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Youth Sources of News During the COVID-19 Period:
Case Study in the UAE

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ABSTRACT

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has produced a global health crisis that has had a deep impact on the way we perceive our world and everyday lives. Not only the spread rate of contagion and patterns of transmission endangered our sense of security, but the safety measures put in place to contain the spread of the virus also require social distancing. In this context of physical threat, social and physical distancing, the role of the different mass media channels and social media in lives of individual, social and societal levels cannot be underestimated.

KEYWORDS

COVID 2019, News, Social Media, UAE

In the contemporary world, social media has made information sharing among individuals seamless and effortless. Moreover, social media is fast becoming a household means of both interpersonal and public communication around the world. Over time, social media has become part of human life, as it allows remote creation of content that keeps people entertained and informed. Many individuals are now in the habit of relying heavily on social media as a source of information (Sulaiman et al., 2020). Social media has provided young people with boundless opportunities for accessing information (UNESCO, 2020). Thus, youths are perceived to be active social media users as a result of youthful enthusiasm and exposure to ICT gadgets. Ocansey et al. (2016) argued that youths use social media on an enormous scale mainly for communication purposes.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, social media has rapidly become a crucial communication tool for information generation, dissemination, and consumption. Since then, an increase has been observed in the exploitation of various social media platforms to share information about the disease. However, this same tool has been used to misinform the populace and to circulate unverifiable and deceptive messages to citizens (Bukhari, 2020).

The spread of fake news among people has created unnecessary panic, fear, distraction, and tension, especially during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this troubling time, information and news are being spread to enlighten and keep people abreast of the latest about the disease. Conversely, it has been observed that many people share fake information and news. Meanwhile, identification, searching, and evaluation are essential in the application or use of information by

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people. (Kabir & Sulaimon, 2020). Ultimately, this information behavior might have influenced the spread of fake news and misinformation. David (2017) noted that effective information behavior enables people to make use of information sources and that these skills are cognitive, affective, and physical. In addition, the global policies put in place to manage the COVID-19 crisis, including those that restrict movement, have resulted in more time spent online by young people. This change has also exacerbated the spread of hate speech, cyber bullying, racism, and incitement to violence during the pandemic (UNESCO, 2020).

Meanwhile, the use of social media to share information during the COVID-19 pandemic has become a concern, as it has been observed that there is increased perpetration of misinformation and fake news through the media. Nielsen (2017) defines social media as computer-mediated technology facilitating the growth and sharing of ideas, awareness, career interest, information, and other means of expression through social networks and virtual communities. Greg et al. (2013) observed that social media by its nature has the power of educating, informing, entertaining, and inflaming the audience and that it creates a contagious and outreaching influence, which the conventional media finds difficult to provide. With all these benefits, however, there is still obvious misuse of social media. Ford and Ravansar (2017) stated that social media information sharing denotes web-based tools that permit people to interact with each other in some way for sharing information, opinion, knowledge, and facts. Information sharing on social media deals with sharing of opinion, knowledge, and facts about a particular event. Information behavior evaluation regarding the use of social media is becoming important (Hashim & Kutbi, 2015; Chukwuere & Chukwuere, 2017). Social media is primarily built for the purpose of information sharing, and behavior evaluation is essential during such an activity (Zhang & Kizilcec, 2014). Lee and Ma (2012) averred that prior research suggested that people share information using social media to receive attention and enhance their reputation and popularity among peers, especially during the time of the serious situation. However, the social needs of people suppress the privacy that accompanies the content, as social media is witnessed by a large audience (Bernstein et al., 2011).

In Yemen, when the government banned Al Jazeera from covering events in the country, social media became an easy outlet used for several activities (AlSayyad & Guvenc, 2015). The Arab Spring uprising introduced social media to Yemen as online meetings were organized in closed Facebook groups and news spread through blogs and YouTube channels (AlSayyad & Guvenc, 2015). In view of the above assertions, the advantages of social media cannot be overemphasized, as it crippled unpopular regimes and opened spaces for people to express their grievances, albeit only virtual public spaces. However, when social media is negatively deployed, the uninformed easily fall prey to misinformation, which at times brings mishap and confusion to the populace (Ngozika et all, 2020).

As indicated by Makani, the role of social media in the current pandemic climate mirrors that of the radio during both world wars. Social media can provide information regarding health, connect us with family and friends and even allow us to change the world, if we are so inclined, by creating and participating in campaigns that aim to inform or solicit help. It's no surprise, then, that WhatsApp use surged 40% and other platforms have had millions of new and additional users during the COVID-19 crisis (Mankani).

AIM OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to examine the various sources of news among youths during the COVID-19 period. This sudy intends to provide insight into the contribution of social media to youths during the COVID-19 period in different Emirates of the UAE. This paper also aims to assess the prevalence of misinformation about COVID-19 on social media platforms and strategies to curb such misinformation. This study also suggests appropriate strategies to reduce the rate of abuse of social

media in disseminating misinformation about COVID-19. The study examines the use of mobile social media and users' access to social media through their mobile devices. By examining technologies and their use, this study allows researchers to explore how technology affects and shapes society.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study has the following specific objectives:

1. To assess the rate of awareness of youths of COVID-19 in the UAE.
2. To assess the prevalence/extent of social media use among youths during the COVID-19 period.
3. To assess the extent of misinformation about COVID-19 circulating during the COVID-19 period.
4. To suggest strategies to curb/minimize the spread of misinformation about COVID-19.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study poses the following research questions:

1. What is the rate of awareness of youths in the UAE of COVID-19?
2. What is the extent of social media use circulate information about COVID-19.
3. What is the rate of misinformation about COVID-19?

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

This study uses the following hypotheses:

1. There is no significant difference in the level of awareness of COVID-19 among youths.
2. There is no significant difference in the awareness level of COVID-19 between those who use social media and those who did not.
3. There is no significant difference in the level of awareness of COVID-19 among the users of several social media platforms.
4. There is no significant difference in the level of awareness of COVID-19 among youths from different Emirates.
5. There is no significant relationship between the level of awareness of COVID-19 and social media use.
6. There is no significant difference in the level of awareness of COVID-19 between male and female social media users.
7. There is no significant correlation between socio-demographic characteristics and usage of social media among youths.
8. There is no significant correlation between socio-demographic characteristics and youths' trust and belief in social media.
9. There is no significant difference in the level of trust in social media between male and female respondents.
10. There is no significant difference in the level of trust in social media between younger and older respondents.
11. There is no significant effect of respondents' socio demographic characteristics on usage of social media during COVID-19.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Pew Research Center (2013) found that 13% of American internet users reported that posting content online had caused trouble in their relationships. Haynes (2001) observed that behavior evaluation of individuals on situations involving behavioral change requires manipulation and assessment. A rapidly evolving research area involves the application of social media to the sharing of information. Social media feeds have a glut of COVID-19 posts from all sorts of sources that have been confirmed to be inaccurate, misinformative, and fake. This kind of information not only confuses but also leads to fear among the populace. Before sharing a piece of information, it is advised that one should evaluate and consider the veracity of the information (Yates, 2020). Spending time in a media environment that contains misinformation is likely to change attitudes and behaviors. Even if users are not nested in networks that propagate misinformation, they are likely to be incidentally exposed to information from a variety of perspectives (Feezell, 2018; Fletcher & Nielsen, 2018; Weeks et al., 2017). Even a highly curated social media feed is thus still likely to contain misinformation. As cumulative exposure to misinformation increases, users are likely to experience a reinforcement effect whereby familiarity leads to stronger belief (Dechêne et al., 2010).

Social media is primarily for sharing information in order to exchange ideas, opinions, and knowledge. It has been observed that some people share fake information through social media to stir panic, especially information relating to the COVID-19 pandemic. The fake information being shared has been observed to undermine the efforts of various government and health agencies/bodies that are involved in the fight against this disastrous virus. An illustration of fake news that was peddled during the pandemic crisis is the widely shared statement on the efficacy of chloroquine to cure COVID-19 without recourse to experts and specialists in the field. Many Nigerian youths, as well as people of all ages, were observed to share this information with great enthusiasm. This was later discovered to have led to the abuse of chloroquine; many were found to have abused the drug in a Lagos hospital. Soto (2020) indicated that two people were hospitalized in Lagos for chloroquine overdoses; this was reported after US President Donald Trump praised the antimalaria drug as a treatment for COVID 19 and was spreading this information on social media. The purveyors of fake news or information do so possibly for their own gain. Without being aware, the receivers of the information tend to take the fake news as genuine.

Social Media Usage in the UAE

Mobile social media usage has been booming in the UAE. Social media is accessed by 9.7 million users through their mobile devices, a number that represents 99% of the country's population. The 2020 usage statistics show that the number of mobile social media users in the country underwent a 10.6% increase, with more than 932,000 new users added last year. Falling smartphone costs and easy availability of cutting-edge technology are the major reasons for this boom. YouTube was the most popular social media platform in 2020, with 8.65 million users. Almost 79% of the UAE's population has profiles on Facebook, while YouTube's penetration also stands at 88% (UAE Social Media Statistics, 2020).

Moreover, Emiratis, on average, spend 2.57 hours on social media daily. Much like in the rest of the world, social media has become one of the most essential parts of daily internet usage in the UAE. In fact, more than 59% of UAE families' youths have access to social media and are literate in its use, whether positive or negative (Norman, 2008). It has been statistically established that youths spend more time on social media watching news and commercial advertisements, blogging, and getting entertained than any other activity, with the average youth using a quarter of their daily time on these activities. Social media communication has become affordable and very efficient in youth group interaction. It has given a voice to the ignored and served as a melting pot of ideas of all kinds. Dropping smartphone prices have driven the massive increase in the usage of mobile phones across the UAE. The largescale rise in the adoption of social media can be attributed to the easy

availability of super-fast internet at very low prices. The explosion in YouTube usage is also due to the increased prevalence of fast internet connectivity. WhatsApp's willingness to keep reinventing its product and keep offering novel experiences to its customers is the reason that it has surged past all other competitors and established a unique niche of its own among chat apps. (UAE Social Media Statistics 2020).

However, according to the Library of Congress, there are three legislative instruments governing the issue of transparency and spreading of misinformation on social media: Federal Law No. 5 of 2012, Federal Law No. 12 of 2016, and the Electronic Media Regulation of 2018. A number of individuals have been brought before the courts of the UAE for violating provisions of Federal Law No. 5. In addition to issuing legislative tools and referring violators to court, the Emeriti authorities have adopted a number of measures to combat the phenomenon of posting false information online or through social media. These measures include the blocking of misinformation, a public awareness campaign, and the creation of a course curriculum for the purpose of educating students about false news in the digital age. The government of the Emirate of Dubai publicized a June 2019 dialogue between local journalists and Facebook addressing false news on social media.

The social media usage policy introduced by the UAE Ministry of Health and Prevention aims to welcome the participation of the public across all channels, as this participation will provide an opportunity for effective intention. The government no longer has total power over what and when information is shared, and audiences are no longer passive; they actively participate in creating and disseminating news (Ahmad & Hillman, 2020). For example, Hopkyns (2020) describes how in the UAE, an Indian expatriate teenager, Suchetha Satish, has been spreading COVID-19 awareness online through composing songs in 21 different Indian languages.

Government, Quarantine, and Social Media in the UAE

Since the outbreak of the coronavirus, all nations of the world have taken giant steps to curb the spread of the disease. The UAE government was proactive in dealing with the dreaded coronavirus, particularly in September 2020, after a surge in COVID-19 cases that led to the UAE's reaching a high with a record 1,007 new cases in a single day. This prompted the government to update the list of fines for COVID-19 rule breakers. Such fines may be up to Dh500, depending on the offence. (Department of Foreign Affairs, 2020).

The regulations of the Dubai Health Authority (2020), as modified in March 2021, prescribed a list of conditions for home quarantine on its website, including home or hotel quarantine and avoiding contact with others for a certain period of time, usually 14 among other rules.

In April 2020 the UAE Cabinet passed a resolution on publishing and sharing health information related to communicable diseases. The resolution provides information and guidelines on the correct procedure for publishing and sharing this information, directing that it be done through spokespersons, experts, and government officials authorized to do so. The resolution is aimed at quelling the spread of rumors and fake news. Under the resolution, it is prohibited to publish, republish, or circulate false and misleading health-related information or any information that is not announced officially or is not approved by MoHaP or other health authorities, or information that contradicts what has been announced through print, audio, visual media or social media, websites, IT tools or other types of media.

The Social Impact Theory

The social impact theory was conceived by Ohio State University psychologist Bibb Latané in 1981 after conducting a series of experiments to validate his hypothesis of how influence works. Three factors make up social impact theory: strength, immediacy, and number. The core message of his theory focuses on the influence group, the target of the influence, proximity in time, and how many people are in the influencing group. Latané's theory holds that there is an influence group and a targeted group for influence. His theory soon became powerful in the context of social media and

influence. Millions of social media users across nations are influenced daily to make a decision to buy; thus, turnaround time for conducting businesses has been reduced. The application of Latané's theory to social media is highlighted below:

- Social media provides strength in the form of friends, colleagues, and family: the people you have relationships with and whose opinions matter to you.
- Social media provides immediacy–both temporally and virtually: the people you are connected to are never more than a mobile device away.
- Social media provides enormous opportunity for the number of people in the influencing group.

Social impact theory is related to some of the context of this study. Social media being a platform for wider coverage, has helped in spreading awareness among the populace about the concept of COVID-19 and various means of curbing its spread.

Social media has changed the landscape of communication. It continues in imitation of stand a "gamechanger" of communication. Social media is an extensive umbrella including various instant online verbal exchange channels. It has enabled people throughout the world in imitation of have interaction or share production then manufacturer related records together with each other. The social impact theory holds that with social media, manufacturers can influence millions of targeted prospects/customers. This same means has been used by governments, World Health Organization (WHO), and other key stakeholders to reach millions of people on the subject of COVID-19. The difference between social media and conventional media is that social media can be customized, as it is generated by individuals. Users exercise greater control over their use of social media than they exercise over other forms of media (Dickey & Lewis, 2011). Consumers are no more inclined according to listen what business agencies necessity to them in imitation of pay attention instead it want enterprise businesses in accordance with listen as it say. This attitudinal and behavioral change among buyers has had an effect on neighborly media manifestation, yet such is a sizeable project for business firms after bear together with that (Kietzmann et al., 2011). This state of affairs alerts to that amount enterprise corporations ought to identify those elements over communal media as affect the consumer mindset towards the product associated information embedded among social media content. This might also allow corporations to increase the violent associative media promotional strategies. Social impact theory is particularly relevant and useful to the subject of COVID-19 because it provides an opportunity to meet a wider coverage of people, and people can be influenced to take precautionary measures against the spread of the virus.

In today's world of social media, the social media theory which greatly emphasizes influence can be likened to:

1. Strength: Youth rely heavily on information shared via social media, whether verified or not.
2. Immediacy: There has never been a time in human history like now, when millions of pieces of information can be shared among people across the world. Social media brings the influence group and the target group into close proximity.
3. In today's world of social media, there is no end to the numbers of an influence group.

METHOD

Research Method

This section accounts for the systematic procedures that were adopted in the collection of data for this research. It is sequentially organized along the following themes: research design description of study area, population of the study, sample size and sampling procedure, research instruments, data analysis and management, and ethical considerations. These were employed toward the realization

of the objectives of the research. A quantitative method of research was selected over qualitative so as to reach these objectives.

Research Design

According to Asika (2009), research designs are often referred to as the structuring of investigation aimed at identifying variables and their relationships to one another. In this study, a questionnaire served as a useful guide in the effort of generating data for this study. The design of this study involved a quantitative method of data collection.

Area of the Study

The study was conducted in the UAE. The study covered seven Emirates in the UAE: Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Fujairah, Ras Alkaimah, Sharjah, and Umm Alquwain.

Sample Size

Sample size is defined as a limited number of elements selected from a population that are representative of that population (Ogbechi. 2002). The sample size for this study was 407.

Data Collection Instrument

A questionnaire was the main research instrument used for the study to gather necessary data from the sample respondents. The questionnaire was a structured type and provided answers to the research questions and hypotheses therein. This instrument was divided into two sections, Sections A and B. Section A dealt with the personal data of the respondents, while Section B contained a research statement postulated in line with the research question and hypothesis in section one. Options or alternatives were provided, of which each respondent could pick or tick one.

Reliability and Validity of the Data Collection Instrument

The survey was reviewed by two media experts, and there was a pilot survey distributed to 50 participants; all the complicated questions were modified. Cronbach's alpha was used to test for reliability. This technique requires only a single test administration to provide a unique estimate of the reliability for a given test. Cronbach's alpha is the average value of the reliability coefficients one would obtain for all possible combinations of items when split into two half-tests.

Method of Data Processing and Analysis

After the data was gathered through the administration of the questionnaire, the collected data was coded, tabulated, and analyzed according to the research question and hypothesis. In order to analyze the data effectively and efficiently for easy management and accuracy, the simple percentage method was used as an analytical tool for this research. Also, t-test was used to check for difference in means while correlation was used to check for relationship between social media usage and awareness. The data was analyzed with SPSS version 21. Microsoft Excel was used for data processing and transformation. A frequency distribution table was presented to describe basic demographic characteristics of the respondents. In addition, bivariate analysis was carried out, including t-test, analysis of variance (ANOVA), and correlation. The purpose of this procedure was to give the study a robust finding. Findings from t-test and ANOVA were used to examine differences in social media use and its importance across several Emirates. The correlation analysis was carried out to assess the relationship between social media use and other explanatory variables/predictors. Advanced analysis, such as multiple comparison using ANOVA and correlational matrix, were also engaged at the multivariate level.

Table 1. Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Background Characteristics

S/N	Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	**Gender**		
	Male	59	15.1
	Female	332	84.9
2.	**Age**		
	12–19 years	103	26.6
	20–30 years	167	43.2
	30 and above	117	30.2
3.	**Emirate**		
	Abu Dhabi	110	28.1
	Ajman	53	13.6
	Dubai	77	19.7
	Fujairah	27	6.9
	Ras Alkaimah	63	16.1
	Sharjah	24	6.1
	Umm Alquwain	37	9.5
4.	**Work Status**		
	Not Employed	175	45.0
	Private Sectors	62	15.9
	Public Sectors	152	39.1

DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION, AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents by background characteristics. The result shows that more than two-thirds of the respondents (85%) were female respondents, while the remaining 15% were their male counterparts; however, the survey was distributed equally between genders, but more females were willing to participate than males. Distribution by age revealed that those in the youngest age group (12–19 years) accounted for 27% of the respondents, while the oldest age group accounted for about 30%. Those in the age group 20–30 years were reported to account for 43% of the total respondents. The distribution by Emirates revealed that the highest percentage of respondents (28%) resided in Abu Dhabi, followed by those who resided in Dubai (20%). Those who resided in Ras Alkaimah accounted for 16%, followed by those in Ajman (14%). Those residing in Umm Alquwain accounted for about 10%, while the lowest percentage (6%) were those in Sharjah. Also, the distribution of respondents by work status revealed that about 45% were not employees, about 39% reported working in the public sector, and 16% reported working in the private sector.

Table 2 reveals that 30% of the respondents used social media for 1–2 hours, while about 29% reported using social media 3–4 hours daily. The highest daily users (more than 4 hours) accounted for the highest percentage of the respondents (40%). The distribution of respondents by the kind of social media they used revealed that the majority of the respondents (38%) used WhatsApp, followed by those who revealed they used Instagram (34%). Those using Snapchat accounted for about 29% of the respondents, Tiktok 0.3%, Twitter 1%, YouTube 0.3%, and others 0.5%.

As shown in Table 3, the distribution of respondents by the kind of tool they used to follow news on social media revealed that more than two-thirds of the respondents (75%) used their

Table 2. Distribution of Respondents by Use of Social Media

S/N	Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	**How often do you use social media?**		
	1–2 hours	117	30.3
	3–4 hours	113	29.3
	More than 4 hours	156	40.4
2.	**What kind of social media do you use?**		
	Instagram	121	31.7
	Snapchat	109	28.5
	Ticktock	1	0.3
	Twitter	4	1.0
	WhatsApp	144	37.7
	Youtube	1	0.3
	All of the above and more	2	0.5

Table 3. Distribution of Respondents by Use of Social Media

1.	**What kind of device do you use to follow news on social media?**		
	Personal Computer	27	6.9
	Smartphone	294	75.2
	Tablet	30	7.7
	Others	40	10.2
2.	**What kind of news do you follow during COVID-19?**		
	COVID-19 news	85	22.0
	Economic news	49	12.7
	Health news	112	29.0
	Political News	59	15.3
	Others	81	21.0
3.	**When do you use social media?**		
	Afternoon	140	36.1
	Evening	130	33.5
	Morning	118	30.4

smartphone to follow news on social media, followed by those who used tablets, at about 8%. Those using their personal computers to follow news are just 7%, while those using other devices than personal computers, tablets, and smartphone accounted for 10% of the total respondents. Also, the distribution of respondents by the kind of news they followed during the COVID-19 period revealed that 29% followed health news, 22% followed COVID-19 news, only 13% followed economic news, while 15% followed political news, and the remaining 21% followed other news. The distribution of respondents by when they used social media revealed morning users at 30.4%, afternoon users at 36.1% and evening users at 33.5%

Table 4 shows that most of the respondents (69%) revealed that social media had been a very active medium for disseminating false information and myths about COVID-19 in UAE. Also, further analysis revealed that no less than 60% of the total respondents believed most UAE were ignorant of the right medium for getting information about COVID-19. In another analysis, about 65% revealed that social media had been a very active medium for spreading false information and myths about the virus. Also, it was reported by a vast majority of the respondents that low knowledge of the technology involved affected their use of social media for the dissemination of information about the pandemic.

Table 5 reveals the distribution of respondents by use of social media. About 63% of the respondents believed there was a synergy between government and social media in disseminating

Table 4. Distribution of Respondents by Use of Social Media

S/N	Variable	Strongly Agree	Agree	Indifferent	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	Social media has been a very active medium for disseminating false information and myths about COVID-19 in UAE	77(20.6)	181(48.4)	70(18.7)	25(6.7)	21(5.6)
2.	I believe most UAE are ignorant of the right medium for getting information about COVID-19	75(20.5)	147(40.2)	104(28.4)	31(8.5)	9(2.5)
3.	Social media has been a very active medium for spreading false information and myths about the virus	91(24.6)	148(40.0)	91(24.6)	21(5.7)	19(5.1)
4.	Lack of knowledge of the technology involved affects my use of social media for the dissemination of information about the pandemic	83(22.3)	156(41.8)	103(27.6)	18(4.8)	13(3.5)

information about COVID-19. Further analysis revealed that no less than 62% of the total respondents reported using social media platforms to spread information about COVID-19 more than any other professional. Also, analysis revealed that no less than 60% of the respondents agreed that rumors were spread on social media during the COVID-19 period. Also, no less than 65% indicated that they knew how to distinguish between rumor and facts on social media.

As shown in Table 6, about 66% of the respondents indicated that they always double-check the news through social media during COVID-19. Also, further analysis revealed that 61% of the respondents indicated that they pass the news through social media without checking the news. About

Table 5. Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Use of Social Media

1.	I believe there is a synergy between government and social media in disseminating information about COVID-19	73(19.7)	161(43.4)	93(25.1)	23(6.2)	21(5.7)
2.	I use social media platforms to spread information about COVID-19 more than any other professional	84(22.8)	145(39.3)	93(25.2)	27(7.3)	20(5.4)
3.	More rumors spread in social media during COVID-19	101(27.4)	132(35.8)	98(26.6)	23(6.2)	15(4.1)
4.	I know how to distinguish between rumors and facts in social media	74(20.2)	165(45.0)	83(22.6)	26(7.1)	19(5.2)

Table 6. Distribution of Respondents by Use of Social Media

1.	Always I double-check the news through social media during COVID 19	106(29.0)	134(36.6)	72(19.7)	30(8.2)	24(6.6)
2.	I pass the news through social media without checking the news	75(20.4)	151(41.1)	77(21.0)	37(10.1)	27(7.4)
3.	I believe social media more than other news sources	102(27.6)	140(37.9)	82(22.2)	27(7.3)	18(4.9)
4.	Social media is used as an immediate mechanism for accessing and sharing information on COVID-19 in UAE	78(21.4)	153(41.9)	88(24.1)	28(7.7)	18(4.9)

65% of the respondents believed social media more than other news sources. In another analysis, 63% of respondents saw social media use as any immediate mechanism for accessing and sharing information on COVID-19 in the UAE.

As shown in Table 7, about 68% reported believing that social media was their main source to reach and obtain information on the pandemic. Analysis revealed that no less than 63% of the respondents believed social media use had enhanced government services and improved knowledge of COVID-19. Another analysis revealed that 66% of respondents said they were aware of the spread of news on social media during COVID-19. A majority of the respondents (70%) agreed that the government used social media in the right way to make people aware of COVID-19.

Table 8 reveals that most of the respondents also suggested that they were satisfied with the government regulations through social media. Further analysis revealed that 66% of respondents believed police used social media in a strong way to make people aware of COVID-19. Also, most of the respondents believed doctors used social media in a strong way to ensure people are aware of COVID-19. Similarly, 66% of respondents believed all doctors through social media during COVID-19, while a majority indicated they followed many doctors during COVID-19. Also, about 69% of respondents indicated they corresponded with doctors through social media during COVID-19.

Testing Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

Ho: There is no significant difference in the level of awareness of COVID-19 among youths in UAE.
Hi: There is a significant difference in the level of awareness of COVID-19 among youths in UAE.

Significance level=0.05

Table 7. Distribution of Respondents by Use of Social Media

1.	Social media is my main source to reach and obtain information on the pandemic	96(26.1)	155(42.1)	63(17.1)	33(9.0)	21(5.7)
2.	Social media use has enhanced government services and improved knowledge of COVID-19	83(22.6)	157(42.7)	85(23.1)	26(7.1)	17(4.6)
3.	I am aware of the spread of news on social media during COVID 19	115(31.2)	132(35.8)	83(22.5)	25(69.4)	14(3.8)
4.	The government used social media in the right way to make people aware of COVID-19	88(23.8)	165(44.6)	67(18.1)	31(8.4)	19(5.1)

Table 8. Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Use of Social Media

1.	I am very satisfied with the government regulations through social media	117(31.8)	146(39.7)	69(18.8)	21(5.7)	15(4.1)
2.	Police use social media in a strong way to make people aware of COVID-19	93(25.1)	151(40.8)	78(21.1)	31(8.4)	17(4.6)
3.	Doctors use social media in a strong way to make people aware of COVID-19	119(32.2)	126(34.1)	77(20.9)	29(7.9)	18(4.9)
4.	I believe all doctors through social media during COVID-19	96(26.2)	145(39.5)	70(19.1)	42(11.4)	14(3.8)
5.	I followed many doctors during COVID 19	110(29.7)	142(38.4)	69(18.6)	26(7.0)	23(6.2)
6.	I chat with doctors through social media during COVID-19	105(27.9)	155(41.2)	60(16.0)	25(6.6)	31(8.2)

Critical Region: Accept Ho if p-value is greater than the significance value; otherwise reject Ho.

Table 9 reveals that the p-value (0.001) is less than the significant value (0.05) We therefore reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is a significant difference in the level of awareness of COVID-19 among youths.

The result suggests the awareness level differs from emirate to emirate.

Hypothesis 2

Ho: There is no significant difference in the awareness level of COVID-19 between high and low users of social media.

Hi: There is a significant difference in the awareness level of COVID-19 between high and low users of social media.

Significance level=0.05

Critical Region: Accept Ho if p-value is greater than the significance value; otherwise reject Ho.

Table 10 reveals that the p-value (0.006) is less than the significant value (0.05). We can therefore reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is a significant difference in the awareness level of COVID-19 between high and low users of social media among youths. The result shows that high users have more awareness of COVID-19 than the low users.

Hypothesis 3

Ho: There is no significant difference in the level of awareness of COVID-19 among users of several social media platforms.

Table 9. ANOVA for Hypothesis 1

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	46.115	6	7.686	9.190	.001
Within Groups	295.208	353	.836		
Total	341.322	359			

Table 10. ANOVA for Hypothesis 2

Has social media been a very active medium for disseminating false information and myths about COVID-19 in the UAE?					
	Sum of Squares	**df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**
Between Groups	11.225	2	5.613	5.211	.006
Within Groups	383.454	356	1.077		
Total	394.680	358			

Hi: There is a significant difference in the level of awareness of COVID-19 among users of several social media platforms.

Significance level=0.05

Critical Region: Accept Ho if p-value is greater than the significance value; otherwise reject Ho.

As Table 11 reveals, the p-value shows a value of 0.483, which is greater than the significance value (0.05). We therefore accept the null hypothesis and conclude that there is no significant difference in the level of awareness of COVID-19 among several social media platform users. In other words, the level of awareness of COVID-19 among Twitter users is not significantly different from the level of awareness among Snapchat and YouTube users.

Hypothesis 4

There is no significant difference in the level of awareness of COVID-19 among respondents from different Emirates.

Hi: There is a significant difference in the level of awareness of COVID-19 among respondents from different Emirates.

Significance level=0.05

Critical Region: Accept Ho if p-value is greater than the significance value; otherwise reject Ho.

Table 12 shows the difference in the level of awareness among several Emirates. The result shows a p-value of 0.000, which is less than the significant value (0.05). We can therefore reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is a significant difference in the level of awareness of COVID-19 among youths in different Emirates.

Table 11. ANOVA for Hypothesis 3

	Sum of Squares	**df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**
Between Groups	.279	1	.279	.496	.483
Within Groups	61.713	110	.561		
Total	61.991	111			

Table 12. ANOVA for Hypothesis 4

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	24.695	6	4.116	6.413	.000
Within Groups	240.687	375	.642		
Total	265.382	381			

Hypothesis 5

There is no significant relationship between the level of awareness of COVID-19 and social media use.

Hi: There is a significant relationship between the level of awareness of COVID-19 and social media use.

Significance level=0.05

Critical Region: Accept Ho if p-value is greater than the significance value; otherwise reject Ho.

Table 13 shows the correlation between the level of awareness of COVID-19 and social media use. The result revealed a strong correlation between social media usage and level of awareness (R=0.506). Also, social media usage is correlated with awareness of COVID-19. The number of hours spent daily on social media and the use of social media for COVID-19 news are also correlated. We can therefore reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is a significant relationship between the level of awareness of COVID-19 and social media use. However, the Pearson correlation values suggest a positive correlation between the level of awareness of COVID-19 and social media usage.

Hypothesis 6

There is no significant difference in the level of awareness of COVID-19 between male and female social media users.

Hi: There is a significant difference in the level of awareness of COVID-19 between male and female social media users.

Significance level=0.05

Critical Region: Accept Ho if p-value is greater than the significance value; otherwise reject Ho.

In Table 14, the p-value shows a value of 0.058, which is greater than the significant value (0.05). We can therefore accept the null hypothesis and conclude that there is no significant difference in the level of awareness of COVID-19 between male and female social media users.

Hypothesis 7

Ho: There is no significant correlation between socio-demographic characteristics and usage of social media among youths.
Hi: There is a significant correlation between socio-demographic characteristics and usage of social media among youths.

Significance level=0.05

Critical Region: Accept Ho if p-value is greater than the significance value; otherwise reject Ho.

Table 13. Correlations

		Level of awareness of COVID-19	Awareness of COVID-19	Social media usage	No. of hours of daily social media use	Use of social media for COVID-19 news
Level of awareness of COVID-19	Pearson Correlation	1	.418**	.506**	.301**	.356**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	374	362	368	363	367
Awareness of COVID-19	Pearson Correlation	.418**	1	.515**	.420**	.445**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	362	366	363	362	360
Social media usage	Pearson Correlation	.506**	.515**	1	.355**	.375**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	368	363	370	365	365
No. of hours of daily social media use	Pearson Correlation	.301**	.420**	.355**	1	.575**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	363	362	365	367	365
Use of social media for COVID-19 news	Pearson Correlation	.356**	.445**	.375**	.575**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	367	360	365	365	370

Note. **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 14. T-Test Analysis for Hypothesis 6

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
	F	Sig.				
Social media use	3.629	.058	.289	377	.772	.035
			.311	82.191	.757	.035

Table 15 shows the correlation between socio-demographic characteristics and social media usage. The result shows that there is a significant correlation between social media use and age, gender, work status, and length of social media usage. Further analysis also revealed significant correlations between age and work status. Gender and work status also revealed significant correlations (0.515). Work status is also significantly correlated with length of social media usage, while the length of social media usage is also correlated with social media use.

Hypothesis 8

Ho: There is no significant correlation between socio-demographic characteristics and youths' trust and belief in social media.

Table 15. Correlations Between Socio-Demographic Characteristics and Social Media Use

		Age	Gender	Work Status	Social Media Use	Length of Social Media Use
Age	Pearson Correlation	1	.418**	.506**	.431**	.479**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	374	362	368	369	367
Gender	Pearson Correlation	.418**	1	.515**	.533**	.423**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	362	366	363	366	366
Work Status	Pearson Correlation	.506**	.515**	1	.453**	.543**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	368	363	370	368	366
Social Media Use	Pearson Correlation	.431**	.533**	.453**	1	.464**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	369	366	368	373	367
Length of Social Media Use	Pearson Correlation	.479**	.423**	.543**	.464**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	367	366	366	367	371

Note. **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Hi: There is a significant correlation between socio-demographic characteristics and youths' trust and belief in social media.

Significance level=0.05

Critical Region: Accept Ho if p-value is greater than the significance value; otherwise reject Ho.

Table 16 shows the correlations between socio-demographic characteristics and youths' trust and belief in social media. The result shows that age and gender show fairly strong correlations with trust and belief in social media. In other words, youths' genders do not necessarily determine their trust and belief in social media. Work status also has a strong correlation (0.548) with youths' trust and belief in social media, while work status shows a fairly strong correlation (0.527) with trust and belief in social media.

Hypothesis 9

Ho: There is no significant difference in the level of trust in social media between male and female respondents.

Hi: There is a significant difference in the level of trust in social media between male and female respondents.

Table 16. Correlations Between Socio-Demographic Characteristics and Youths' Trust and Belief in Social Media

		Age	Gender	Work Status	Social Media Use	Trust and Belief in Social Media
Age	Pearson Correlation	1	.482**	.490**	.433**	.432**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	370	365	365	367	370
Gender	Pearson Correlation	.482**	1	.394**	.536**	.422**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	365	369	365	363	368
Work Status	Pearson Correlation	.490**	.394**	1	.575**	.548**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	365	365	367	365	367
Social Media Use	Pearson Correlation	.433**	.536**	.575**	1	.527**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	367	363	365	370	370
Trust and Belief in Social Media	Pearson Correlation	.432**	.422**	.548**	.527**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	370	368	367	370	376

Note. **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Significance level=0.05

Critical Region: Accept Ho if p-value is greater than the significance value; otherwise reject Ho.

Table 17 shows the independent sample t-test to test the difference in the level of trust in social media between male and female respondents. The result shows a significant value of 0.001, which indicates a significant difference in the level of trust and belief between male and female youths.

Hypothesis 10

Ho: There is no significant difference in the level of trust in social media between younger and older respondents.

Hi: There is a significant difference in the level of trust in social media between younger and older respondents.

Significance level=0.05

Critical Region: Accept Ho, if p-value is greater than the significance value, otherwise reject Ho.

Table 18 shows the significant difference in trust and belief in social media by age group. The result shows no significant difference between the younger age groups (12–19 years and 20–30 years). However, the oldest age group (30 years and above) shows a significant difference (0.004) in the level

Table 17. Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Level of trust in social media	Equal variances assumed;	15.790	.000	6.881	380	.000	4.097	.595	2.927	5.268
	Equal variances not assumed			7.310	356.517	.000	4.097	.561	2.995	5.200

Table 18. Different Age Groups' Trust and Belief in Social Media

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
12–19 years	Between Groups	3.124	2	1.562	2.487	.090
	Within Groups	45.222	388	.628		
	Total	48.347	390			
20–30 years	Between Groups	1.717	2	.859	1.271	.287
	Within Groups	48.630	388	.675		
	Total	50.347	390			
30 years and above	Between Groups	1.507	2	.754	.663	.004
	Within Groups	81.880	388	1.137		
	Total	83.387	390			

and trust and belief in social media. Therefore, there exists a significant difference in the level of trust and belief in social media between the older age group and the younger age groups.

Hypothesis 11

Ho: There is no significant effect of respondents' socio-demographic characteristics on usage of social media during COVID-19.
Hi: There is a significant effect of respondent's socio demographic characteristics on usage of social media during COVID-19.

Significance level=0.05

Critical Region: Accept Ho if p-value is greater than the significance value; otherwise reject Ho.

Table 19 shows the multiple regression model revealing the impact of socio-demographic characteristics on social media use during COVID-19. The result revealed that all the socio-demographic factors have significant impact on social media use during the COVID-19 period in UAE.

Table 19. Dependent Variable: Social Media Use During COVID-19

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	45.947	3.684		12.472	.000
	Age	.591	.039	.607	15.222	.000
	Gender	-8.484	.547	-.798	-15.524	.000
	Work Status	.033	.004	.406	7.858	.000
	Emirate	.459	.031	.551	10.522	.000

Note. R-Squared = .877 (Adjusted R-Squared -.769)

FINDINGS

Findings from this research revealed that a majority of the respondents in this study are high social media users. The report revealed that no less than 70% of the respondents use social media daily for at least three hours a day. Findings from this study also revealed that nearly all the respondents (98%) use three social media platforms, namely Instagram, Snapchat, and WhatsApp. Further analysis revealed that no less than 22% have followed news on COVID-19 daily throughout the COVID-19 period. Reports also revealed an even distribution of the time of day in which respondents use social media to access news on COVID-19 (morning, afternoon, and evening). Reports also revealed that more than half of the respondents have good knowledge of the use of social media for disseminating information during the COVID-19 period. A large percentage (at least 68%) can differentiate between real and fake news on social media. Also, a majority of the respondents (68%) believe that social media has enhanced government services and improved knowledge of COVID-19. The test of analysis also revealed that there are significant differences in the level of awareness of COVID-19 among social media users. The differences among the Emirates were also discovered to be significant. Further test of differences also suggests that high social media users among the youths have higher level of awareness of COVID-19 than lower users. Also, male respondents are believed to have higher awareness level than female respondents. Result from correlational matrix analysis also revealed that socio-demographic characteristics such as age, gender, Emirates, and work status have significant correlation with usage and with trust and belief in social media.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research is to investigate social media use during COVID-19 among youths in the UAE. Findings from this study revealed that the average youth in the UAE during COVID-19 is a high social media user.

The result revealed that at least 22% of the respondents have followed news on COVID-19 daily throughout the COVID-19 period. Also, in Table 5, it was reported that no less than 62% of the respondents use social media platforms to spread information about COVID-19 more than any other professional. Also, the result revealed that no less than 70% of the respondents are high users/subscribers of several social media platforms. The result from Table 5 also revealed that no less than 61% of the respondents spread information about COVID-19 more than any other professional. Analysis from Table 4 indicated that about 69% of the respondents suggested that social media has been a very active medium for disseminating false information and myths about COVID-19 in the UAE. Findings from Table 6 revealed that a majority of the respondents (66%) indicated that they have always double-checked the news through social media during COVID-19, which proved to be an effective way of minimizing the spread of misinformation about COVID-19.

Regarding answers to research questions: The findings from this research revealed that no less than 70% of the respondents are aware of COVID-19 in the UAE according to the findings in Table 4.

1. What is the extent of social media use to circulate information about COVID-19 among youths?

Findings from Table 5 revealed that 62% of the respondents use social media to spread information about COVID-19.

2. What is the rate of misinformation about COVID-19?

Findings from Table 4 revealed that at least 69% of the respondents believe that social media has been a very active medium for disseminating false information and myths about COVID-19 in the UAE.

The Pew Research Center (2013) found that 13% of American internet users reported that posting content online had caused trouble in their relationships. Findings from this research revealed at least 27% of respondents have spread rumors via social media during COVID 19.

Ocansey et al. (2016) argued that youths use social media on an enormous scale mainly for communication purposes. This corroborates findings in Table 7 that revealed that almost 70% of the respondents have used social media as their main source to reach and obtain information during the pandemic.

Figueiras et al. (2021) did a cross-sectional study on "levels of trust in information sources as a predictor of protective health behaviors during COVID-19 pandemic" in the UAE. They found that "the levels of trust in sources of information were associated with the adoption of protective behaviors, significantly so for citizens of the UAE. These findings may help inform the improvement of pandemic–related health messaging in multicultural contexts."

Another study was conducted by Tahat et al. (2023) about the "role of social media in changing the social life patterns of youth at UAE." They found that "Participants say connected with their family, take more interest in their domestic matters, and also interact more with their parents and relatives."

In comparing the previous studies in the UAE and this study, the researcher finds that social impact theory focuses on influence groups, target of the influence, proximity in time, and how many people are in the influencing group. The findings from this research revealed that no less than 70% of youths (in the influence group) reported using social media as their main source for gathering information during the COVID-19 period.

From the collected data, the researcher finds that there are correlations between socio-demographic characteristics and youths' trust and belief in social media. The results show that age and gender have fairly strong correlations with trust and belief in social media. In other words, youths' genders do not necessarily determine their trust and belief in social media. Therefore, the researcher suggests two topics for future research:

1. The role of social media and gender in disseminating false information about COVID-19 in the UAE
2. Positive and negative impacts of social media and gender during the COVID-19 period.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

We wish to confirm that there are no known conflicts of interest associated with this publication and there has been no significant financial support for this work that could have influenced its outcome.

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