

Abstract

Women living in conservative countries often face constraints in their interaction with strangers, both online and offline. Given that interactions with strangers are an important factor in getting customers by small business owners, this study aims to analyze gender differences in Facebook business practices in conservative nations. The study examines five hypotheses relating to how men and women post, talk about their businesses, and interact with others online through 1350 manually collected observations from 90 buying and selling public Facebook groups in Egypt, Iraq, and Jordan. The results show that the posting rates of business-related information in public groups are not different between men and women. However, women frequently advertise female-specific products to other women. Furthermore, while real identity positively affects post interactions, women are more likely to hide aspects of their real identity online. These insights from data analysis are supported by qualitative interviews where women also report hiding parts of their identity online and explain reasons why they do so. Together these results suggest that women adopt practices to conserve their privacy, and these might come at a cost of reduced interaction.