

Gender and Internet among the Arab minority in Israel /

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Dissertation Abstract

This research aimed at examining behavior patterns of internet surfing among the Arab minority in Israel. The Arab community is a traditional society living in a developed country, and we set to find out whether different patterns of behavior exist among men and women and whether the social-cultural context in any way affects their surfing behavior beyond the familiar patterns and attitudes known in traditional societies, including Arab societies.

The study therefore examined internet use patterns among Arab users with respect to gender, and taking into consideration demographic and cultural factors such as age, education, parents' education and religion. In addition we examined attitudes toward internet and internet use patterns, and their interrelations with internet self-efficacy and experience. By the end of this study there emerged a profile of the Arab internet user in Israel.

The dissertation's rationale, questions, and hypotheses were based on studies and questionnaires which dealt with internet adoption by men and women *vis à vis* local culture. The basic assumption is that gender differences indeed exist among Arab users in Israel, regarding internet adoption, use patterns, attitudes and efficacy, and that these differences derive from effects of local culture as well as other demographic variables. The central assumption was based on studies which found gender differences in attitudes toward internet and internet use patterns which were influenced by local culture. According to the studies, gender differences displayed in traditional societies are more profound than those found in modern societies. However, existing studies show very little consideration to these topics among the Arab minority in Israel, a deficiency which this study strives to fulfill.

The study focused on a number of major questions: (a) Are there gender differences in the attitudes of Arab internet users according to different demographic variables? (b) Are there gender differences in internet use according to different demographic variables? (c) Are differences in internet self-efficacy related to gender?

(d) What gender differences exist regarding certain internet contents and technologies, such as immediate messages, social networks, e-mails, sex sites, religion sites and others? (e) How do the two genders regard parental monitoring over children's internet use? (f) Do educated men express positive attitudes toward internet use by women, even though negative views toward women usually prevail in the Arab traditional society?

The study group included 609 Arab internet users (313 women, 294 men, two did not specify gender), whose ages range between 13 and 50; most of them live in the north and center of Israel; 473 are Muslims, 134 Christians, and two Druzes. The participants had different education backgrounds.

The study tools included a questionnaire and an interview. The questionnaire consisted of five parts: personal and demographic items, internet usage, computer and internet literacy, general attitudes and gender attitudes toward the internet and self-efficacy in internet and computers. Some parts of the questionnaire were partially based on Li & Kirkup's questionnaire (2007) and others were composed by the researcher himself. The interview was half-way structural. The interviewees were Muslims and Christians from different regions and with different education backgrounds.

Main Findings: Men and women alike expressed positive attitudes toward the internet. There was a negative relationship between age and attitudes – attitudes become more negative with age. On the whole, users rated their self-efficacy as high, without significant differences between men and women.

Among men and women alike there was a significant positive relationship between users' attitudes toward the internet and their internet efficacy, literacy and experience. In addition, highly educated internet users expressed positive attitudes toward internet use by the opposite-sex. The men's attitudes were surprising – negative views toward women, including women's use of technology, are widespread in traditional societies.

Examining content preferences according to gender, we found some differences – women were more prominent in activities such as watching recorded TV programs and films and searching for health related information, while men lead in the online

games arena. The activities "News reading" and "Listening to music" were found to engage men and women similarly.

Both genders expressed positive attitudes toward religion sites and both had very negative attitudes toward sex sites, the women more strongly so. Women consider the latter insulting and both genders find them harmful to social values. There was a negative relationship between attitudes toward religion sites and attitudes toward sex sites. The users' awareness to the threats of the internet were also manifest in their attitudes toward parental monitoring over children's use of the internet. Men and especially women expressed positive attitudes toward parental monitoring and concern regarding the dangers facing teens.

The Arabic language was favored among both genders, a result of poor understanding of foreign languages. Women showed stronger tendency to use their native language.

Concerning social networks, short messages and social applications, the quantitative findings revealed that men are more dominant than women, findings that are supported by studies that were conducted in the Arab world. However, the qualitative findings were reversed: the interviewees believed women have the dominancy.

The findings contribute to deepening our understanding of the Arab internet users in Israel with respect to gender. A clearer picture of the Arab user was revealed, according to which Arab women are undergoing a change in adoption, use, attitudes and self-efficacy in the internet.

In the Discussion section we suggest that future studies continue investigating internet users and combine non-users as well, to examine other factors that are likely to influence behavior patterns. Our claim is that the theoretical contribution of this study will have practical future implications regarding educated internet assimilation among the majority of the population.