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The Role of Facebook in Promoting Citizenship Values Among University Students: A Field Study in the Department of Social Sciences, University of 20 August 1955, Skikda

Üniversite Öğrencileri Arasında Vatandaşlık Değerlerinin
Geliştirilmesinde Facebook'un Rolü: 20 Ağustos 1955 Üniversitesi,
Sosyal Bilimler Bölümü Üzerine Bir Alan Araştırması

Abstract

This study aimed to identify the role played by Facebook in promoting citizenship values among students in the Department of Social Sciences at the University of 20 August 1955, Skikda. It examined the extent to which Facebook contributes to the development of democratic values and the reinforcement of students' sense of belonging. The questionnaire was used as the primary instrument for data collection, and the study adopted the sample survey method within the framework of the descriptive approach. The study was conducted on a sample of 58 students. The findings revealed that Facebook contributes to the development of contemporary understandings of democracy among university students through the exchange of ideas and opinions and through participation in dialogue. The results also indicated that the platform reinforces the sense of national belonging and contributes to shaping a personality characterized by loyalty and civic attachment.

Keywords: Facebook, Values, Citizenship, University Students, Skikda

Öz

Bu araştırma, 20 Ağustos 1955 Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Bölümünde öğrenim gören öğrenciler arasında Facebook'un vatandaşlık değerlerinin geliştirilmesindeki rolünü belirlemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Çalışmada, Facebook'un demokratik değerlerin gelişimine ve öğrencilerin aidiyet duygusunun güçlenmesine ne ölçüde katkı sağladığı incelenmiştir. Veri toplama aracı olarak anket kullanılmış, araştırma betimsel yaklaşım çerçevesinde örneklem tarama yöntemiyle yürütülmüştür. Araştırma, 58 öğrenciden oluşan bir örneklem üzerinde gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırma bulguları, Facebook'un öğrenciler

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arasında fikir ve görüş alışverişini teşvik ederek demokratik anlayışların gelişimine katkıda bulunduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Bulgular ayrıca platformun ulusal aidiyet duygusunu güçlendirdiğini ve bağlılık ile vatandaşlık bilinci temelinde şekillenen bir kişilik yapısının oluşumuna katkı sağladığını göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Facebook, Değerler, Vatandaşlık, Üniversite Öğrencileri, İskikda.

Introduction

The dissemination and consolidation of citizenship values in contemporary society require innovative, rigorous, and multidisciplinary perspectives, particularly when examining the university student population. As a significant component of the intellectual community, university students are increasingly exposed to a complex environment characterized by cultural diversity, ideological plurality, and evolving social challenges. This situation has been intensified by the widespread diffusion of advanced digital communication technologies and social networking platforms, particularly Facebook. While these platforms provide unprecedented opportunities for interaction and information exchange, they also introduce challenges that may influence social cohesion and collective identity.

One manifestation of these transformations in several developing societies is the growing interest in irregular migration (Harga) among young people, including university students. From a sociological perspective, migration aspirations are often associated with broader questions related to civic participation, social inclusion, and perceptions of future opportunities. Consequently, examining the relationship between citizenship values and digital environments has become increasingly important for understanding contemporary youth attitudes and behaviors.

Within this broader context, Algeria remains one of the societies facing ongoing challenges in strengthening, institutionalizing, and promoting civic values among university students. The persistence of socioeconomic pressures and the legacy of historical transformations underscore the importance of reinforcing principles of civic responsibility and active citizenship. At the same time, contemporary technological developments should not be viewed solely through a risk-oriented lens. Digital platforms may also offer opportunities to encourage civic awareness, public engagement, and social participation.

Given Facebook's widespread use among Algerian youth, the platform has emerged as a prominent virtual space through which social interaction, political discussion, and identity formation occur. Its potential role in fostering political socialization, democratic awareness, and civic engagement has therefore become an important area of inquiry within contemporary sociological and political research. Accordingly, this study examines this intersection by exploring whether Facebook functions primarily as a factor contributing to civic disengagement or as a medium that supports contemporary forms of democratic participation and civic integration.

Research Problem

Facebook is one of the most widely used and influential technological communication platforms among different segments of society. It performs an explicit function related to communication and the establishment of social relationships, while also serving a broader function associated with strengthening social cohesion, national belonging, and citizenship values.

Youth in general, and university students in particular, constitute an important social group in preserving societal values, strengthening national identity, and fostering a sense of belonging to the homeland. The positive contribution of digital technologies to these objectives depends largely on their responsible use within ethical and legal frameworks. Accordingly, this research seeks to determine the role played by Facebook in promoting citizenship values among university students. The study therefore addresses the following question:

What role does Facebook play in promoting citizenship values among university students?

Research Objectives

This study investigates how Facebook use influences citizenship values among university students, focusing on three key dimensions. First, it identifies the extent to which the platform contributes to the dissemination of citizenship values among students. Second, it examines how Facebook usage shapes and reinforces students' sense of belonging to their community and nation. Finally, it explores the role of the platform in developing and strengthening their understanding of democratic principles.

Research Hypotheses

The study tests two primary hypotheses regarding the platform's impact on civic attitudes among university students. The first hypothesis proposes that continuous Facebook use contributes to the development and strengthening of democratic values among university students. The second hypothesis suggests that the information and content available through Facebook reinforce and deepen students' sense of belonging.

Conceptual Framework

Definition of Facebook

Facebook is defined as *“a social networking website that can be accessed free of charge and is operated by Facebook Limited Liability Company as its private property”* (Abdelhamid, 2012, p. 106). The platform is currently owned and operated by Meta.

It is also defined as *“a social network that can be accessed free of charge. It enables users to add friends to their friend lists, send them messages, update their personal profiles, and introduce themselves to others”* (Abdeldjouad, 2018, p. 650).

Facebook has further been defined as “one of the social networking sites that allows ordinary or legal persons, such as companies, to present themselves and strengthen their presence through the site, either with people within that site or through communication with other sites” (Ghassan, 2010, p. 35).

Accordingly, Facebook is a social networking platform that facilitates communication among users and provides opportunities for the exchange of opinions and perspectives on various social issues and values.

Definition of Citizenship Values

Values are “a set of ideals, principles, and moral controls that guide individual and collective behavior” (Taibi, 2016, p. 99).

The concept of value encompasses multiple dimensions and applications. It has been defined as “the ideological motive that affects human thought and behavior, or as behavioral controls influenced by a person’s ideas and beliefs. These controls place human behavior within a specific framework that corresponds to what society wants and prefers” (Al-Hassan, n.d., pp. 514–515).

Values may also be defined as “a set of habits, customs, standards of behavior, and desirable principles that represent the culture of a group of people, a community, or an individual” (Niazi, 2000, p. 260).

The English term *citizen* and the French term *citoyen* derive from the Latin root *civitas*, referring to the citizen as an inhabitant of the city. In Arabic, the term is a translation of the English word *citizenship* and the French word *citoyenneté*, both of which refer to citizenship and derive conceptually from the notion of homeland.

In its general meaning, citizenship refers to “a person’s sense of belonging to a group and sharing its feelings. In situations of alienation, it means longing for the homeland, which reminds the individual of its customs, traditions, and the behaviors of its citizens. It also leads the citizen to interact, in the broadest sense, with the homeland and with fellow citizens. Citizenship is therefore the individual’s relationship with the homeland as land, understood as a geographical, historical, social, and political space. Citizenship and national spirit are thus the true driving force of social life. This national spirit includes a set of values that define the individual’s relationship with society and lead to commitment to the social contract binding citizens who are equal in rights and duties” (Zaher, 2015).

According to John Dewey, citizenship refers to “the individual’s ability to participate in life experience, that is, to give and take. It includes everything that makes the individual more useful, and therefore more valuable to others, as well as everything that enables one to participate more richly in the valuable experiences of others” (Nacer, 2003, p. 48).

Citizenship has also been defined as “the attribute of the citizen who enjoys rights and fulfills the duties imposed by belonging to the homeland. Citizenship, for the citizen, extends beyond the limits of the homeland. It refers to belonging and to the individual’s formal identity outside the community, when one complies with rights and

duties. It is therefore a relationship between an individual and a state, as defined by the law of that state” (Al-Kouri, 2004, p. 21).

Citizenship is based on three fundamental principles. The first concerns the citizen as a legal entity possessing rights and duties. The second links citizenship to democracy and regards the citizen as a political actor. The third addresses the issue of incomplete citizenship, emphasizing legal equality, judicial independence, and protection against arbitrary exercises of power (Bara, 2017).

Citizenship values are *“the beliefs that determine the individual’s behavior toward the state in which he or she lives. They include belonging, loyalty, and democracy” (Ben Shams, 2017).*

They have also been defined as *“a set of judgments and standards in which members of society believe, expressing their love for and pride in their homeland, as well as their exercise of rights and performance of duties in light of the religious and moral considerations of society” (Al-Qahtani, 1433 AH).*

Accordingly, citizenship values refer to a set of standards and principles that shape the relationship between individuals and the political community. They guide individual behavior through forms of civic and political participation, enabling individuals to fulfill their responsibilities and duties while exercising their rights in pursuit of a dignified civic life.

Facebook and Citizenship Values

The Internet is a scientific encyclopedia that provides services to users across a wide range of fields, including scientific research and business activities. While it offers significant advantages, it may also have negative effects on the attitudes and behaviors of some children and young people. It transmits information, concepts, and knowledge that may contribute to personal development and social advancement, but it may also expose users to misleading content and information that conflict with established social and moral values. In addition, concerns have been raised regarding identity intrusion, the destabilization of beliefs, and various forms of intellectual influence in digital environments (Fouada, 2011).

The risk of transmitting values, cultures, and beliefs disconnected from local realities has become increasingly visible as young people spend more time interacting within digital environments. This development has contributed to the emergence of a new understanding of citizenship that begins within virtual spaces. In this context, citizenship has become “electronic,” expressions of attachment to the homeland have increasingly taken digital forms, and participation in public affairs has become closely associated with interaction through online platforms (Djaidour, 2016).

Digital citizenship, associated with John Perry Barlow's vision of a borderless digital environment, is defined as *“a set of values followed in the optimal and positive use of technological tools needed by school students, citizens, regardless of their age groups and cultural levels, whether young or old, in order to*

contribute to the advancement of their homelands and protect them from the misuse of such tools” (Al-Tawalbeh, 2017).

Citizenship, in its contemporary digital form, evolves alongside the development of the Internet and its services, including the web, file transfer systems, e-commerce, and electronic communication. It is *“linked to the digital revolution that accompanies it. As a result of interactions among Internet citizens and the exchange of information and ideas, new mental visions, ways of thinking, and behavioral patterns have emerged that differ from those defined by citizenship values within national territories. It also paves the way for the adoption of new and integrated standards and regulations that are not based on law but on continuous interpretation and inaccurate information. Consequently, it affects citizens’ behavior and leads to the emergence of cyberterrorism. This new culture, which highlights electronic citizenship, is capable of obstructing the state’s vision in strengthening citizenship values to confront locally and globally posed challenges, foremost among them combating terrorism” (Zaher, 2015, p. 10).*

From this perspective, strengthening awareness of digital citizenship contributes to reinforcing responsible online behavior, enhancing civic awareness, and supporting constructive engagement within digital spaces.

The objectives of digital citizenship include establishing a comprehensive framework for fostering safe, ethical, and responsible technology use across different age groups. Its primary purpose is to promote awareness of digital citizenship, improve electronic security, and reduce the negative consequences associated with inappropriate Internet use. It also provides practical guidance that helps individuals navigate digital environments safely and effectively (Al-Maleh, 2017).

In addition, this framework encourages a balanced digital culture in which freedom of expression is accompanied by responsibility, mutual respect, and ethical conduct. It promotes self-regulation and conscious digital behavior grounded in societal values and accepted moral principles. These objectives collectively contribute to the creation of a safe and constructive digital communication environment.

Media play an important role in shaping public opinion regarding both public and private issues. Through various communication channels, media disseminate messages in written, audio, visual, and mixed formats. Technological developments have significantly expanded these channels beyond traditional forms of communication. Today, information, videos, comments, and interactive content circulate through diverse digital platforms. Among the most prominent of these platforms is Facebook, which is used by individuals of different age groups for entertainment, education, communication, and the acquisition of positive values.

Within this framework, Facebook may contribute to the promotion of citizenship values by transforming university students from passive recipients of information into active participants in

digital communication. As an interactive platform, it enables users to exchange information, express opinions on public issues, and engage in discussions related to social and political matters. Such interactions may contribute to the development of democratic awareness and civic engagement.

The platform may also serve as a space for cultural transmission and identity formation. Through awareness campaigns and educational content, Facebook can facilitate the dissemination of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage, thereby strengthening awareness of national identity and collective belonging. Digital communication tools, symbolic representations, and cultural narratives shared through the platform may further contribute to preserving and promoting societal heritage.

Ultimately, these forms of interaction may support the development of civic responsibility, loyalty, and attachment to the community. By providing opportunities for dialogue, participation, and engagement, Facebook can strengthen students' sense of belonging and encourage greater involvement in addressing community concerns and contributing to social development.

Method and Data Collection Instrument

Method refers to the procedures through which data are collected, analyzed, compared, interpreted, and organized in order to reach scientifically acceptable conclusions and generalizations (Amer, 2002).

This study falls within the category of descriptive research because it seeks to identify the role of Facebook in developing and strengthening citizenship values among university students. The study adopted the sample survey method, which combines description with quantitative and qualitative interpretation of the phenomenon under investigation.

The questionnaire served as the primary data collection instrument. It consisted of a set of questions administered to the study participants in order to obtain the information required to address the research objectives and hypotheses. The instrument was designed based on the research problem, research questions, objectives, and hypotheses.

The final questionnaire contained sixteen (16) items organized into two main sections, with eight (8) items allocated to each section.

Section One

Continuous use of Facebook develops democratic values among university students. This section included eight questions.

Section Two

The information provided by Facebook reinforces the sense of belonging among university students. This section included eight questions.

Research Sample

A sample is a limited portion of the research population selected either randomly or systematically. It represents the starting point from which the study proceeds. The term itself refers to the process of selecting or designating a specific element “*from the research population for the purpose of scientific investigation*” (Zerouani, 2002, p. 267).

The study was conducted on a population of 292 first- and second-year Master’s students from all specializations within the Department of Social Sciences at the University of 20 August 1955, Skikda. These specializations included sociology of communication, sociology of education, sociology of deviance and crime, and urban sociology. The sample was selected using a simple random sampling method with a sampling ratio of 20%. The final sample consisted of 58 students, including 15 males and 43 females.

Main Findings and Results

The Use of Facebook in Developing Democratic Values

The findings on Facebook use indicate that 37.93% of respondents use the platform for less than three hours per day, while the same percentage reported using it for more than five hours daily. Five respondents indicated that their use occasionally falls below one hour per day. These findings suggest a strong attachment to digital environments, where students seek information, knowledge, communication, and entertainment.

The gratifications obtained through Facebook use varied across several dimensions. Social gratifications ranked first (42.68%), followed by cultural gratifications (36.58%), religious gratifications (9.76%), and sports-related gratifications (4.88%). These results suggest that Facebook provides opportunities for social interaction and relationship building beyond the limitations imposed by physical environments.

Regarding the dissemination of positive values, respondents indicated that Facebook contributes to the spread of social, national, political, and legal values at varying levels. National values ranked second after social values, with 35.71% of respondents identifying them as prominent. The values most frequently reinforced through Facebook use included peaceful dialogue (50%), respect for the opinions of others (21.43%), rejection of racism (21.43%), and commitment to laws and regulations (7.14%).

These findings indicate that Facebook content may contribute to raising awareness of the importance of adhering to these values. The platform also appears to encourage freedom of expression, as reported by 48.87% of respondents. In addition, students indicated that Facebook contributes to social and political engagement through continuous exposure to public issues and debates.

Concerning whether Facebook encourages fanaticism, 56.90% of respondents stated that it does not, whereas 37.93% indicated that such content appears occasionally. Only 5.17% believed that Facebook consistently promotes fanaticism.

The results further show that 60.34% of respondents believe that Facebook contributes to the consolidation of democratic values, while 27.59% reported that it does so occasionally. Students indicated that Facebook helps them develop contemporary understandings of democracy through the exchange of ideas and opinions (43.11%), exposure to democratic cultures in other societies (22.41%), visual content promoting democratic values (17.24%), and content encouraging freedom of expression and rejection of fanaticism (17.24%).

Overall, the findings support the proposition that continuous Facebook use contributes to the development of democratic values among university students. Consequently, the first hypothesis was confirmed.

University students demonstrate a high level of engagement with Facebook, spending considerable time on the platform daily. This pattern highlights the central role Facebook occupies within contemporary youth communication practices.

The platform satisfies a variety of social, cultural, entertainment, and informational needs. Its diverse content environment allows students to engage with topics relevant to their interests while maintaining continuous interaction with broader social networks.

The findings further indicate that Facebook contributes to the dissemination of positive values among university students by providing content associated with social, national, and historical issues. Such content may support the development of civic awareness and social responsibility.

Continuous interaction with the platform also appears to reinforce democratic values, particularly those related to dialogue, tolerance, cooperation, and respect for differing viewpoints. These values are important components of civic participation and democratic culture.

Through the circulation of information, discussions, and public-interest content, Facebook may encourage greater awareness of social and political issues. The platform therefore functions as a digital space in which students can exchange perspectives and engage with matters relevant to public life.

Finally, Facebook contributes to students' understanding of democratic principles through exposure to diverse viewpoints, visual materials, and public discussions that encourage participation and civic engagement.

The Information Provided by Facebook and the Reinforcement of Students' Sense of Belonging

The findings indicate that the information available on Facebook is diverse and widely used by students. This was confirmed by 67.24% of respondents. The information obtained from the platform includes social information (43.53%), national information (29.41%), historical information (17.65%), political information (5.88%), and scientific information (3.53%).

These findings suggest that communication, acquaintance, and access to current information constitute major motivations for Facebook use among students. The predominance of social information may reflect the importance students attach to interpersonal interaction within digital environments.

At the same time, trust in online information remains moderate. While 31.04% of respondents stated that they consistently trust information published on Facebook, 51.72% indicated that they trust such information only occasionally.

Among the national values acquired through Facebook content, respondents reported pride in religion (37.88%), pride in history (30.30%), pride in language (16.67%), and pride in ethnicity (15.15%). These findings suggest that Facebook may contribute to strengthening awareness of cultural and historical heritage.

Furthermore, 48.28% of respondents stated that information published on Facebook consistently promotes love of the homeland through content that encourages positive attitudes toward society and collective identity. Many respondents therefore perceive Facebook not only as a source of entertainment but also as a platform that promotes adherence to social customs and traditions. This view was expressed by 51.73% of respondents. Meanwhile, 34.48% indicated that Facebook content occasionally encourages departure from certain customs and traditions.

The findings also show that content commemorating national figures and historical sacrifices contributes to strengthening pride in national history and reinforcing values associated with dedication and service to the homeland. Such values appear particularly visible during national and religious occasions, although they remain present throughout the year.

A strengthened sense of belonging contributes to the formation of a personality characterized by loyalty and attachment to the homeland. This perception was reported by 51.70% of respondents.

Students indicated that their knowledge of national history is developed through several forms of Facebook content, including historical images and videos (31.03%), posts and articles related to colonialism and resistance (27.59%), content highlighting national and historical figures (25.87%), and seminars presenting documented historical information (15.51%).

Based on these findings, several recommendations emerge. First, additional academic research should be conducted to examine Facebook and related digital phenomena, particularly regarding their influence on civic awareness and citizenship values.

Second, awareness initiatives targeting university students should be strengthened, given their important role in social development and civic engagement.

Third, greater attention should be directed toward monitoring harmful digital content that may undermine positive social values or contribute to the spread of misinformation.

Finally, appropriate legal and regulatory mechanisms should be strengthened to address the dissemination of harmful rumors and misleading information that may negatively affect social cohesion. The findings confirm that the information provided through Facebook contributes to reinforcing the sense of belonging among university students. Accordingly, the second hypothesis was confirmed.

Conclusion

Facebook plays an important role within contemporary social environments by providing university students with access to diverse forms of information, news, and public discussions. Through this continuous flow of content, students are exposed to issues related to their society and are given opportunities to develop informed perspectives on social, cultural, and civic matters.

The findings of this study indicate that Facebook contributes to strengthening citizenship values among university students. The platform facilitates the dissemination of content associated with loyalty, belonging, civic responsibility, and social participation. In addition, it supports the development of democratic awareness by exposing students to discussions, viewpoints, and information that encourage engagement with public affairs and promote understanding of democratic principles.

The results further suggest that Facebook serves as a digital environment through which students reinforce their sense of belonging and develop greater awareness of national, social, and cultural issues. Consequently, the platform may contribute to the formation of civic attitudes that encourage participation, responsibility, and constructive interaction within society.

Based on these findings, several recommendations can be proposed. First, further academic research should be encouraged to examine Facebook and related digital phenomena, particularly with regard to their influence on citizenship values, civic participation, and democratic awareness among university students.

Second, awareness programs aimed at university students should be strengthened in order to promote responsible and informed use of social media platforms. Such initiatives can contribute to maximizing the educational and civic benefits associated with digital communication technologies.

Third, greater attention should be devoted to monitoring harmful online content and addressing forms of misinformation that may negatively affect social cohesion and civic awareness. Efforts in this area should be implemented in accordance with legal and ethical principles while respecting responsible digital participation.

Finally, appropriate legal and regulatory measures should be reinforced to reduce the spread of false information and harmful rumors that may adversely affect social stability and public trust. Overall, the study concludes that Facebook functions not only as a communication platform but also as a significant social space that may contribute to the promotion of citizenship values, democratic awareness, and a sense of belonging among university students.

Author Contributions

Hebhoub Nadjiba and Lyazid Mokadem contributed jointly to the conceptualization of the study, research design, data collection and analysis, interpretation of the findings, drafting of the manuscript, and critical revision of the text. Both authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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