Original Paper

Gender Differences and Emotional Expressiveness on Facebook:

An Analysis of Prosodic Features among Jordanian Facebookers

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Abstract

Despite seemingly countless studies addressing emotional expressiveness, most of these studies were focused on western communities, neglecting the Arab community in general, and the Jordanian discourse in particular. The purpose of this paper is to examine how paralinguistic features of emotional expression are used by male and female Jordanian Facebookers. A total of 100 participants, 50 males and 50 females, took part in this study, all of whom were native Jordanians. The current study was conducted by utilizing the "Web for corpus building" approach, as the data has been extracted manually from Facebook status updates, comments on other users' status updates, photos, wall posts and so on. The findings revealed that women experience and express emotions more often than men in general. More studies with different contextual factors (e.g., age, social status, and ethnicity) and a different sources of data collection (e.g., face-to-face interaction, role plays, and observation) are recommended for future studies.

Keywords

gender differences, emotional expressiveness, prosodic features, Jordanian facebookers

1. Introduction

In eastern popular culture, it is highly believed that there are gender differences in children's emotion expressions (Banikalef, Marlyna, & Ashinida, 2014). Many studies have been done, observing emotional expressiveness in males and females and there is plethora of research proving that females are more emotionally expressive than males and females differ in their experience and expression of specific emotions (Simon, Nath, & Simon, 2011; Chaplin & Aldao, 2013). Other researchers have also concluded that there are some emotions that have been stereotypically connected to each gender. Emotions such as

happiness, sadness, and fear are believed to be more characteristic of women, while men are characterized more by anger and aggression (Simon et al., 2011; Deng, Chang, Yang, Huo, & Zhou, 2016). Most of the research carried out to study gender differences in emotional expressiveness have been focused on face to face interactions. As new online technologies emerge and people become more comfortable with online activities and in particular, social networking site. Therefore, to date, an analysis of emotional expressiveness in online discourse is still at infancy and should be explored (Parkins, 2012; Banikalef, Marlyna, & Ashinida, 2014). As such purpose of this study is based upon the recommendation suggested in Banikalef, Marlyna and Ashinida (2014) calling for more research to be conducted in an online context of social networking sites.

Among all social networking websites, Facebook is by far the most popular. As of March 2017, Facebook reached two billion active users worldwide (Statista.com, 2017). 73% of them are young users and their ages range between 18 to 28 years. According to internetworldstats.com, the number of Jordanian users who have Facebook profile in 2016 was about five million, which is more than half of Internet users in Jordan. Forty-one percent of Facebook users in Jordan are between 18 and 24 years old. According to Barasa (2010) most people in the older generation are computer illiterate, thus the use of computers generally serves the young generation. The United Nations and UNICEF describe youth as persons between the ages of 15 of 24 years. According to savethechildren.org, more than 70% of the Jordanians are under age 30. In line with Banikalef et al. (2014) and Bjørnsson (2010) who argue that Facebook is growing in popularity among young people of, or approaching, university age, the sample in the current study is taken from Jordanian undergraduate Facebook users aged between 18 to 24 years old.

The social media platform of Facebook makes available an ample data to examine the communicative acts of individuals in a social network woven by interesting events, culture, topics, etc. Micro blogging is one of Facebook's most popular features (Buechel & Berger, 2012). This feature allows Facebook users to share text-based messages (e.g., status updates) about their thoughts, emotions, and activities with other Facebook users (Settanni & Marengo, 2015; Banikalef et al., 2014). For social scientists, these status updates represent a vast and relatively new source of ecological data with potential connections with individual behavioral and psychological characteristics (Tov, Ng, Lin, & Qiu, 2013).

2. Aims of the Study

Current continuance literature resides in two camps. On one hand, most of previous research on emotional expressiveness focused on western communities, neglecting the Arab community in general, and the Jordanian discourse in particular. Therefore, it would be helpful to understand how emotional expressiveness is represented in Jordanian community. On the other hand, other researchers assumed that text-based forms of computer-mediated communication (e.g., email, instant messaging, chat, etc.) undermine emotional expression due to the lack of paralinguistic cues. According Walther (2008), text-based messages may deprive online communicators of the personal feeling that another real person

is involved in the in the interaction. Consequently, the current paper aim to investigate how paralinguistic features that help the user in emotional expressivity, are represented, how these representations are used to express emotion and how they are used by Jordanian men and women in online interaction.

3. Literature Review

Gender differences and emotional expressiveness is not a new area of investigation by any means. There have been some very insightful studies which explored how men and women express their emotions, concluding that women showing greater positive emotion expression overall (Parkins, 2012; Chaplin, 2015; Settanni & Marengo, 2015; Aljasir, Bajnaid, Elyas, & Alnawasrah, 2017) . Most of the studies conducted to examine gender differences in emotional expressiveness have been focused on face-to-face interactions (Conferral, 2008; McRae, Ochsner, Mauss, Gabrieli, & Gross, 2008; Hess et al., 2000, Brody, 2009).

As new online technologies emerge, they bring globalization in every facets of communication. In its new form, internet is essentially a heart of communication, information and entertainment. According to statista.com, the number of internet users in 2017 was about 3.578 billion users worldwide. People mainly use the internet to communicate with other people via Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) either via e-mail, chat rooms, or as part of a digital community (Banikalef, 2015). In the following paragraphs a brief review of related studies is provided with particular attention paid to emotional expressiveness in on-line discourse.

In a recent study Parkins (2012) did a study to examine the emotional expressivity of men and women on Facebook and Twitter. Data was collected through the analysis of posts, tweets and comments from a sample of fifty native Australian men and women over a two-week period. Findings showed that participants used six common techniques to express emotion, namely, punctuation markers, full stops, capitalized text, emotions, laughter, and additional letters. He concluded that women are more emotionally expressive than men are and societies are still responsible for creating a climate in which males and female express their emotion differently.

Another a significant study was carried out by Deng, Chang, Yang, Huo and Zhou (2016) to find out gender differences in both emotional experience and expressivity. The emotional experience was observed through recording heart rate while the participant watched 16 video clips that included eight types of emotion (pleasure, amusement, sadness, surprise, horror, neutrality, anger, and disgust. Then, they were asked to report motivation, valence, and arousal as indicators of emotional expressivity. Findings showed gender differences in emotional experience and emotional expressivity. When watching videos that induced amusement, anger, and pleasure, men showed higher decreases in their heart rates, whereas women reported higher levels of arousal. The researchers concluded that men often have more intense emotional experiences, while women have higher emotional expressivity, specifically for negative emotions.

In terms of Facebook content, Settanni and Marengo (2015) examined the relationship between user-generated textual content shared on Facebook and self-report measures of stress, depression, and anxiety. Emotion-related textual indicators were derived from text corpora of users' status updates and comments collected from 201 adult Italian Facebook users. Findings revealed that users with higher levels of anxiety or depression showed negative emotions on Facebook more frequently. Moreover, younger users recorded higher frequency of both emotion-related words and emoticon use in their posts. Their study concluded that Facebook personalities are an extension of users' real-life personalities. The findings also support the feasibility and validity of Facebook profiles to examine individual emotional well-being.

In line with Settanni and Marengo (2015), Aljasir, Bajnaid, Elyas, and Alnawasrah (2017) examined the relationship between the themes of Facebook status updates and the levels of online disclosure. Facebook status updates were collected from 50 Saudi participants for an eleven-month period. Data were categorized in line with five classifications, namely, text only, text and a photo, text and a video, text and a URL link, or a photo only. Findings revealed that that the mean scores of males and females did not differ significantly on any of the disclosure levels, with the exception of females' profile photos, which continue to be considered sensitive information and even possibly stigmatizing information. The researchers concluded that Saudis' attitudes in real life may be not fully mirrored their behavior on Facebook.

McDuff et al. (2017), analyzed gender differences in facial behaviors as over 2,000 viewers watch a set of video advertisements in their home environments. The facial responses were recorded using participants' own webcams. Using a new automated facial coding technology, they coded facial activity. The findings revealed that women are not universally more expressive across all facial actions. Nor are they more expressive in all positive valence actions and less expressive in all negative valence actions. It appears that generally women express actions more frequently than men, and in particular express more positive valence actions. However, expressiveness is not greater in women for all negative valence actions and is dependent on the discrete emotional state.

Although many studies have been carried out on gender differences in emotional expressiveness, few of them used Facebook as research tool to examine online emotional disclosure (e.g., Parkins, 2012; Aljasir, Bajnaid, Elyas, & Alnawasrah, 2017; Settanni & Marengo, 2015). Moreover, an investigation of the literature reveals that the great majority of earlier works have focused on the English speaking countries (e.g., Parkins, 2012; Chaplin, 2015; Settanni & Marengo, 2015; McDuff et al., 2017). However, studies based on non-western languages are very scarce.

According to McNeill (2008), Mcneill (2008), Banikalef and Bataineh (2017), Facebook provides social experts with an unprecedented opportunity to observe behaviors in a real-life setting, test hypotheses, and recruit participants effectively from many different countries and different demographic groups. This study will extend previous research of emotional expressiveness in general,

and among young Arab Jordanians in particular. This extension is made by examining emotional expressiveness in Facebook status update produced by young Arab Jordanian Facebook users.

4. Methods

Studies of gender differences in expressivity have been somewhat restricted to data collected in lab settings or which required labor-intensive manual coding. Research addressing the nature and development of gender differences in emotion expression cannot rely solely on self-report or parent-report questionnaire studies. While this methodological approach is informative, it should be complemented by methods that capture youths' actual in-the-moment expressions of emotion. For this reason, a corpus of notes will be chosen from males and females on Facebook.

4.1 Instruments

Social scientists have distinguished between two different approaches the Internet can be used in research. These are named as "Web as corpus" and "Web for corpus building" (Hundt, Nesselhauf, & Biewer, 2007). The "web as corpus" allows the researcher to create corpora from the Web directly. While, the "Web for corpus building" needs the researcher to select manually the data to build offline corpora (Meinl, 2013). The current study was conducted by the "Web for corpus building" approach, as the data has been extracted manually from Facebook status updates, comments on other users' status updates, photos, wall posts and so on. In other words, this study used Facebook as the main source of compiling the corpus. Facebook provides researchers with sufficient naturalistic behavioral data. This corpus could provide a rich source of information for researchers interested in understanding the paralinguistic features of online interaction in general and the different types of emotional expression markers, in particular.

4.2 Subjects and Setting

A total of 100 participants took part in this study, all of whom were native Jordanians. To achieve a greater degree of generalizability and to limit bias between the genders, 50 of the participants were males and the other 50 were females. Since Facebook is growing in popularity among young people of, or approaching, university age, the sample in the current study is taken from Jordanian undergraduate Facebook users aged between 18 to 24 years old. All of them are university students from two private universities namely Irbid National University and Jadara University. They are purposely selected from different disciplines in the two universities which made it easy access to the students' updates on Facebook as they are added to the researchers' Facebook pages. The two universities are located in Irbid city in the north of Jordan.

4.3 Data Collection and Analysis

In order to elicit the data as they occur normally and naturally, the participants were not informed about how often their profiles would be checked or what particular elements of their Facebook profiles would be studied. Through examining the participants' Facebook profiles it was found that there were six

common strategies that were used to express emotion. This does not mean that there were no more than six: these were the most common and it was therefore decided that these emotional expressive markers would be studied for the current study. The emotion markers analyzed were:

1) The extensive use of "Sigh" of pain (such as اخ— هاا uh)

2) The extensive use of punctuation markers (such as *!!* and *??*)

3) The extensive use of full stops used within a speech sample (e.g..........)

4) Word Elongation (e.g., مالاااااااي, greaaaat)

5) The general use of emoticons (e.g., ♡)

6) The use of different laughter expressions(e.g., lol, ههههههه, haha)

Each participant's Facebook profile was observed over a one-month period. Each day the researchers recorded how many times each expression marker was used. These expression markers were not only limited to their Facebook status updates but also their wall posts on their friends' walls were also considered, as were their comments on other users' status, photos, wall posts, and so on.

5. Results and Discussion

Findings showed that women experience and express emotions more often than men in general. Figure 1 reveals that female Facebook users had a higher frequency of use emotional expression categories than men.
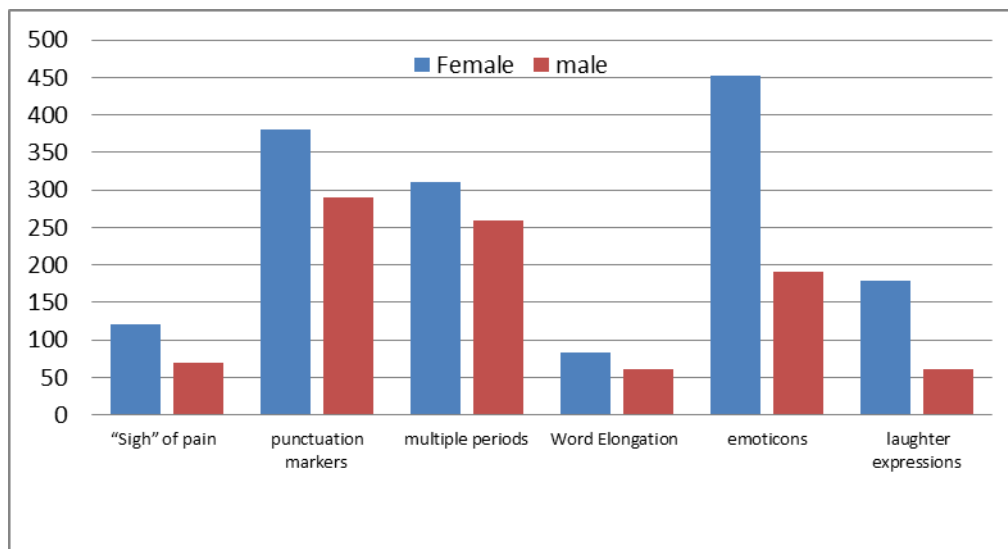

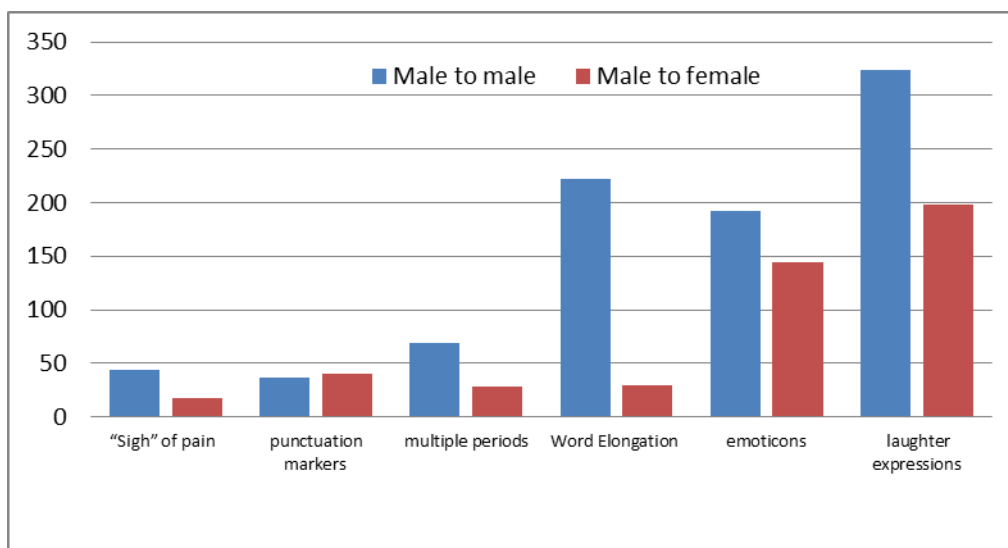**Figure 1. The Frequency of Emtional Expression Markers between Men and Women**

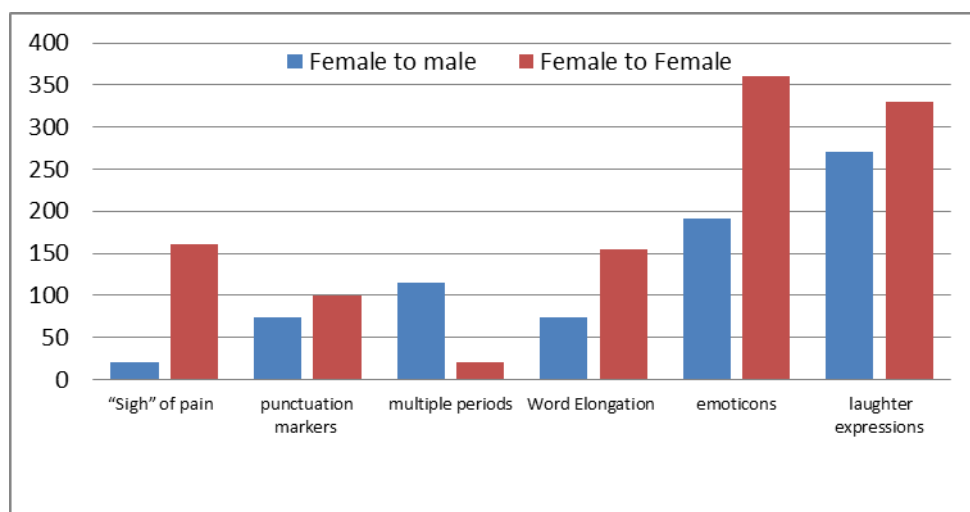**Figure 2. Male-Initiated Emtionl Expression Markers**

Figure 3. Female-Initiated Emotional Expresion Markers

5.1 The Use of "Sigh"

Data Analysis showed that Facebook users used Facebook as platform to express their feelings of sadness, frustration and pain. In order to express their deep pain or sadness, Facebook users incline to use words that have no grammatical meaning, but just signify emotions, such as "Aha", "aaaaaah", or "uh" (خاااا, اخ, اوأأأأأه). Such markers mostly used to express annoyance, anger, sadness and frustration. Consider the following examples:

"أأأأخ وااااخ ما كنت اعرف انك رتح تكون اهم من حياتي"

(aaaaaah and aaaaaaahh I never thought that I will love you more than my life).

" مؤلم جدا عندما ترى من تحب مع شخص اخر ااااخ "

(It is really painful when you love someone and you see them with somebody else aaaaaah).

As it can be noticed in Figure 1, Female usersrecorded over double the frequency rate of markers of "Sigh", with female accumulating a frequency of 100 and males of 55. An interesting observation of the data in Figure 3 is that females use markers of "Sigh" more frequently when talking to other females than to males. In Jordanian culture, generally there is a strong sense of paternalism as what most Westerners refer to as "Male Dominance" (Banikalef & Bataineh, 2017). In a male patriarchal society like the population of the current study, findings showed that women used marker of "Sigh" with the expression of more negative emotions rather than with positive ones. Other studies have supported these findings, concluding that persons with more status and power (male) experience positive emotions such as happiness and security, whereas those with less power and status (female) experience negative emotions such as fear, sadness, and anger (Kemper, 1991, 2016; Spataro, Pettit, Sauer, & Lount Jr., 2014).

5.2 The Use of Punctuation Markers

The reality is that language grows in conjunction with culture, and change is not always a bad thing. Digital communication and social media have formed new opportunities for expressing emotions through innovative ways (Banikalef & Bataineh, 2017). One of those ways, for example, is the use of punctuation markers. Those markers are usually seen as grammatical devices (Parkins, 2012). However the current study found that those markers were not used for grammatical purposes. Data analysis showed, for example, the exclamation point no longer just express surprise, emotion, or excitement, but it is used to show that the person really meant what they typed. See the following examples:

"!!! "قبل شوي شفت كومنت من بنت اسمها الركبة البيضاء ههههه"

(I read a comment a little while ago in a facebook page by a girl her nickname is the white knee!!!!! hahahah)

"وان سالوك عن العدل في بلادنا قل مات عمر!!!"

(If you were asked about justice, tell them that Omar has passed away!!!).

From the content analysis of the excerpts, findings showed that punctuation markers were used more than necessary in one sentence (three or more together at one time, e.g., really !!!), and that to add more emphasis in what the user had to say. As can be noted from Figure 1, female users use more punctuation markers than do males. It has been noticed also that male users inclined to use more punctuation markers in humorous contexts. See the following example:

"البنت العربية !!دائما اول حب بكون ابن عمها او ابن خالها بعدين بتروح تحترف ؟؟"

(The Arabic girl!! the first love for her is always her cousin, after that she will start to love others professionally !!! Hahahah).

On the other hand, female users tended to use more punctuation markers in sadness situation when they really meant what they typed. In general, they used those markers as a code to share their feeling with a target audience in mindwithout arousing the social concerns that may come from attempting to share

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utterance originally produced by them in conservative culture as in the case of Jordan. See the following example:

"تعبت من الدنيا ؟؟؟!!!"

(I get tired from this life ???!!!).

This observation is consistent with stereotypes on male users that see them as more emotionally expressive of positive emotions. The findings of Banikalef et al. (2014) showed that male users were expected to express more positive emotions than female users in online interactions. Based on the researchers' experience as native speakers of Jordanian Arabic, the concept of man in the Jordanian community is the one who is fearless, emotionless, resourceful, stoic, and serious. In other words, in the Jordanian culture, it is the expected norm for men to hide any kind of negative emotional expression.

5.3 The Use of Full Stops

As was the case for punctuation markers, full stops are also not restricted to grammaticality use. In most written languages, the full stop is a neutral way to mark a pause or complete a thought; but in online communications are turning it to represent many different things. The first use, as can be seen in the example below, shows that the whole story is not written or that there is an unspoken reason for something being the way it is:

" مافي اصدقاء بس مصالح......"

(There are no friends but there are interests…….).

The female users states that "there are no friends but interests…." and this is followed by a series of full stops, in this case possibly explanation that there is more to be said, but she does not feel the need to share the clear reason with others. Another possible reason is that she has a target audience in mind and she wants them to know themselves.

In the following example, the full stops are being used for a different purpose. In this case the female user states "*you really meant what you said………*" In this case possibly demonstrating that the female tries to make an open invitation to the offender to guess at his mistake and repair it. Another purpose of the full stop is to show a pause or a silence in the conversation. The content analysis showed that full stop was also used as alternative for pause words such as um and uh. This means that participants in this study were interacting like they were talking, but coding that talk in writing.

5.4 Word Elongation

Some users incline to elongating words through character repetition in which some linguists describe this technique as "word lengthening" (e.g., Brody & Diakopoulos, 2011), or other as "phoneme extension" (e.g., Kalman & Gergle, 2014). Banikalef and Bataineh (2017) state that online user may duplicate letters in an effort to compensate for the lack of paralinguistic cues when they're writing as opposed to speaking. Findings showed that this strategy can be employed different situations to express emotional stances such as frustration, sarcasm, hesitation, and happiness. In the excerpt below, the

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word "congratulation" in this context used as a term for showing "happiness" has been extended to add a positive drawn out tone and emphasizes how good the reader finds the situation is:

"مبااااااااارك التخرج"

(Congratulaaaaation on your graduation).

As it can be noticed from the data in Figures 2 and 3 that both male and female use this emotional expression marker when interacting with user of their own gender, more than with user of the other gender. This phenomenon could probably be explained by examining the Jordanian culture. Other than Islam, Jordanian culture is based on a tribal society with a robust sense of Arab identity rooted in its cultural system, particularly in the areas from which the data for this study were collected (Banikalef & Bataineh, 2017). In other words, Jordanian society is too conservative and certain tribal norms govern male and female interaction. Therefore, when they are interacting with other gender, female participants use formal language and show inclination to suppress any emotional reaction, including paralinguistic cues.

As it can be seen in Figure 2 that male users in male-to male interactions record over quintuple the frequency rate of "word Elongation", with male accumulating a frequency of 225 and females of 40. As a possible explanation for this situation Banikalef (2015) founds that Jordanian women were more active on Facebook than their male counterparts. He found also that during five month women generated around 1000 status updates, compared to 643 status updates by their male counterparts.

5.5 Emoticons

In Computer Mediated Communication (CMC), emoticons are identified as "emotion icons", mostly as a tool to represent facial expressions, such as smile, in the absence of paralinguistic cues (Walther & D'Addario, 2001). They are considered to be socio-emotional suppliers in the Social Networking Sites (SNS) and, particularly, in Facebook. As can be noticed in Figure 1, emoticons are the most frequently used prosodic strategies to express emotion in digital world. It shows that 450 emoticons were used by females and 200 by males, which is at least double the use of all other prosodic strategies among both genders. This may be the case because emoticons provide participants with some of the richness of real-time, face-to-face interactions. They used as "iconic forms" to strengthen the message so that the reader will understand the condition or emotion of speaker. The following examples show some representations of different emotions using emoticons:

"ليس هناك اجمل من الخميس"☺

(Nothing beautiful more than Thursday ☺)

"كل عام. أمي، وأنت بخير"💕

(Happy New Year to you, Mom.💕)

"انتي ليش هيك نحيفة ؟" 😕

"Why you look very thin"

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One of the most interesting findings is that female users frequently used love -heart emoticons (❤❤) when they are talking about issues like marriage or romantic expressions especially about the opposite gender. Another interesting finding women used more positive emoticons (e.g., cheery faces and chuckling faces) when talking with other females friends. Other studies have supported these findings, concluding that women are concerned about how they are perceived and the positive image that they represent. By using various positive emoticons may be their way of trying to promote their positive image in digital world (Parkins, 2012; Ling, Baron, Lenhart, & Campbell, 2014).

5.6 Laughter

Digital communication and social media have formed new opportunities for how giggles or chortles are presented. The terms of e-laughter—"ha ha", "ho ho", "heehee", "heh"—are implicitly understood by just about everybody (Larson, 2015). The e-Laughter "ha" is like a Lego, a building block, with which the user can create more elaborate hilarity. This means that "Hahaha" shows that you are really amused. Findings showed that participants used different types of symbols to represent online laughter. One of the classic laughter expression appeared in the data is (ههههه) and for long amusement some participants lengthen its letters to make like (ههههههههههههههههه). Another form of e-laughter used by the participant is using the roman letters as in (hahaha) which used more frequently by female participants than male counterparts. It can be seen from the data in Figure 1 that female recorded over triple the frequency rate of laughter expression, with women accumulating a frequency of 180 and males of 60. Culturally speaking, toughness and frowning are basic components in Jordanian culture. In order to be "Zalameh" or a real man in Jordanian slang, one has to be less humorous and more serious (Banikalef et al., 2014).

6. Conclusion

This qualitative study aims at investigating how paralinguistic features of emotional expression are represented, how these representations are used to express emotion and how they are used by Jordanian men and women on Facebook. A total of 100 participants, 50 males and 50 females, took part in this study, all of whom were native Jordanians. With the help of "Web for corpus building" approach, the data has been extracted manually from Facebook status updates, comments on other users' status updates, photos, wall posts and so on. Findings revealed women showed greater emotional expressivity, especially for positive emotions and internalizing negative emotions such as sadness. The study contributed filling in the gaps in previous literature concerning emotional expressivity in the context of Jordan and in the Arab region. Moreover, the current study answered the call that researchers did in Jordan who requested that additional studies should be made.

The most significant part of the study is the implications of the findings concerning emotional expressiveness in Jordan. The present study is just an initial step, but the hope is that it can raise awareness about engendering emotional expressivity in Jordan as well as in other contexts across Arab

countries. The tribal system in Arab countries including Jordan may hinder individuals' expressiveness of emotions in the presence of others, while individuals of Western countries are more likely to do so both alone and in the presence of others. Furthermore, individuals from cultures that tend to emphasize social cohesion are more likely suppress their own emotional reaction in order to first evaluate what response is most appropriate given the situation. Therefore, a comparison between Western and Arab communities would highlight the differences in emotion expressiveness and yield significant information concerning different sociolinguistic features. As a result of this study, several recommendations may be made for future research to reduce the knowledge gap. Studies that focus on the emotional expressiveness should be should study each aspect in-depth. Future studies also should look into the reasons why women show greater emotional expressivity than men.

Though this study adds valuable insight to the growing body of literature, it is not without limitations. First, although nonverbal cues can indicate what general class of emotions a person is feeling, they typically do not provide detailed information about that person's emotional state. Second, by using a majority sampling of participants from the northern part of Jordan, the researchers limited the ability to generalize the results of the study into a broader sample.

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