University Students' Awareness of Social Media Use and Hate Speech in Jordan

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Abstract

The Internet's social network is an integral part of our daily lives, easily facilitating communication and information exchange. The study focuses on online "hate speech" content that becomes a global matter by asking university social-media users in Jordan about their perceptions and determining how such platforms influence users' attitudes and feelings of safety when dealing with news-content "hate speech". Survey-based results (n = 150) revealed that "hate speech" was easily identified by respondents because they were exposed to it. Respondents were able to alert their friends and family members about such speech. Smart devices were seen as commonly used for spreading hate speech. More strategies for confronting such speech were discussed.

Keywords: Hate Speech, Social-Media Sites, Middle East, Strategies of Confrontation, Jordan.

Introduction

The Internet has become a ubiquitous platform allowing online users to search/find news and information easily, communicate at all levels via mobile devices and entertain, as well as engage with, other like-minded people (those who do or do not share the same views or values) in different manners. These activities are seen as a positive side of Internet use. The other side, however, is that some users, for differing reasons, misuse this technology and use it to harm or affect "others" by creating and spreading content called "hate speech" which requires a high level of authorisation to monitor and tackle (eMORE, 2017; Gunter & Elareshi, 2016; Poushter, Bishop, & Chwe, 2018). This particularly affects those using leading social-media sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

The term "hate speech" is defined as expressions that advocate incitement to harm "others" (Awan, 2016) and are seen as representing a threat, or a cause of damage, to individuals' lives and as increasing the sense of "fear in entire communities" (eMORE, 2017, p. 7). Gitari et al. (2015, p. 215) consider such content as "offensive and threatening language that targets certain groups of people based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, colour or gender". Such content usually emanates from supposedly rival groups or different ethnic groups. Kowalski et al. (2012) indicate that some Internet users

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produce cyber-bullying or hate content as the Internet has provided social mobility for "others". In this paper, we have examined how "hate speech" content via social–media networks is perceived by young adults in higher education, how such content is spread via social media and whether students feel safe when online.

1. RELATED WORK

Internet social networks have become popular platforms. They include Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, etc., all of which maintain the sharing of news and information via websites and smart devices (e.g., mobile phones, laptops/tablets) which are used as hubs that allow people to express their views widely and to access similar content. Such interactivity has created new forms of communication between online users that have never been seen before (Erjavec & Kovačič, 2012; Gitari et al., 2015).

1.1. Hate–speech definition

"Hate speech" has always occurred in different formats in interactions between people over time in the real world (e.g., racism, discrimination) and now finds a vehicle through the virtual world as defined by Internet social networks (eMORE, 2017; Thomas, 2011). The latter has become an obvious vehicle for "hate speech" because of its easy access and the speed at which information can be sent information to many people. In general terms, there is no consensus as to what constitutes "hate speech", but similar definitions have been provided. After common usage of the term "hate speech" on social–media networks, such a phenomenon was defined, for example by Gitari et al. (2015), as being usually produced by bias-motivated and hostile users towards "others" for certain gains such as discrimination, creating fear or causing instability between countries.

According to Erjavec & Kovačič (2012, p. 900), "hate speech" is "an expression that is abusive, insulting, intimidating, harassing and/or incites violence, hatred, or discrimination". Facebook (2019) defines "hate speech" as any content that "attacks people based on their actual or perceived race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sex, disability or disease [and] is not allowed […], however, they allow content that many people may find to be in bad taste (jokes, stand-up comedy, popular song lyrics, etc.)". Awan (2016) states that "hate speech" is any form of language used to depict people in a negative fashion regarding their race, gender, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation or physical and mental disability. This form can be directed at an individual or generalised (directed at a group or community) with the targets going through different experiences of emotional distress caused by "hate speech".

Based on these definitions, "hate speech" seems to be produced in the discourse practices of daily life and is very accessible and easy to share with "others". In the figure below, the pyramid reveals biased behaviours growing in a complex manner. London to Hate Crime blog (2016) indicate that although the behaviours at each level negatively impact individuals and groups, as the behaviour moves up through the levels, it has more life-threatening consequences. The upper levels are supported by the lower levels. For example, if people or institutions treat behaviours on the lower levels as being acceptable or "normal," this results in the behaviours at the next level becoming more accepted. For example, regarding the concerns over where "hate speech" advocating genocide comes

from, the pyramid reveals that such hatred is built on the acceptance of behaviours described in the lower levels, and so on.

Figure 1. ADL pyramid of hate speech
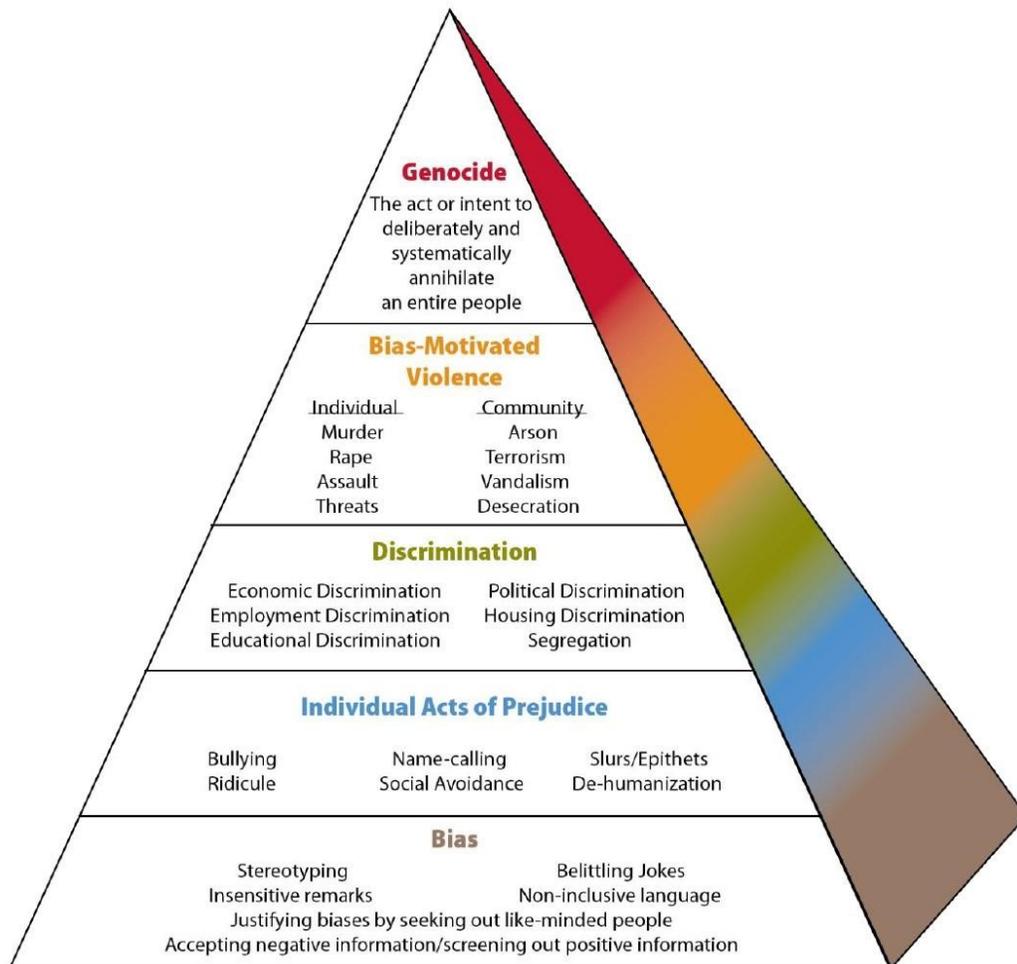
Source: Anti–Defamation League (ADL) 2018

In the Middle East, an increase in hatred cases was observed in relation to several terrorist attacks and violence, e.g., in Syria, Iraq and Jordan, in recent years, especially since the Arab uprisings of 2011 that resulted in a refugee crisis affecting several Arab and EU countries (eMORE, 2017). Moreover, during these uprisings, many refugees crossed the Mediterranean to EU countries, such as Sweden, Norway and Germany, with the latter country officially welcoming them. But the refugees started to face a pattern of criticism and hatred over the possibilities of their taking local jobs and these criticisms were widely shared on social media such as Twitter (e.g., #RefugeesNotWelcome) and Facebook (Awan & Zempi, 2017).

Internet social networks have empowered users to express their individual voices at an almost marginal cost. However, there is also a dark side to this practice as social media enable online harassment, cyber-hate, cyber-bullying and anti-social behaviour. Olteanu et al. (2018) observe that violent attacks by extremists tend to lead to more messages directly advocating violence offline and to online "hate speech". It polarises "us" against "them", resulting in many cases of offensive language usage, as Mondal et al. (2017) indicate. In the US, in 2014, 60% of Internet users indicated that they had witnessed offensive name-calling, with 25% having seen someone physically threatened. In Jordan, the authorities adopted the Electronic Crimes Law (No. 27, 2015), stringent legislation countering any online/offline "hate speech" alerting anyone to incite hatred against "others" based on their race, religion and sexual orientation through any means of communication and using any forms such as words, audio, messages and photos. Such legislation enables the authorities to monitor and tackle the flow of such content, especially that posted anonymously. This has led to an extensive reaction on social networks and to the examination of online "hate speech" by some platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, which seem to have primarily adopted a merely reactive policy to dealing with "hate speech" reported by their users (Mondal et al., 2017).

Some research has found that some social networks have been used to facilitate intolerance and online "hate speech" against "others" (Erjavec & Kovačič, 2012; Kottasová, 2017; Potok, 2017). For example, Hall's (2013) statement that the Internet has been increasingly used as a vehicle for hate is seemingly undeniable. Freedom of expression is one of the most important elements for anyone. The founder of liberalism, John Mill (1978), argues that opinions [expression] should lose their intangibility if expressed in circumstances that could lead to the promoting of harmful acts against anyone. Littler and Feldman (2015) found that 73 per cent of reported incidents targeting Muslims had occurred online. They revealed how social-media sites were used to contribute to an atmosphere of intolerance in the portrayal of others (e.g., Muslims). In 2013, Facebook was forced to respond to a letter (published in Huffington Post, 2013) by several celebrated women who had been threatened with online violence and who claimed that there had to be a zero-tolerance approach to any jokes about "rapes" on Facebook (Lee, 2013).

Muslims (or Arabs) have often been targeted and stereotyped by Western media (ADL, 2016; Ibrahim, 2010; Olteanu et al., 2018; Sampathkumar, 2017). The Internet's social networks have led this wave, with several stories being reported about the targeting of such minorities as refugees in the EU. Facebook, based on its own standards, chose not to remove images and content in 2013 targeting Muslims, as Oboler (2013) reported, which raised concerns about the ethical standards of online media and how they should be regulated and monitored. Afterwards, Facebook agreed to remove some "hate speech", as defined by their definition. For instance, in 2019, Facebook banned content supporting any white-supremacy or white-nationalist movement.

1.2. The Internet in Jordan

The usage of the Internet among Jordanian households, as in most Arab countries, has increased in the last few years. Out of a total population of 9.99 million (median age 23.2), 90 per cent of citizens have a smart phone / smart device, 89 per cent have an Internet

subscription and 33 per cent use PCs, as reported by the ICT Ministry (2018); (see also Poushter et al., 2018). A total of 58 per cent of the population are active social–media users with 80% having mobile-phone subscriptions and 54 per cent being active social-media users. Moreover, Facebook's total advertising audience in Jordan has reached 5.50 million (55.0%) monthly active users (58% males, 42% females), with 2.10 million Instagram users (Hootsuite, 2019). However, Snapchat is most popular in Jordan in terms of looking for posts and stories from social-media influencers, as reported by Dennis et al. (2019). A study conducted by Poushter et al. (2018) and supported by the Pew Research Centre found that more educated people (89%) used the Internet for different matters than did less-educated ones (73%).

In comparison, Lebanon (80%) and Jordan (76%) are considered to have the highest rates of smartphone ownership among emerging and developing countries (Poushter et al., 2018). The Internet's social networks are used for different reasons, such as entertainment, communication, education, news and information (Al–Tarawneh, 2014). However, given that they are the largest category using such platforms, young people might be perceived as being "vulnerable" to information in the sense that they tend to lack filtering and tend to be credulous regarding online news information (Abu-Shanab & Al-Tarawneh, 2013).

Online social networks led the wave of Arab uprisings in 2011, which reached Jordan in the form of protests in some main cities as a result of economic conditions, poverty and a high rate of unemployment (Al–Tarawneh, 2014). Such movements used social-media networks to spread their message and citizens were able to use these networks to follow up news and information from the activists and protestors who called for political, economic and social reforms and who supported the opposition parties and youth movements. The Jordanian government stepped in and took the lead by opening dialogue with the opposition and taking control of the Internet's social communications.

1.3. Strategies for confrontation

As occurred in other parts of the Middle East, Jordan witnessed several terrorist attacks led by radical groups affiliated with "ISIS" or other groups, particularly incidents in December 2016 which resulted in several locals being killed, including officials and foreign tourists. As a result, the government announced and amended its Cyber-Terrorism Law to criminalise those who caused the attacks. This legislation included the 2015 e-crimes law that was linked to "hate speech" content (Roth, 2018). Before this, the National Policies Council in 2014 announced a comprehensive cyber-crime and counter-extremism strategy, dealing with such matters as terrorist attacks (Al-Sharafat, 2018) and focusing on culture/religion, democracy and human rights.

In September 2017, the government retracted legislation on social media as it was satisfied with amendments to the e-crime law of 2015. For example, Article 10 of the draft law indicated a penalty of:

> imprisonment for a period of no less than one year and no more than three years and a fine between 5,000 to 10,000 Jordanian dinars to anyone who publishes or re-publishes what is 'hate speech' through social media or the Internet or any information systems.

With the multiplicity of media practices, especially in the digital age with information combining "propaganda" and hatred against "others", it has become necessary to recall the fundamental rules of the media profession and to ask about the journalists' identities, their actual job, their mission, their roles in the community and their rights, duties and responsibilities. This is because some media (offline/online) has witnessed a significant decline in its moral practices over the last decade or so in terms of delivering news and information with regard to the Arab uprisings of 2011, as a result of technological developments in media use with people being able to receive and share information themselves. Today, most people get their news through smart devices (on the go) and through the Internet which, for various reasons, has led to the spreading of hate content and media production has become influenced by one view or another. Such influence requires the need to recall, and adhere to, professional values. Journalism has basic principles – such as upholding the facts, the human spirit, respect for "others", transparency – to which all journalists and all political and social actors, including users of social media, must adhere. This is because the concepts of freedom of expression and freedom of opinion are essential elements guaranteed by international human-rights law (Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948).

Based on the above discussion, this study seeks to determine how online "hate speech" content is perceived by university students, the better to understand such a phenomenon in the digital age, especially those examples posted on Internet social networks. In particular, the study focuses on two main research questions.

RQ: How is online "hate speech" perceived? We want to understand how our respondents perceive such content (words and phrases) through their social–media networks and how they deal with it.

RQ: What are the perceptions of respondents regarding freedom of expression through the Internet and social–media networks? We want to know how people should express themselves on the Internet and on social media without showing hatred for "others".

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Participants and sample

The data included a random sample of undergraduate university students (all levels and faculties) at Zarqa University because this is the largest and most popular private Jordanian university, with more than 9000 enrolled students. The university itself is located just 6 km to the east of the capital city, Amman. A consent form regarding participation in the study was conducted. In order to ensure a representative sample, the number of courses chosen was arranged to coincide proportionally with the number of students majoring in disciplines offered by those faculties. From all enrolled students, more than 200 respondents from 13 faculties were recruited and, after filtering, 150 respondents were gathered. To carry out this study, approval from the participating university's Institutional Review Board was sought, with respondents assured that they would remain anonymous. Once approval was obtained, the survey questionnaire was administered in classrooms, with either the first author or an assistant as moderator, during the spring semester (March–April) of 2017.

2.2. Questionnaire

A pre-structured questionnaire was designed in Arabic (the official language), with a range of different questions related to views on social-media use (old/new), attitudes, perceptions of online "hate speech" content, reaction to such content, whether respondents felt safe when they expressed their views on the Internet and whether online content should be controlled and monitored by the authorities.

Heightened interest in Internet social-network use and the effects of using them as platforms for everyday habits has inspired many to develop different instruments, based on qualitative and quantitative approaches, to measure content, text, perceptions, attitudes and practices (Awan, 2017; Erjavec & Kovačič, 2012; Gitari et al., 2015; Mondal et al., 2017). This study is based on a survey instrument that seeks to understand how university students perceive online "hate speech" through social-media networks. Therefore, the study used a variety of measures related to the quantitative approach. Use of the self-reporting method was encouraged and appreciated as this can be quite useful in understanding different angles regarding how people perceive and feel about such phenomena; (see for e.g., Roebuck, Siha, & Bell, 2013).

3. RESULTS

Table 1. Sample characteristics

Item	N	%
Gender		
Male	82	54.7
Female	68	45.3
Jordanian[*]	145	96.6
Age		
18–20	50	33.3
21–25	86	57.3
>26	14	9.4
Education level		
First year	50	33.4
Second year	45	30.0
Third year	20	13.3
Fourth year	35	23.3
Usage		
Internet hours per day (avg.)		2-4 hour
PCs (avg.)	29	19.3
Laptop/tablet (avg.)	43	28.7
Smartphone (avg.)	78	52.0
Accessing point		
Home	28	18.7
Café	42	28.0
University	70	46.7
Sports club	10	6.6
Total	**150**	**100%**

[*] Note: Although we did not ask respondents to justify their nationality, it is normal to find many Jordanians who are originally Palestinian and who settled in Jordan as a result of the wars of 1948 and 1967.

As the sample was composed of undergraduate students, some statistics are primarily descriptive (percentages) as the main questions did not make definitive statements of cause and effect or correlation (Roebuck et al., 2013). As shown in Table 1, respondents were aged between 18 and 26, with the majority (57.3%) aged from 21 to 25. In this analysis, the gender of the respondents was distributed, with male students (54.7%) being more numerous than females (45.3%) and the overwhelming majority were Jordanian. Those in their early education years were more numerous than those their in middle and late years.

3.1. Internet usage

When respondents were asked how much time they spent on the Internet, approximately half indicated that they spent an average of 6-8 hours weekly (53%), with 21% spending between 4-6 hours weekly and 11% and 8% respectively spending 2-4 or 1-2 hours weekly. Similar results were cited by several other studies (Dennis et al., 2019; Di Gennaro & Dutton, 2006; Ramirez, 2003; Roblyer, McDaniel, Webb, Herman, & Witty, 2010; Ziani & Elareshi, 2016). Such studies have highlighted increasing use of the Internet and social media for different purposes. For example, Facebook was found to be used effectively among academics and university students and, as a result, these groups spent a considerable amount of time on social media (Ziani & Elareshi, 2018).

When respondents were asked about what device(s) they mostly used to access Internet social networks, 52% reporting using smartphones, 29% used laptops or tablets and 19% used PCs. This is not surprising at all, since smart devices (phones, tablets, laptops) now have a multiplicity of functions that allow their users to connect easily to the Internet "on the go", whereas PCs have limited options compare with smart devices (Roebuck et al., 2013; Ziani & Elareshi, 2016). In Jordan, where fixed Internet use is not accessible for everyone and mobile connections are extremely useful platforms for people accessing news and information, such a result is confirmed by Poushter et al. (2018), who found that ownership of mobile-phone devices rose from 51% in 2015 to 76% in 2017.

Respondents indicated that they accessed the Internet in different places (Table 1). As they are young adults, locations such as the university and cafés would fit perfectly with their time and activities. Therefore, it is logical that they would look for news and information while in university or chatting in cafés. It is also the case that some universities and public places (e.g., cafés) allow their consumers access to "free" Wifi. Females (59%) were more likely than males (45%) to access the Internet at home and at university (66% vs. 53% respectively), while – as expected – more males (75%) indicated that they accessed the Internet in cafés than did females (53%).

3.2. News-source media that are most influential on students' attitudes

Respondents were also asked to think about which news sources could have influenced their attitudes towards different matters. It appears that the most influential news media in the eyes of our respondents was the Internet (47%), followed by mobile phones (23%) and TV (18%). Our results support the work of Ziani and Elareshi (2016) who found that the Internet and mobile phones became in-demand media for sending and receiving news and information, especially among young people (Dennis et al., 2019). Internet social networks were also found to provide opportunities for communicating with

"others" and to share information and young people in the Arab world are quick to embrace new technologies (Dennis et al., 2019; Salem & Mourtada, 2015).

Table 2. Most influential news media on students' attitudes

Items	N	%	M	%	F	%
TV	27	18	15	16.4	12	20.3
Newspaper	8	5.3	5	5.5	3	5.1
Radio	6	4.0	4	4.4	2	3.4
Magazine	4	2.7	2	2.2	2	3.4
The Internet (e.g., social media)	70	46.7	43	47.3	27	45.8
News on mobile phone	35	23.3	22	24.2	13	22.0
Total	*150*	*100%*	*91*	*100%*	*59*	*100%*

Males (47.3%) were slightly more likely than females (46%) to say that the Internet was the most influential platform on students' attitudes, compared with news on mobile phones and TV. Less important platforms, in terms of influence, were newspapers, magazines and the radio. These results also support the findings of Al-Tarawneh (2014) and Abu-Shanab and Al-Tarawneh (2013), who found that Jordanians were now becoming more technology-savvy users of the Internet where they communicated, collaborated and shared all sorts of news and information, especially after the Arab uprisings of 2011. Dennis et al. (2019) found that more Jordanians were likely to get news and information from social-media influencers than from newspapers.

3.3. "Hate speech" definition

An open question asked respondents to define the concept of "hate speech", especially through Internet social networks. The majority of respondents defined online "hate speech" as any content that would harm or insult any individual or group based on his/their ethnicity, race, gender, beliefs and background, in the form of words and phrases used on the Internet. They said that it involved someone, or a group of people, humiliating or ridiculing "others" not belonging to the same group. Respondents also emphasised that Internet social networks helped the creators of "hate speech" because of the ease and unlimited access offered to facilitate such content and behaviour, with everyone thinking that they are free to do whatever they want. This finding showed that respondents were aware of online "hate speech" that was spread on the Internet. This might be why respondents indicated that they had experienced some online "hate speech" from "others", especially through Internet social networks in the form of words (53%) or expressions (18%).

Respondents also confirmed that Internet social networks were mostly used to spread such content, with Facebook (85%) being the top platform used for this purpose, compared with Twitter (64%), YouTube (53%), blogs (41%), email (23%) and online news (10%). This is a similar finding to that of Oboler (2013) who gave examples of Facebook content pages related to "hate speech" that were clearly marked, especially targeting Muslims, Islam and minorities (e.g., the Rohingya minority in Myanmar). Although more people use Facebook for communication and for sharing information etc.,

female students (78%) were more likely to do so than males (59%), indicating that Facebook allowed more of its users to attack "others" on different matters. This is a result supported by Awan (2017) who said that Facebook was used to allow many "hate speech" offences to be committed against "others", such as Muslims, and as a result of international pressure the company admitted in 2016 that it did not do enough to control the flow of "hate speech". Therefore, it introduced new policies to stop those who spreading "hate speech" content in different places, especially those targeting refugees in some EU countries (Associated Press, 2016; eMORE, 2017; Ingber, 2019).

Table 3. Methods used to respond to "hate speech"

Items	N	%	M	%	F	%
I start with a counter campaign	5	3	3	2.5	2	3.0
Inform the authorities	13	7.3	6	5.1	7	10.6
Ask someone for advice	17	9.3	10	8.5	7	10.6
Join a group that creates a counter–media campaign	27	15	19	16.1	8	12.1
I respond directly	43	23.4	29	24.6	14	21.2
I don't care about the post and preferred not to respond	70	37	46	39.0	24	36.4
I pass the post to friends	9	5.0	5	4.2	4	6.1
Total	*184*	*100%*	*118*	*100%*	*66*	*100%*

Respondents had different reactions and attitudes in responding to online "hate speech" content, with 67% indicating that either they did not care about such a post, or preferred not to respond, whereas some (43%) said that they did respond directly to the post. It seemed that some (35%) preferred to pass the post to friends, join an online group to create a counter–media campaign (27%), ask someone for advice (15%), or informed the local authorities (8%). Males (39%) were slightly more likely than females (36%) to say that either they did not care about the post or they preferred not to respond, that they were able to respond directly (males 25% vs. females 21%), or that they joined a group that created a counter–media campaign (males 16% vs. females 12%), while asking someone for advice when finding "hate content" was mentioned by females (11%) more than by males (9%).

When asked which individual or group would be more likely to be targeted by online "hate speech" (Table 4), the refugees, the homeless, foreign employees, politicians and ethnic minorities (note that no major gender differences were found here) were all mentioned. In general, this result reflected how respondents felt about such groups. It is worth saying that Jordan has faced many difficulties over many decades as a result of ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, not least the wave of Arab uprisings in 2011. People would move and migrate from neighbouring countries (e.g., Syria, Iraq, Palestine) when high-level wars and conflicts took place (Al-Rawi, 2019; Al-Rawi & Fahmy, 2018) and Jordan was considered as a possible safe place in which to settle (e.g., Palestinians at first and Syrian refugees now), although this might affect the country's socioeconomic

conditions with "others" sharing resources with the locals (Bulbul, Kaplan, & Ismail, 2018; Dekker, Engbersen, Klaver, & Vonk, 2018).

Table 4. Categories of individuals/groups targeted by "hate speech"

Items	N	%	M	%	F	%
Homeless	19	10.6	10	9.0	9	13.0
Refugees	30	16.7	23	21.0	7	10.1
Religious minorities	15	8.4	9	8.0	6	8.7
Ethnic minorities	16	8.9	11	10.0	5	7.2
Disabled people	7	3.9	5	5.0	2	2.9
Foreign employees	17	9.5	11	10.0	6	8.7
Foreign tourists	7	3.9	2	2.0	5	7.2
Women	12	6.7	3	2.7	9	13.0
Poor people	6	3.4	3	2.7	3	4.3
Members of Parliament	15	8.4	10	9.0	5	7.2
Politicians	16	8.9	11	10.0	5	7.2
Marginalized people	10	5.6	6	5.5	4	5.8
Rich people	9	5.1	6	5.5	3	4.3
Total	*179*	*100*	*110*	*100%*	*69*	*100%*

Further analysis was carried out to examine respondents' perceptions in terms of whether they agreed or disagreed with four statements related to online "hate speech" and how they felt about the online sphere (Table 5).

Table 5. General statements for online "hate speech"

Items	N	%	M	%	F	%
I have the right to feel safe while using the Internet	72	48	42	57	30	40
The Internet is not a free zone for freedom of expression	60	40	25	33	35	47
The authorities should closely monitor any online "hate speech" content	10	6.7	4	5	6	8
I support punishment for anyone publishing online "hate speech" content	8	5.3	4	5	4	5
Total	*150*	*100%*	*75*	*100%*	*75*	*100%*

Items originally measured on Likert scale: "strongly agree" (5) and "strongly disagree" (1).

The respondents tended to highlight their concerns about use of the Internet, especially in the case of spreading hatred information. Respondents insisted on having the right to feel safe while being online, although they believed that the Internet was not a free-zone sphere for all expressions and views. Despite all this, they were more likely to reject the statement that the government should abridge speech, which is not a similar finding to that of Dennis et al. (2019), who found 75 per cent of Jordanians wanted the

Internet to be more regulated, with support for pro-social Internet regulation – improving affordability and enhancing Internet users' privacy. Males (57%) were more likely to report that they had the right to feel safe online than females did (40%). But females (47%) indicated that they worried that the Internet was not a free zone for the expression of opinions and views.

Finally, when asked about what would motivate people to post online "hate speech" content, the answers included: "inability to confront" (65%), "people get jealous from other" (43%), "marginalisation" (34%) and "lack of legislation and deterrent laws" (23%). Less popular answers as motivations were people being isolated, or suffering from poverty or depression.

Conclusion

A self-reporting questionnaire was carried out to examine how university respondents perceived online "hate speech" content. Evidence emerged that Internet social networks has been patronized by online users. In this regard, the current study found that respondents spent 6-8 hours per week using the Internet. This is a result supported by several Arab and non-Arab studies which confirm the rapid growth in use of Internet social networks for different reasons (Arabian Gazette, 2015; Dennis et al., 2019; Poushter et al., 2018; Ziani & Elareshi, 2018). Ease of use, low costs and curiosity are all factors that might lead people into using the Internet (Al-Tarawneh, 2014; AlSayyad & Guvenc, 2013; Gunter & Elareshi, 2016).

Earlier research has explored cyber "hate speech" by different users e.g., extremist activists. (see e.g., Cammaerts, 2009) highlighting the difficulties in regulating such a phenomenon and in controlling it (Erjavec & Kovačič, 2012). The Internet's social media are powerful enough to influence people to act in a certain way and manner (e.g., the 2011 Arab uprisings) in which protests, violence and hatred spread across countries such as Libya and Syria and in some parts of Jordan. Such content can also leave people feeling anxiety, depression and isolation, as reported by Awan and Zempi (2017).

Although the sampling in this research was not equipped to recruit a statistically representative population of the universities in Jordan, the robustness of its findings is reinforced by their similarity to earlier studies (Dennis, Martin, & Wood, 2017; eMORE, 2017; Poushter et al., 2018). Research in the Middle East has confirmed that the Internet is widely used by different demographics (Aharony & Gazit, 2016; Dennis et al., 2019). However, mobile devices (as opposed to offline media) have become increasingly adapted for local people as information-receiving and search platforms (Abu-Shanab & Al-Tarawneh, 2013; Dennis et al., 2017; Poushter et al., 2018).

The current study found that respondents understood and were aware of online "hate speech" content, as they were able to identify the concept clearly. Online "hate speech" content is produced in different formats to target different groups (Awan, 2016; Gitari et al., 2015; Olteanu et al., 2018). However, the line between what is acceptable speech and what is "hate speech" is highly debateable and social media are merely vehicles providing opportunities for expression (see e.g., Facebook policies regarding hate content). Past studies have confirmed that social media are among the platforms used by "others" to spread "hate speech". For this reason, respondents would respond to such content in different manners, although they preferred not to do so. Respondents were able to

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highlight those more likely to be targeted with "hate speech" content. This is worth investigating further, especially in terms of how people view refugees, the homeless and foreign employees.

This paper contributes to the online "hate speech" discourse examining students' perceptions. The analysed data highlights the need for an improved dialogue between different stakeholders in Jordan in order to ensure a safe sphere for everyone. For all their potential for hate speech, social-media sites provide a space for expression and for access to information that is much freer than ever before. Any attempt at regulating such content must consider the fact that the right to free speech, in terms of saying something to which "others" will vehemently object, is one of the foundations of an open society (Elsayed-Ali, 2018). Strategies for confronting online "hate speech" in Jordan would include changing the online culture through educating users in terms of online activities, providing clear information and tackling such content with the support of law-enforcement authorities.

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