

Trust, Re-sharing, and Privacy Concerns among Arab University Students on Social Media

Farah Saboune¹, Loyal Halawani², Nijad Abdelsamad³, Barakat Alzyoud⁴, Rania Abdel-Qader Abdallah¹

¹College of Communication and Media, Al Ain University, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

²College of Media and Design, American University of Bahrain, Riffa, Bahrain

³Faculty of Fine Arts and Architecture, Lebanese University, Deir el Kamar, Lebanon

⁴Department of Digital Media, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Applied Science Private University, Amman, Jordan

Correspondence: Rania Abdel-Qader Abdallah, College of Communication and Media, Al Ain University, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. E-mail: rania.abdallah@aau.ac.ae

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Abstract

Social media platforms are deeply embedded in the everyday communicative, academic, and social lives of university students, raising questions about how students manage trust, sharing, and privacy within them. This study examined patterns of social media use, social engagement, platform trust, information re-sharing, and privacy concern among university students in four Arab countries: the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Jordan, and Lebanon. Using a quantitative cross-sectional survey, data were collected from 346 students and analyzed using descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha, Pearson correlations, Welch's t-tests, and one-way ANOVA. Findings confirm intensive use: 94.8% were active users, 97.1% had used these platforms for more than five years, and 76.0% spent three or more hours online daily. Students reported moderate-to-high social engagement ($M = 3.63$) and high self-reported verification awareness ($M = 4.14$). Trust was platform-specific, highest for WhatsApp ($M = 2.91$) and lowest for Facebook ($M = 1.51$), and re-sharing concentrated on visually oriented platforms such as Instagram and Snapchat. Privacy was great for political or religious opinions and personal photos. Platform trust was positively associated with re-sharing ($r = .49, p < .001$) and negatively associated with privacy concern ($r = -.21, p < .001$), while privacy concern was negatively associated with re-sharing ($r = -.18, p < .001$), a pattern consistent with a privacy-calculus logic. This trust–re-sharing–privacy structure was consistent across gender, country, and age, indicating a shared regional pattern. Interpreted through Uses and Gratifications Theory and Communication Privacy Management, the findings inform digital-literacy and privacy-awareness initiatives across Arab higher education.

Keywords: social media, self-disclosure, privacy calculus, platform trust, uses and gratifications theory, communication privacy management, Arab university students

1. Introduction

Social media platforms have become deeply embedded in the everyday communicative, academic, and social lives of university students. No longer functioning merely as tools for interpersonal communication, social networking sites now serve as complex digital environments where students exchange information, construct identities, maintain peer relationships, access educational resources, and participate in broader public conversations. University students are among the most intensive users of social networking sites for both academic and social purposes (Guraya et al., 2018), and they rely on these platforms for communication, learning, and content sharing (Mese & Aydin, 2019). Beyond communication, such networks also function as sources of academic, emotional, and peer-based support in higher education (Mishra, 2020).

Within this context, examining students' social media use across Arab universities is especially relevant because university students in the region are intensive users of these platforms for communication, information-seeking, entertainment, learning, and social interaction. As use intensifies, students must also continually decide whom and what to trust, what to re-share, and how much personal information to disclose. Students turn to social media to satisfy a range of communicative and psychological needs (Khalifa & Al-Subaie, 2022), and self-disclosure decisions actively shape peer dynamics (Chan et al., 2026), underscoring that platform use cannot be treated as neutral content consumption but

involves ongoing judgments about gratification, trust, and privacy. Throughout this article, trust refers to platform trust: students' confidence in the social media platforms themselves as environments for information sharing and interaction rather than trust in themselves or in particular members of their online networks.

Intensive use also carries psychological, social, and cultural implications. Social media use has been linked to depressive symptoms, problematic use, and anxiety among university students, with these effects shaped by self-esteem, perceived social support, fear of missing out (FoMO), the family environment, and the platforms and content involved (Ma & Li, 2026; Abbouyi et al., 2026; Jameel et al., 2026; Riyanto et al., 2026). Phubbing—the practice of ignoring others in face-to-face interactions by attending to one's smartphone—has been positively associated with both FoMO and social media addiction, with FoMO acting as a mediator: the stronger students' fear of missing online updates, the greater their urge to check their phones (Ivonesti et al., 2026). Self-disclosure decisions likewise shape peer dynamics and relationship quality (Chan et al., 2026), and among Arab university students, platforms operate as spaces of cultural negotiation associated with cultural, moral, religious, social, and economic value orientations (Rehim et al., 2026).

Finally, social media use raises questions of trust, privacy, misinformation, and digital safety. Identity visibility and engagement intensity have been associated with students' exposure to digital harassment, while technological literacy and cybersecurity awareness are linked to lower exposure, framing digital risk as a sociotechnical outcome in which user awareness and platform conditions jointly shape exposure (Salem, 2026).

These questions are sharpening as artificial intelligence reshapes Arab media environments, transforming how news is produced and raising new professional and ethical challenges around trust and verification (Abdallah, Taha, & Aissani, 2026).

Despite this growing body of research, the psychological, social, trust-related, and privacy-related dimensions of social media use are typically examined separately. Few studies integrate them within a single, culturally grounded account of how students experience these platforms. Accordingly, this study investigates social media use among university students in four Arab countries: the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Jordan, and Lebanon, examining how they use platforms, how they engage socially, how much they trust different platforms, what they re-share, and which types of personal information they are most concerned about protecting. It further examines how these dimensions relate to one another and whether they differ by gender, country, and age. The study contributes locally by informing digital-literacy and student-support strategies and theoretically by linking communicative motivation, social engagement, platform trust, and privacy regulation across Arab higher-education contexts.

1.1 Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. First, it addresses a relatively underexplored context: although social media use among university students has been widely studied, far less evidence comes from the Arab region spanning the Gulf and the Levant, where rapid digital adoption, a young and connected population, and distinctive cultural norms shape online behavior in ways that may differ from Western settings. Second, the study integrates dimensions that are usually examined in isolation: use patterns, verification behavior, social engagement, platform trust, re-sharing, and privacy concern within a single, culturally grounded account, and it examines how these dimensions are interrelated. Third, by profiling how students use, trust, and protect their information on the platforms they rely on most, the findings provide an evidence base for digital-literacy curricula, privacy-awareness initiatives, and student-support strategies in higher education. Finally, the study offers a foundation and an interpretive model that can guide subsequent inferential, longitudinal, and cross-cultural research.

1.2 Research Objectives and Questions

The study pursued seven objectives: to describe participants' demographic characteristics; to examine patterns of social media use (platforms, duration, intensity, content preferences, and connections); to assess students' social engagement and verification behavior; to assess trust in different platforms; to examine information-sharing and re-sharing behavior; to identify privacy concerns regarding personal information; and to examine how these dimensions are interrelated and whether they differ by gender, country, and age. Correspondingly, it addressed:

1. What are students' demographic characteristics?
2. What are the main patterns of social media use?
3. What are students' levels of social engagement and verification behavior?
4. What are their levels of trust in different platforms?
5. What are the main patterns of information sharing and re-sharing?
6. Which types of personal information generate the highest privacy concern?
7. How are these dimensions interrelated, and do they differ by gender, country, and age?

1.3 Literature Review

Prior research on university students and social media converges on three intersecting concerns: the psychological consequences of intensive use, the social and supportive functions of online networks, and the trust-, disclosure-, and privacy-related dimensions of digital experience. The following review synthesizes this evidence thematically.

A first strand links intensive or problematic use to psychological outcomes. Among Chinese undergraduates, higher social media use was associated with depressive symptoms, mediated by self-esteem and perceived social support (Ma & Li, 2026). Among Moroccan youth, FoMO and social media engagement mediated the relationship between psychological distress and problematic use (Abbouyi et al., 2026), while phubbing positively predicted both FoMO and social media addiction, with FoMO as a partial mediator (Ivonesti et al., 2026). Anxiety among nursing students in Indonesia varied not only with usage duration but also with platform and content type (Riyanto et al., 2026), and the family environment mediated the links between addiction, anxiety, and depression among Saudi students (Jameel et al., 2026). Self-regulation emerged as protective, reducing FoMO among TikTok users (Kusuma & Dariyo, 2026), and mediating and moderating mechanisms similarly shaped the relationship between use and mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic (Zhao & Zhou, 2020).

A second strand highlights the supportive and relational functions of online networks. Systematic review evidence shows that social networks provide academic, emotional, and peer-based support, particularly for underrepresented students (Mishra, 2020), and social networking sites can enhance social presence, learning motivation, well-being, and academic performance (Samad et al., 2019). Uses and Gratifications research among Bahraini university students during the COVID-19 pandemic likewise documented gratifications of connection, information-seeking, entertainment, reassurance, and learning (Khalifa & Al-Subaie, 2022).

A third strand foregrounds trust, disclosure, and digital risk. The depth, appropriateness, and intention of self-disclosure shape peer dynamics among university students, indicating that online sharing is consequential rather than automatic (Chan et al., 2026). Exposure to digital harassment is associated with engagement intensity, identity visibility, and cultural norms, and is reduced by technological literacy and cybersecurity awareness, framing digital risk as a sociotechnical outcome shaped jointly by users and platform environments (Salem, 2026).

1.4 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in an integrated framework combining Uses and Gratifications Theory and Communication Privacy Management. The integration treats students' social media use not as a purely technical activity but as a multidimensional communicative experience in which motivation and gratification-seeking drive engagement, while trust and privacy regulation govern how much students disclose and re-share (Figure 1).

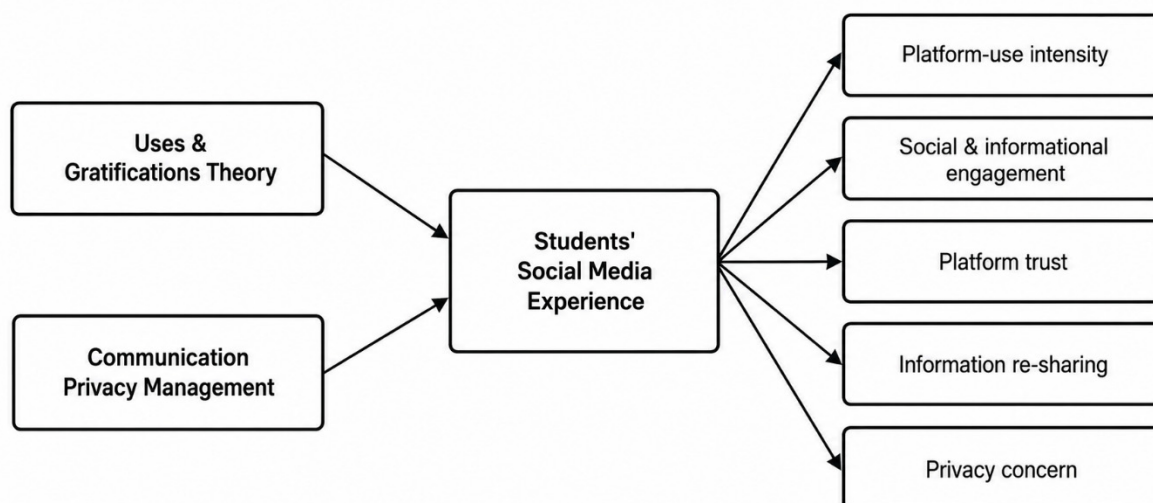


Figure 1. Integrated interpretive framework for students' social media use.

1.4.1 Uses and Gratifications Theory

Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973) views students as active users who select platforms

and content to satisfy informational, entertainment, social, self-expression, and identity needs. This has been demonstrated in a Bahraini university sample, where use was motivated by connection, information-seeking, entertainment, reassurance, and cognitive needs (Khalifa & Al-Subaie, 2022). The perspective also accommodates social-integrative gratifications: online networks provide peer connection, belonging, and academic and emotional support (Mishra, 2020; Samad et al., 2019), which helps explain the moderate-to-high social engagement observed in the present study. Uses and Gratifications Theory, therefore, frames why students use particular platforms and what they seek from them, including information, entertainment, social connection, and self-expression. More recently, the theory has been extended to Arab youth's engagement with sustainability content on social media, showing how informational and participatory gratifications can convert digital exposure into awareness and engagement (Aissani, Abdallah, Kaba, & El Refae, 2026).

1.4.2 Communication Privacy Management

Communication Privacy Management (CPM) theory (Petronio, 2002) explains how individuals treat private information as something they own and regulate through personal privacy rules, balancing the benefits of disclosure against the risks of exposure. Applied to social media, CPM frames trust, re-sharing, and privacy concern as parts of a single boundary-management process: students open their privacy boundaries by trusting a platform and re-sharing content when perceived benefits outweigh perceived risks and tighten them when sensitive information is at stake. This "privacy-calculus" logic predicts that trust and disclosure should move together, while privacy concern should restrain disclosure (Dinev & Hart, 2006). This view is supported by evidence that the depth, appropriateness, and intention of self-disclosure shape peer dynamics and that disclosure decisions are consequential rather than automatic (Chan et al., 2026). CPM thus provides a direct theoretical account of the trust, re-sharing, and privacy-concern dimensions central to this study and of the associations among them tested below.

Together, the two perspectives provide a coherent lens for the study: Uses and Gratifications Theory explains why students use social media and what gratifications they seek, while Communication Privacy Management explains how they manage trust, disclosure, and privacy as they do so. The framework, therefore, links motivation, social engagement, platform trust, information re-sharing, and privacy concern within a single account and motivates the descriptive and correlational analyses that follow.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design and Context

The study adopted a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to describe students' patterns of use, social engagement, platform trust, sharing behavior, and privacy-related risk perception, and to examine how these dimensions are interrelated, at a single point in time. The design is descriptive and correlational rather than causal, providing an empirical profile of how students perceive, use, trust, and interact with the platforms they rely on. The study was conducted with university students in four Arab countries: the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Jordan, and Lebanon, where students are intensive users of digital media for communication, learning, entertainment, news, and self-expression. These four countries were selected on methodological, theoretical, and practical grounds. Methodologically, they span two Arab sub-regions, the Gulf (United Arab Emirates and Bahrain) and the Levant (Jordan and Lebanon), providing contextual variation within a shared linguistic and cultural space. Theoretically, this composition allows the study to examine whether the trust–re-sharing–privacy structure is regionally shared or country-specific. Practically, the authors' institutional bases in these countries enabled direct access to student populations with very high social media penetration, supporting reliable data collection.

2.2 Population, Sample, and Sampling

The population comprised university students in four Arab countries: the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Jordan, and Lebanon, who use social networking sites. A purposive sampling technique was used because the research questions required participants with direct, active experience of platform use, sharing, trust, and privacy decisions; this approach deliberately prioritizes information-rich cases over statistical representativeness. After excluding missing values and duplicate records, the final valid sample consisted of 346 students; 50.9% were male and 49.1% female. Respondents were distributed across Jordan (27.7%), Lebanon (27.2%), the United Arab Emirates (25.1%), and Bahrain (19.9%), and their ages spanned 20–25 years (30.3%), 26–30 years (24.6%), and older than 30 years (45.1%). The relatively high proportion of students older than 30 reflects the inclusion of postgraduate, mature, and part-time students, who are common in Arab higher education and among the most active and experienced social media users; this breadth strengthens the age range available for comparison. Although purposive sampling supported focused data collection, the sample is not statistically representative of all Arab university students, and findings are therefore interpreted as context-specific evidence rather than generalizable estimates.

2.3 Instrument and Operational Definition

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed in line with the study objectives, research questions, and relevant literature. The instrument included closed-ended, multiple-response, and Likert-type/ordinal items organized into six sections: (1) demographics; (2) general use patterns (platforms, number of accounts, duration, daily time, followers,

groups, and content types); (3) engagement and verification behavior (nine statements); (4) trust in eight platforms; (5) information re-sharing behavior (seven platforms); and (6) privacy concern regarding six categories of personal information. From these items, five composite constructs were derived and used in the inferential analyses: platform trust, information re-sharing, privacy concern, verification awareness, and social engagement (Table 4). Each composite was computed as the mean of its items, so that scores remained on the original response scale (1–4 for trust and re-sharing, 1–3 for privacy concern, and 1–5 for verification awareness and social engagement); negatively worded verification-awareness items were reverse-scored before aggregation. Across the platform sections, the set of platforms assessed varies: trust was rated for eight platforms and re-sharing for seven, with Instagram and LinkedIn included among them. These five composite constructs constitute the study's core variables, and their indicators are the questionnaire items composing each scale: platform trust (eight items, one per platform), information re-sharing (seven items, one per platform), privacy concern (six items, one per information type), verification awareness (four items), and social engagement (four items), together with the demographic background variables of gender, country, and age (see Table 4).

2.4 Validity, Reliability, and Analysis

Content validity was addressed by ensuring that items covered the study's dimensions, demographics, use patterns, trust, re-sharing, privacy concern, verification, and social engagement, and aligned with the reported results. Internal-consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha for each multi-item construct (Table 4): platform trust ($\alpha = .840$), information re-sharing ($\alpha = .839$), privacy concern ($\alpha = .834$), and social engagement ($\alpha = .866$) demonstrated good to very good reliability, whereas verification awareness ($\alpha = .519$) showed low internal consistency and is therefore interpreted descriptively and with caution. Data were analyzed at two levels. First, descriptive statistics, frequencies, percentages, weighted means, and standard deviations described the sample and ranked trust, re-sharing, privacy concern, verification, and social engagement. Mean scores were interpreted relative to each scale by dividing its range into three equal intervals representing low, moderate, and high levels (for five-point scales, 1.00–2.33, 2.34–3.66, and 3.67–5.00). Second, inferential statistics examined relationships and group differences among the five composite constructs: Pearson correlations assessed bivariate associations; Welch's independent-samples t-tests (which do not assume equal variances) compared men and women, with Cohen's d as the effect size; and one-way ANOVA, with eta squared (η^2) as the effect size, compared the four countries and the three age groups. Homogeneity of variance was checked with Levene's test; where it was violated, Welch ANOVA with Games-Howell post-hoc comparisons was used, and otherwise one-way ANOVA with Tukey post-hoc comparisons. Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.

2.5 Procedures and Ethical Considerations

The questionnaire was administered to university students across the four countries who use social networking sites; participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed that responses would be used for academic purposes only. After data cleaning, the final dataset comprised 346 valid and unique responses. The study followed standard ethical principles for survey-based research: participation was voluntary, no personally identifying information was collected or reported, and all findings were presented in aggregate using frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. To reduce social-desirability bias, the questionnaire was fully anonymous, and respondents were assured that there were no right or wrong answers and that data would be reported only in aggregate; nonetheless, as with all self-report instruments, some response bias cannot be excluded and is acknowledged among the study's limitations. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained; participants could decline any item, and the study involved no experimental manipulation, deception, or clinical assessment.

3. Results

This section reports the findings in two parts. It first presents descriptive results across demographics, use patterns, verification and social engagement, platform trust, re-sharing behavior, and privacy concern, using frequencies (f), percentages (%), and arithmetic means (M), with items ranked by mean where relevant. It then reports inferential results, correlations among the five composite measures, and comparisons by gender, country, and age.

Table 1. Frequencies and percentages for demographic variables ($N = 346$)

Variable	Category	f	%
Country	UAE	87	25.1
	Bahrain	69	19.9
	Jordan	96	27.7
	Lebanon	94	27.2
Gender	Female	170	49.1
	Male	176	50.9
Age	20-25	105	30.3
	26-30	85	24.6
	Older than 30	156	45.1

Note. Percentages are based on 346 valid and unique responses.

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 346 respondents. The gender distribution was almost balanced (50.9% male, 49.1% female). Respondents were drawn from four Arab countries, with the largest groups in Jordan (27.7%) and Lebanon (27.2%), followed by the United Arab Emirates (25.1%) and Bahrain (19.9%). Regarding age, the largest group was students older than 30 years (45.1%), followed by those aged 20–25 (30.3%) and 26–30 (24.6%). The sample thus combined respondents from four national contexts and different age groups, providing a useful basis for examining varied experiences with social media use. The substantial share of respondents older than 30 reflects the deliberate inclusion of postgraduate, mature, and part-time students, who are common in Arab higher education (see Section 2.2).

Table 2 shows that social media use is highly common; 94.8% reported using social networking sites regularly. Snapchat was the most widely used platform (93.4%), followed closely by WhatsApp (92.5%), then YouTube (82.4%), Telegram (66.5%), Twitter/X (44.2%), Facebook (33.5%), and LinkedIn (9.8%). Most students had long experience, with 97.1% using these platforms for more than five years, and daily use was high: 38.7% spent more than five hours per day, and 37.3% spent three to five hours, so roughly three-quarters (76.0%) were online at least three hours daily. Students used social media especially as a source of information (69.7%), for watching videos (61.8%), for following products (57.8%), and for chatting with others (56.9%), and they followed diverse content, particularly health and fitness (62.4%), fashion and clothing (52.6%), and entertainment (46.8%). For verification, students relied mainly on concerned or competent authorities (62.7%), trusted media (62.1%), and experienced people (44.5%). Overall, the table indicates that social media is deeply integrated into students' daily routines, combining informational, social, entertainment, and consumer-related functions.

Table 2. Social media use patterns, content preferences, and verification practices

Item	Category/response option	f	%
Do you use social networking sites?	Yes	328	94.8
	Sometimes	18	5.2
	5	78	22.5
	4	50	14.5
	9 or more	46	13.3
How many accounts do you have?	6	53	15.3
	7	29	8.4
	3	51	14.7
	8	22	6.4
	1	5	1.4
How long have you used SNS?	2	7	2.0
	9	5	1.4
	More than 5 years	336	97.1
	3-5 years	10	2.9
	0-3 hours	83	24.0
Daily hours on social media	3-5 hours	129	37.3
	More than 5 hours	134	38.7
	More than 5000	32	9.2
	101-500	120	34.7
	0-100	92	26.6
Followers/friends across all sites	501-1000	54	15.6
	3001-5000	22	6.4
	1001-2000	19	5.5
	2001-3000	7	2.0
	50-100	33	9.5
Groups/pages/forums followed	1-10	199	57.5
	10-50	53	15.3
	More than 100	61	17.6
	No	90	26.0
	Maybe	190	54.9
Does social media affect your thoughts/behavior?	Yes	66	19.1
	Snapchat	323	93.4
	WhatsApp	320	92.5
	YouTube	285	82.4
	Telegram	230	66.5
Which platforms do you use? (multiple response)	Twitter/X	153	44.2
	Facebook	116	33.5
	LinkedIn	34	9.8
	Age	157	45.4
	Email address	146	42.2
Information you allow to be shared (multiple responses)	Perspectives/opinions	111	32.1
	Marital status	75	21.7
	Other	67	19.4
	Personal photos	50	14.5
	Mobile phone number	34	9.8
What matters when using SNS? (multiple response)	Accommodation/residence	27	7.8
	Workplace/appointment	10	2.9
	Source of information	241	69.7
	Watch videos	214	61.8
	Products	200	57.8
Type of content followed (multiple response)	Chat with people	197	56.9
	Local news	151	43.6
	Promotions and advertisements	109	31.5
	International news	56	16.2
	Arab news	50	14.5
Tools used to verify information (multiple responses)	Spending leisure time and entertainment	46	13.3
	Follow media pages	18	5.2
	Health and fitness	216	62.4
	Fashion and clothing	182	52.6
	Entertainment industry/content	162	46.8
	Careers/jobs	149	43.1
	Sports news	117	33.8
	Lifestyle content	107	30.9
	Cultural news	74	21.4
	Social news	62	17.9
	Political news	61	17.6
	Other	46	13.3
	Concerned/competent authorities	217	62.7
	Trusted media	215	62.1
	Experienced people	154	44.5
	Library	91	26.3
	YouTube	86	24.9
	Google Images	71	20.5
	Studies and research	49	14.2
	Google Scholar	8	2.3

Note. For multiple-response items, percentages represent the percentage of respondents selecting each option; therefore, percentages may exceed 100% within an item. Instagram was not presented as a response option in this platform-use item; it was assessed in the trust and re-sharing sections (see Section 2.3).

Table 3. Patterns of verification, interaction, and social engagement on social networking sites

Statement	Strongly disagree f	%	Disagree f	%	Neutral f	%	Agree f	%	Strongly agree f	%	Mean
I pay attention to checking the accuracy of news on SNS	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	119	34.4	227	65.6	4.66
I follow local and international news through verified pages on SNS	7	2.0	31	9.0	77	22.3	101	29.2	130	37.6	3.91
Social media helps me make new friends	15	4.3	13	3.8	90	26.0	133	38.4	95	27.5	3.81
I feel happy when communicating with others through SNS	7	2.0	12	3.5	112	32.4	129	37.3	86	24.9	3.79
Social media helps me acquire new skills	22	6.4	36	10.4	96	27.7	136	39.3	56	16.2	3.49
I welcome new friendships on social media	15	4.3	42	12.1	125	36.1	101	29.2	63	18.2	3.45
Long use of SNS causes problems with my family members	32	9.2	28	8.1	118	34.1	105	30.3	63	18.2	3.40
I share information from SNS without verifying its authenticity	109	31.5	78	22.5	56	16.2	287	25.1	16	4.6	2.49
I do not care about the accuracy of news from SNS	229	66.2	256	16.2	261	17.6	0	0.0	0	0.0	1.51

Note. Agreement items were coded from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Means are ranked from highest to lowest.

Table 3 presents students' verification behavior and social-interaction patterns. The highest mean was for checking the accuracy of news ($M = 4.66$), indicating a strong tendency to verify news before accepting it, followed by following local and international news through verified pages ($M = 3.91$). Students also reported that social media helps them make new friends ($M = 3.81$) and that they feel happy when communicating with others ($M = 3.79$), both with relatively high means. The lowest means were for sharing information without verifying its authenticity ($M = 2.49$) and not caring about the accuracy of news ($M = 1.51$), suggesting that students are generally cautious about circulating unverified content. Overall, the table reflects a positive level of digital awareness, verification behavior, and social engagement.

Table 4. Internal consistency, reliability, and composite descriptive statistics

Construct	No. of items	Cronbach's α	Composite Mean	SD	Level	Interpretation
Platform trust	8	0.840	2.38	0.67	Moderate	Very good
Information re-sharing	7	0.839	1.87	0.68	Low to moderate	Very good
Privacy concern	6	0.834	2.34	0.54	High	Very good
Verification awareness	4	0.519	4.14	0.61	Moderate to high	Low; descriptive use only
Social engagement	4	0.866	3.63	0.86	Moderate to high	Very good

Note. Verification awareness showed low internal consistency and should be interpreted descriptively and cautiously; the other constructs demonstrated very good reliability.

Table 4 reports the internal-consistency reliability and composite descriptive statistics for the five constructs derived. Social engagement recorded a high composite mean ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.86$) with very good reliability ($\alpha = .866$), and verification awareness was also high ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 0.61$), although its low alpha ($\alpha = .519$) means it should be read descriptively and cautiously. Platform trust ($M = 2.38$, $SD = 0.67$; $\alpha = .840$) was moderate, privacy concern ($M = 2.34$, $SD = 0.54$; $\alpha = .834$) was high relative to its three-point scale, and information re-sharing ($M = 1.87$, $SD = 0.68$; $\alpha = .839$) was low to moderate. With the exception of verification awareness, all constructs demonstrated good to very good internal consistency, supporting their descriptive interpretation in the analyses that follow.

Table 5. Students' trust levels across social networking sites, ranked by mean

Platform	Do not trust f	%	Trust a little f	%	Trust often f	%	Trust a lot f	%	Mean
WhatsApp	37	10.7	81	23.4	105	30.3	123	35.5	2.91
Snapchat	52	15.0	59	17.1	115	33.2	120	34.7	2.88
Instagram	45	13.0	68	19.7	134	38.7	99	28.6	2.83
YouTube	44	12.7	95	27.5	115	33.2	92	26.6	2.74
Twitter/X	96	27.7	132	38.2	78	22.5	40	11.6	2.18
Telegram	114	32.9	111	32.1	78	22.5	43	12.4	2.14
LinkedIn	161	46.5	102	29.5	53	15.3	30	8.7	1.86
Facebook	210	60.7	104	30.1	25	7.2	7	2.0	1.51

Note. Trust was coded on a four-point ordinal scale from 1 = do not trust to 4 = trust a lot.

Table 5 presents students' trust levels across platforms. WhatsApp ranked first ($M = 2.91$), followed by Snapchat ($M = 2.88$), Instagram ($M = 2.83$), and YouTube ($M = 2.74$), which enjoyed relatively higher trust. By contrast, Facebook

recorded the lowest trust ($M = 1.51$), with 60.7% reporting that they did not trust it, preceded by LinkedIn ($M = 1.86$) and Telegram ($M = 2.14$). Trust thus differs markedly across platforms, with higher trust associated with platforms used frequently for everyday communication and social interaction, such as WhatsApp, Snapchat, and Instagram.

Table 6. Students' re-sharing behavior of information and news across platforms, ranked by mean

Platform	Do not re-share f	%	A little f	%	Mostly f	%	A lot of	%	Mean
Instagram	83	24.0	67	19.4	131	37.9	65	18.8	2.51
Snapchat	104	30.1	49	14.2	110	31.8	83	24.0	2.50
Twitter/X	161	46.5	60	17.3	82	23.7	43	12.4	2.02
YouTube	213	61.6	46	13.3	87	25.1	0	0.0	1.64
Telegram	214	61.8	57	16.5	68	19.7	7	2.0	1.62
LinkedIn	238	68.8	54	15.6	54	15.6	0	0.0	1.47
Facebook	289	83.5	10	2.9	40	11.6	7	2.0	1.32

Note. Re-sharing was coded on a four-point ordinal scale from 1 = do not re-share to 4 = re-share a lot.

Table 6 shows students' re-sharing behavior across platforms. Instagram ranked first ($M = 2.51$), followed very closely by Snapchat ($M = 2.50$), suggesting that students are more likely to re-share from visually oriented, socially interactive platforms. Twitter/X ranked third ($M = 2.02$), while YouTube, Telegram, LinkedIn, and Facebook recorded lower means. Facebook was the least used for re-sharing, with 83.5% reporting that they do not re-share from it. Re-sharing is thus stronger on platforms that support quick, visual, and socially visible interaction. Figure 2 contrasts trust and re-sharing across platforms, showing that the platforms students trust most are also those from which they most often re-share.

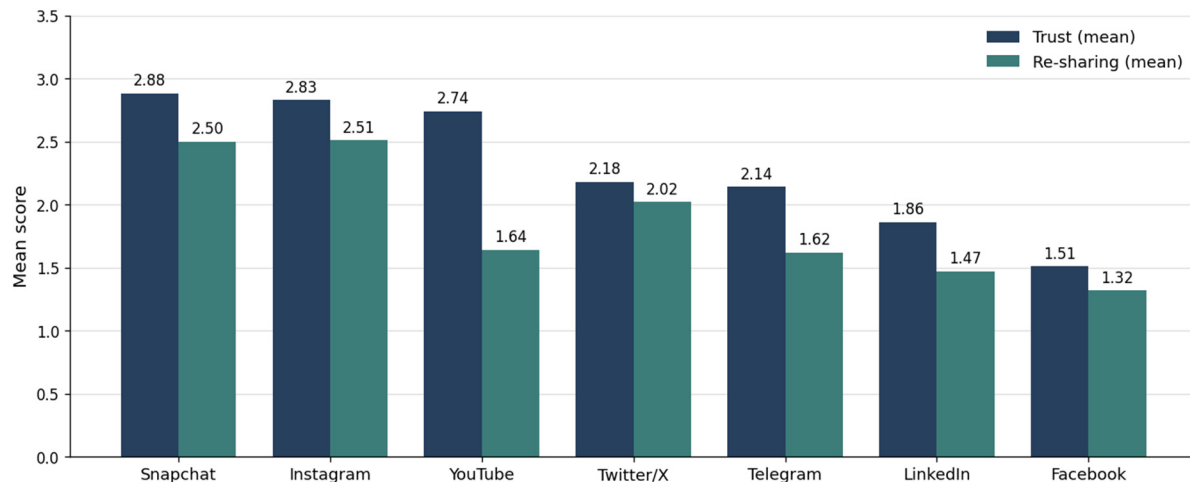


Figure 2. Platform-specific trust versus re-sharing behavior (mean scores)

Table 7. Students' privacy concerns about the sharing of personal information, ranked by mean

Type of information	Do not worry f	%	A little f	%	Worry a lot	%	Mean
Political or religious opinions	24	6.9	58	16.8	264	76.3	2.69
Personal photos	37	10.7	102	29.5	207	59.8	2.49
Bank accounts and credit-card information	58	16.8	88	25.4	200	57.8	2.41
Records of activities	50	14.5	150	43.4	146	42.2	2.28
Memories/events previously shared	89	25.7	124	35.8	133	38.4	2.13
Other personal information	113	32.7	102	29.5	131	37.9	2.05

Note. Privacy concern was coded on a three-point scale from 1 = do not worry to 3 = worry a lot. Means therefore range from 1 to 3.

Table 7 presents students' privacy concerns, rated on a three-point scale. The highest concern related to political or religious opinions ($M = 2.69$), with 76.3% highly concerned, followed by personal photos ($M = 2.49$; 59.8% highly concerned) and bank account and credit-card information ($M = 2.41$; 57.8% highly concerned). Students also expressed concern about records of activities, previously shared memories and events, and other personal information, although with lower means. The table indicates that students are most concerned about information that may threaten their reputation, social or political sensitivity, personal privacy, and financial security.

3.1 Associations Among the Composite Measures

Table 8. Pearson correlation matrix among the five composite measures

Measure	M	SD	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
1. Platform trust	2.38	0.67					
2. Information re-sharing	1.87	0.68	.49***				
3. Privacy concern	2.34	0.54	-.21***	-.18***			
4. Verification awareness	4.14	0.61	.10	-.01			
5. Social engagement	3.63	0.86	.39***	.23***	.17**	.16**	

Note. $N = 346$. Values are Pearson's r . * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 8 reports Pearson correlations among the five composite measures. Consistent with a privacy-calculus interpretation, platform trust was moderately and positively associated with information re-sharing ($r = .49$, $p < .001$): students re-shared more from platforms they trusted more. Privacy concern was negatively associated with both trust ($r = -.21$, $p < .001$) and re-sharing ($r = -.18$, $p < .001$), indicating that greater concern accompanied more guarded disclosure. Social engagement was positively associated with trust ($r = .39$, $p < .001$), re-sharing ($r = .23$, $p < .001$), verification awareness ($r = .16$, $p = .004$), and, modestly, privacy concern ($r = .17$, $p = .001$), suggesting that more socially engaged students were also more active and more reflective across dimensions. Verification awareness was otherwise weakly and non-significantly related to trust, re-sharing, and privacy concern, consistent with its low internal consistency.

3.2 Differences by Gender, Country, and Age

Table 9. Gender differences in the composite measures (Welch's t-test)

Measure	Female M (SD)	Male M (SD)	t	df	p	Cohen's d
Platform trust	2.38 (0.65)	2.38 (0.68)	0.00	343.91	.998	0.00
Information re-sharing	1.84 (0.66)	1.90 (0.69)	-0.86	343.86	.390	-0.09
Privacy concern	2.33 (0.56)	2.36 (0.52)	-0.46	340.12	.648	-0.05
Verification awareness	4.19 (0.62)	4.10 (0.59)	1.35	341.61	.176	0.15
Social engagement	3.65 (0.87)	3.62 (0.86)	0.24	342.93	.813	0.03

Note. Welch's t-test (equal variances not assumed); Female $n = 170$, Male $n = 176$. Cohen's d signed Female – Male. No comparison was statistically significant.

Table 10. Country differences in the composite measures (one-way ANOVA)

Measure	UAE M (SD)	Bahrain M (SD)	Jordan M (SD)	Lebanon M (SD)	F	p	η^2
Platform trust	2.39 (0.68)	2.45 (0.65)	2.33 (0.67)	2.37 (0.66)	0.38	.769	.003
Information re-sharing	1.93 (0.69)	1.90 (0.69)	1.84 (0.70)	1.82 (0.63)	0.53	.665	.005
Privacy concern	2.27 (0.56)	2.36 (0.52)	2.34 (0.57)	2.41 (0.51)	0.97	.408	.008
Verification awareness	4.12 (0.59)	4.13 (0.61)	4.13 (0.59)	4.18 (0.65)	0.21	.893	.002
Social engagement	3.59 (0.89)	3.78 (0.85)	3.62 (0.86)	3.59 (0.85)	0.79	.502	.007

Note. One-way ANOVA, $df = 3, 342$. $\eta^2 =$ eta squared. Levene's test was non-significant for all measures; Tukey post-hoc showed no significant pairwise differences. n : UAE = 87, Bahrain = 69, Jordan = 96, Lebanon = 94.

Table 11. Age-group differences in the composite measures (one-way ANOVA)

Measure	20–25 M (SD)	26–30 M (SD)	>30 M (SD)	F	df	p	η^2
Platform trust	2.46 (0.70)	2.39 (0.69)	2.32 (0.63)	1.392	343	.250	.008
Information re-sharing	1.94 (0.74)	1.90 (0.62)	1.80 (0.65)	1.492	199†	.227	.009
Privacy concern	2.34 (0.54)	2.33 (0.53)	2.35 (0.55)	0.052	343	.956	.000
Verification awareness	4.07 (0.59)	4.19 (0.62)	4.17 (0.62)	1.032	343	.358	.006
Social engagement	3.73 (0.83)	3.63 (0.85)	3.58 (0.89)	0.962	343	.384	.006

Note. One-way ANOVA with Tukey post-hoc. † Information re-sharing used Welch ANOVA with Games-Howell (Levene's $p = .016$). No pairwise differences were significant. n : 20–25 = 105, 26–30 = 85, >30 = 156.

Tables 9 to 11 compare the five composite measures across groups. No statistically significant differences emerged by gender (Welch's t-tests, all $p > .17$; $|d| \leq 0.15$), by country (one-way ANOVA, all $p > .40$; $\eta^2 \leq .008$), or by age group (all $p > .22$; $\eta^2 \leq .009$). The patterns of trust, re-sharing, privacy concern, verification, and social engagement were thus highly consistent across male and female students, across the four countries, and across age groups. This convergence suggests that the observed structure of use, trust, re-sharing, and privacy concern is a shared regional pattern rather than a country- or age-specific artifact; at the same time, the very small effect sizes ($\eta^2 \leq .009$) indicate that any genuine group differences, if present, are likely modest and would require larger samples to detect.

4. Discussion

The findings position social media not as a peripheral activity but as a deeply embedded environment that shapes

communication, information-seeking, entertainment, social interaction, trust, and privacy awareness among university students across the four countries surveyed. The intensity of use (94.8% active users, 97.1% with more than five years' experience, and 76.0% online three or more hours daily) confirms that students' digital lives are strongly platform-centered, consistent with evidence that university students are among the most active users (Guraya et al., 2018). The multifunctional pattern of use supports Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1973; Khalifa & Al-Subaie, 2022): students turn to different platforms to satisfy informational, social, entertainment, and self-expression needs.

A notable finding concerns verification behavior. The highest-rated item was checking the accuracy of news ($M = 4.66$), and the lowest was not caring about the accuracy of news ($M = 1.51$), indicating meaningful digital awareness. This matters because social media environments can intensify exposure to selectively amplified, emotionally engaging, or misleading content. The result should nonetheless be read cautiously: self-reported awareness may diverge from real-time behavior under conditions of speed and peer pressure (Salem, 2026), and the very high, near-unanimous endorsement of the news-checking item with no responses in the lower categories is consistent with a degree of social-desirability bias. This caution is reinforced by the low internal consistency of the verification-awareness construct ($\alpha = .519$) and by its weak, non-significant correlations with trust and re-sharing. Even so, the items reflecting uncritical behavior, not caring about accuracy ($M = 1.51$) and sharing without verification ($M = 2.49$) received the lowest agreement, suggesting that students position themselves as cautious consumers of online information, even if their real-time behavior in fast-moving feeds may not always match this self-image.

The relationships among the composite measures form the analytical core of the study and align closely with a privacy-calculus reading of Communication Privacy Management. Platform trust and re-sharing were positively correlated ($r = .49$), and privacy concern was negatively correlated with both trust ($r = -.21$) and re-sharing ($r = -.18$). In CPM terms, students open their privacy boundaries, trusting a platform and re-sharing its content when perceived benefits are high, and tighten them when privacy risk is salient. This helps explain the apparent paradox of high trust coexisting with high privacy concern: the two are not contradictory but opposing forces in a continuous boundary-management calculus. Social engagement was positively associated with trust, re-sharing, verification, and, modestly, privacy concern, suggesting that more socially active students are also more reflective participants rather than simply less cautious ones. These associations extend prior evidence that self-disclosure is a deliberate, consequential act (Chan et al., 2026) by demonstrating a coherent trust–disclosure–privacy structure in a four-country Arab sample.

Trust was platform-specific: highest for WhatsApp, Snapchat, Instagram, and YouTube, and lowest for Facebook. Students thus do not trust “social media” as a category; trust varies with familiarity, frequency, and peer-based interaction. The Uses and Gratifications perspective helps interpret this: students may develop higher trust in platforms closely tied to everyday communication and peer networks. Such trust, however, may rest more on habit than on informed understanding of data policies. Re-sharing followed a parallel pattern, concentrating on visually oriented platforms; this can be read as a form of social participation and identity expression (Chan et al., 2026). The convergence of trust and re-sharing on the same cluster of platforms—WhatsApp, Snapchat, and Instagram, attracting both the highest trust and, for the latter two, the most active re-sharing, while Facebook ranked lowest on both, was confirmed statistically by their strong positive correlation ($r = .49$), indicating that trust and visible social participation reinforce one another in students' platform choices.

Privacy concerns emerged as a key dimension, highest for political or religious opinions, personal photos, and financial information. This pattern resonates with wider digital-commerce research identifying payment trust, data governance, and financial vulnerability as central concerns in platform environments (Abdallah et al., 2026). These priorities are culturally meaningful: reputation and religious and political expression carry particular weight in Arab cultural contexts (Rehim et al., 2026). Crucially, privacy concern was not merely an attitude but a behavioral regulator: its negative correlations with trust and re-sharing show that more concerned students disclosed less, exactly as Communication Privacy Management predicts (Petronio, 2002). Framing digital risk as sociotechnical helps explain this layered relationship (Salem, 2026).

4.1 A Proposed Interpretive Model and Testable Propositions

Beyond description, the study organizes its findings into an interpretive model of the Student Social Media Experience (Figure 3) that integrates motivational, social, and privacy-related dimensions. Drawing on Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1973; Khalifa & Al-Subaie, 2022) and Communication Privacy Management (Petronio, 2002), the model comprises four dimensions derived directly from the present findings: platform-use intensity, social and informational engagement, platform trust and re-sharing, and privacy concern, and specifies how they are connected through four propositions, two of which are directly supported by the correlational results reported above.

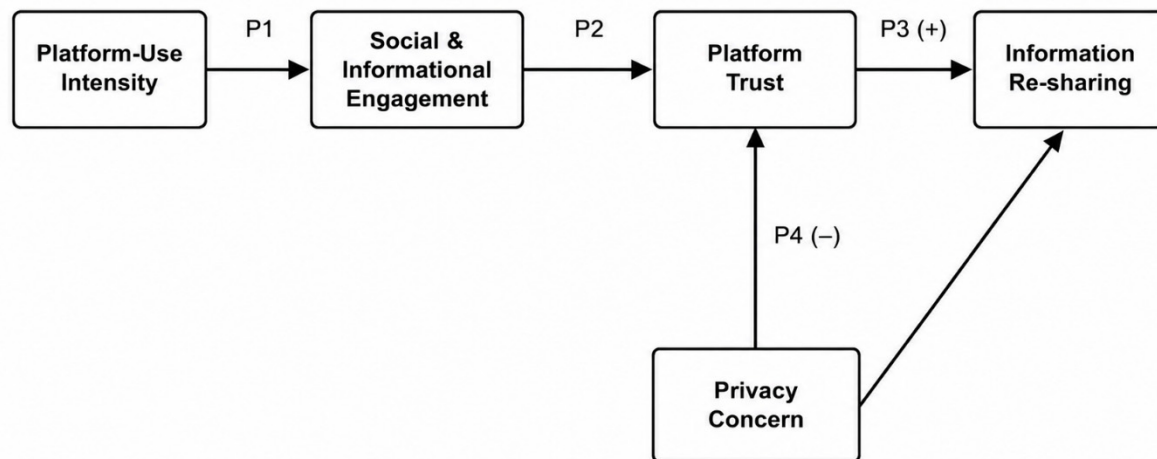


Figure 3. Proposed model of the Student Social Media Experience: use intensity, social and informational engagement, platform trust, and information re-sharing, with privacy concern as a restraining factor (propositions P1–P4)

P1. Platform-use intensity is positively associated with social and informational engagement, since heavier and longer-term use increases opportunities for interaction, information-seeking, and self-expression (consistent with the high use intensity and moderate-to-high social engagement reported here).

P2. Social and informational engagement is positively associated with platform trust and re-sharing, as students who are more engaged interact more with, and re-share more from, the platforms they rely on (supported here by the positive correlations of social engagement with trust, $r = .39$, and re-sharing, $r = .23$).

P3. Platform trust is positively associated with information re-sharing: the more students trust a platform, the more readily they re-share its content (directly supported by the observed correlation, $r = .49$, $p < .001$).

P4. Privacy concern restrains trust and re-sharing: students who are more concerned about protecting personal information disclose and re-share less (directly supported by the negative correlations of privacy concern with trust, $r = -.21$, and re-sharing, $r = -.18$).

Two of these propositions (P3 and P4) are directly supported by the correlational results, while P1 and P2 are consistent with the descriptive patterns and are advanced for fuller testing using structural approaches such as PLS-SEM. Framed this way, the model reframes students not as passive “users” of platforms but as actors who continuously negotiate attention, trust, sharing, verification, and privacy, and it offers a structured agenda that subsequent longitudinal and cross-cultural studies can extend.

4.2 Practical Implications

The findings carry clear implications for higher education. First, the intensity of use suggests that universities should treat social media literacy as a core component of student development, extending beyond technical use to source evaluation, verification skills, and responsible re-sharing. Second, the strong privacy concern about political or religious opinions, personal photos, and financial data, together with its restraining effect on disclosure, points to a need for targeted privacy education built around realistic student scenarios. Third, because students already report positive verification behavior, institutions can build on this strength with advanced training in source evaluation and misinformation detection (Salem, 2026). Fourth, the consistency of patterns across countries and demographics indicates that region-wide initiatives are appropriate. Concretely, universities could embed short digital-literacy modules within first-year orientation and general-education courses; develop peer-led awareness campaigns that leverage the visually oriented platforms students already trust and use; issue clear institutional guidance on protecting financial and personal data; and provide accessible, confidential support channels for students who experience distress related to heavy use.

4.3 Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations should be acknowledged, each with implications for interpretation. First, the cross-sectional design

precludes causal inference; although trust, re-sharing, and privacy concern are correlated as Communication Privacy Management predicts (Petronio, 2002), the data cannot establish the direction of these effects, and longitudinal or experimental designs are needed to test the proposed sequence. Second, the study relied on self-reported data, which may be affected by recall and social-desirability biases, especially for sensitive items on privacy and sharing; anonymity and aggregate reporting were used to mitigate this, but the near-unanimous endorsement of some verification items suggests that residual bias remains, and future work could incorporate behavioral or digital-trace measures. Third, the verification-awareness construct showed low internal consistency ($\alpha = .519$), plausibly because it comprised few, heterogeneously worded items, including reverse-coded statements; it is therefore treated as exploratory and interpreted descriptively rather than as a robust scale. Fourth, the sample of 346 students was purposively drawn from four Arab countries and is not statistically representative, which limits generalizability to the wider Arab student population. Finally, the absence of significant gender, country, and age differences is itself informative, pointing to a consistent, regionally shared pattern, but it may also reflect the relatively homogeneous profile of the purposive sample and limited statistical power for small effects; larger probability samples are needed to confirm this consistency and to detect any smaller differences not identified here.

Future research should therefore proceed in several directions. First, it should refine and validate the measurement scales, particularly verification awareness, and report internal-consistency coefficients. Second, it should use longitudinal and experimental designs to examine how trust, disclosure, and privacy regulation evolve over time and whether trust drives re-sharing as the privacy-calculus model implies. Third, validated psychological scales (for FoMO, anxiety, social media use, self-regulation, and perceived social support) should be integrated to examine psychological consequences more precisely (Zhao & Zhou, 2020). Fourth, the proposed model should be tested using structural approaches such as PLS-SEM (Abdallah & Saboune, 2026) to estimate the full set of relationships simultaneously. Finally, combining quantitative and qualitative methods would capture how students interpret trust, manage privacy, and experience social pressure within a culturally specific context (Rehim et al., 2026).

5. Conclusion

This study set out to examine the psychological and social dynamics of social media use among university students in four Arab countries: the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Jordan, and Lebanon, drawing on a sample of 346 students. The findings portray these students as highly active, long-term users for whom WhatsApp, Snapchat, Instagram, and YouTube are central to everyday communication, whereas Facebook emerged as the least trusted platform and the one least used for re-sharing. These students combined a meaningful, albeit self-reported, awareness of information verification with moderate-to-high social engagement, and they expressed pronounced privacy concern, most notably regarding political or religious opinions and personal photos. Importantly, the coexistence of high platform trust with strong privacy concern did not represent a contradiction but a layered, selective relationship: students extend habitual trust to the platforms embedded in their daily routines while remaining deliberately guarded about the most sensitive categories of personal data.

Beyond describing these patterns, the study makes three contributions. Theoretically, it integrates Uses and Gratifications Theory and Communication Privacy Management into a single framework, linking why students use social media with how they manage trust, disclosure, and privacy dimensions that prior work has typically treated in isolation. Empirically, it offers timely evidence from four Arab countries across the Gulf and the Levant: the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Jordan, and Lebanon, a region that remains underrepresented in social media scholarship, and it shows that trust, re-sharing, and privacy concern form a coherent privacy-calculus structure that is consistent across gender, country, and age. Conceptually, it consolidates these strands into a four-dimensional model of the Student Social Media Experience that links platform-use intensity, social and informational engagement, trust and re-sharing, and privacy concern through propositions that are partly supported here and that future longitudinal and cross-cultural research can estimate and extend.

The findings carry clear practical implications for universities across the region and comparable institutions. They suggest that universities should treat social media literacy as a core element of student development, one that extends beyond technical proficiency to encompass information verification, source evaluation, privacy protection, and psychological self-regulation. Because students concentrate their trust and activity on a small set of familiar platforms, such initiatives are likely to be most effective when they are built around the platforms students already use most rather than around social media in the abstract, helping students capitalize on the informational, social, and educational benefits of these environments while reducing the risks of misinformation, overuse, and privacy exposure.

As a cross-sectional survey of students in four Arab countries, the study invites confirmation across larger and more diverse samples. Even so, it reframes highly connected young users as active agents who continuously negotiate attention, trust, sharing, and privacy, and its descriptive and correlational profile and interpretive model provide both a foundation and an agenda for that continuing work.

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Author contributions

Dr. FS and Dr. RA were responsible for study design and revision. Dr. LH, Dr. NA, and Dr. BA were responsible for data collection. Dr. FS drafted the manuscript, and Dr. RA revised it. All authors read and approved the final manuscript. There are no special agreements concerning authorship; the order of authors reflects the relative extent of each author's contribution to the study.

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Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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