ABSTRACT

PALESTINIAN FACEBOOK GROUPS: THEIR USES AND GRATIFICATIONS

by: Lina Jarad

Social networking sites such as Facebook are changing the way people interact and represent themselves. Moreover, Facebook is being used by scholars and journalists in gathering study and news stories as it is a much faster approach than traditional media. However, no research has evaluated Facebook and its use by marginalized groups such as Palestinians. Therefore the current study is conducted to examine a specific tool on Facebook—Facebook groups, and the needs and satisfactions this tool brings to Palestinians in their political struggle. Drawing on the Uses and Gratifications Theory, this study will analyze Palestinians’ membership in Palestinian Facebook groups and look for differences in use between Palestinians residing at home, and in diaspora.
PALESTINIAN FACEBOOK GROUPS:
THEIR USES AND GRATIFICATIONS

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By
Lina Jarad
Miami University
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Advisor: ________________________________
Dr. James Patterson

Reader: ________________________________
Dr. Jim Cherney

Reader: ________________________________
Dr. Stephanie Rollie
# Table of Contents

Introduction..................................................................................................................... 1  
Chapter I: Literature Review .......................................................................................... 2  
  Arab and Palestinians’ Use of Media.......................................................................... 3  
    Arabs’ Use of Media ........................................................................................... 3  
    Palestinians’ Use of Media ................................................................................. 5  
Social Networking Sites................................................................................................... 8  
    Overview ............................................................................................................. 8  
    Facebook Groups .............................................................................................. 12  
Uses and Gratifications................................................................................................... 14  
    Uses and Gratifications: Background ................................................................ 14  
    Uses and Gratifications: Technology and Theory Development ....................... 15  
Chapter 2: Methodology ............................................................................................... 17  
  Sample ..................................................................................................................... 17  
  Measures .................................................................................................................. 19  
Chapter 3: Results.......................................................................................................... 20  
Chapter 4: Discussion ................................................................................................... 26  
  Introduction ............................................................................................................. 26  
  Research Findings and Implications ..................................................................... 26  
  Limitations .............................................................................................................. 34  
  Future Research ..................................................................................................... 34  
  Conclusion .............................................................................................................. 35  
References.................................................................................................................... 36  
APPENDIX A............................................................................................................... 41  
  Survey Invitation Letter ......................................................................................... 41  
APPENDIX B ............................................................................................................... 42  
  Survey ..................................................................................................................... 42  
Appendix C ................................................................................................................... 46  
  Debriefing page...................................................................................................... 46
List of tables

Table 1: Topics ......................................................................................................................... 21
Table 2: Needs .......................................................................................................................... 23
Table 3: Information ............................................................................................................... 23
Table 4: Identity Gratifications .............................................................................................. 24
Table 5: Social Interaction Gratifications ............................................................................. 25
Table 6: Value of Palestinian Facebook Groups ................................................................. 25
List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>Place of Residence</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>Age Distribution</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Introduction

The increased usage of the Internet as a means of communication is changing the way people interact, network, and represent themselves. Many studies on immigrants (Staeheli et al, 2002), and geographically dispersed communities (Nassar, 2002; Hanafi, 2005) have focused on the use of internet by such groups in narrating their stories, or advocating their issues.

More specifically, social networking websites like Facebook are rapidly becoming more popular and are being used not only for connecting with friends and family, but also as a means for advocating political, religious, and social interests. Social networking sites are also being used as a marketplace, music exchange, and as a tool for meeting new people. Frequently Facebook users are invited by their ‘Facebook friends’ to join groups that they created or found interesting that contain specific themes. Users organize Facebook groups to discuss everything from political and social issues, to sport teams and literature. (www.facebook.com, 2008).

This study will analyze Palestinians’ group membership on Facebook based on the Uses and Gratifications Theory. The analysis will look at the purposes and satisfaction Palestinians achieve by joining these groups. The study will also compare group membership between Palestinians residing at home, and those outside Palestine, to examine differences in Facebook group use.

This research was based on the Uses and Gratification communication theory which focuses on why people use specific media to satisfy social or psychological needs. The literature will include three sections: Arabs and Palestinians’ use of media, social networking sites, and the Uses and Gratifications theory.

An online survey was used in this research study. The population for study will consist of all Facebook groups relating to Palestine. ‘Palestine’, ‘Gaza’, and ‘Jerusalem’ will be used as the search terms in the Facebook search box. Since there are currently more than five hundred groups that include one and/or all of these words in their titles, only groups that are created by Palestinians/Arabs will be included.

The study adds to the body of knowledge that applies Uses and Gratifications
Theory to internet use. It will attempt to provide valuable information on how new forms of media, like Facebook might have an effect on marginalized people’s communication and in preserving of their identity. It will also study if Palestinians’ use of Facebook is similar to their use of other forms of media. In addition the study will attempt at studying whether media use, and social and political attitudes are different between Palestinians living at home and those living in foreign countries. This is important in furthering research about Palestinians’ identity representation through new forms of media, at home and the diaspora.
Chapter I: Literature Review

Arab and Palestinians’ Media Use

Arabs’ Use of Media

Developments in media and the introduction of the Internet have deeply changed public and mass communication in the Arab world. In the pre-Internet era, Arabs had only limited channels of public communication, which were strictly government controlled in most cases. That explains why Arab governments have, for years, resisted the establishment of Internet networks in their countries, as they have felt that this new kind of media would change the nature of communication in Arab countries (Bakkar, 2006). Taraki (2007) discusses that Internet developments enhanced the ability of Middle East scholars to act as “public intellectuals” as expressing themselves on issues of public concerns. Some of the most common issues that scholars write about on the Internet include: Islam, the war on terror, the Palestine question, sexuality, and Zionism (Taraki, 2007).

The traditional forms of media such as television and print focused on the issue of Arab women’s status and their portrayal in the media. Sakr (2002) has done extensive research on Arab women’s activism and their use of various media like satellite TV, and the Internet to place their voices. One question that Sakr (2002) aimed to answer is “not whether satellite television and the Internet in Arab countries have led to an increase in the availability of information about women. Instead, the question is whether it has contributed to a qualitative change in media treatment of women’s status” (823). One of her interviewees, a representative of the new woman research center in Egypt, told Sakr that in previous years when Arab women raised issues such as violence against women, they were accused of presenting a false and distorted image of women.

Honor crimes (involving the murder or attempted murder of a woman alleged to have besmirched their family’s reputation by being found in the company of an unrelated male) is one of the central issues Arab women deal with in trying to change their status in the Arab society. Several Jordanian, Moroccan, and Tunisian female journalists have written newspaper reports, or developed T.V. shows covering the issue of honor crimes and petitioning their governments to change their laws that protect males who engage in
such crimes (Sakr, 2002). While laws have not changed, these women have spoken out and created awareness of the issue (Sakr, 2002).

Taking a different direction in media use, Sakr (2002) reports that Palestinian women mainly used the early forms of media to promote equal rights for women in politics. Being involved in political parties, they joined forces in the 1990s concerned with the single issue of equal rights for women. They learned to make their voices heard in the local and international media on issues such as adequate representation for women on the Palestinian legislative council. Their coalition established regular slots in the local audiovisual and print media, with a weekly 55-minute primetime television program called Bisaraha (which means frankly). In this way women were able to influence the institution-building initiated in the wake of the 1993 Israeli-Palestinian Oslo Peace Accords (Sakr, 2002).

As the Internet started to be more frequently used in 2001 and after, studies by Al-Hail (2005) and Sakr (2002) discussed how Arab women reported the Internet to facilitate mobilization in times of crisis, allowing active participation in policy debates, circulation of new perspectives, and as a convenient window on the world in a male-dominated society. In Al-Hail’s (2005) study, Qatari women viewed the Internet (especially the use of e-mail) as “increasingly becoming an agency for cultural and social change” as it has brought an enormous change in their social habits and thinking, as well as being a means for escapism and promoting ideas among other females (p. 99).

While Qatari women focus on using e-mail, Egyptian women have been increasingly reported to use the Internet tool of blogging. An article titled “Egypt women blog for their rights” discussed how young Egyptian women are blogging to “beat the censorship and fight for equality” (www.bbc.com, 2009). Due to the anonymity offered by the Internet, Egyptian women are discussing political and cultural issues, as well as posting personal stories. The report also discussed how these blogs make collaboration on social issues possible between men and women, as well as facilitating the discussion of taboo subjects such as women’s harassment.

There is minimum research found on the use of Arabs in general (both males and females) of the Internet. A study by Staeheli et al (2002) focused on immigrants’ Internet use and the spaces of politics. Their study focused on immigrants in the United States and
one group they focused on is the Arabs. The two websites they focused on are Al-Awda (the return) and Arabica Café. The study concluded that Arabs in the United States focus their Internet use on topics related to Arab culture and politics; specifically the Palestinian case and the right of return for Palestinian refugees. They argued that Arabs use these websites for two reasons: to use the political process in one country to influence events in another country (being the U.S), or as an indication as a refusal of assimilation as they appeared to be less concerned with integration with the American society (Staeheili et al, 2002).

Palestinians’ Use of Media

The issues of refugees, the right of return, the homeland, resistance, and identity are the most common topics Palestinians narrate about in various literary venues, dance, film, and new forms of media such as the Internet (Nassar, 2002). In order to understand the significance of these issues to Palestinians it is important to first mention some of the political background. Since the creation of Israel in 1948 on Palestinian land and its result in the appropriation of 77% of Palestinian land, the magnitude of migration has been increasing (Hanafi, 2005; Khoury-Machool, 2007). Estimates put the Palestinian refugee population (those whose houses were in what is called Israel today, and who currently live in the West Bank, Gaza, neighboring Arab countries, or outside the Arab world) at approximately seven million in 2007 (www.cia.gov). During the last Israeli invasion of the West Bank (in 2000-2005) “Israel has been demonstrating invincible military powers mainly targeting Palestinian refugee camps. In part, this constitutes the Israeli long term undeclared agenda to erase the refugee camps. In other words no refugee camps, no memory of past lost home, thus no right of return” (Nassar, 2002, p.4). In spite of a number of international human rights and United Nations resolutions granting the displaced Palestinians the right of return over the last 61 years, it has been consistently denied by Israel and its western allies (Nassar, 2002). Today, the “right of return” to Palestinians simply means a return to a national soil—The West Bank and Gaza, rather than the return to the 1948 homes (Nassar, 2002). Thus, part of the struggle for the self-determination by Palestinians has been to tell the truth about their experiences as Palestinians across geographical barriers.
Many of the early writings and films aimed to document the Palestinian tragedy and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A documentary film produced in 1999, by the Palestinian film maker Najwa Najjar aimed at fighting back some Israeli claims that Palestine did not exist historically, Palestinians had no communal identity, and thus no national rights. In her film she documents Palestinian social life in Yaffa before 1948 through the story of a Christian couple who lived there showing the effect of the 1948 war and exile on them. Nassar (2002) argues that through visual diaspora (the use films, photographs, and the Internet) the Palestinians are still holding to a memory of a lost home and caught in the past by holding the reminiscent of home and objects brought from home.

In her research of Internet use, Nassar (2002) focused on Palestinian websites that are created by Palestinians, and/or Palestinian refugees residing in the West Bank and Gaza but their use is not limited to Palestinians living in Palestine. Some of the websites that were studied include: Al-Shaml (reunion) www.shaml.org, Miftah (key) www.miftah.org, and Al-Awda (return) www.al-awda.org, “they all without exception advocate the right of return…thus giving a collective identity to the displaced Palestinians, moreover, they are defying the myth that Palestine never existed” (Nassar, 2002, p.9). Many of these websites tend to be very informative and to provide maps, statistics, data, locations, images, jobs, and press releases.

Hanafi (2005) also studied the issue of the Palestinian use of media and was interested in the issue of “geography” and Palestinian identity and how “the continuing difficulty of finding a solution to the physical return of the Palestinian diaspora to the homeland is increasingly being addressed in the digital realm by the rise of virtual communities” (Hanafi, 2005, p.581). One specific virtual community that was studied is PALESTA (Palestinian Scientists and Technologist Abroad). PALESTA is an Internet based network established to harness the scientific and technological knowledge of expatriate professionals for the benefit of development efforts in Palestine. Their goals are to resolve problems vital to the Palestinian economic development, keep people informed about issues at home, and identify and initiate projects that will contribute to the Palestinian development. Most of the members of PALESTA are Palestinians living in Europe or the United states and who hold foreign passports. Due to the fact that Israel
controls the borders, Palestinian holders of foreign passports (compared to refugees who
don’t hold any passports) are still denied the right of return, but allowed a only 3-month
tourist visa to the West Bank (Hanafi, 2005).

In light of the serious difficulty of free movement for these Palestinians, the
PALESTA discussion list is seen as a very important tool for these members as a means
of opening a dialogue between members who are geographically distant in a cost
effective manner (Hanafi, 2005). Hanafi (2005) argues that “Internet networking does not
suggest the ‘end of geography’ but rather a kind of ‘reshaping of geography’. Internet
networking accomplishes this ‘reshaping’ by simultaneously connecting various
dispersed communities not only to their center but also to each other-periphery to
periphery” (Hanafi, 2005, p.581). Meyer et al (1999) also argue that the network has
generated a kind of “collective self consciousnesses” for a worldwide professional
expatriate community (p. 7).

As blogs and social networking sites are becoming very popular tools of
expression among people worldwide, a search was done on Palestinian blogs to see
whether their themes and topics of discussion were consistent with what researchers like
Nassar (2002) and Hanafi (2005) have found about Palestinians’ use of media. Some of
these blogs included: Muslimah Media Watch www.muslimahmediawatch.org, A Mother
From Gaza http://a-mother-from-gaza.blogspot.com, A Voice From Gaza http://a-voice-
from-gaza.blogspot.com, Palestine Blogs http://palestineblogs.net, From Gaza With Love
http://fromgaza.blogspot.com, and Life Must Go On In Gaza and Sderot http://gaza-
sderot.blogspot.com.

Automatically, and just from some blog titles, one can see that the issue of Gaza is
common. Gaza is a part of a Palestinian territory that was occupied by Israel until 2005,
and more recently invaded again in late 2008. The situation in Gaza has gained a lot of
media attention, since there were more than 1100 Palestinians reported dead, and 5000
injured in the span of few months between December 2008, and January 2009 (Al-
Jazeera, 2009). Also, many human rights organizations have placed concern of Israel’s
use of some weapons that violate international law (www.bbc.com, 2009). The blogs
from/on Gaza focus on Israel’s actions against civilians and children, the physical and
psychological damage caused by Israel, as well as providing daily updates on the
situation and life in Gaza. Other Palestinian blogs focused on issues including: women’s health, women’s image in the media, Islam phobia, displacement and identity, and political news about the situation in Palestine.

One interesting blog that is worth discussing is “Life must go on in Gaza and Sderot”. This blog is written by both a Palestinian and an Israeli, as an effort to provide an unbiased reporting of the life in Gaza and Sderot (an Israeli village next to Gaza). This could indicate that there might be some sort of collaboration between Israelis and Palestinians over the Internet in an effort to help establish peace in the region.

Bakkar (2006) explains that over the Internet, people have a large quantity of channels to express themselves to be heard, and to answer to other voices. He specifically discusses the social networking site Facebook, and how the postings on this website are not filtered through governments since the website is American, thus encouraging Arabs to freely express themselves. As Nassar (2002) argues that Palestinians of today are willing to sacrifice to maintain the Palestinian narrative alive despite all the efforts to deny them that right, the question is will Palestinians use new venues of media like SNS, specifically Facebook, to continue their efforts in being heard? And do they feel they can express themselves better on topics that are taboo since Facebook is not monitored by their government? In order for communications scholars to better understand importance issues that Palestinians communicate to the world and are interested in exchanging with others the following research question is proposed:

RQ1: What are the topics Palestinians mostly discuss on the internet using Palestinian Facebook Groups?

Social Networking Sites

Overview

In recent years the Internet has arguably become an important medium in today’s society. From early company e-mail systems to the World Wide Web’s news, marketing, dating, and blogging sites, the Internet and its applications are attracting many citizens, professionals, and researchers. More specifically, social networking sites (SNSs) are increasingly attracting the attention of researchers who are intrigued by their
affordances and reach (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). The current section of the literature review will focus on explaining the nature and background of SNSs (especially Facebook), their popularity, and their effects on users.

Since their introduction, SNSs have attracted millions of users who integrate these sites into their lives. Bebo, Linked-in, My Space, Facebook, Friendster, and Orkut are only a few names of the major SNSs that are attracting more and more people on a daily basis (Brooks, 2008). Social networking sites are web-based services that allow individuals to create online profiles through a specifically identified Facebook network that could be based on a university of attendance, city of residence, or work place. These profiles can be completely public or semi-public. Public profiles usually display all the user’s profile sections including photos, interests, groups, and special applications. Semi-public profiles usually only display users’ basic information like name, network affiliations, groups, and some photos. Users then create a list of friends (or other users) with whom they share a connection. Individuals can then communicate and keep track of users or others with whom they have connected.

While their technological features are fairly similar, the designs, applications and purposes are varied (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Some sites are created for strangers to connect based on shared interests like Match.com, while others support the maintenance of preexisting social networks like MySpace (the later could also connect strangers like friends-of-friends). In addition, some SNSs cater to diverse audiences, while others attract people based on a common language, sexual orientation, or religious beliefs. Sites also differ in the way they incorporate communication tools like photo/video sharing, mobile connection, blogging, and marketplaces.

All social networking sites share a “backbone [that] consists of visible profiles that display an articulated list of friends” (Boyd & Ellison, 2008, p. 211). When a user joins one of these SNSs he or she is asked to fill out a form containing a list of questions that usually include descriptions of one’s age, location, and interests. The answers to these questions then generate the user’s profile which is then viewable to all users of that specific social networking site. This is a default setting; however, some SNSs have technological features that enable their users to make their profile viewable only by chosen members/friends. In addition, most SNSs provide a mechanism for users to leave
messages on their friends’ profiles in a form of “wall posts” or “comments.” What is worth mentioning is that the term “friends” is misleading since the connection between users does not necessarily mean friendship in the traditional sense and the reasons people connect on these sites are varied (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Some people become “friends” as in the relationship between musical figures, or political figures and their fans, or sometimes merely based on attraction.

As noted in Boyd and Ellison’s (2008) research, SixDegrees.com was the first recognizable SNS that launched in 1997. While the site attracted millions of users, it failed to become a sustainable business and the service was closed in 2000. Based on a personal communication between Boyd & Ellison, and the founder of SixDegrees, the founder believed that the failure was because the site was “simply ahead of its time” (Boyd & Ellison, 2008, p. 214). After SixDegrees failed, several sites were launched or refashioned as a SNS like LiveJournal, the Korean site Cyworld, and the Swedish LunarStorm which contained friend lists and journal/diary pages. In 2001, a new wave of SNSs sharing a business networking theme began to appear. Some of these sites include Ryze.com, Tribe.net, LinkedIn, and Friendster. Some of these sites never acquired popularity while others grew attractive to business services, with Friendster left as the ‘most significant’ of all in the years to follow (Boyd & Ellison, 2008).

In 2003 MySpace began competing with SNSs like Friendster.com and Xanga.com. According to the MySpace co-founder Tom Anderson (in Boyd & Ellison, 2008), “the founders wanted to attract estranged Friendster users” (Boyd & Ellison, 2008, p. 216). MySpace became extremely popular after a rumor emerged that Friendster would adopt a fee-based system that led its users to join an alternative SNS. MySpace was mainly popular within rock bands that were expelled from Friendster for failing to comply with profile regulations. Other criteria that attracted users to MySpace included the relationship created between bands and fans, the regular adding of features based on user demands, and users’ ability to personalize their pages (Boyd & Ellison, 2008).

Facebook –today’s most popular SNS and 6th most visited website worldwide, was established in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg (Hoffman, 2008). Unlike other SNSs, Facebook was designed as a college network only available to Harvard University students possessing Harvard University email addresses. As Facebook began supporting
other schools, users were still required to have a valid university email address. However, in 2005 Facebook expanded to include high school students, professionals in corporate networks, and eventually, everyone (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Facebook’s unique feature that distinguishes it from other SNSs is the ability for outside developers to build ‘applications’ which allow users to perform many tasks all at the same site. These applications include: online games, personality tests, videos, and creating events, advertisements, and marketplaces (Facebook, 2008).

Friendster, MySpace, and Facebook are coined under the category of friend networking sites (FNSs). Friend networking sites have specifically attracted many scholars since they attract younger generations who comprise the majority of online populations. According to Pew Internet & American Life’s organization website (2002) eighteen to twenty nine year olds make up 78% of the online population. Benefits of SNSs, especially FNSs, have been proven to affect people both on the personal and professional level.

Several studies have examined the personal benefits from using friend networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook and found that the benefits included: satisfying many social, personal, cognitive, affective, and escapist needs mentioned in the earlier section (Donathan & Boyd, 2004, Skog, 2005, Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007, and Valkenburg, Peter, & Schouten, 2006). More specifically, users experience increased self esteem, enhancement of self-presentation, identity formation, maintaining friendships, finding old friends, social interaction, entertainment, and keeping updated with current events.

In regards to benefits on the professional level, research documented that many researchers and journalists benefit from SNSs and FNSs since they provide rich sources of naturalistic behavioral data (Golder, Wilkinson, & Huberman, 2007; Gross & Acquisti 2005, Lenhart & Madden, 2007; and Wilson, 2008). Scholars have used SNSs in studying impression management behaviors, trust relations, privacy and behavior, and identity shaping through cyber space (Wilson, 2008; and Stafford, 2003). Journalists have also gained from SNSs since they provide cheaper and easier ways of finding sources, and large numbers of participants in reporting on different issues (Brooks, 2008).
Facebook Groups

As mentioned earlier, Facebook is ranked the sixth most popular website on the Internet, and the first most popular social networking site. Westling (2007) argued that Facebook is a better means for achieving a public sphere than anything that has come before it online:

The sheer fact that over half the student population at most universities are part of the network as well as millions of other people around the world demonstrates the utility of Facebook as an arena for communication. There is no other online community that connects members of real-world communities (geographic, ideological, or otherwise) in such an effective way (p. 4).

Westling (2007) focused his study on Facebook’s affect on political communication, utilizing the study of the upcoming 2008 election campaigns and their use of Facebook as a place for ‘conversation’ with the American people.

While the ‘application’ feature mentioned previously is one that distinguishes Facebook from other SNSs, the ‘groups’ is another feature unique to Facebook. This feature has a home page displaying descriptions, pictures, members’ names, and a wall (the message board) and it allows people from different backgrounds to come together in support of a common interest, belief, a cause, or a gathering. Groups are either public with open membership (anyone can join), public with closed membership (only those invited to join can join), or private (public can not see or find in a search). Group administrators can send out a message to all of the group members, but everyone can post messages, videos, or photos to the discussion board. The group is like a virtual community, within Facebook, where users can discuss a given topic (Johnson, 2008).

The themes of Facebook groups include: business (marketing, real estate, general), common interests (pets, politics, food and drink, sexuality, wine), entertainment and arts (dance, night live, movies), geography (countries, transportation), Internet and technology (cyberculture, gadgets, news), music (jazz, classical, international), organizations (academic, community, professional, political), sports and recreation (cheerleading, fantasy sports, professional), and student groups (abroad, clubs, religious, study groups). Below are some samples of group names:

Graduate Students of Color
From the title, or group description it is easy to recognize the country of interest that groups is concerned with. In regards to Palestinian groups, there are more than a thousand groups found on Facebook, and from an initial look, the themes seem to be focused on the following issues: common interests, organizations, and countries. Some of the Palestinian group names include:

- Another Voice Palestine
- We Love Palestine
- Jerusalem in Exile
- Palestine is a Country
- Visit Palestine

Groups can be joined by anyone, no matter what network they belong to. Thus Palestinian groups are not strictly joined by Palestinians, but by any members who are simply interested in the group type and or features.

Overall, Facebook groups are a way of sharing and discussing topics of interest in a public arena. One of the few studies that have focused on the group feature of Facebook argued that this feature plays a vital role in political communication:

Politicians can use Facebook to communicate with community members who are willing to listen, but they can not actively impose their messages on anyone. At the same time, community members have the means to express their opinions to political actors and organize to create their own voice if they feel no candidate yet represents their stance. (Westling, 2007, p. 4)

The study at hand will attempt to better understand the uses of this feature for Palestinians, especially because this feature allows free expression of ideas without being
monitored by the government. Since the literature found focuses on Palestinians in Diaspora’s use of media, the following research question is posed:

RQ2: Do Palestinians residing in Palestine have different reasons for joining Palestinian Facebook groups than Palestinians residing outside?

Uses and Gratifications

Uses and Gratifications: Background

It is common for scholars in the communication discipline to analyze the uses of mass media and study the effects it has on people. The early studies of traditional mass communication research that focused on media effects originate back to the 1940s when scholars studied the short term effects of television programs (Katz & Blumler, 1974). However, these studies did not explore the links between the satisfaction detected from media use and the psychological or sociological needs that were satisfied. Thus, scholars in the 1970s directed their investigations toward how and for what purposes consumers used mass media. These studies were not only conducted in the U.S. but also in Britain, Sweden, Finland, Japan, and Israel (Katz & Blumler, 1974). Studies investigated the needs of media users and then attempted to “trace the extent to which they are gratified by the media or other sources,” while other observed the gratifications first, then attempted to “reconstruct” the needs that were gratified (Katz & Blumler 1974, p. 21).

Uses and Gratifications Theory (U&G) was introduced in 1974 by Katz and Blumler as a response to the traditional mass communication research and it suggests that media users play an active role in both choosing and utilizing the media. According to McQuail (2001) there are three objectives for U&G: First, to explain how mass communication is used to gratify individuals’ needs, second to discover the motives for individuals’ media use, and third to identify the positive and negative consequences of individual media use.

Uses and Gratifications theory argues that the audience is an active rather than a passive member in terms of their involvement with the media. Users of mass media take an active part in the communication process and are goal oriented in their media use. For example, whether they are seeking identification gratification or simply entertainment,
television viewers are selective in terms of the kinds of TV programs they watch in order to satisfy these desires (Griffin, 2000). McQuail (1987) found the following reasons behind why people use media: information seeking, personal identity, integration and social interaction, and entertainment. Information seeking reasons include finding out about current events, self-education, and gaining a sense of security through knowledge. Personal identity reasons include finding reassurance for personal values, finding models of behavior, and gaining insight into oneself. Categories for the integration and social interaction reasons of using media include gaining a sense of belonging, identifying with others, connecting with family and friends, and social empathy. Finally, entertainment reasons include filling time, gaining cultural enjoyment, and sexual arousal.

**Uses and Gratifications: Technology and Theory Development**

As technology evolves, scholars continue to refine the existing theories related to mass media. For years, mass communication scholars have focused extensively on how broadcast and print media affect the public. The introduction of the Internet in the 1980s, and the fact that it has the one of the fastest adoption rate of any other media technology, has led communication theorists to revise traditional theories of mass media in order to keep up with this new communication medium (Stafford, 2003). According to Rice and Williams (1984, p.55) "the new media provide fertile test beds for many of our theories and models."

The U&G has been repeatedly cited as holding promise for the analysis of new media. Many studies have included references to the suitability of U&G for new media research (Williams, Strover and Grant, 1994, Newhagen and Rafaeli, 1996, Morris and Ogan, 1996, and December, 1996). In his article, *Uses and Gratification Theory in the 21st Century*, Ruggiero (2000) asserts that the emergence of computer-mediated communication has revived the significance of U&G. Ruggiero (2000) contends “in fact, uses and gratifications has always provided a cutting-edge theoretical approach in the initial stages of each new mass communications medium: newspapers, radio and television, and now the Internet.” (p. 1) More recently, the uses and gratification approach has been used to study mediated areas such as online interactive advertising
(Roberts & Ko, 2001), Internet services (Stafford, 2003), news gathering (Diddi & LaRose, 2006, and Chung & Yoo, 2006), blogging (Li, 2007) and social networking sites (Raacke & Raacke, 2008, and Yale, 2007).

Social Networking Sites (SNSs) are virtual places where people who share similar interests can meet to discuss and share ideas. Raacke and Raacke (2008) suggest that one way to explore the needs individuals are meeting by using these SNSs is to apply the uses and gratifications theory since it is concerned with how individuals use the media and therefore it emphasizes the importance of the individual. Therefore, the following research question is proposed:

RQ3: What are the reasons Palestinians join Palestinian Facebook groups?
Chapter 2: Methodology

The study examines the reasons Palestinian Facebook members use Facebook groups through the foundations of Katz and Blumler’s (1974) uses and gratifications theory and McQuail’s (1978) four reasons for media use. In order to achieve a deep understanding of the situation and gain wide range of responses, a Facebook based survey was administered from May 14, 2009 to May 25, 2009.

Sample

The population of the study is comprised of participants of Palestinian Facebook groups. The sample was originally intended to include all Palestinian Facebook groups that have 400 or more members. These groups were identified through a search using words like “Palestine”, “Gaza”, and “Jerusalem”; as well as by looking at the names of administrators and their network affiliation. There are 125 Palestinian groups that fit in this category, however, due to Facebook restriction policy on sending messages, the survey was sent to only 52 group administrators requesting them to forward the invitation to their groups members (group administrators have the privilege to send a mass ‘message’—facebook email, to all users with one click). After the survey was closed, the researcher received messages on Facebook indicating that administrators of groups of 5,000 and more members N=16 were unable to send a mass email, thus bringing the number of group administrators that received the survey down to 36. These groups were selected in the order they were found on Facebook and have less than 5000 members.

The survey resulted in 290 participants, of which only 210 were Palestinians and continued with the survey. The number of participants who lived in Palestine was 36, and those living outside were 173, with 1 unidentified.
Figure 1: Place of Residence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Figure 1</strong></td>
<td>36</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>209</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

94 of the participants were males, and 112 females with 4 unidentified.

Figure 2: Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Figure 2</strong></td>
<td>94</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>206</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One hundred and four participants were in the age category of 18-25, 82 were between 26-35, 10 between 36-45, 6 between the ages of 46-55, and 5 above the age of 56. Below is the age distribution chart.
The first question of the survey asked whether the participant is of Palestinian origins since many participants of these groups might be from different nationalities. If the answer was “NO”, then the survey was terminated, if “YES”, it will direct them to the next question.

**Measures**

The survey questions were generated based on McQuail’s (1987) four reasons for media use (information, personal identity, integration and social interaction, and entertainment) that have been largely replicated and complemented in subsequent research. The motives used in this survey were McQuail’s (1987) four general motives and the scale was adapted from a replication of these gratifications that was used by Li (2005) in studying motives of blog writers with a reliability of $\alpha = .65$.

While Li (2005) used a 5-point Likert scale to measure the frequency of topic discussions, I adapted the scale into a 7-point Likert scale, to test for more detailed attitudes with “1” indicating strongly disagree and “7” indicating strongly agree. A 7-point Likert scale gives more variation of people’s thoughts. Li’s (2005) items included some of the following: ‘to keep in touch with family and friends’, ‘because it is a place to publish my self’, ‘to refine my thinking’, and ‘because it is the thing to do’. The framing of the items was modified in
order to fit within Facebook terms. Some of the items included “express my self freely”, “keep connected with friends”, and “I find reassurance of my values”. An additional section of “other reasons” was added in order to see if new gratifications were found.

The Palestinian Facebook group topics were generated based on the literature review on Palestinian’s use of media. I looked at a wide variety of topics and chose to include the ones that are most commonly discussed through various forms of media. These topics included “Palestinian Refugee Right of Return”, “Israel’s Terrorism”, and “Issues of Sexuality”. An open-ended question was added at the end and aimed to specify the answer if participants wanted to add “other information”. Those answers were later coded into the existing topic categories.

See **Appendix B** for survey questions.
Chapter 3: Results

Research question one asked: *What are the topics Palestinians mostly advocate for on Palestinian Facebook Groups?* A list of topics were provided to participants to rate on a 7 point Likert scale, with an option of an open ended “other” to be filled in. The topics were “refugees right of return,” “Israeli-Palestine peace process,” “Palestine heritage,” “Jerusalem the capital of Palestine,” “Israel’s terrorism,” “issues of sexuality,” “Gaza,” “women’s equality rights,” “arts in Palestine,” and “honor killings.”. The topics that received the most interest were “Palestine heritage” (M= 6.11, S.D= 1.33); “Gaza” (M=6.00, S.D= 1.33); “Jerusalem the capital” (M= 5.98, S.D= 1.52); “refugees right of return” (M= 5.95, S.D. = 1.57), and “Israel’s terrorism” (M= 5.84, S.D= 1.67). Below are the full results:

Table 1: Topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heritage</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.11</td>
<td>1.333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaza</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>1.328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerusalem</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.98</td>
<td>1.517</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugees</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.95</td>
<td>1.569</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrorism</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.84</td>
<td>1.671</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.37</td>
<td>1.760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.96</td>
<td>1.837</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.77</td>
<td>2.071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honor</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>2.149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexuality</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>1.999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid N (listwise)</td>
<td>189</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of the “other” topics category, the answers included: sports, non-violent resistance, Palestine’s history, and The Wall.

One-Way ANOVAs were used to test if there was a difference in topic interest between Palestinians living at home and those living abroad. A difference existed for each of the following topics: “peace process”, “Palestine heritage”, “Israel’s terrorism”, and “Gaza”. Palestinians living at home showed significantly less interested in the issue.
of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process than those living outside of Palestine: (F (1,201) = 4.29, p<.05), (M= 4.11) for those living in Palestine compared to a mean of (M= 4.90) for those living outside. Palestinians living at home also showed significantly less interest in the topic of Heritage than those living outside (F (1,199)=5.7, p<.05), (M=5.62) for those living in Palestine and (M=6.2) for those living outside.

For the topic “Israel’s Terrorism” those living at home again showed less significant interest than those living outside ( F(1,196)= 13.11, p<.05) with a mean of (M=4.94) for those living in Palestine and a mean of (M=6.04) for those living outside. Finally, for the “Gaza” topic, those living in Palestine were significantly less interested in advocating the topic than those living outside (F (1,201) = 6.52, p<.05,) the mean for those living in Palestine was (M= 5.49), and for those living outside (M=6.11).

The second research question asked: Do Palestinians residing in Palestine differ in terms of reasons for joining groups from those residing outside of Palestine? The four reasons for use of Facebook groups were “information seeking”, “personal identity”, “integration and social interaction”, and “entertainment”. A category of “other” was also added to test for new motives. To answer RQ2 One-Way ANOVAs were run, and there was significant difference in the categories of “personal identity”, and “entertainment”. Participants living in Palestine showed significantly less interested in the needs of “personal identity” in using Facebook groups as compared to those living outside: (F (1,201) = 7.89, p< .05,) with (M= 4.7) for those living in Palestine, and (M= 5.66) for those residing outside. In terms of “entertainment” needs, group members living in Palestine reported more need for using the groups for entertainment (M= 4.41), than those living outside (F(1,202)= 4.59, p<.05) with a mean of (M= 4.41) for those living in Palestine, and a mean of (M= 3.72) for those living outside.

Research question three asked: What are the reasons Palestinians join Palestinian Facebook groups? When looking at the frequency results of all motives to all Palestinians, the “personal identity” motive had the highest mean (M=5.5, S.D= 1.83), and “information seeking” had the second highest mean of (M=5.2, S.D=1.65).
Table 2: Needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.50</td>
<td>1.830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.20</td>
<td>1.645</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.10</td>
<td>1.660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>1.724</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid N (listwise)</td>
<td>198</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The “other” option yielded responses that were coded and mostly fit under the “integration and social interaction” motive. Some of these answers are noted below:

- Solidarity with Palestine
- Spread the Palestinian story
- Patriotic feelings
- To see that others feel like I do
- Keep contact with friends living in the 48 lands (now Israel)
- Organize rallies and events
- To remember Palestine

When looking at items individually, information seeking motives were mostly gratified by finding photos and videos about Palestine, with a mean of M= (5.95, S.D=1.57), and the second highest one was finding information about events taking place in Palestine with a mean of (M= 5.37, S.D=1.77). The table below shows the information seeking answers in detail:

Table 3: Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Photos and Videos about Palestine</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.95</td>
<td>1.570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events in Palestine</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.37</td>
<td>1.773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events outside Palestine</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.07</td>
<td>1.923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Info related to studies</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>2.011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Info related to work</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>1.908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid N (listwise)</td>
<td>154</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The “other” option resulted in finding information about protests and fundraisers, political activism events, and information about Palestine intellectuals.

In terms of the “personal identity” motive, the means were high for each of the items, with “being able to express freely” having the highest mean of (M=5.33, S.D=1.7).

Table 4: Identity Gratifications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity Gratification</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Express freely</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.33</td>
<td>1.740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reassurance of Personal values</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.02</td>
<td>1.803</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insight into who I am</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.81</td>
<td>1.902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Express self more than in real-life</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>1.947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid N (listwise)</td>
<td>172</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One-Way ANOVA was run to look for difference in terms of residence, there was significant difference for all of the items except “expressing more than in real life situations”. For the item “expressing self freely” the significant difference result between members living in Palestine and those outside was (F(1,190)= 5.81, p<.05). Members living in Palestine do not think they can express themselves freely (M=4.63) on Palestinian Facebook groups as much as those living outside (M=5.46). There was also a difference in the item of “finding reassurance of oneself” as those living in Palestine reported less use of that gratification (M=4.29), than those living outside (M=5.16), F(1,189)= 3.93, p<.05. For the item “gaining an insight into truly who I am” members living in Palestine showed less gratification by this item M=4.19, than those living outside (M=4.93). Other motives were recorded in the “other” category and included: get exposure to other values and ideas, and share personal Palestinian experience.

Finally, for the “integration and social interaction” motive, the item of “gaining a sense of belonging to Palestine” had the highest mean of (M=5.89). The “other” answers included: find people from my origin and traditions, and spread the word about Palestine.
Table 5: Social Interaction Gratifications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stay in touch with friends in Palestine</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.14</td>
<td>1.802</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay in touch with friends outside of Palestine</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.32</td>
<td>1.738</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belonging to Palestine</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.89</td>
<td>1.728</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make new friends</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.83</td>
<td>1.788</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fit in with the FB community</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>1.921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belonging to country of residence (for those living outside)</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>1.956</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid N (listwise)</td>
<td>162</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The last question on the survey dealt with the value of Palestinian Facebook groups to the participants, with a high mean of (M=5.30) for the item “valuable tool for advocating issues related to Palestine”, and next was “I feel I educate others” with a mean of (M=5.08). There was no significant difference in terms of gender or place of residence on these items.

Table 6: Value of Palestinian Facebook Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valuable education</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.30</td>
<td>1.624</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change entertainment</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>1.742</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid N (listwise)</td>
<td>204</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 4: Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to analyze Palestinians’ group membership on Facebook through the Uses and Gratifications theory, and to see if there were differences between those living at home and those living abroad in terms of needs of using Palestinian Facebook groups. In addressing RQ1, which sought to find the topics Palestinians mostly advocate for on Facebook groups, ten topics were provided to participants to rate, and four other topics emerged from an open ended “other” category. RQ2 inquired about the difference in terms of reasons and uses of joining Facebook groups between Palestinians residing at home, and out. Quantitative analysis were performed to answer this question and a difference existed in two reasons, “personal identity”, and “entertainment”, as well as in three of the gratifications received, “express self freely”, “find reassurance of values”, and “gain an insight into truly who I am”. Finally, RQ3 inquired about the general reasons Palestinians join Facebook groups and four reasons were provided with three being more prevailing than the others, these two were “personal identity”, “information seeking”, and “social interaction”.

The section will conclude with explicit implications for those within the Palestinian virtual community, and scholars interested in media studies.

Research Findings and Implications

When discussing their reasons for using Palestinian Facebook groups, Palestinian members are expressing their needs and satisfactions from this media tool. What needs do you have to join Facebook groups? What information do you seek? What do you gain from joining? One theory that can shed light upon these questions is the Uses and Gratifications theory (Katz & Blumler, 1974). The theory posits that people play an active role in choosing and utilizing the media, and studies conducted using this theory investigate the needs for people to use a certain medium and to what extent these needs are gratified.
The four general needs for media use created by McQuail (1978) that were provided to participants to rate were “information seeking”, “personal identity”, “social interaction”, and “entertainment”. Palestinians showed a high need for all first three, with means over (M= 4.0) for each category, with “personal identity” being ranked first. The results show that Palestinians in diaspora had more need of identity when using facebook groups (M= 5.66) than those living in Palestine (M= 4.7). This could be explained in relation to the political situation Palestinians live in. Since the establishment of Israel in 1948, on Palestinian land, and the loss of lands and homes, Palestinians have been struggling to keep their identity clear and collective, especially those living in diaspora. This is natural since many of these Palestinians could be refugees, or disconnected and unable to return to Palestine, but still identify as Palestinians and have the need to show it. In Nassar (2002), and Hanafi’s (2005) studies, the use of websites and virtual communities by Palestinians in diaspora was aiming at one very specific goal, establishing a collective Palestinian identity for the displaced Palestinians who are geographically separated and have a difficulty in finding a solution to the return to the homeland. Some of the explanations that participants had were that by joining Palestinian Facebook groups they can see that others feel like they do, and they can see what other Palestinians are doing to use them as models of behavior.

There were also significant differences in the list of gratifications that applied to the personal identity needs. Palestinians living at home expressed that their need of personal identity was less gratified by joining facebook group than those who live outside in terms of the following items “express self freely,” “find reassurance of oneself,” and “gain an insight into oneself”. The first item “express self freely” can be explained by some of the participants comments of dangers associated with Facebook as everyone’s name is public thus the possibility of the information being used by spies, or Israeli agencies against Palestinians. The next two categories were reported to be more appealing to Palestinians living outside and it could be explained by the physical separation of these members to their homeland, and the way they are portrayed negatively in the media (Turner, 2003). Thus by connecting with other members who share same values, they can find more reassurance of their identity.
The need for “information” had the second highest mean of (M=5.20, S.D=1.65) and the gratifications received from using Facebook groups were receiving and sending information about Palestine photos, videos, and events. Many participants explained that they used these groups because they ‘crave real and true information’, and to ‘clarify the true image of Palestine’. This again can be attributed to the mainstream media and how it portrays Palestinians internationally and the bias when covering the Israel-Palestinian conflict. Studies on media portrayals of the conflict have focused on American media. One specific study done by Viser (2003) investigated The New York Times, and CNN in their portrayal of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and found that they use more Israeli sources than Palestinian ones. Also, “stories were more likely to be displayed prominently if Palestinians rather than Israelis were the perpetrators of violence” (Viser, 2003). Considering this, Palestinians then probably seek alternative media that is coming straight from those experiencing the situation, rather than outside reporters. One participant expressed:

If we can't reach out to people in person to show them the reality of the Palestinian conflict and undo the damage that the biased media does on daily basis, then we should at least try to use web 2.0 technologies to demonstrate and support our case.

In the open ended answers the need for “social interaction” seemed to gain the most gratification by Palestinians using Palestinian Facebook groups. McQuail (1987) explained that “social interaction” reasons include the following: gaining a sense of belonging, identifying with others, connecting with family and friends, and social empathy. Many of the participants’ comments about joining the groups included: “organizing rallies and protests,” “solidarity with Palestinians,” “keep connected with friends living in 1948 land,” “keep connected with family and friends,” “networking to support human rights,” and “show political activism”. The fact that Palestinians could organize events, stay connected with other Palestinian communities, and show their solidarity, gratifies their need for social interaction. The item of “belonging to Palestine” had the second highest mean of all gratifications rated by participants (M=5.89), (the first was receiving information about Palestine photos and videos M=5.95).
The last need category rated by participants was “entertainment” and it had a low mean of (M=3.84). There was also a significant difference between Palestinians living at home and those outside in terms of them needing to use facebook group for entertainment. Participants living in Palestine, (M=4.41) use Facebook groups for entertainment needs more than those living outside (M=3.72), and this is explained by the fact that 76.6% of Palestinian youth reported spending their leisure time at home due to the limited mobility they have due to the conditions of living under Israeli siege (Khoury-Machool, 2007). Since the majority of the participants fell under the 18-35 age groups, and those living in Palestine have not many options for entertainment, internet, or computer mediated tools seem to be a logical use for entertainment.

When looking at the topics Palestinians most advocate for on Facebook groups, there seems to be a similarity between what is advocated on former forms of media used by Palestinians and their use of these groups. The topics provided to participants were: “refugees right of return,” “Israeli-Palestinian peace process,” “Palestine heritage,” “Jerusalem the capital of Palestine,” “Israel’s terrorism,” “issues of sexuality,” “Gaza,” “women’s equality rights,” “arts in Palestine,” and “honor killings”. All the topics had means above 4, except “honor killings,” and “issues of sexuality”. The low interests in these two topics can be explained by the family honor tradition and the fact that it is dealt with as a private issue and there are no official laws protecting women who have “misused their sexuality” (Ruggi, 1998). Ruggi (1998) and Prusher (2007) explain that since honor killings often remain private family affairs, there are no official statistics available on the practice. Some sources indicate that in 1996 there were 20 honor killings, and in 2007 there were 50 (Prusher, 2007). Compared to killings of Palestinian civilians by Israel forces, for example 384 killed in 2007, the issues of sexuality and honor killing would seem of less importance to Palestinians as well (www.btselem.org, 2009).

Palestine heritage was the topic that had the highest mean of (M=6.11). Nassar (2002) argued that through visual diaspora the Palestinians are still holding to a memory of a lost home and caught in the past by holding the reminiscent of home and objects brought from home. Heritage is important to Palestinians since the majority of them live outside of Palestine and preserving the culture, traditions, and possessions is viewed as very important to preserving their collective identity. There was significant difference in
the advocating of this topic, as those living outside of Palestine advocated more for “heritage” than those living in Palestine. Again, this can be explained by the physical separation to the land.

Previously, the issue of Gaza was found to be dominating Palestinian blogs and in this study, the topic had the second highest mean (M=6.00). The reason for this is clear. Gaza has been under Israeli siege for more than three years now, and more recently Israel invaded Gaza with military strikes that lead to the death of more than 1000 civilians between December 2008 and January 2009 (www.aljazeera.net, 2009). Participants explained that Facebook enables them to send and receive information in a timely manner, much faster than other traditional forms of media. And so, when issues like attacks on civilians take place, the information and pictures can be sent out to the ‘world’ to see and react in a timely manner.

The topic of “Jerusalem as the capital” also received high attention, with a mean of (M=5.98). The issue of Jerusalem has been crucial to Palestinians since its reoccupation by Israel in 1967. Many illegal actions have been taking place against Palestinian lands and houses built in the Jerusalem area (mainly on the east side and the surrounding villages). The Israeli army often receives commands for demolishing houses or confiscating lands claiming that the lands were illegally obtained by Palestinians. The purposes of these actions are to bring more Jewish people into the area, gain more land for Israel and reduce the number of Palestinians living in Jerusalem. This would make it easier for Israel to establish its capital there. The right wing Israelis are calling for The Great Israel which would start at the Euphrates River and ends at the Mediterranean Sea; its capital would be Jerusalem. But the Palestinians also consider Jerusalem their capital, because the east side includes Christian and Muslim holy places. While there are many UN resolutions that require Israel to abide with international law in terms of the legal borders and properties of Jerusalem, Israel continues to violate these laws (Khalidi, 2000). These discussions and similar ones are seen on Palestinian Facebook groups.

The topics of “refugees’ right of return” and “Israel’s terrorism” also go along with issues like the topic of Gaza and Jerusalem, and the general Palestinian struggle since their loss of lands and continuous attacks by Israel since 1948. Many of the participants’ comment indicated that they use these groups to share their personal
experiences, to help find solution to the conflict, spread knowledge about the conflict, and so forth.

Finally, the additional topics that emerged from the open ended results are sports, non-violent resistance, Palestine history, and The Wall. Khouri-Machool (2007) explained that the efforts of many international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Palestine in establishing IT programs were targeting Palestinian youth to ensure the practice of non-violent resistance, rather than violent. The fact that participants indicate their use of Facebook groups as a tool for non-violent resistance proves the success of these NGOs’ efforts. Participants indicated that organizing rallies and demonstrations was much easier through facebook in reaching many people and being able to see what is already organized instead of “re-inventing the wheel”.

The topic of The Wall is an important one to Palestinians and it has been advocated in Palestinian media, specifically in film (www.palestinefilm.org, 2009). Several Palestinian groups on Facebook are tailored specifically to this issue: “The Wall must fall”, and “stop the wall in Palestine”. Israel started building The Wall during the latest uprising (2000-now) as a way to prevent Palestinian suicide bombers from entering Israel. However, the problem lies with the confiscation of Palestinian land that is part of the future Palestinian state, and the separation of many families by it. Stop The Wall is an ongoing organization/campaign against the building of the wall, their website documents:

“78 Palestinian villages, neighborhoods, communities and cities are threatened in their very existence by the isolation imposed on them via the construction of the Wall, the settlements and their infrastructure. Throughout the West Bank some 266,442 Palestinians are facing living conditions that soon will force them to abandon their homes and communities and to turn into refugees or internally displaced people. This fact sheet gives the basic information about this wave of forced expulsion at the hands of the Occupation”.

Raacke and Raacke (2008) suggest that one way to explore the needs individuals are meeting by using social networking sites is to apply the uses and gratifications theory since it is concerned with how individuals use the media and therefore it emphasizes the importance of the individual. For Palestinians using Facebook groups, the importance of the individual seems to be taking place since many of the participants indicated that they
feel they are educating others and taking actions to help their country. Political activism and patriotism seem to be the most gratifications Palestinians gain by joining facebook groups. When asked to rate how valuable this tool was in advocating issues related to Palestine, the mean on the scale of 1-7 was (M=5.3). Many of the open ended comments support this and some included:

   I know, for a fact, that my constant article posting educated scores of people -- many people sent me messages saying they were in solidarity with me, they were shocked that Israel using white phosphorous, that they were circulating these articles to 20 more friends, that they "couldn't believe what the media was telling them," etc. etc. And all these people were American, and previously apathetic about the Israel-Palestine issue. Because I was their friend, and they saw how this was affecting me, they tuned in.

Facebook is a good forum to present alternative information/media that people otherwise may not be exposed to. Similarly, it much easier to spread the word about events and issues by using facebook events etc.

While Facebook is mainly used for entertainment by the majority of youngsters, I think it can help in enabling dialogue and allowing people to express themselves in a way that is hard to express using other means of communications. This dialogue and self expression (as long as it's peaceful and not offending) is very crucial to support the Palestinian cause since other forms of protesting the Israeli occupation are "frowned upon" by a lot of countries and authorities around the world.

Networking on FB allows for a quicker sharing of thoughts and ideas. Also, upcoming events and shows concerning Palestine are spread to a far greater amount of potential participants.

The active role that Palestinians play in choosing and utilizing Facebook groups for their cause seems to be consistent with the U&G theory creators. While many other
theories discussed how media affects its users, this theory takes a different approach and argues that the media have a limited effect on their audience because audiences are able to exercise control over their media. Palestinians are definitely exercising control over this new media tool, as they are using it to their cause.

Palestinian Facebook groups are appearing to be of a high importance to Palestinians, and as many indicated, they are a good way to provide more accurate information about Palestinian issues, in a fast manner. However, some of the comments participants provided seem to be very crucial to the value of this new technology tool. One participant explained:

Facebook Palestinian groups are whimsical often shallow and uninformative. They promote one person/group or family ideals and values and perceptions of Palestinian history. They do not offer a balanced level of knowledge and are often inaccurate, rhetorical, self serving tokenistic entertainment.

Another participant complained about the large number of Palestinian groups that advocated the same issue (there are over 6 Facebook groups with the name Free Gaza, and Free Palestine) and how it confuses recipients of group invitations. The participants explained that many people are simply creating groups to show that they are activists, but they are doing more harm by dividing and confusing Facebook members, rather than having everyone under the same group. These issues of incompetence and the variety of duplicated groups can harm the Palestinian cause rather than help it. Thus, while this tool seems to be of satisfaction to the Palestinian individual, it is unknown whether or not their efforts are necessary influencing others.
Limitations

One major limitation of the research was the inability to reach the majority of Palestinian Facebook group members. This was due to a policy on Facebook that limits sending generic messages to several members in a row, and so the researcher was blocked from sending invitations to group administrator and had to wait several hours to be able to send invitations again. The process of sending invitations took one week, with invitations sent to the first 52 groups on the list. Another reason for not being able to reach many participants was another Facebook policy that prevents group administrators of sending a mass message to all the group members if the group had 5000 or more members. With this in mind, 17 out of 52 groups did not receive the invitations. The researcher tried to contact a Facebook administrator, but was unable to contact them.

The inability to reach many group members might have also led to the fact that there was a big difference in the number of participants who live inside versus outside of Palestine. There were 36 participants who reside in Palestine, and 173 who reside outside of Palestine. The gap between the numbers could also be related to the fact that some of these participants who indicated living outside of Palestine could be students living abroad on a temporary base.

Finally, the researcher provided topics of discussions to participants to choose from and these topics were broad ideas which was limiting in knowing how participants were using and discussing them.

Future Research

The current research study showed how the Uses and Gratifications theory can empower media users by making them in control of specific media tool’s use. The theory use emphasized on the ability of audiences to exercise control over their media. A valuable future research could look into non-Palestinian users’ membership in Facebook groups related to Palestine, and whether they learn/benefit from them as Palestinians in this study hoped to. A comparison could be done between the needs of non-Palestinian and Palestinian users for joining Palestinian Facebook groups, and how these needs are gratified.
Another future research could look into the role of computer mediated tools like Facebook on the communication of resistance or the work of social/political movements in Palestine. Since the research showed that many users mentioned non-violence resistance, this could mean that a communication trend might be taking place in terms of political resistance.

**Conclusion**

Computer mediated technologies such as the social networking site Facebook, are becoming a popular way of connecting between people, and establishing and maintaining one’s identity. The current study looked at a geographically dispersed group of people who use this tool in their political struggle. The results showed that Facebook groups are definitely an asset to Palestinians in advocating for issues related to the Israel-Palestinian conflict and that Palestinian individuals believe they are making a change by educating others by using this tool. The study showed that new internet technologies are empowering individuals who do not have access to expressing themselves in traditional media forms. However, while these new media forms are empowering an individual and giving them a place to express themselves, it does not necessarily mean that the effect on the public is as strong as other forms of media.
References


39


Dear Group Administrator:

My name is Lina Jarad, I am a Palestinian master’s student in the Department of Communication at Miami University and I am conducting a research project on Facebook as part of my graduation requirements.

This research seeks to understand how new internet technologies affect Palestinians and issues important to them. This research can add valuable information to scholars and researchers who are interested in Palestinian issues, and so participation would be valuable to the Palestinian cause.

I would appreciate if you could send the following letter to your group members (using the link: message all members) for voluntary participation on the survey I am conducting. There is minimal risk associated with participating in this survey. All answers are confidential and no one’s name or IP address will be collected or saved. Answers to all questions are voluntary so if someone feels uncomfortable answering a specific question, they can always skip it.

The survey can be accessed by clicking on the following link:

https://survey.muohio.edu/Checkbox/LinaJarad.aspx

If you have questions about this research, or would like to obtain a copy of final results please call or email me 513-720-0032 jaradl@muohio.edu, or my advisor, Dr. James Patterson at pattersj@muohio.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant please contact the Office for the Advancement of Research and Scholarship at 513-529-3600, or humansubjects@muohio.edu.

Thank you for your time and effort, it is much appreciated.

Sincerely,

Lina Jarad
Speech Communication
Miami University of Ohio
513-720-0032
APPENDIX B

Survey

Introduction: I appreciate your taking the time to complete the questionnaire. You should be able to complete it in 10-15 minutes. You must be 18 years or older and of Palestinian origins to participate in this study.

Purpose of the study: This research seeks to understand how new internet technologies effect Palestinians and issues important to them. This research can add valuable information to scholars and researchers who are interested in Palestinian issues, and so participation would be valuable to the Palestinian cause.

Although every effort will be done to ensure confidentiality of your responses, you should be aware that all Internet-based communication is subject to the remote likelihood of tampering from an outside source. IP addresses will not be investigated and data will be removed from the server.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant you can contact the Office for the Advancement of Research and Scholarship at 001-513-529-3600, or at humansubjects@muohio.edu. If you have questions regarding this research project, ask the investigator, Lina Jarad at 001-513-720-0032 or jaradl@muohio.edu, or the faculty advisor Dr. James Paterson at 001-513-529-7474 or pattersj@muohio.edu.

By clicking the link below:

1. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.
2. I understand that I can refuse to answer specific questions
3. I understand that the information I give in this study is confidential.
4. I understand that a copy of the research report for this study will be made available to me upon request

Given these statements, I freely consent to participate in this research project done by a graduate student in the Department of Communication:

Yes
No
This section of the survey will ask about origins and country of residence. Answers are required in order to continue the survey.

1. *Are you or your parents originally from Palestine?*
   - Yes
   - No
   (If answer is no survey will be terminated and participants will be thanked for their time)

2. *Do you currently live in Palestine?*
   - Yes
   - No

The next section of this survey will ask about the needs you fulfill by joining Palestinian Facebook groups.

3. What needs do you have to join Palestinian Facebook groups?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Need</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information seeking</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal identity</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social interaction</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next set of questions will ask about information obtained by joining Palestinian Facebook groups.

4. I seek the following information when joining Palestinian Facebook groups:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information about events in Palestine</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information about events in foreign country of residence (only if answer to Q2 was No)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photos and Videos about Palestine</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information related to my studies (sharing notes, etc)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information related to my work.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The next set of questions will ask you about personal benefits of joining Palestinian Facebook groups

5. Through joining Palestinian Facebook groups:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I can share my opinion freely</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I can keep connected with friends</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I can express myself more than in real-life situations</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I can make new friends</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I find reassurance of my values</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I have a sense of belonging to Palestine</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I gain an insight into truly who I am</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I can fit in within the Facebook community</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I have a sense of belonging to the country I reside in</td>
<td>(only if answer to Q2 was No)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This section of the survey will ask about different topics of interest in regards to joining Palestinian Facebook groups

6. When joining Facebook groups related to Palestine, I am interested in the following topics:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The Palestinian refugees right of return</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The Israeli-Palestinian peace process</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Palestine Heritage</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Jerusalem the capital of Palestine</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Israel’s Terrorism</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Issues of Sexuality</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7. Gaza 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
8. Women’s Equality Rights 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
9. Arts in Palestine 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
10. The issue of honor killings 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
11. Other (Please type your answer in the space provided) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

This section will ask about the value of Facebook to Palestinians

8. Please indicate how strongly you agree with the following statements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Facebook is a valuable tool for advocating issues related to Palestine</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I feel that I make changes in society through Facebook</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I feel I educate others on Facebook</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I think Facebook is mainly a tool for entertainment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The final section of the survey will ask for your demographics

9. Gender:
   Male  Female

10. Age
    18-25   26-35   36-45   46-55   55-above
Appendix C

Debriefing page

Thank you for your participation in this research project! This survey is part of a study working to understand the impact of new internet tools on the Palestinian society. It will advance the academic study of communication in international issues.

If you would like a copy of the research report upon completion, please contact me at jaradl@muohio.edu, or at 513-720-0032.

For any comments or questions, please contact Lina Jarad, graduate student in the Speech Communication department at Miami University, at jaradl@muohio.edu or (513)529-7182.

If you have any questions about your rights as a human subject, please contact the Miami University Office for the Advancement of Research and Scholarship at humansubjects@muohio.edu or (513)529-3734.

Thank you for your participation! You may close your browser now.