



The Role of Social Media in Developing Interest in Sports Among Arab Women

Amr Assad*

Abstract

This paper examines the impact of social media in developing Arab women's interest in sports. A survey questionnaire based on the uses and gratification theory was distributed to 411 Arab women from different age groups, education levels, and employment statuses. In analyzing the results to explore the participants' motivation in their use of social media for sports, the study indicates that entertainment and information-seeking were the main motivations for women consuming sports on social media. The overall findings also suggest that social media plays a pivotal role in driving Arab females' interests in sports.

Keywords: Arab women, social media, sports, Uses and Gratification Theory, Motivations

Introduction

While mainstream media has not always been accessible to everyone, the emergence of social media platforms in recent years has given users the opportunity to hand-select their favorite content and programs more easily than ever (Bayor et al. 2018; Sedky et al. 2020). Social media users engage on these platforms for a variety of reasons, but the most common reason for use is entertainment. Social media allows users to connect not only with friends and family, but with celebrities and influencers, it also helps them acquire knowledge and learn new skills (Corso and Robinson 2013; Rogers 2020; Whiting and Williams 2013).

It has been noted that sports fans, both males and females, read and present their opinions on sports across social media platforms. Many of these fans use platforms for 'fan-ship' reasons. This term, coined by Woods and Butler (2020), is used to describe the motives of social media users who create fan pages on Facebook for their favorite athletes or celebrities. Thorpe et al. (2017), however, assert that the expansion of social media use has played a

* Assistant Professor - Applied Media, Faculty of Applied Media, Higher Colleges of Technology, Abu Dhabi, UAE.



pivotal role in increasing visibility, generating conversation, and driving online engagement around women's sports in particular. Not only do female athletes use social media to develop their profiles, sports fans and audiences use the platforms to connect with one another (Bruce 2016). French (2013) has observed that, while women use social media more than men, men use it for sports and entertainment more frequently. Women, on the contrary, are likely to watch their favorite athletes via social media platforms but may also use these outlets for socializing, following celebrities, and other activities (French 2013). Evidence suggests that women tend to use social media in these ways because it gives them easy access to searchable content, so that they no longer have to rely on TV to access their favorite programs (Chua and Chang 2016; Lou and Yuan 2019). Because social media platforms, such as YouTube and Facebook, give users easy access to content, Abeza et al. (2015) have noted that these users are increasingly relying on them to access sports-related content.

As for gender roles in Arab society, social media is becoming a game-changer because it has attracted a sizeable majority of Arab women who have found new ways to participate in debates and discussions on subjects ranging from politics to entertainment and sports (Hurley 2019). Alnjadat et al. (2019), for example, observe that social media has a more significant impact on the academic performance of Arab women than Arab men. Women reported that social media negatively affected their academic achievement, while men are found to be more addicted to social media platforms than them.

Alzahrani and Alanzi (2019) also studied the impact of social media platforms on people with diabetes. They concluded that Saudi women prefer using WhatsApp and Twitter to gain better knowledge about their health and to keep in touch with their acquaintances. Similarly, Ahmed et al. (2018) found that Arab women prefer to use social media platforms such as Instagram or Facebook to socialize with friends and to spread information about brands, purchasing, and selling.

For Arab women, however, the use of social media is not limited to socializing, academia, or content searches. It has also become a key source of engagement for Arab women interested in sports. Ahmed and Thorpe (2020) show that female athletes using social media sites (i.e., Instagram and Facebook), have begun to challenge the stereotypes surrounding women in sports, significantly influencing female audiences to look for sports content, news, and sports events. Recently, social media posts related to female athletes have gone viral and have even been reposted by those with occupations not related to sports. The increasing participation in sports from Arab countries and its promotion on social media platforms has encouraged the region's domestic audiences to reexamine their cultural perception of sports, particularly women's sports. Additionally, sports role



models and athletes featured on social media have encouraged Arab women to take an interest and consider participating in sports, thus breaking stereotypes and changing perceptions towards sports (AlKhalifa and Farello, 2021).

This examines the factors that motivate Arab women to use social media to follow sports as well as the role that social media plays developing their interest in sports. It also explicitly addresses the sports-related social media needs and interests of Arab women. Within media scholarship, there is limited research on Arab women's interest in sports, particularly in the GCC region. Thus, this subject deserves further exploration, and this research aims to fill that gap. The current study is based on uses and gratification theory, which explores how individuals use media for entertainment, information-seeking, socializing, and self-status aspects (Sheffer and Schultz 2014). It evaluates which of the aforementioned factors motivate Arab women and contribute to their interest in sports. The theory is discussed in the following section of the paper.

The study addresses the following research questions:

1. Which uses and gratification theory dimensions (entertainment, information-seeking, socializing, and self-status) significantly contribute to an interest in sports among female audiences in Arab countries?
2. Which other needs and motivations, including access to content, accessibility, economics, education, and fan-ship, significantly impact the level of interest that Arab women have in sports?

The research paper also evaluates the demographic characteristics of Arab women with interests in sports, including their age, educational background, and employment status.

3. Does age significantly influence the extent of interest among Arab women in sports?
4. Does the extent of interest in sports among Arab women differ depending on education levels?
5. Does employment status significantly impact the level of interest Arab women have in sports?

Theoretical and Empirical Evidence

In the context of social media and mass media, Blumler and Katz's (1973) theory of uses and gratification asserts that modern society is goal-oriented and actively seeks or uses media to achieve its goals. Through social media, members of society aim to fulfill their needs of gratification and desires as social media platforms enable individuals to engage, communicate, and maintain relationships (Sheffer and Schultz 2014). In the era of digital expansion, individuals using networking platforms can combine various platforms to achieve maximum gratification. In this realm, as discussed



previously, social media also provides users a platform to voice their opinions and communicate their perceptions to a larger public audience (Hurley 2019). The users of media platforms are reliant on traditional mediums for accessing information regarding political, sports, and economic trends. Still, they have access to a combination of different platforms—such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, etc.—where they can share, create, and seek information. Hence the uses and gratification theory allows researchers to evaluate how users meet their needs related to emotional connection, information-seeking, and status through social media (Froget et al. 2013).

Blumler and Katz (1973) initially divided media users' motivations into five groups: cognitive needs, social needs, personal needs, affection needs, and the need to relax. Modifying the theory, Park et al. (2009) reduced these categories into four gratification dimensions that relate to the usage of social media platforms. These dimensions include entertainment, information-seeking, socializing, and self-status aspects, which the current study employs in later sections.

The information-seeking aspect refers to individuals who satisfy their need for education and information on trends through media (Eginli and Tas 2018). The entertainment aspect concerns individuals who use a combination of social media platforms for entertainment and leisure. The socializing aspect relates to individuals who used the platform to interact, communicate, and engage with like-minded people in order to maintain and form new relationships while receiving societal acceptance and validation (Park et al. 2009). The self-status aspect relates to individuals who use social media platforms to add value and status to their lives.

Consequently, the role of social media has been considered positive in meeting the needs of individuals by enabling them to engage, be involved, and take an interest in different domains and fields, such as fashion, arts, media, politics, sports, and entertainment, etc. (Heinonen 2011; Kowalczyk and Pounders 2016; Yoo and Gretzel 2011). In this context, the current study uses these four social media dimensions of uses and gratification theory to test whether they are significant contributors to surveyed Arab females developing an interest in sports.

As discussed earlier, people are motivated to use social media for entertainment, profile-surfing, self-status development, and socializing with their family and friends (Brandtzæg and Heim 2009). Young Len-Ríos and Young (2017) found that female users in particular are motivated to use social media for entertainment, information, or news, and Plume and Slade (2018) noted that women in the UK are more likely to be influenced by relationship maintenance and social interaction, compared to men who are interested in seeking information from posts or videos, however, no significant difference is found between the men and women's behavioral intention for sharing sponsored advertisement (Plume and Slade 2018).



Similarly, Shi et al. (2016) examined the effect of social media brand pages among users and found that women consider entertainment more favorable because it meets their emotional needs; therefore, they are motivated to use social media for continued social interactions.

With its easy accessibility, social media has allowed users to access sports coverage and content globally and digital media has played a vital role in attracting viewers to sporting events. Around 60% of sports fans use social media to search for online sport updates or athletes' information due to its convenience and quick access (Creedon 2014). The platform creators themselves have also applied this information to conduct statistical analysis of user engagement. Billings et al. (2017), for example, found that Snapchat users in the US use the Snapchat app to follow sports or research sports-related information. While these surveyed fans used other platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook for social interaction and sports information, Snapchat was considered significantly helpful for facilitating an interest in sports among fans.

Comparing these statistics to those in the Arab world, it has been noted that the use of Snapchat is also increasing among Arab users; in 2018, the company released the Arabic language version of the application encouraging millions to increase their usage (Radcliffe and Brune 2018). However, Snapchat usage for sports, particularly among Arabs, has not been given much attention.

On the other hand, in the western world, platforms like Instagram, Twitter and Facebook have also been studied. For example, Meng et al. (2015) analyzed the types of content on Facebook and Twitter being produced by users in North America, and it has been observed that the National Basketball Association (NBA) delivered sports-related information to sports fans, thereby branding their communication. Meanwhile, female fans who use Twitter and Facebook take more interest in searching for information or posting content on these platforms during a game (Abdourazakou and Deng 2019).

In studies on media representations of women's athletics, however, Cooky et al. (2013) have noted that mainstream media covers women's sports less frequently than men's sports, thus marginalizing and silencing women athletes. Research conducted by Litchfield and Kavanagh (2019) examined the gender representation of sports athletes in social media coverage of the 2016 Olympic Games with a focus on Australian teams. The study found that males and females were represented differently on social media platforms. For instance, there were more 'active images' of male athletes compared to female ones. Another American-based study by Coche (2013) concluded that 72% of the articles on the Entertainment and Sports Programming Network (ESPN) website and social media pages focused more on men's tennis compared to women's tennis (20%), while the



remaining 8% were other stories about tennis as a sport. This lack of coverage has ultimately driven fan engagement on social media platforms and these platforms continue to play an important role in the promotion of women's sports and fan engagement (Vann 2014). Social media consumption has been positively linked with sports events and patronage, and female sports fans have been motivated to follow sports-related information and news on social media, and enjoy interacting with athletes' posts and purchasing their products (Hazari 2018).

It should also be noted that scholars in the west have thoroughly explored and examined the sport-related content on social media and what motivates both genders to consume such type of content on different social media accounts. For example, French (2013) argued that most women consume sports-related content through social media platforms for the purposes of connecting with their close contacts, while men tend to engage with the sports content on social media mainly to identify with their favorite teams and engage in other sports-related activity.

The literature concerning the use of social media for sports among Arab women is still nascent. Studies examining the needs and motivations behind the consumption of sports-related content on social media among Arab women are still limited. Although many researchers have begun to view the use of social media in the Arab world as pivotal for garnering and developing sports acceptance locally, most studies have treated Arab women's social media use and Arab women's interest in sports as separate phenomena. Al-Jenaibi (2011) has observed that women from the UAE use social media for entertainment, business development, and gathering news. Similarly, Vieweg and Hodges (2016) have noted that Qatari women use social media for socializing and entertainment ends, such as posting photos and videos, giving and receiving likes, commenting, and gathering information. Similarly, Elareshi Ziani and Al Shami (2021) have highlighted how Bahraini women use social media to share information and spend an average of three hours daily on social media enjoying entertainment clips, comics, and reading news stories and content. Meanwhile, AlKhalifa and Farello (2021) have researched how women's football committees in GCC countries are using social media to create awareness about the sport, which has positively affected female fans. Theodorakis et al. (2017) have also found that Qatari women use social media to follow sport events and discuss sport-related information with friends and family.

This paper also examines how fan-ship (Witkemper et al. 2012) motivates female sports lovers to use different mediums, such as social media platforms, to form an emotional relationship with an athlete or team. Studies have also found that accessing sports through social media is popular among Qatari fans, as it was reported that 35% of female fans use social media for fan-ship or to follow sports-related content twice a week (Theodorakis et al.



2017). D'Andrea and Mintz (2019) have stated that social media users in Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries consume sports for entertainment purposes and share sports-related memes, preferably on Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook. Nabulsi (2014) found that Palestinian youth use social media to share football-related memes and relate them with their movement and cause. Monaghan (2014) noted that social media is increasingly used for football fan activism and meme creation.

This study lastly examines how demographic factors, such as education and occupation, impact Arab women in developing interest in sports-related social media content. Irem et al. (2014) have discussed how social media has become a key platform and source of information (e.g., education, entertainment, news, and sports) that has swept the traditional patriarchal culture in many of the Arab countries, thus allowing students to share their assignments and work with friends and classmates. Al-Hamdan et al. (2021) add similar perspectives explaining that, while girls in Saudi Arabia are not provided with sports education or attend sports activities in public schools, they use social media to acquire education regarding physical activities and sports. In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, this information-sharing has had a significant impact on physical education in Arab countries, as many schools put sports classes, assembly exercises, and other related work on hold (Al Lily et al. 2021). Thus, students relied on social media for their education.

While it can be argued that, irrespective of gender, several needs and motivations encourage people to use social media, limited studies have explored what factors influence Arab women to use social media for sports. This study attempts to address this gap through quantitative findings. Based on the literature, the current study also evaluates other needs and motivations behind Arab women's developing interest in sports along with the four dimensions of uses and gratification theory (Park et al. 2009). These include access to social media platforms (Creedon 2014), accessibility to content available on social media platforms which otherwise is not available on traditional communication mediums (Mohamed 2016), economic aspects, education (Al Lily et al. 2021; Hamdan et al. 2021) and 'fan-ship' (Witkemper et al. 2012; Woods and Butler 2020).

Methodology

This paper used a quantitative research methodology and a survey strategy. An online survey questionnaire was created on Google Forms and was filled out by 412 Arab women through social media platforms, email, and WhatsApp groups. One completely blank case was removed; therefore, the final sample size of the study was 411.



A convenience sampling strategy was used in this paper to reach as many Arab women as possible. Participants were instructed to fill out the web survey about the dimensions of uses and gratification theory (information need, socializing, entertainment need, and self-status need) and other social media needs and motivations for sports as found in the literature (accessibility, economic aspect, ‘fan-ship’ aspect, education, and content accessibility aspect). These items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale as factors of latent independent variables. Meanwhile, the dependent variable of ‘developing interest’ was measured by gauging the level of awareness that Arab women have about sports events and trends around the world, as well as their perception of and attraction to sports-related content on social media. This was also measured using a 5-point Likert Scale.

The questionnaire was divided into four sections:

1. The first section measured respondents’ demographic characteristics, including age, educational status, employment status, and country.
2. The second section determined the hours they spent on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and TikTok.
3. The third section of the survey included 5-point Likert Scale questions regarding the dimensions of uses and gratification theory and other needs and motivations of using social media.
4. The fourth section focused on respondents’ awareness level, perception, and interests to measure the dependent variable through a 5-point Likert scale.

The researcher began the study by cleaning the data using MS Excel in order to perform a demographic analysis (frequency analysis) using SPSS 25.

Moreover, the data was analyzed using Smart PLS, where partial least square path model (PLS-PM) was run to examine whether the independent variables (information, social need, entertainment need, and self-status need; accessibility impact, economic aspect, ‘fan-ship’ aspect, educational aspect and content accessibility aspect) significantly impacted the dependent variable (dependent variable). Further, IBM SPSS software was used to test the impact of demographic characteristics on the level of interest in sports that Arab women have developed over time.

Before performing the PLS test and assessing relationships via other inferential tests, the researcher performed data quality checks, including reliability tests (Cronbach's alpha, rho A, composite reliability) and validity tests (AVE and discriminant validity). All tests were performed via Smart PLS 3.



Table (1): Reliability and validity tests

	Cronbach's Alpha	Rho A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Access Content	0.926	0.929	0.953	0.872
Accessibility	0.675	0.820	0.806	0.600
Developing Interest	0.948	0.952	0.957	0.711
Economic Aspect	0.807	0.840	0.884	0.718
Educational Reasons	0.896	0.904	0.935	0.828
Entertainment	0.933	0.962	0.951	0.828
Fan-ship Reasons	0.926	0.929	0.953	0.871
Information	0.911	0.912	0.944	0.848
Social Aspect	0.568	0.686	0.762	0.531
Self-Status	0.811	0.830	0.887	0.723

The Cronbach's α , rho A and composite reliability values associated with all latent variables were greater than 0.7, except in the case of 'social aspect'. However, α values greater than 0.5 were still considered acceptable (Taber, 2018). Moreover, the AVE of each variable was greater than the 0.5 threshold, which suggested adequate convergent validity (Ab Hamid et al. 2017).

Table (2): Discriminant Validity

	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]	[6]	[7]	[8]	[9]	[10]
Access Content [1]	0.934									
Accessibility [2]	0.397	0.775								
Developing Interest [3]	0.722	0.483	0.843							
Economic Aspect [4]	0.445	0.513	0.484	0.848						
Educational Reasons [5]	0.393	0.403	0.408	0.401	0.91					
Entertainment [6]	0.367	0.255	0.399	0.279	0.62	0.91				
Fan-ship Reasons [7]	0.696	0.471	0.751	0.407	0.34	0.373	0.933			
Information [8]	0.812	0.438	0.723	0.475	0.395	0.348	0.685	0.921		
Social Aspect [9]	0.483	0.505	0.49	0.458	0.301	0.288	0.484	0.495	0.729	
Self-Status [10]	0.580	0.508	0.538	0.442	0.335	0.266	0.573	0.546	0.671	0.851

The discriminant validity, the square root of AVE, was greater in each column, suggesting that all latent constructs ensured discriminant validity.

Results and Analysis

To statistically examine the study's objectives, the author performed and presented a number of quantitative techniques in this section, including both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. More specifically, the author conducted a demographic analysis (via frequencies), a frequency and percentage analysis, descriptive statistics, partial least square path modeling (PLS-PM), and a one-way ANOVA.



Table (3): Demographics Analysis

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Age	18 to 27 years old	100	24.3	24.3	24.3
	28 to 37 years old	119	29.0	29.0	53.3
	38 to 47 years old	86	20.9	20.9	74.2
	48 to 57 years old	63	15.3	15.3	89.5
	Above 57 years old	43	10.5	10.5	100.0
	Total	411	100.0	100.0	
Education Level	Less than High School	37	9.0	9.0	9.0
	High School	60	14.6	14.6	23.6
	Higher Diploma	94	22.9	22.9	46.5
	Bachelor's Degree	98	23.8	23.8	70.3
	Master's Degree	72	17.5	17.5	87.8
	PhD	50	12.2	12.2	100.0
	Total	411	100.0	100.0	
Employment Status	Student	54	13.1	13.1	13.1
	Full-Time Employee	117	28.5	28.5	41.6
	Part Time Employee or Internship	78	19.0	19.0	60.6
	Self Employed	73	17.8	17.8	78.3
	Unemployed	59	14.4	14.4	92.7
	Other	30	7.3	7.3	100.0
	Total	411	100.0	100.0	
Country	Algeria	20	4.9	4.9	4.9
	Bahrain	24	5.8	5.8	10.7
	Comoros	9	2.2	2.2	12.9
	Djibouti	8	1.9	1.9	14.8
	Egypt	19	4.6	4.6	19.5
	Iraq	16	3.9	3.9	23.4
	Jordan	13	3.2	3.2	26.5
	Kuwait	20	4.9	4.9	31.4
	Lebanon	23	5.6	5.6	37.0
	Libya	18	4.4	4.4	41.4
	Mauritania	10	2.4	2.4	43.8
	Morocco	17	4.1	4.1	47.9
	Oman	12	2.9	2.9	50.9
	Palestine	16	3.9	3.9	54.7
	Qatar	25	6.1	6.1	60.8
	Saudi Arabia	30	7.3	7.3	68.1
Somalia	12	2.9	2.9	71.0	
Sudan	12	2.9	2.9	74.0	



		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Syria	19	4.6	4.6	78.6
	Tunisia	15	3.6	3.6	82.2
	United Arab Emirates	59	14.4	14.4	96.6
	Yemen	14	3.4	3.4	100.0
	Total	411	100.0	100.0	

The study assessed four demographic characteristics of the research population (i.e., the Arab women: age, education, employment status, and country). The frequency analysis and descriptive statistics (in the later parts) are performed via SPSS 25. According to the data, most participants were 28 to 37 years old (29%), or 18 to 27 years (24.3%) at the time of the study. This information suggests that the research population was relatively young.

In terms of education, large numbers of Arab women either had a Bachelor's degree (23.8%) or a higher diploma (22.9%). 17.5% of the respondents also had a Master's degree. This information means that the population was well-educated.

Additionally, most Arab women who participated in the study were full-time employees (28.5%), followed by self-employed individuals (17.8%); 14.4% of the study's participants were unemployed.

With respect to country, 14.4% of the women were from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), 7.3% were from Saudi Arabia, 6.1% were from Qatar, and 5.8% were from Bahrain. Overall, the study's sample represented 22 Arab countries, as shown in the above figure.

The study measured the time spent by Arab women on various social media platforms daily (on average).

Table (4): Time Spent on Social Media Platforms

		Frequency	Percentage
Facebook	Not Used	61	14.9%
	Less than 2 hours	225	55.0%
	2-4 hours	104	25.4%
	More than 4 hours	19	4.6%
Instagram	Not Used	117	29.2%
	Less than 2 hours	170	42.4%
	2-4 hours	84	20.9%
	More than 4 hours	30	7.5%
Twitter	Not Used	98	24.1%
	Less than 2 hours	197	48.4%
	2-4 hours	85	20.9%
	More than 4 hours	27	6.6%
YouTube	Not Used	88	21.6%
	Less than 2 hours	171	42.0%



		Frequency	Percentage
	2-4 hours	102	25.1%
	More than 4 hours	46	11.3%
Snapchat/ Tik Tok	Not Used	157	39.1%
	Less than 2 hours	136	33.8%
	2-4 hours	91	22.6%
	More than 4 hours	18	4.5%
Other	Not Used	195	50.1%
	Less than 2 hours	107	27.5%
	2-4 hours	56	14.4%
	More than 4 hours	31	8.0%

According to Table 4, Facebook was the most widely used social media platform among the respondents; 55% reported spending 'less than 2 hours on Facebook daily. 48.4% and 42.4% of the respondents reported spending less than 2 hours daily on Twitter and Instagram, respectively. Table 4 also shows that most of the participants spent less than 2 hours daily on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube. It lastly indicates that Snapchat/TikTok are more frequently 'not used' among the social media platforms, while YouTube has 11.3% users (highest among the other platforms) who spend more than 4 hours daily on the platform.

Descriptive Statistics

After discussing the demographics and social media user behavior, authors studied the social media factors behind Arab women’s motivation for sports-related social media engagement. These factors included all the dimensions of uses and gratification theory and other factors found in the literature that helped the researcher assess which motivation or need had the highest rating for women using the platforms.

Table (5): Ranking of Uses and Gratification Theory Dimensions and Other Needs and Motivations Behind the Use of Social Media for Sports

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Accessibility [All the places in my country enable me to access social media at any point in time]	403	1	5	2.58	1.329
Accessibility [Having my personal laptop/mobile phone makes it easier for me to access and be present on social media platforms]	409	1	5	4.21	0.915
Accessibility [Profiles of athletes, celebrities, sports companies are easy to access on social media platforms]	402	1	5	3.83	0.969
Economic Aspect [Being present and indulging in social media activities does not require me to spend any money]	399	1	5	2.87	1.263
Economic Aspect [Social media is the best source of entertainment as it provides budget-friendly entertainment]	405	1	5	3.55	1.128



	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Economic Aspect [Following athletes, celebrities, etc. on social media does not require me to spend any money]	397	1	5	3.18	1.233
Social Aspect [social media helps me to find and be connected with friends and colleagues]	410	1	5	4.37	0.799
Social Aspect [Everyone I know has used or uses social media platforms]	405	1	5	2.54	1.374
Social Aspect [Social Media platforms help me keep my social life active]	401	1	5	3.71	0.983
Self-Status [social media helps me to be up-to-date with trends and new information]	407	1	5	4.15	0.686
Self-Status [social media has been very beneficial to me in terms of gaining new skills and learning new things]	408	1	5	4.20	0.806
Self-Status [Using social media platforms have added value to my life]	396	1	5	3.91	0.934
Information [I use social media for sports because it provides quick and easy access to large volumes of athlete information]	399	1	5	3.57	1.091
Information [I use social media for sports because it provides quick and easy access to large volumes of information regarding sports championships and world cups]	401	1	5	3.68	1.004
Information [I use social media for sports to learn and be updated about what's happening in the world of athletes and sports]	399	1	5	3.72	1.043
To Access Content Not Available at Traditional Media [I prefer using social media for sports because the similar kind of information is not available on newspapers, TV channels, or Radio]	401	1	5	3.63	1.058
To Access Content Not Available at Traditional Media [I prefer using social media for sports because it allows me to engage in the conversations of sports which traditional media does not allow]	401	1	5	3.77	1.018
To Access Content Not Available at Traditional Media [I prefer using social media for sports because it allows me to post my opinions to the world, which traditional media does not allow]	401	1	5	3.81	1.035
Educational/Academic Reasons [I use social media for sports as a part of my research]	397	1	5	3.11	1.248
Educational/Academic Reasons [I use social media for sports as a part of my job]	398	1	5	2.65	1.160
Educational/Academic Reasons [I use social media for sports as a part of my assignment or course]	394	1	5	2.66	1.185
Entertainment [I use social media platforms for sports or follow athletes because it gives me something to do when I'm bored]	399	1	5	2.90	1.373
Entertainment [I find athletes life amusing over the social media accounts and love to get daily updates]	397	1	5	3.14	1.125



	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Entertainment [I use social media platforms for sports or follow athletes because it gives me something to do to occupy my time]	400	1	5	2.90	1.361
Entertainment [I use social media for sports as I get to see memes and other funny posts about the losing/winning teams]	399	1	5	3.24	1.254
Fan-ship Reasons [One reason I follow athletes over social media is that I consider myself a fan of the athlete's team or the sports they play]	399	1	5	3.77	0.997
Fan-ship Reasons [I follow athletes over social media because I am a fan of sports and athletes in general]	403	1	5	3.77	1.007
Fan-ship Reasons [I use social media to follow athletes because I am a fan of those particular athletes]	396	1	5	3.77	0.987
Valid N	384				

Most respondents agreed with the statement, “Social media helps me to find and be connected with friends and colleagues” ($M = 4.37$, $SD = 0.799$), which correlates with the social interaction aspect of the uses and gratification theory. Hence, some Arab women are motivated to use social media for sports to fulfill social desires of engaging and maintaining relationships. This item was followed by another one that read, “Having my personal laptop/mobile phone makes it easier for me to access and be present on social media platforms” ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 0.915$), suggesting the importance of accessibility. The respondents also rated the items referring to 'usefulness' highly as they believed social media helped them gain new skills, learn new things, and access up-to-date information.

On the other hand, the “economic aspect” factor scored comparatively low. One of the social aspects, “Everyone I know has used or uses social media platforms” had the lowest mean score ($M = 2.54$, $SD = 1.374$). This score indicated that there were still individuals who did not use social media platforms.

In the same context of sports, Arab women mostly agreed that social media allows them to post their opinions to the world in a way that traditional media does not ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 1.035$). Social media also allows them to engage in conversations related to sports ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 1.018$), which points to the importance of the information-seeking aspect of the uses and gratification theory. Moreover, many women also considered the 'fan-ship reasons' important to their use, with a mean score of 3.77 each, such that most of the respondents follow athletes over social media because they are fans of athletes and sports in general.

The lowest mean scores pertained to the education/academic context. The respondents had a similarly low mean score when social media was used for



education/job purposes. For instance, the item, “I use social media for sports as a part of my job” had a mean value equal to 2.65.

Table (6): Level of Interest in Sports Among Arab Females

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Awareness [I am more aware of sporting events and championships that take place around the world than I was before]	405	1	5	3.79	0.961
Awareness [I already knew that Qatar is hosting the FIFA world cup in 2022]	409	1	5	3.77	1.116
Awareness [I am more aware of athletic personalities and different kinds of sports than I was before]	401	1	5	3.74	1.055
Interest [I like watching sports, world championships, and other sporting events live]	397	1	5	3.48	1.063
Interest [I make an active effort not to miss live updates or highlights when a football, soccer, tennis, cricket, or any other match is going on]	397	1	5	3.02	1.095
Interest [I find sports more interesting than I did before]	407	1	5	3.60	1.087
Perspective [My perspective about sports has changed greatly, and I think more female participation is required]	408	1	5	3.80	1.092
Perspective [I believe female participation in sports should be encouraged from Arab countries as well]	409	1	5	3.91	1.201
Perspective [My perspective about sports being all about men has greatly shifted]	406	1	5	3.74	1.163
Valid N	389				

The descriptive statistics of the outcome (i.e., interest in sports), reveal that the highest scores in the 'perspective' category are related to the perspective that women’s participation in sports should be encouraged in Arab countries. According to the mean scores, the respondents highly believed that Arab countries should encourage women’s participation in sports (M = 3.91, SD = 1.201). Respondents also reported that they were aware of sporting events and championships (M = 3.79, SD = 0.961), such as the Qatar FIFA World Cup 2022 (M = 3.77, SD = 1.116). These scores mean that, overall, the level of awareness regarding sports was high among the surveyed Arab women, and that their interest in sports was increasing.

Considering the study's aim (i.e., evaluating the impact of social media on a developing interest in sports among Arab female audiences), researcher presents a PLS path model below.

In the above model, the researcher examines the impact of the different dimensions of the uses and gratification theory (information, social need, entertainment-seeking and self-status need) and the aforementioned aspects found in the literature (accessibility impact, economic aspect, ‘fan-ship’ aspect, educational aspect and content accessibility aspect) on the extent of Arab women’s interest in sports (awareness, interest, and perspective).

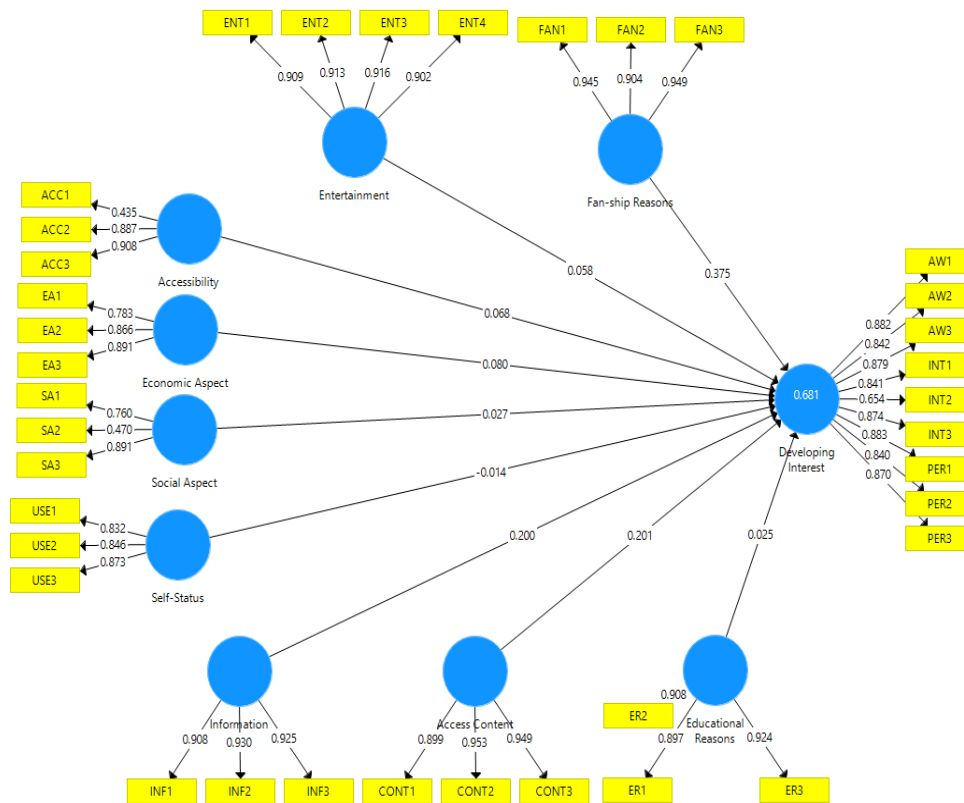


Fig. (1): Impact of Uses and Gratification Factors and Social Media Needs and Motivation Factors on the Level of Interest Developed Among Arab Women.

Table (7): Model Fit Estimates

	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0.073	0.073
d_ULS	3.796	3.796
d_G	1.349	1.349
Chi-Square	3224.85	3224.85
NFI	0.771	0.771

The SRMR is the difference between the observed and the model implied correlation. A value less than 0.08 is considered a good fit. Here, the model indicates a good fit since the SRMR value was less than 0.08. Moreover, the NFI value was close to 1, which also suggests a good fit. Overall, the model shows a 68.1% variance in the dependent variable (see Fig. 1).

Table (8): Impact of Uses and Gratification Factors and Social Media Needs and Motivation Factors on the Level of Among Arab Women’s Developing Interest

	Beta	Sample Mean	SD	T value	P value
Access Content -> Developing Interest	0.201	0.206	0.053	3.798	0.000
Accessibility -> Developing Interest	0.068	0.070	0.041	1.659	0.098
Economic Aspect -> Developing Interest	0.080	0.080	0.032	2.481	0.013



	Beta	Sample Mean	SD	T value	P value
Educational Reasons -> Developing Interest	0.025	0.024	0.035	0.702	0.483
Entertainment -> Developing Interest	0.058	0.055	0.033	1.749	0.081
Fan-ship Reasons -> Developing Interest	0.375	0.374	0.046	8.121	0.000
Information -> Developing Interest	0.200	0.200	0.047	4.252	0.000
Social Aspect -> Developing Interest	0.027	0.028	0.046	0.576	0.565
Self-Status -> Developing Interest	-0.014	-0.015	0.047	0.292	0.770

Table 8 measures the impact of each predictor variable in the model in a developing interest in sports. The p-values reveal that access to content, fan-ship, and information-seeking were statistically significant motivations in explaining the extent of interest in sports at 0.01 level. Economic aspects were significant at 0.05 level, while accessibility and entertainment were significant at 0.1 level in predicting the extent of interest in sports among Arab women.

The researcher also observed that all significant variables played a positive role in developing interest in sports since the beta coefficient was positive in all cases. Among social media needs and motivations, accessibility, access to content, fan-ship, and economic aspects were significant, while in the context of uses and gratification theory dimensions, entertainment and information were statistically significant.

This data means that greater access to content, greater accessibility, economic benefits, greater entertainment, fan-ship, and more information contributed to the development of an interest in sports among Arab women.

The study also evaluates the relationships between Arab females' demographic characteristics and the extent of their interest in sports. First, this research study evaluates whether age significantly influenced the extent of interest among Arab women in sports.

Table (9): Impact of Age on Level of Interest in Sports Among Arab Women

Age and Developing Interest in Sports				
Dependent Variable: Developing Interest				
F = 12.509				
Sig. = 0.000				
Your Age?		Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
18 to 27 years old	28 to 37 years old	0.03093	0.10208	1.000
	38 to 47 years old	0.13959	0.12227	0.948
	48 to 57 years old	0.30802	0.14323	0.293
	Above 57 years old	1.05194*	0.18542	0.000
28 to 37 years old	18 to 27 years old	-0.03093	0.10208	1.000
	38 to 47 years old	0.10866	0.12896	0.994
	48 to 57 years old	0.27709	0.14898	0.493
	Above 57 years old	1.02101*	0.18990	0.000



Your Age?		Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
38 to 47 years old	18 to 27 years old	-0.13959	0.12227	0.948
	28 to 37 years old	-0.10866	0.12896	0.994
	48 to 57 years old	0.16843	0.16348	0.974
	Above 57 years old	.91235*	0.20148	0.000
48 to 57 years old	18 to 27 years old	-0.30802	0.14323	0.293
	28 to 37 years old	-0.27709	0.14898	0.493
	38 to 47 years old	-0.16843	0.16348	0.974
	Above 57 years old	.74392*	0.21484	0.008
Above 57 years old	18 to 27 years old	-1.05194*	0.18542	0.000
	28 to 37 years old	-1.02101*	0.18990	0.000
	38 to 47 years old	-.91235*	0.20148	0.000
	48 to 57 years old	-.74392*	0.21484	0.008

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

According to the one-way ANOVA results, there was a significant difference in the extent of interest in sports among different age groups ($F = 12.509, p < 0.001$). In other words, the age of the respondents played a significant role in their developing interest in sports.

The multiple comparisons between the groups suggest that the oldest age group of the study (i.e., above 57 years old Arab females), had a significantly lower score in the ‘extent of interest in sports’ than the younger groups. On the other hand, there were no significant differences in the interest in sports between the other groups. However, the younger age groups still had a greater interest in sports than their older counterparts; for example, the 18 to 27 years old age group had the highest average extent of interest in sports.

Table (10): Impact of Education on Level of Interest in Sports Among Arab Women

Education and Developing Interest in Sports				
Dependent Variable: Developing Interest				
F = 3.350				
Sig. = 0.006				
Completed Education Level		Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
Less than High School	High School	0.05755	0.23230	1.000
	Higher Diploma	-0.17668	0.20806	1.000
	Bachelor’s Degree	-0.48160	0.19902	0.252
	Master’s Degree	-0.19420	0.20743	0.999
	PhD	-0.36387	0.22011	0.804
High School	Less than High School	-0.05755	0.23230	1.000
	Higher Diploma	-0.23423	0.17425	0.950
	Bachelor’s Degree	-.53915*	0.16334	0.020
	Master’s Degree	-0.25175	0.17350	0.912
	PhD	-0.42142	0.18847	0.341



Completed Education Level		Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
Higher Diploma	Less than High School	0.17668	0.20806	1.000
	High School	0.23423	0.17425	0.950
	Bachelor's Degree	-0.30492	0.12653	0.226
	Master's Degree	-0.01752	0.13939	1.000
	PhD	-0.18718	0.15764	0.983
Bachelor's Degree	Less than High School	0.48160	0.19902	0.252
	High School	.53915*	0.16334	0.020
	Higher Diploma	0.30492	0.12653	0.226
	Master's Degree	0.28740	0.12549	0.299
	PhD	0.11773	0.14549	1.000
Master's Degree	Less than High School	0.19420	0.20743	0.999
	High School	0.25175	0.17350	0.912
	Higher Diploma	0.01752	0.13939	1.000
	Bachelor's Degree	-0.28740	0.12549	0.299
	PhD	-0.16967	0.15681	0.993
PhD	Less than High School	0.36387	0.22011	0.804
	High School	0.42142	0.18847	0.341
	Higher Diploma	0.18718	0.15764	0.983
	Bachelor's Degree	-0.11773	0.14549	1.000
	Master's Degree	0.16967	0.15681	0.993

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

The researcher also assessed the relationships between education levels and interest in sports using a one-way ANOVA test. Overall, education had a statistically significant impact on the extent of interest in sports among the respondents ($F = 3.35, p < 0.01$).

Individual results revealed that Arab women with a bachelor's degree had the highest mean score of interest in sports; however, it was significantly higher than only the high school education level. Statistically, the average interest in sports between Arab women of different education levels was equal (except between the Bachelor's and high school levels).

Table (11): Impact of Employment Status on Level of Interest in Sports Among Arab Women

Employment and Developing Interest in Sports				
Dependent Variable: Developing Interest				
F = 15.284				
Sig. = 0.000				
Employment Status		Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
Student	Full-Time Employee	-0.06756	0.13438	1.000
	Part Time Employee or Internship	-0.03324	0.15161	1.000
	Self Employed	-0.10808	0.15161	1.000
	Unemployed	.84636*	0.18589	0.000
	Other	.84716*	0.24018	0.014



Employment Status		Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
Full-Time Employee	Student	0.06756	0.13438	1.000
	Part Time Employee or Internship	0.03432	0.11415	1.000
	Self Employed	-0.04053	0.11415	1.000
	Unemployed	.91391*	0.15684	0.000
	Other	.91472*	0.21848	0.003
Part Time Employee or Internship	Student	0.03324	0.15161	1.000
	Full-Time Employee	-0.03432	0.11415	1.000
	Self Employed	-0.07485	0.13401	1.000
	Unemployed	.87959*	0.17183	0.000
	Other	.88040*	0.22948	0.006
Self Employed	Student	0.10808	0.15161	1.000
	Full-Time Employee	0.04053	0.11415	1.000
	Part Time Employee or Internship	0.07485	0.13401	1.000
	Unemployed	.95444*	0.17183	0.000
	Other	.95525*	0.22948	0.002
Unemployed	Student	-.84636*	0.18589	0.000
	Full-Time Employee	-.91391*	0.15684	0.000
	Part Time Employee or Internship	-.87959*	0.17183	0.000
	Self Employed	-.95444*	0.17183	0.000
	Other	0.00080	0.25343	1.000
Other	Student	-.84716*	0.24018	0.014
	Full-Time Employee	-.91472*	0.21848	0.003
	Part Time Employee or Internship	-.88040*	0.22948	0.006
	Self Employed	-.95525*	0.22948	0.002
	Unemployed	-0.00080	0.25343	1.000

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Lastly, the author performed another ANOVA test to assess the link between employment and interest in sports. Overall, employment status significantly impacted the level of interest that the surveyed Arab women have in sports ($F = 15.284$, $p < 0.001$).

Individually, self-employed Arab women were most interested in sports, as indicated by the fact that they had the highest mean score in the extent of interest in sports, followed by full-time and part-time employees. Moreover, the unemployed and 'other' employment status groups (such as women who were retired, housewives, etc.) had a significantly low mean interest in sports than the other groups.

Discussion

In discussing the results from the lens of existing theories and reviewed



literature, the findings align with the theories of social media put forward in the introduction. Before evaluating whether social media has been effective in driving the interest of female audiences in sports, it is important to shed light on the aspects motivating Arab women to use social media in general. For example, the descriptive statistics (See Table 5) indicated that the majority of the women surveyed were attracted or convinced to use social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, etc., because these platforms helped them to socially connect with friends and colleagues. These statistics suggest that women from Arab countries mostly use social media platforms to fulfill their social needs. It allows them to socialize with other people for the purpose of building and maintaining quality social relationships and enhancing social interactions. This is supported by the findings of another study that justified Arab women's use of social media for social and personal reasons as it helps them keep in touch with friends. (Alzahrani and Alzani 2019).

Likewise, women in western societies use social media to keep in touch and maintain relationships with their social connections. Park et al. (2009) as well as Plume and Slade, (2018) argue that women use social media platforms to expand their social circles and to interact and communicate with like-minded people.

Another significant dimension in the uses and gratification theory that was linked with the consumption of sports-related content on social media was the entertainment-seeking dimension. (Witkemper et al. 2012) The entertainment dimension of the uses and gratification theory shows that Arab females are motivated to use different types of social media accounts during their leisure time as well (Park et al. 2009).

Apart from uses and gratification dimensions, most users following sports through social media outlets use these platforms to access content that is not available on traditional media and that allows them to voice their opinions and engage in conversations about sports (See Table 5). For example, in studies by Plume and Slade (2018) and Ahmed and Thorpe (2020), researchers identified the same behavior among women asserting that most women who used social media in the context of sports chose to share their views and engage in conversations related to sports or politics from which they might otherwise have been restricted.

In the causal analysis the results showed that out of the four uses and gratification theory's dimensions, entertainment-seeking and information-seeking aspects of social media had a statistically significant impact on Arab women's developing interest in sports. However, other uses and gratification dimensions, such as social and self-status-seeking motivations, have had an insignificant impact on Arab women's interest in sports. Furthermore, social media usage aspects, such as economic aspects and accessibility, were significant and positively contributed towards developing and enhancing the



interest of Arab women in sports (See Table 8). The findings correlate with the literature put forward by Creedon (2014), who explains that digital media can significantly impact people's interests and preferences due to its global accessibility.

Additionally, based on the fact that the most common uses of social media (such as access to better content, informative news, and entertaining content) are significant factors for Arab females developing more of an interest in sports, this study further supports the findings of Rajakumar (2021); Theodorakis et al. (2017); Creedon (2014); Irem et al. (2014), and Hull et al. (2019). These authors discuss the key role that social media platforms play in influencing and changing audiences' perception of and level of interest in sports by making people aware of the current sporting trends and events around the world (Theodorakis et al. 2017). Overall, the results confirm that the social media platforms of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and others, are playing a significant role in Arab women's interest in sports. The results also confirm that Arab women's demographic characteristics, such as age groups, educational level, and employment status, play a significant role in impacting their interest in sports.

Even though the results of the current study provide valuable findings and contribute to the research gap identified, the chosen methodology and techniques may have limited a holistic understanding of the relationship between Arab women and sports-related social media content. For example, considering that the impact of social media on female audiences' interest in sports is a relatively new topic in the Arab region, a qualitative analysis via interviews could have provided in-depth and detailed results.

Moreover, although the PLS path model is a value-added analysis, it limits the present study's analytical scope. For example, content analysis techniques via social media platforms—such as Facebook comments, Twitter tweets, and Instagram posts or stories—could have helped broaden the current study's scope by helping researchers identify how women engage with sports-related content and how social media influences their perception of, knowledge of, and interest in sports. Finally, the limitations of the sample size should also be considered, the surveyed population is too small to generalize or draw conclusions on strong themes about the Arab region in its entirety.

Conclusion

The objective of the current research paper is to determine the impact of social media in developing Arab women's interests in sports. It observed that social media play a significant role in increasing visibility and driving online engagement regarding sports among Arab women.

This study specifically focused on the way Arab women use social media in sports. Based on a sample of 411 Arab females, the study finds that access



to content, fan-ship, and information-seeking reasons are the most important motivations that explain why Arab women consume sports content on social media platforms.

Economic, accessibility, and entertainment aspects significantly predict interest in sports among Arab women. Moreover, social media needs and motivations have a positive impact on the level of interests developed among Arab women.

Demographic factors significantly influence the extent of interests in sports among Arab women. According to the results of this study, Arab women who are self-employed, young and have a bachelor's degree are more interested in sports than women who have other demographic characteristics. These findings suggest that social media could be used effectively to raise awareness and develop interests in different types of sports among Arab women.

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