication, Cairo University. The following tables show the distribution of the study sample in terms of sources and publication years.

**Table (1)**

The sources of the study sample

Sources of studies	Western studies		Arab studies	
	F	%	F	%
Studies published in scientific journals	55	79.7	33	66
Scientific thesis	10	14.5	11	22
Scientific conferences presentations	-	-	6	12
Scientific papers	2	3	-	-
Studies published in Books	1	1.4	-	-
Scientific reports	1	1.4	-	-
Total	69	100	50	100

**Table (2)**

The publication years of the study sample

Publication years	Western studies		Arab studies	
	F	%	F	%
2011	7	10.1	-	-
2012	3	4.4	2	4
2013	3	4.4	1	2
2014	5	7.2	10	20
2015	5	7.2	2	4
2016	12	17.5	11	22
2017	11	15.9	10	20
2018	8	11.6	8	16
2019	6	8.7	6	12
2020	9	13	-	-
Total	69	100	50	100

## **Findings:**

### **The positive psychological effects of SNS:**

some scholars focused on the positive psychological effects of SNS. By revising the literature

in that field, one can classify these studies into:

#### **1- Improving self-expression:**

Some studies have proven that there is a positive relation between using SNS and self-expression. It was found that using SNS supports self-expression among adolescents in the U.S.A, but this is accompanied by anxiety about judgments of others (Weinstein 2018). A second analytical study also showed that using SNS improves self-presentation and self-expression among adolescents (Uhls et al 2017).

Additionally, there was a significant correlation between the intensive use of SNS among Saudi female students and their self-expression by sharing personal photos, feelings and activities (Mansour 2017). In the same context, adolescents who actively interacted on Facebook by posting status updates and photos, or sharing links, had clearer social identities on Facebook than others (Raymer 2015). University students are joining SNS because they believe that their pages on these sites are an extension to their identities (Benage 2011).

#### **2- Increasing self-esteem:**

According to some scholars, using SNS enhances self-esteem. Lonely people use SNS to replace their personal relationships with virtual ones as a way to escape from low self-esteem (Jensen 2018). SNS also had a strong influence in raising self-concept within the Saudi disabled community (Al-Aayed & Al-Shaee 2017). Nearly (32.7%) of blind people in Egypt supported that the use of SNS satisfies their needs for self-esteem (Al-Banna 2016). In addition, there were significant differences between Egyptian and Saudi students Facebook users in their self-esteem, as whenever the usage of Facebook increases, their self-esteem increases (Mustafa 2016, Moayad 2016).

It was found that the frequent use of Facebook doesn't negatively affect self-esteem among university students (Raymer 2015). In the same context, the self-perception through Facebook profile leads to improving self-esteem (Gonzales & Hancock 2011). A series of studies also agreed that there is a positive correlation between the intensive use of Facebook among university students and their self-esteem (Ahn 2011).

### **3- Decreasing depression and loneliness:**

By reviewing some studies, it was found that using SNS reduces depression and loneliness.

A survey and clinical interviews conducted among a sample of Algerian youth showed that the use of SNS doesn't negatively affect the dimensions of mental health and the use of SNS helps those who suffer from anxiety and depression to get rid of their psychological diseases (Abdel Kareem 2019). Using SNS also doesn't increase depression or loneliness among the respondents of households in the U.S.A (Jensen 2018). Another study applied to Saudi university students supported the same conclusion (Al-Shalaan & Al-Moqren 2014). Decreasing or increasing the levels of loneliness depends on the characteristics of SNS users and their motivation for use (Ryan et al 2017).

It was clear that positive interaction and social support on SNS decrease depression, loneliness and psychological symptoms and vice versa (Seabrook et al 2016, Brusilovskiy et al 2016). It was found that there is a negative correlation between social activities on Facebook (number of friends, photos, videos) and social anxiety (Dobrea & Pasarelu 2016). The literature published from 2010 to 2015 showed that the use of SNS among children and youth leads to getting rid of psychological loneliness by expressing and sharing their feelings (Swist et al 2015). The use of SNS also helped divorced Saudi women in reducing their depression by providing entertainment and decreasing the level of regret and loneliness (Saleh 2014). The number of friends on Facebook reduces depression (Nabi et al 2013). As well as receiving messages from close friends on Facebook makes users feel less depressed and less lonely (Burke 2011).

#### **4- Increasing the feeling of confidence and belonging:**

Using SNS gives users a sense of social confidence and belonging. A second analytical study indicated that using SNS gives socially embarrassed teens an opportunity to increase their social confidence (Akram & Kumar 2017). Additionally, there were significant differences between Egyptian male students of shelter institutions in their self-confidence according to the degree of using Facebook (Mustafa 2016). It was also found that the use of SNS increases the self-confidence of divorced Saudi women (Saleh 2014). A second analytical study supported a positive correlation between using Facebook among university students and their feeling of social confidence (Ahn 2011).

Additionally, some scholars have proven that SNS have a positive effect on improving the sense of belonging to the family and society (Yasin 2019, Al-Azmi 2017, Al-Tahrawi 2014, Sharaievska 2012). On the other side, Another Study indicated that there is no significant correlation between the intensive use of SNS among Alex university students and their social confidence or their sense of social belonging (Ali & Shahawi 2017).

#### **5- Psychological support:**

The use of SNS provides psychological support for users and makes them feel loved, appreciated, and accepted. A second analytical study showed that there is a correlation between using SNS and getting support, satisfying the need for social acceptance which lead to happiness and health (Clark et al 2018). Using SNS gives users a sense of psychological support which makes them feel valued, respected, and loved (Yousfy & Bin-Obaid 2017). In Egypt, (70.7%) of blind people showed that using SNS satisfies their needs for socialization, their needs for acceptance by others (35%), and their needs for love (25%) (Al-Banna 2016).



It was also found that there is a positive correlation between the number of Facebook friends and escaping from life pressure and problems (Shaheen & Al-Gendi 2015). Facebook friends give strong support that reduces life stress and psychological illness (Nabi et al 2013). And receiving messages from close friends on Facebook also makes users feel happy and healthy, but users have to interact with ties and their friends on Facebook not reading their posts only (Burke 2011).

### **The negative psychological effects of SNS:**

Many scholars concentrated on the negative psychological impacts of SNS. By revising the

literature in that sphere, one can classify such studies into:

#### **1- Decreasing self-esteem and self-confidence:**

Although SNS have some positive psychological effects on users, these sites also negatively affect self-esteem and self-confidence. It was found that (88%) of youth make social comparisons on Facebook which leads to envy, so when the use of Facebook increases, self-esteem decreases (Jan et al 2017). The respondents of Scottish adolescents who were more used to SNS throughout the day and at night, and who were more emotionally interested in SNS, had low self-esteem (Woods & Scott 2016). A quasi-experimental study showed that Facebook users with depression and low self-esteem were more envious comparison (Appel et al 2015). Dutch university students also clarified that low self-esteem users feel more Jealous, so they present their happy relationships on SNS due to their need for popularity (Utz & Beukeboom 2011).

In addition, there is a correlation between the intensive use of Facebook and lower self-esteem (Shaheen & Al-Gendi 2015, Newham 2012). Another study showed that the frequent use of Facebook among university students leads to greater stress via increasing communication overload and lowering self-esteem (Chen & Lee 2013).

On the other side, it was found that there is a correlation between the use of SNS and the loss of self-confidence among the respondents of rural youth in Egypt and divorced users in Turkey (Al-Damahogy & Abdel Monem 2019, Aydin et al 2018). Jordanian university

students also showed that the use of SNS reduces their self-dependency due to their dependency on others' opinions through these sites (Mutalka & Al-Amri 2018). The use of SNS also negatively affected self-confidence and self-dependency of Saudi university students, and there were no significant differences between males and females (Al-Dorsy & Al-Arishi 2014).

## **2- Increasing depression:**

According to several studies, SNS use leads to depression. A study concluded -by reviewing 13 papers- that depression is the most common impact of using SNS among adolescents (Keles et al 2020). Face-to-face emotional support was associated with lower odds of depression while SNS emotional support was associated with greater odds of depression among young adults (Shensa et al 2020). In the same context, the respondents of American young adults who used several SNS platforms had more anxiety, depression, alcohol and drug consumption (Vannucci et al 2019, Moreno & Whitehill 2014). It was found that adolescents who use SNS more than 2-3 hours per day have poorer mental health and more depression. There was a relation between low self-esteem and SNS use (Al-Qudah & Baioumy 2019, Uhls et al 2017).

Additionally, heavy use of SNS and Facebook causes higher levels of depression due to making social comparisons (Yoon et al 2019, Christensen 2018, Clark et al 2018, Appel et al 2016). Another study was conducted among university youth in Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Palestine indicated that there is a positive correlation between the daily use of SNS and jealousy and depression. Negative behaviors of friends on SNS such as (blocking, lying, defamation, etc.) lead to depression (El-Helw et al 2018). There was a correlation between negative Facebook experience and depression among young adults (Rosenthal et al 2016). A second analytical study also showed that cyberbullying on SNS causes negative psychological effects such as depression and isolation that lead to suicide (O'keeffe & Clarke-Pearson 2011).

Kircaburun's study affirmed that depression among students aged 12-18 in the southern region of Aegean is associated directly with self-esteem and the daily use of SNS (Kircaburun 2016). By using a representative sample, (4.5%) of European adolescents had high levels of depression, due to their intensive use of SNS (Banyai et al 2017). SNS addiction among adolescents also led to depression (Al-Dowi 2017, Al-Ammar 2017, Hoare et al 2016). Some studies indicated that the use of SNS led to depression among the respondents of Jordanian and Palestinian university students and Turkish divorced users. Effects were greater among males than among females (Mutalka & Al-Amri 2018, Bint-Farrag 2017, Aydin et al 2018). The same result was confirmed by two other studies (Younis 2016, Amedie 2015).

### **3- Increasing anxiety and stress:**

It was proved that the use of SNS increases the levels of anxiety and stress. A study conducted on 2185 respondents in China, who were the first to experience COVID-19, demonstrated that the intensive use of SNS led to an increase in the levels of stress. Respondents from big cities were more stressed (Zhong et al 2020). Time spent, SNS addiction and activity on these sites were intermediate variables affect the occurrence of anxiety and distress among adolescents (Keles et al 2020). In the same context, the problematic use of Facebook among adults led to anxiety. Users with higher degrees of insecurity, low self-esteem and who have psychological distress were gravitating towards Facebook (Flynn et al 2018).

Three second analytical studies demonstrated that prolonged use of SNS leads to increasing anxiety among adolescents (Al-Qudah & Baioumy 2019, Uhls et al 2017, Dobrea & Pasarelu 2016). By a meta-analysis of 23 samples conducted on 13929 respondents, it was found that there is a positive relation between using Facebook and psychological distress among adolescents and young adults (Marino et al 2018). It was also found that there is a positive correlation between the use of SNS among the respondents of Jordanian and Palestinian university students and their anxiety. Males were more affected than females (Mutalka & Al-Amri 2018, Bint-Farrag 2017). Contrary to the previous result, Saudi university female students were more affected

(Al-Dorsy & Al-Arishi 2014). But another study indicated that there are no significant differences between males and females in the levels of anxiety among Algerian secondary school students who are addicted to SNS (Mobarki & Bin Emara 2018).

The respondents of young Americans showed that individuals who use 7-11 SNS platforms have higher levels of anxiety than those who use 0-2 SNS platforms (Primack et al 2017). The American young adults reported that the more time they spend on SNS, the more anxiety they feel (Vannucci et al 2017). Lee's study affirmed that the frequent use of more than one SNS platform leads to stress and psychological problems due to exposure to a flood of information and different ideas (Mutalka & Al-Amri 2018, Lee et al 2016). Three other studies concluded that the use of SNS leads to stress (Kinyanzu 2017, Younis 2016, Abdel Hamied 2014). In the same context, the respondents of Saudi female university students had come under greater stress than male students, due to their use of SNS (Al-Dorsy & Al-Arishi 2014).

#### **4- Increasing isolation and alienation:**

Several studies have proven that using SNS leads to social isolation and family alienation. There was a correlation between using SNS and social isolation, indifference, rebellion, and family alienation among the respondents of rural youth in Egypt. Nearly (64.5%) of them felt family alienation (Al-Damahogy & Abdel Monem 2019). Two other studies showed that the use of SNS leads to family alienation among Jordanian and Egyptian university students. Males were more affected than females (Mutalka & Al-Amri 2018, Abdel Mawgood 2014). It was found that (50%) of Algerian husbands become alienated from their families, due to the intensive use of Facebook (L'kahl & Zaidi 2017). In addition, the use of SNS have had a moderate effect on family alienation among Saudi female university students. Females who used SNS more than 4 hours per day were the most affected (Bin-Sufran 2013).

The intensive use of SNS among the respondents of Arab youth led to social isolation, due to their integration into the virtual world (Atia & Al-Batriek 2019). There was a correlation between the use of Facebook and SNS in general and the feeling of loneliness and isolation (Clark et al 2018, Maatook & Mahawat 2018, Zraika 2018, Subramanian 2017, Bin-Saleh 2016). Four other studies supported a

positive correlation between SNS addiction and social isolation among Egyptian, Kuwaiti, Syrian, and Omani university students (Galal 2018, Al-Ammar 2017, Al-Gohaini 2017, Goda et al 2016). Blind people in Egypt and Iraqi university students also indicated that using SNS and Facebook leads to isolation from the real world (Al-Banna 2016, Shaban 2016). In addition, (61%) of respondents in Bahraini society and (51%) of Algerian university students agreed that using SNS leads to the feeling of loneliness and social isolation (Ameen 2016, Quasmia 2016).

Algerian secondary school students had a feeling of social alienation (social isolation, rebellion, aimlessness, helplessness, and despair), due to their use of Facebook (Bin-Zayed 2016). It was found that the unbalanced use of SNS among Bangladesh users leads to common negative feelings such as loneliness, sadness and discomfort as their family members and partners spend a lot of time on SNS. Females and people between the age of 46-55 were the most affected and SNS were mostly used by young people in an unbalanced way (Anwar et al 2015).

Two other studies applied to Saudi couples and Algerian university students confirmed that when using WhatsApp and Facebook increases, the feeling of loneliness increases (Al-Mutawa 2015, Mourakchi 2014). Females were the most affected (Al-Dorsy & Al-Arishi 2014). The intensive and unhealthy use of SNS increases the feeling of loneliness over time among respondents in Hong Kong. Social relationships on SNS are not alternative for offline social interaction in reducing the feeling of loneliness (Yao & Zhong 2014). Some Facebook users in Algeria have been isolated from the real world and have merged into the virtual world (Bin-Ais & Bughdady 2014, Qot & Bulghlify 2014, Nomar 2012).

In the same context, (34.5%) of Emirates university students also showed that SNS addiction causes isolation, loneliness, and social failure (Al-Obaid 2014). Cypriot and Sudanese university students also indicated that social isolation is one of the most important negative effects of SNS (Sevük 2013, Roaya Center 2012). It was found that students who use one or more SNS platforms to

communicate with their parents have a higher degree of loneliness (Gentzler et al 2011).

### **5- SNS addiction:**

Previous studies revealed high levels of SNS addiction among university students and this addiction was positively associated with depression and neuroticism (AlBarashdi 2020). Use intensity, psychological enhancement and social identity were main factors in turning the respondents of Chinese users to SNS addiction. Use intensity was more related to SNS addiction among females whereas social identity was more related to males (Wang 2020). SNS addiction is a way of replacing affection that is missing in the real world (D'Arienzo et al 2019). Two other studies conducted among university youth in Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Palestine, and a review of some studies applied to Egyptians, Palestinian and Algerian families proved that there is a significant correlation between the heavy use of SNS and addiction of these sites (El-Helw et al 2018, Al-kilany 2018). The same result was confirmed by six other studies (Subramanian 2017, Aishwarya & Vinod 2017, Bin-Saleh 2016, Chris 2016, Abdel Hamied 2014, Al-Zuyon & Abo-Saeleek 2014).

By a systematic literature review, it was found that there is a positive correlation between narcissism and problematic Facebook use (Casale & Banchi 2020). Students who have vulnerable narcissism may contribute more to problematic use of SNS than those who have grandiose narcissism (Casale et al 2016). Two other studies proved that there is a positive correlation between narcissism (feeling of superiority, vanity, authority, and exploitation) and Facebook addiction. Through Facebook addiction, they try to pass their narcissistic wounds and avoid any conflict in the real world (Bin-Gadidi 2016, Alloway et al 2014).

There was a negative correlation between users' age and SNS addiction (Abbasi 2019). Another wide online survey on 23532 Norwegians confirmed that lower age, females, single people, students, lower education, lower income, lower self-esteem, and those with narcissism are more addicted to SNS (Andreassen et al 2017). In addition, a wide online survey applied to 23333 SNS users showed that

users who suffer from obsessive-compulsive, anxiety, and depression were more addicted to SNS. Females and single users also were more addicted (Andreassen et al 2016). Another study indicated that females were the most addicted users to Facebook especially among adolescents (Nawi & Hamzah 2012).

#### **6- Other negative psychological effects:**

Some studies indicated that using SNS affects mental health in general and causes some negative psychological effects such as the sense of guilt, the tendency to lie, and obsessive-compulsive. Time spent on Facebook and number of friends on this site are important variables in explaining the variance in the levels of problematic Facebook use among young adults (Cudo et al 2020). In Scania, women (aged 18-30) who use SNS frequently and have a high number of friends on these sites were more likely to have poor mental health. This was apparent among women with low emotional support and who use SNS almost hourly (Scott et al 2020). SNS addiction was negatively associated with university students' mental health and self-esteem affect this relation (Hou et al 2019). The same conclusion was clear among Iranian youth as their problematic SNS use was associated with psychological distress directly and indirectly during the COVID-19 pandemic (Lin et al 2020).

Other results also indicated that the intensive use of SNS caused psychological distress among New Zealand adults (Stronge 2019). It was found that there is a moderate positive correlation between the use of Instagram among Saudi youth and the negative psychological effects. There were no significant differences between males and females (Helmi 2018). The use of SNS also created a state of psychological conflict among the respondents of Libyan university students (Masuod 2019).

The intensive use of SNS leads to strong pathological dependence on these sites and increases the feeling of guilt (Kapoor et al 2018). In another study applied to Saudi university students, it was found that there are significant differences between males and females in the effect of SNS on their lying and deceiving in favor of females (Al-Dorsy & Al-Arishi 2014). There was also a positive correlation

between SNS addiction and obsessive-compulsive (Younis 2016). But another study showed that there is no robust causal research emphasizes the impact of SNS on the mental wellbeing of young people (Best 2014).

### **Discussion:**

The results revealed the prevalence of negative impacts of SNS. Nearly two-thirds of the reviewed studies focused on the negative psychological impacts of SNS on users especially adolescents and university students which indicates that these categories of users are the most used and affected by SNS. Nearly half of the reviewed studies examined SNS impacts on isolation and depression. The study sample covered the Arab region and varied regions of North America, Europe and Asia, but it was noticed that the interest of Arab studies in the psychological effects of SNS started later than western studies, as the Arab Spring Revolutions in 2011 drew Arab researchers' attention to the importance of SNS and their multiple effects especially political influences, which explains the lack of Arab studies in the first years of the study sample (2011-2013).

There were no crucial results regarding the effect of SNS on self-expression, self-esteem and self-confidence over the period of our study, as some Arab and western studies concluded that using SNS satisfies the need for self-expression, self-esteem and self-confidence, as well as the need for detection identities by sharing status and activities. On the contrary, some Arab and western studies indicated that using SNS may negatively affect these aspects.

Western studies had a high concern during our study years with social comparisons made with heavy users of SNS and may lead to envy and low self-esteem which in turn become reasons for problematic SNS use, while Arabic studies concentrated on the users' dependency on others' opinions through SNS which leads to decreasing self-confidence.

Some Arab and western studies showed that people who do not have real social relationships or have high levels of depression and loneliness may attract to SNS to get psychological and social support. The western studies (2011-2018) have emphasized that decreasing



depression and loneliness is associated with the number of friends on SNS, positive interaction and the amount of psychological and social support users receive on SNS. Additionally, Arab and western studies determined some intermediate variables may increase depression among users such as using several SNS platforms and the intensive prolonged use of these sites. Arab studies concentrated on negative behaviors of friends on SNS as a reason of depression whereas western studies focused on making social comparisons on SNS. As well as some western studies went far from depression to alcohol and drug consumption and suicide due to the exposure to cyberbullying.

Comparing with western studies, a high number of Arab studies (25 studies) concluded earlier (2012-2019) that using SNS increases social isolation and family alienation because Arab societies' culture gives great importance to family interaction, cohesion, and overlap in social relationships. No western study in our sample focused on SNS impacts on family alienation, but concentrated only on feeling loneliness as a result of using SNS.

Both Arab and western studies focused on examining to what extent SNS cause anxiety and stress, but western studies -starting from 2016- became concerned with examining the effect of some intermediate variables on occurring anxiety and stress such as intensive prolonged use, interaction, feeling insecurity, low self-esteem and using several SNS platforms. Both Arab and western studies explained the occurrence of depression, stress, anxiety and other psychological disorders in light of users' exposure to a flood of information and different ideas on these sites.

Contrary to studies that were applied mostly to adolescents and university students, Arab and western studies related to SNS addiction concentrated on users in general. Over our study years (2011-2020), it was clear that use intensity and narcissism are important reasons in turning users to SNS addiction. Some western studies concluded that psychological enhancement, missing affection and love, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem and loneliness are the main factors in SNS addiction. Females and lower age may be more addicted to these sites.

During the few past years (2016-2020), the rapid increase in the use of SNS has prompted researchers to study the impact of these sites on users' psychological aspects. COVID-19 pandemic has drawn more attention to focus on these impacts, especially with the increase in time spent on SNS and the number of friends on these sites. On the contrary, we have not found any Arab study concerned with the psychological effects of SNS during the COVID-19 pandemic.

From a statistics perspective, there is a significant correlation between using SNS and the psychological effects especially negative ones. It is clear that the same negative psychological effects of SNS have manifested over our study years and have become more evident and worse, especially with the intensive prolonged use of these sites in recent years and it has become certain that SNS have negative psychological impacts on users, especially adolescents, more than their positives, but we need to do more experimental studies to make sure that using SNS is the direct reason of these effects positive or negative.

#### **The proposed theoretical model:**

According to the results of previous studies which were reviewed and analyzed, we formulated a theoretical model to help researchers explain how SNS affect users' psychological aspects, as well as understanding the intermediate variables which control the occurrence of these effects, taking into consideration the elements of SNS environment.

This theoretical model emphasizes the **moderate impact of SNS** on users, which results from the long-term intensive use of these sites. This model is based on the following main hypothesis: **“The long-term Intensive use of SNS leads to negative psychological effects. These effects increase among users with psychological disorders.”** Therefore, the main hypothesis of this model emphasizes the role of usage type, personal and psychological characteristics of SNS users in determining the type and degree of the effects of these sites on their psychological aspects.

The results of several Arab and western studies that have been revised, supported this hypothesis. Most studies agreed on some intermediate variables that control the relation between the use of SNS

and their effects on the psychological aspects of users. These intermediate variables are determined as follows:

- **psychological characteristics of SNS users:**

Some previous studies indicated a number of psychological characteristics of SNS users which determine the type and degree of psychological effects, such as suffering from psychological and social unity, psychological distress, low psychological support (love - acceptance - happiness - appreciation), feeling depressed and stressed, feeling of social embarrassment, low self-expression, low self-esteem and narcissism (feeling of superiority, vanity, authority, and exploitation). The more severity of these characteristics, the greater the psychological effects of these sites. And there is a vicious cycle between using SNS and their effects.

- **The intensive and prolonged use of SNS:**

Numerous Arab and western studies confirmed that the intensive and prolonged use of SNS leads to addiction which in turn increases the severity of the negative psychological effects of these sites, as these sites transmit users from real reality to virtual reality, away from the normal social life which enhances the psychological and social capabilities.

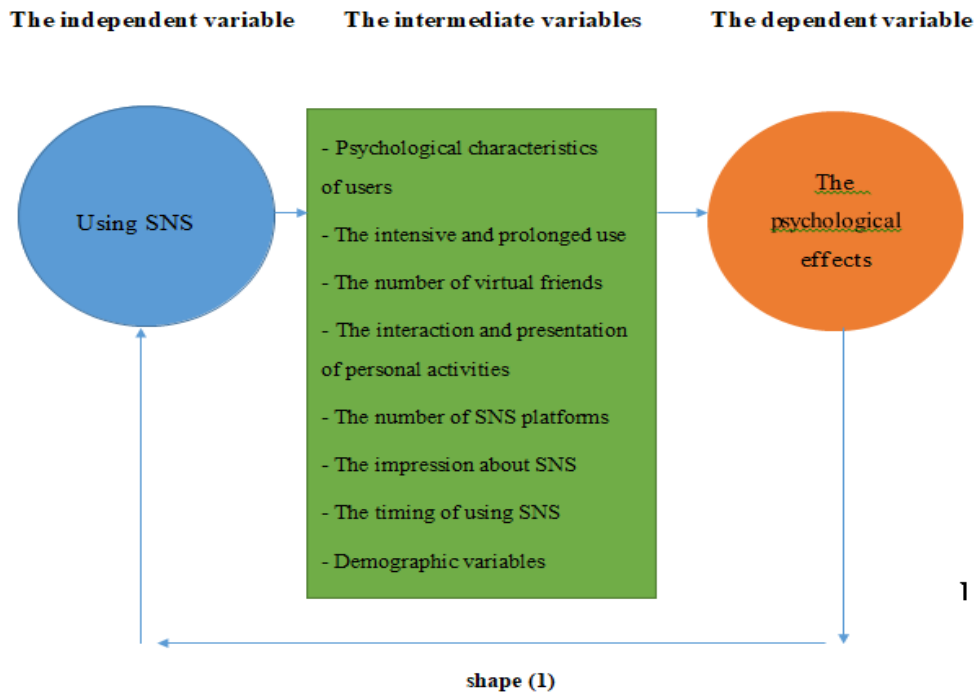
- **The number of virtual friends:**

The negative psychological effects of SNS increase with the increase in the number of friends on these sites, in the case of not interacting with them on these sites and only following them and reading their posts, where the users are exposed to many negative experiences, pictures, and videos. The increase in the number of friends also forces users to make social comparisons, which lead to jealousy, depression, frustration, anxiety and dissatisfaction, and reduce their self-confidence.

- **The interaction and presentation of personal activities:**

Users' interaction and presentation of their personal activities, occasions, photos and videos, and expressing their feelings on SNS reduce the severity of the negative psychological effects of these sites and may have positive effects on users, as they receive many likes and positive comments that enhance self-confidence, self-expression and the sense of psychological support (love - acceptance - happiness - appreciation).

- **The number of SNS platforms:**  
Previous studies showed that there is a positive correlation between the number of SNS platforms used and the severity of negative psychological effects of SNS on users.
  - **The impression about SNS:**  
The negative psychological effects of SNS decrease, with the negative impression about these sites and the lack of confidence in the content these sites provide.
  - **The timing of using SNS:**  
A number of studies indicated that long-term use of SNS before bedtime increases the negative psychological effects of these sites.
  - **Demographic variables:**  
Which include gender - age - educational level - socioeconomic level. Previous studies differed in the extent to which these variables affect the occurrence of negative psychological impacts of SNS on users.
- Shape (1) indicates the variables of the proposed theoretical model.**



## **Conclusion:**

This study presented a complete revision of the psychological effects of SNS on users in different countries by review 119 Arab and western studies in the period from 2011 to 2020.

The positive psychological effects of SNS represented in increasing self-expression by using personal photos, videos, status updates, expression of feelings, interests, and activities, which help in obtaining psychological support (love - acceptance - happiness - appreciation) and improving self-esteem.

The use of SNS reduces the feeling of loneliness, depressions, and stress by providing entertainment and support, and expressing feelings through these sites. The interaction through SNS also supports the feeling of self-confidence, and social affiliation.

On the other side, the negative psychological effects of SNS represented in reducing users' self-confidence and self-dependence, because these sites reinforce the social comparisons, jealousy, and dependency on other users' opinions. Using SNS causes depression and envy as a result of social comparisons and friends' behaviors on these sites (Lying – blocking – defamation, etc.). Some recent studies conducted on Arab societies have shown that males are more affected than females. The use of SNS also increases anxiety, stress and psychological conflict, as a result of exposure to contradictory opinions and ideas, and increases the feeling of social isolation, rebellion, indifference, and family alienation, due to spending a lot of time on these sites.

It has been noticed that females, younger age, and people with narcissism are the most addicted to SNS. Prolonged and intensive use of SNS leads to strong pathological dependence on these sites, feelings of guilt, and suffering from obsessive-compulsive.

In light of the results of previous studies that were reviewed, a theoretical model was formulated to help in understanding the various psychological effects of SNS on users, as well as understanding the intermediate variables that control the occurrence of these effects, taking into consideration the elements of SNS environment. This theoretical model emphasizes the moderate impact of SNS on users.

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