

Manifestations of Cultural Alienation on Social media: Facebook as a Case Study

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Abstract:

The study explores the manifestations of cultural alienation from the perspective of 100 Facebook-user among M'sila University students. Accordingly, a scale with 17 items covering eight (8) aspects of cultural alienation was developed. The study disclosed that most students use Facebook, often have multiple accounts with pseudonyms, interact in non-realistic groups, and encounter frustration and psychological anxiety because of long non-interaction. Additionally, national language, social values, religion, ethics, traditions, and ways of thinking were the most affected cultural aspects.

Keywords: Manifestations; Alienation; Culture; Facebook; Students.

1. Introduction:

The last decade of the 20th century and the beginning of the current century witnessed a remarkable technological advancement in information and communication technologies demarcated by a significant impact on various aspects of human life, particularly the social fabric of modern societies. The emergence of new media, especially social media like Facebook, has attracted a large youth audience. The spread of the internet, which transcends spatial and temporal boundaries, has seen high usage rates among young people, especially university students, who have become heavily addicted to it for prolonged and continuous periods. Due to the intense exposure to this network, it has become a tangible reality, particularly given the current circumstances facing this age group. Consequently, this phenomenon was conducive to a form of cultural alienation among university students, presenting itself as one of the contemporary social and cultural challenges

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The rapid changes in cultural, technological, and scientific domains have deeply influenced human cognition, worldview, and psychological makeup. Cultural alienation is manifested through various socially unacceptable behaviors, such as social withdrawal or isolation, leading to non-participation in social responsibilities, self-centeredness, a focus on personal goals and interests, and a rejection of social and cultural norms and standards.

The current study aims to shed light on the phenomenon of cultural alienation among university students by examining the main manifestations of cultural alienation among Algerian university youth through their use of Facebook, and attempts to answer the following questions:

- ✓ To what extent do students at the University of M'sila use Facebook?
- ✓ What are the most common manifestations of cultural alienation among students at the University of M'sila?

1.1. Objectives of the Study

The present study is prone to achieve the following objectives:

- ✓ To examine the extent of Facebook usage and engagement among students at the University of M'sila.
- ✓ To identify the most common manifestations of cultural alienation among students at the University of M'sila.

1.2. Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it addresses key themes, namely:

-Culture: Culture is the essence of any society, representing a distinct identity that must be preserved and passed down to younger generations as a bridge between generations.

-University Youth: University students represent society's elite and are at the core of its development.

-Cultural Alienation: Cultural alienation poses various threats to both society and individuals.

-Social Media: Platforms like Facebook, due to their widespread use, contain elements that threaten the cultural identity of societies.

1.3. Definition of Key Concepts

1.3.1. Alienation

The English word "alienation," the French "aliénation," and the German "Entfremdung" all stem from the Latin word "alienatio," which derives from "alienare"—meaning to transfer ownership or to remove or separate. This action is further derived from "alienus," meaning to belong to or be connected to someone else, which in turn originates from the Latin term "alius," indicating "the other," whether as a noun or adjective (Richard, 1980, p.63).

Additionally, In the Critical Dictionary of Sociology, R. Boudon and F. Pareto defines "alienation" as a term rooted in Latin, meaning both "alienation" and "estrangement." It has a legal interpretation—signifying the transfer or sale of property or rights—and a psychological interpretation that denotes general intellectual weakness and the breakdown of the bond between the individual and others (Boudon, 1986, p. 29). Furthermore, Abdel Hadi El-Gohary, in his Dictionary of Sociology, describes alienation as a state that completely dominates an individual, making them feel strange and distant from certain aspects of their social reality (El-Gohary, 1983, p. 23). Another definition provided by the Dictionary of Social Sciences, states that alienation is defined as the individual's sense of loss and estrangement from their own self and from society (El-Hawari & Masluh, 1999, p. 48).

1.3.2. Culture

The concept of culture is complex and often disputed due to its linguistic and intellectual evolution. This complexity calls for tracing its development and examining its linguistic and terminological changes over time (Zemam, 2001, pp. 135-148).

Linguistically: The word "culture" originates from the Latin term "Cultura," which means the cultivation of land (Ziyada, 2001, p. 49). In Arabic, the term "thaqafa" (culture) derives from the root "taqafa," signifying skill, understanding, learning, and quick acquisition. It also implies the physical act of refining objects, such as straightening a spear, alongside its psychological connotations related to education and discipline (Al-Aifa, 2003, p. 37).

Terminologically: In anthropology and sociology, "culture" refers to a set of symbols and teachings that shape the non-material aspects of human life, such as language, customs, and behaviors unique to humans (Al-Omar, 2000, pp. 176-179). Firth defines culture as "all learned behavior acquired by an individual from society." This definition encompasses all behavioral patterns learned from society without limiting it solely to human societies, extending it even to animal communities (Mansour, 2004, p. 30). Contrastingly, Maurice Godliber emphasizes that humans, unlike other social animals, not only live within relationships but also actively create relationships to live. Throughout their existence, humans innovate new ways of thinking and acting, both in relation to each other and to their environment, thus producing culture (Karidis, 2001, p. 5). -Malik Bennabi offers a practical definition of culture as "a set of ethical traits and social values that influence an individual from birth, unconsciously linking their behavior to the lifestyle of the society they are born into."

1.3.3. Cultural Alienation

Hazem Khairy defines cultural alienation as "any renunciation by a person of their natural right to possess a free and evolving culture, for self-relief and to satisfy society." He goes further to explain that Self-relief in this case is the voluntary surrender of one's right to criticize and evolve their culture, entrusting others with this right, whereas Satisfying society refers to the renunciation of one's natural right to criticize or evolve culturally assigning it to others (Khairy, 2006, p. 20).

Mohamed Abdel Mokhtar sees cultural alienation as a feeling experienced by certain communities or those with a specific cultural reference. They feel that they live by values and practices with which they cannot identify, making them feel disconnected from these new cultural references. This often manifests as cultural identity confusion, which Erikson defines as a learned process from an individual's cultural and social environment. Instances of rebellion against norms and values represent a cultural rejection of society, as well as feelings of estrangement and alienation. The effects of cultural identity loss include socially unacceptable behaviors like isolation, lack of participation in collective responsibility, self-centeredness, and rejection of social and cultural laws and norms (Magdy, 2001, p. 34).

Additionally, Fatima Darwish defines alienation as a phenomenon resulting from the contradiction between social ideals and social reality. It occurs when societal values inspire individual desires and ambitions that are hindered by the social structure.

As it stands, the individuals live in obscurity influenced by external factors but unable to affect the external world. Alienation, therefore, represents a mental state arising from dissatisfaction due to unmet primary needs, such as the need for social connections and a personal identity. In this study, we adopt the following definition, aligning with our research objectives: cultural alienation is the distancing of an individual from their community's culture, rejecting and alienating from it while embracing and imitating foreign and unfamiliar cultural elements, especially lifestyle and social systems, in preference to local and authentic ones (Zahran, Sanaa Hamed, 2008, p. 111).

1.3.4. Social media "Facebook"

Social media platforms emerged in early 2007, serving as tools for communication and networking, with **Facebook** and **Myspace** being the most popular.

Communication:

Linguistically: The term "communication" in Arabic (tawassul) stems from the root "wasl," meaning the act of connecting or joining without interruption. Communication is derived from tawassul, which implies continuous connection and is the opposite of disconnection (Nour Eddine, 2005, p. 463). According to Ibn Zakariya Al-Razi, "wasl" indicates combining something with another to establish attachment (1979, p. 115). Communication is thus synonymous with pairing, linking, cohesion, gathering, notifying, and informing.

Social:

Linguistically: In examining the term "jama" (جمع), it is found that the root "jīm and mīm" (جيم وميم) represents a fundamental idea, signifying the joining or uniting of things. The word is used to denote gatherings of people, such as in the term "jum'a" (جمعة), referring to Friday gatherings for prayer due to the congregation of people. (Taqi al-Din Abu Bakr, 1994, p. 141).

Social network "Facebook":

Language Definition: The word "network" (شبكة) in Arabic, according to al-Razi, originates from the idea of mixing or intertwining, as in the phrase "darkness intertwined" (اشتباك الظلام), which means mixing.

Technical Definition: Communication in this context refers to the sustained, strong relationship between two parties involved, an openness of self to the other in a live, unbroken relationship that continues until it renews (Issam Suleiman al-Mousa, 1998, pp. 22, 25). Omar Nasrallah defines it as "a relationship between at least two individuals, each representing an active self" (Mahmoud Hassan Ismail, 2003, p. 30). In addition, a system of electronic networks allows users to create personal sites and connect via a social electronic system with other members who share the same interests and hobbies or friends from university or high school (Hosni Awad, undated, p. 10).

On his side, Ballas (2006) defines it as "a program used to build an online community where individuals can connect for various purposes." Furthermore, Preece and Maloney-Krichmar define it as "a place where people meet for specific goals, guided by policies that include rules and standards suggested by the program" (Abbas Mustafa Sadiq, 2008, p. 17). According to Zaher Radi social media sites is "a system of electronic networks that allows subscribers to create their own personal sites and connect them through an electronic social system with other members who have similar interests and hobbies" (Zaher Radi, 2003, p. 23).

The term "social networks" from al-Shahri's perspective is "a system of electronic networks that allows users to create their own sites and connect them through an electronic social system with other members who share similar interests or join them with friends" (Fahad bin Ali al-Tayyar, 2004, pp. 201-202).

Procedural definition: Social media sites are a collection of sites that allow individuals to connect within a virtual community, including "Facebook," after introducing themselves and sharing their identities. They exchange topics, photos, and videos and post comments on received content. These sites also offer services that enhance interaction and communication between social network members, such as enabling interaction with others, entertainment, news updates, and more. They have removed all geographical barriers and facilitated access to foreign cultures.

2. Literature Review

Voluminous research has been conducted worldwide tackling the effects of utilizing social media platforms and sites on their users.

A study by Polk (1984): Polk conducted a study indicating that youth alienation is more of a cultural-educational issue than a social or psychological one. **The cultural gap** or **conflict** represents the clash of values and customs, with youth rejecting the values and beliefs imposed by family or school institutions. This rejection creates a sense of social alienation within educational institutions.

Al-Ashwal and Others (1985) examined social change and alienation among university youth. The researchers used two scales, one to measure youth alienation across five dimensions, applying both expert validity and internal validity, which yielded high reliability scores. The sample consisted of **3,764** male and female students from several Egyptian universities. Key findings showed an inverse relationship between alienation and attitudes toward social change, with two-thirds of the sample showing above-average levels of alienation.

In the Egyptian context, Damanhuri and Abdul Latif (1990) focused on feelings of alienation from self and others. They used a self- and other-alienation scale, applied to samples of Egyptian and Saudi students, with **100** students divided equally between both countries. Results showed similar factor structures for alienation in both countries: **11** factors for the Egyptian sample and **14** for the Saudi sample. The study also explored the effects of cultural differences, revealing variations between male and female students.

Regarding the Kuwaiti context, Al-Sunai (2002) focused on alienation among Saudi and Omani university students, aiming to develop an alienation scale suitable for the Arab-Islamic environment. The sample included **201** students from both countries. The study found that Saudi students had higher alienation scores than Omani students, and that unmarried students had higher scores than married ones.

In the Algerian context, a similar study was conducted by Noui Iman (2012) targeting a different sample of university students (Biskra students). The study surveyed the levels of alienations among students as well as differences in cultural alienation manifestations among University students (Biskra) based on gender and residential area. The study concluded that Significant statistical differences exist between the dimensions of cultural alienation, no significant differences based on gender were found, and that there are differences in cultural alienation based on residential area, favoring urban residents.

3. Methodological Procedures:

3.1. Methodology:

The study adopted the descriptive method, deemed “the most suitable research method for educational social reality and provides an essential plan to achieve a correct understanding

of this reality.” Through this method, the study was able to comprehensively cover all dimensions, using a structured approach to gather, organize, and analyze data.

3.2. Data Collection Tools:

Every scientific study relies on a set of research tools as the main guide for conducting and progressing the research. The tools used in this study include:

3.2.1. The Questionnaire:

The questionnaire is a set of questions posed by the researcher to individuals in the sample, providing answers to interpret the research topic. We prepared it after reviewing the study’s literature, previous studies, and conducting a preliminary study. After presenting it to a group of professors, the final form was established. It includes two sections:

The first section pertains to participants’ personal information including gender, residence, and field of study. The second section delves into two main parameters that dwell on measuring the extent of Facebook usage and the prevalent manifestations of cultural alienation.

3.3. Statistical Methods: We relied on frequencies and percentages.

3.4. Population and Study Sample:

The study sample consisted of students from the University of M'sila. The sample was randomly selected from the total number of students, with the sample size amounting to 100 students.

Table 1 : Distribution of Participants by Gender.

Gender	Repetition	Percentage
Male	34	34%
Female	66	66%
Total	100	100%

From the data in the above table, we can deduce that more than half of the sample is female, with 66 female students representing 66% of the sample, compared to 34 male students representing 34% of the sample.

Table 2 : Distribution of Participants by Residence.

	Countryside	City	Total
Repetitions	28	72	100
Percentage	28%	72%	100%

The table shows that most of the sample members reside in urban areas, representing 72% of the sample, while 28% reside in rural areas.

4. Presentation and Interpretation of Results

4.1. The use and the impact of Facebook usage

Table 3 : Participants' responses regarding their ownership of Facebook accounts

Ownership	No	Yes	Total
Repetitions	2	98	100
Percentage	2%	98%	100%

Table 4 : Participants' responses regarding the period they have been as Facebook users.

How long have you been a Facebook user	Less than 5 years	Between 5 to 10 years	Between 10 to 15 years	More than 15 years	Total
Repetitions	10	60	24	6	100
Percentage	10%	60%	24%	6%	100%

The above tables illustrate the responses of participants regarding their ownership of Facebook accounts and the period they have been using Facebook. Remarkably, almost all participant 98% own a Facebook account. According to the findings displayed in table 4, we notice that a large portion of participants have been using Facebook for a period ranged between 5 to 10 years. As it stands, participants are well-informed regarding the different uses, manipulations and secrets of such a social network platform.

Table 5 : Students' responses regarding the name used on Facebook

Facebook Username	Real	Pseudonym	Total
Repetitions	19	81	100
Percentage	19%	81%	100%

Table 5 displays the participants' responses regarding the names associated to their Facebook accounts. Notably, the majority of respondents use pseudonyms on Facebook representing 81%. Assumably, they use pseudonyms to keep their identities hidden for greater freedom during interactions, especially among female students. A low percentage was portrayed regarding students' use of their real identities representing 19% of participants. They presume that it facilitates communication, with no restrictions on revealing their identities.

Table 6 : The nature of interactional groups

Nature of interactional groups	Anonymous identity	Unrealistic	Known	Total
Repetitions	20	50	30	100
Percentage	20%	50%	30%	100%

Regarding the findings portrayed in table 6, half 50 % of participants engage in interactions in unrealistic groups whereas an estimated percentage of 30% interact with groups of known identities and orientations. The lowest percentage 20% goes for interacting in groups with anonymous identities.

Table 7 : The frequency of Facebook usage.

Frequency	Once a day	More than once a day	Day and night	Total
Repetition	5	14	81	100
Percentag	5%	14%	81%	100%

Based on the numerical representations in table 6, the vast majority of participants 71% are heavy users of their Facebook accounts proclaiming that they use it day and night. On the

other hand, lower percentages were detected for using Facebook once a day 5% or more than once a day 14%.

Table 8 : The content that motivates students to browse on Facebook

Content	Entertainment	Research	Chat	News	Songs	Photos	Total
Repetition	11	10	65	5	5	4	100
Percentage	11%	10%	65%	5%	5%	4%	100%

The results demonstrated in the table above evinced that the large part 65% of Facebook users utilize it for chatting. Actually, the findings emphasized role of social media networks in motivating students' interactional tendencies. Contrastingly, very low percentages were reported regarding other incentives such as research, entertainment, news, songs, and photos ranking between 4% to 11%.

As regards students' feelings when apart or disconnected from Facebook for a long time, their responses pertain remarkable negative attitudes and psychological misbehaviors encountered by its users. According to students' responses, being disconnected from Facebook is conducive to several unpleasant reactions. Among participants, 39% stated that they encounter feelings of depression and disappointment while others experienced psychological emptiness, anxiety and disturbances, and **psychological emptiness** feelings (missing messages and news) with estimates percentages 19%, 17%, and 11%, respectively. Worth noting, a lower rank 14% was associated to the aspect of no feelings encountered when apart from utilizing Facebook. Table 9 below illustrates the distinctive feelings and attitudes encountered when disconnected for a long time.

Table 9 : Feelings and attitudes encountered when disconnected for a long time.

Feelings, Attitudes and psychological aspects	Psychological anxiety and disturbance	psychological emptiness	Out-of-date	Depression and disappointment	No Feeling	Total
Repetitions	17	19	11	39	14	100
Percentage	17%	19%	11%	39%	14%	100%

4.2. The prevalent manifestations of cultural alienation.

Table 10 : Students' perceptions towards the concept of Cultural Alienation

Meaning of Cultural Alienation	Impression and admiration of foreign cultures	Feeling of social and cultural detachment	Detachment from ones' own culture	Cultural Irritability	Total
Repetitions	39	24	26	11	100
Percentage	39%	24%	26%	11%	100%

The findings portrayed in the table above demonstrated an absence of a unified understanding regarding the concept of cultural alienation. The numerical representations disclosed that approachable ranks were registered. Cultural alienation is perceived by 39% of students as the state of being impressed and admiring foreign cultures on the expense of your own culture. An estimated portion of students understand cultural alienation as a detachment from ones' own culture or feeling of social and cultural detachment ranking 26%, 24%, respectively. The lowest rank 11% goes for cultural alienation defined as a sort of cultural irritability.

Impacted Aspects of Cultural Alienation	Yes	No
The national language	83%	17%
Values	76%	24%
Religion	50%	50%
Ethics	45%	55%
Customs, traditions, and convention	60%	40%
Shared past and history	57%	43%
Way of thinking	93%	7%

The table above demonstrates the impact Facebook use has on the different aspects of cultural alienation. The significant impact on the national language as a substantial usage of dialect in writing and commenting was reported by 83% of respondents. Notably, a significant

consensus was determined among student responses on the aspects of cultural alienation represented in higher agreement percentages.

5. Conclusion:

The present study explores the different manifestations of cultural alienation among M'sila university students. It sought to investigate students' perceptions regarding the impact of social media, particularly, Facebook on their cultural aspects such as religion, ethics, traditions, and thinking. Additionally, the study was prone to investigate the frequency, purposes, and motivations for using Facebook. Ultimately, the study revealed a significant attachment and heavy use of Social media networks for different purposes mainly chatting and interacting in virtual groups. As it stands, the heavy usage of Facebook was evidently conducive to a significant alienation from users' cultural aspects. According to students' perceptions, the most affected cultural aspects are:

First, **National language** represented in the widespread use of dialect in writing and comments. Second, **Values**, particularly social values, are mostly affected followed by ethical and religious values. Common negative behaviors on Facebook include dishonesty, revealing family secrets, and betrayal.

Furthermore, **Islamic religion and morality** were significant cultural aspects affected by Facebook usage. As it stands, the use of Facebook might contradict Islamic values and canons prompting some attitudes and behaviors such as establishing affable relationships, neglect of religious duties, non-traditional marriage, sharing of explicit images and use of obscene language, and even prohibited relationships.

The restricted sample and the particularity of the regional district can limit the generalizability and the plausibility of the research findings. Therefore, suggesting more research with different samples is highly recommended.

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